Environmental Roots of Development Problems

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Environment and Development: The Turbulent Journey of Modernity

This book is about the complex and highly contested nexus between the goals and promises of development, and the frustrating rise of environmental problems and tensions. In the past half century, environmental questions, multiple and broadly defined, have increasingly occupied centre stage in global debates about the maelstrom of present-day socio-economic tendencies and uncertain future prospects. Despite many attempts to elucidate its meaning, development remains an elusive concept, fraught with contradictions, associated with ethereal promises and recurrent frustrations. Likewise, the definition of environment, as well as associated terms such as nature and ecology, depends on the moral, religious and technological basis of each society and its time-space circumstances. It is possible to argue, nonetheless, that most of the controversies here are related to the reduction of development to economic growth, as

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well as the threat of environmental problems as mere calls for improved management strategies (increasingly through market-based strategies that transfer the rationality of economic growth to the supposed mitigation of environmental impacts). In effect, environment-development dilemmas are actually much broader and more complicated than suggested by simplistic narratives of progress and conservation. All major challenges around the world are directly associated with controversial processes of environmental change and landscape degradation, as in the case of mass migration, staggering levels of energy and material waste, food insecurity, widespread water and air pollution, obscene levels of socio-spatial inequality and genocidal practices against indigenous peoples and other minority groups. It has also to do with the historical agency of nature and its impact on socio-political relations, as in the case of the 2020 Coronavirus outbreak, the burning of the Amazon in recent years and the escalation of anthropogenic global warming.

The difficulty to properly understand and effectively deal with the socio-ecological consequences of development are basically derived from the uneasiness to challenge the advance of capitalist-based modernity. That is, the normativity of development has been translated into the affirmation of Western modernity as the unescapable model for the rest of the planet, and, in that way, the self-granted permission to conquer and explore nature has also become a global phenomenon. Development intrinsically requires the mobilisation of nature and its conversion into economic resources, but it is a process that ‘exists through the actions that it legitimates, through the institutions it keeps alive and the signs that testify its presence’ (Rist 2008: 10). From the period of European colonisation to the phase of national independence and international development in the post-war decades and, finally, the more recent adjustments of public policies under the influence of neoliberalising ideologies, the pursuit of capitalist production and reproduction institutions has transformed local, national and global spheres of socio-ecological interaction. Since the golden age of Portuguese navigation in the fifteenth century, capitalism has systematically and purposefully expanded out of Europe Modernity as an unstoppable project with global repercussions. Capitalist activity has taken over continents, locations, cultures and practices throughout the world, which was translated in the twentieth century in
the agenda and process of development. In this intense geographical process, the production of new spatial settings has become a central pillar of the circulation and accumulation of capital (Ioris 2020). Socio-spatial frontiers of development function as a mirror, where the bare and explicit features of capitalism are exposed through the formation of site-specific mechanisms of resource extraction, economic production and political justification. Because of these interdependent relations between ‘core’ and ‘periphery’ through joint processes of exploitation, realignment and reinforcement in both old and new areas, it can be argued that capitalist development also largely depends on accumulation by frontier making and socio-ecological change (Ioris 2018a).

Our basic aim in this introductory chapter is to examine the meaning and fundamental features of the advance of development, what is later detailed and exemplified in the other chapters of this book. The main purpose is to suggest a new conceptual approach to frontier-making dynamics that underpin the socio-ecology of development. This involves reflecting on the necessity, the configuration and the contestation of socio-spatial frontiers, beyond the conventional descriptive and quantitative assessments of land-use change, resource extraction or commodity production. The examination of the environmental roots of development and its relentless expiation to all corners of the planet is extremely relevant because, as pointed out by Sachs (2010: vii), in an age of globalisation ‘politics is compelled to push either equity without ecology, or ecology without equity. It is hard to see how this dilemma can be resolved unless the belief in ‘development’ is dismantled’. The uneven and ferocious development of capitalist modernity and the production of economic frontiers has been the object of a long debate and occupied critical scholars working in several different disciplines. The spaces of capitalist frontiers have been repeatedly studied by many researchers, and interpretations range from neoclassical enthusiasm about the economic outcomes of new frontiers to critical voices discussing growing proletarianisation and acts of resistance following the penetration of capitalism. Although often used interchangeably, Watts (2018) differentiates between ‘frontier’ as a zone of socio-economic advance and ‘border’ as a line of demarcation between national territories or administrative units. Lund and Rachman (2018) also make a distinction between frontier dynamics (the frontier is
a free resource zone, where social order is eliminated, property is disrupted and social contracts dissolved) and territorialisation (when spaces acquire new systems of authority and regulation). Departing from such literature, our focus on these pages is on the political ontology of frontspaces (i.e. the spaces of the frontier of development), that is, the locales, landscapes and places undergoing changes because of the advance of new socio-economic processes that are dialectically connected with wider spatial trends at broader scales.

We are primarily concerned with the socio-spatial frontier as an area that is undergoing a rapid transformation because of the migration of people and the opening of new economic opportunities, and where authority and governance are significantly diluted and transformed. Moreover, frontiers are more than ‘liminal spaces’, characterised by a state of ambiguity or in-between-ness fraught with possibilities and opportunities to start over (McDowell and Crooke 2019) because the room for innovation is actually limited because of the normativity of capitalism and the power asymmetries between central, relatively consolidated areas and the frontier. Frontspaces are projections of the institutions and relations of central politico-economic areas; in other words, they are the centre being reasserted and gradually incorporate the margins in the same developmental project. Marx argued that capitalism is not merely the movement of exchange values because circulation alone can never realise capital (considering that the mere exchange of equivalents extinguishes value, and the circulation of money and commodity cannot lead to self-renewal). The success of circulation requires mediation of the total economic process, including geographical connections and socio-ideological aspects, as in the case of new sites for extracting resources and producing commodities. ‘Commodities constantly have to be thrown into it anew from the outside, like fuel into a fire’ (Marx 1973: 255). New development frontiers, as in the case of Africa, the Amazon and in Southeast Asia, today, are therefore required to accommodate economic and social demands and divert attention away from home-grown problems. There is always a demand for materials and resources, new markets and business opportunities, for compensating socio-ecological degradation and reducing socio-political tensions through migration. Marx (1976: 794) observes that some workers emigrate, but ‘in fact they are merely
following capital, which has itself emigrated’. The next section summarises our five main points (or conceptual claims) about the advance of capitalist development and its socio-ecological outcomes.

**Theorising the Time-Spaces of Economic Development and Frontier Making**

The socio-spatial frontiers of capitalist development exist not only because they provide economic and social opportunities that may be more difficult to access elsewhere but because problems accumulated in central areas are responsible for frontier making (insofar as this constitutes a fundamental endeavour to renovate the whole economic system). At the frontier, the new remains tamed, subordinate and relativised as genuine economic creativity because the ontic reality of the frontier is fundamentally shaped by the transplantation of exogenous socio-economic relations. The above-mentioned empirical discussion helps to illustrate the projection of the situation of the politico-economic centre on the frontier. For instance, for more than 400 years, there were limited and only sporadic attempts to develop productive activities in the Amazon (Théry 1997), due to the more compelling possibility of collecting and exploiting the region’s abundant resources, resulting in its perennial frontier status (Bunker 1985). In the middle of the last century, due to the complexification of the South American economy and mounting tensions in the eastern core areas, the Amazon entered a new phase of economic development, which, nevertheless, did not change its status as a frontier maker. On the contrary, the new phase of frontier making was predicated upon the old: the time was ripe for a focus on production (at least the image of production) and for a new language of modernity (Ioris 2015). Since the 1960s, the region has been a target for the construction of hydropower schemes, roads, mega timber processing plants, navigation infrastructure, the industrial pole of Manaus (Brazil) and, most importantly, for the advance of agribusiness. The region is still a frontier, despite looking ever more like the politico-economic centres, and even more of a frontier precisely because of this attempt to imitate the centres. (and even more of a frontier precisely because of that).
Consequently, in order to interrogate the frontier, one has to simultaneously comprehend the achievements and contradictions of the most developed (central) economic areas. We can rely on the politico-economic methodology adopted by Marx to describe the evolution of capitalism and from his claim that the bourgeois economy supplies the key to the ancient economies that preceded it. Marx (1973: 105) argues that the anatomy of humans ‘contains a key to the anatomy of the ape’, that is, ‘the intimations of higher development in the less developed systems can be understood only after the higher development is already known’. To understand the interpenetration between past and present, Marx specifically warns that one must progress carefully because similarities and differences must be examined in detail, avoiding simplistic, non-critical associations. That is certainly useful, but we need first to reverse the chronological direction of Marx’s analysis, from the centre to the (more recent) socio-spatial frontier. The reason is that, although the frontier obviously emerged after the economy evolved in central areas, it, nonetheless, always revisits the basic elements of the centre’s economic past. This is the case regarding, for example, processes of primitive accumulation, dispossession, unregulated appropriation of resources and labour exploitation, ideological argumentation of progress and the imposition of a bourgeois order and associated values. Starting from the realisation that development frontiers are predicated and constrained by the lingering failures of the areas where migrants and business people originally came from, the controversial and politicised dynamics that emerge can be schematically summarised in five main points, which are relevant for the examination of other contemporary frontiers around the world.

The first main conceptual claim is that development frontier making may appear as a social and spatial dislocation, as distanced from the centre, while, in effect, the centre is being projected, restated and restored. There is no essential disconnection between the socio-economy in the consolidated (central) and the new (frontier) areas, but actually a coherent continuity between the centre and the frontier. Frontiers are therefore more than ‘zones of incorporation’ of an expanding world system (cf. Wallerstein 1974); they play a key role in the reorganisation and revitalisation of the centre. There is no spatial contradiction between the centre and the new areas, but in reality, the frontier is presupposed in the contradictions of
the centre itself and functions as a mechanism to mitigate those tensions and prolong the existence of the centre. In this way, the areas where capitalism keeps expanding are, from the outset, loaded with the practices, realisations and vices of the old areas. The European colonisation of the Americas transferred to the new continent socio-political hierarchies, values and ideologies that underpinned metropolitan societies in Europe. The Americas contained not only riches and resources but became catalysts for controlled, top-down reforms in the centre. Similar processes were present in the eighteenth century when colonisation expanded in India, and in the nineteenth century during the Scramble for Africa and the partition of the continent among European colonial powers. Simultaneously, other parts of Asia and Oceania were turned into spatial frontiers. In more recent decades, several of these former colonies have been recolonised, this time particularly under the rhetoric of market globalisation, foreign investment (often in the form of land, water and nature grabbing) and international development.

In this way, the social, economic and spatial configuration of frontiers fundamentally replicates the mechanisms of exploitation and exclusion that define capitalist nations (with all their contradictions and frictions). The development frontier is more than a spatial fix, as argued by Harvey (2006), that is, a location where capital can be diverted and invested in infrastructure and real estate, in order to respond to problems of over-accumulation. Frontiers are areas where time and space are reconfigured and that in theory could result in something new but because of their subordinate status rapidly assume a configuration that largely mimics the core areas. That is, time and space are transfigured but retain the properties they had in the original, central areas. The frontier is where the trajectory of time and space (as established in the central area) is disrupted, creating a realm of potentialities, but then, due to the dynamics of frontier making, the new area is retained within the sphere of influence of the centre. The geography of the frontier fundamentally unfolds around the troublesome gap between the possibility of the new and the concrete reproduction of key features of the (older) centre. As theorised in Aristotle’s Physics, change requires the existence of potentiality, which is actualised and realised according to specific circumstances but without full independence. The end-state of the process of change depends on the
specific properties of the system and its potentiality for change. The frontier is less fixed, more tentative and, to some extent, open, but the previous order is only superficially and temporarily interrupted, and then rapidly and effectively reconfigured according to what existed before in the centre. The reasons for the stymied potentiality of frontier activity are located in the controlling power of the processes of expropriation, enrichment and authority, which empower some sections of society and establish a new spatial order that only partially, asymmetrically incorporates the majority of the frontier population.

The centre must be upheld (to safeguard dominant interests and political power) through the production of new economic and social peripheries, but only to the extent that the periphery mirrors the decisive politico-economic features of the centre. (That is the crucial difference between frontiers in a capitalist economy and refugees from the advance of capitalism, as in the case of alternative communities and isolated Indigenous tribes). In all social spaces defined by market-centred relations, the ‘critical economic decisions are often far removed from where the primary effects will be felt and without the input from those who will be directly affected. That makes it especially difficult to fully grasp and combat the extent of environmental degradation’ (Magdoff and Williams 2017: 77). Although the mindset of frontier people may still not be strictly capitalist (in the sense of efficient realisation of profit and maximisation of economic outputs), the logic of the frontier is indirectly associated with capitalist tendencies operating at different scales. While Harvey (2006) did not pay special attention to the lived processes at the frontiers of capital expansion, his observation that location is an active element in the overall circulation and accumulation of capital is spot on: frontier still has a fluid and unsettled organisation, but which from the outset has very favourable conditions for supporting the centre and creating new spaces for capital to flourish. The new socio-spatial frontiers emerge out of the contradictions and constraints of consolidated areas but also with limited freedom to reconstitute social and economic relations much beyond the given hegemonic conditions. The strategic role of frontier situations is not simply to recirculate capital, but to mitigate mounting social tensions (such as unemployment and political unrest, e.g. Scottish and Irish migrants to British colonies or ex-colonies), release
the value of natural resources hitherto beyond economic use (minerals, water, land, labour power, etc.) and pave the way for new cycles of investment and circulation. Frontiers may be located in either urban or rural areas; in some cases, the movement is from conflict-prone rural areas towards the periphery of large cities, as has typically happened in Latin America (the case of Lima’s barriadas is paradigmatic, exacerbated by Peru’s civil war in the 1980s and the liberalising reforms in the 1990s).

Our second main claim is about the production of development frontiers through the reinforcement of the multiple and interconnected dualisms that characterise Western culture and the Westernised pattern of economic development. Many authors have identified the origins of Western dualisms in Hebrew theology and Greek philosophy, sustained through the Christian polarity of good-evil and the Cartesian mind-body dichotomy that permeate Western patterns of thought and associated scientific knowledge. The result is a situation in which interpersonal dualisms (male/female, white/non-white, learned/traditional, archaic/modern, unproductive/productive, etc.) are deeply rooted in, and help, to reinforce, Western culture and its socio-economic structures (Mellor 2000). These ingrained dualisms are forced upon spatial frontiers by dominant interest groups as part of the attempt to consolidate new relations of production and reproduction. The long chain of dualisms derives from the fundamental dichotomy between core and frontier, which is nurtured by the supposed superiority of the centre and the alleged deficiencies of the frontier. The fabricated contrast between ‘superior’ people in central areas and ‘second-class’ frontier inhabitants is instrumental both for the institutionalisation of the new frontier and for upholding the authority of the centre. The typical narrative of frontier making replicates the hierarchical differentiation between core and frontier, and reinforces the message that activities at the frontier must reproduce social roles and institutions imported from consolidated areas.

Dualistic thinking has been put to work to further the advance and legitimisation of frontier making in different parts of the world. Australian settler culture vividly illustrates the superposition of various dualisms; this society was highly racist, anti-native and hierarchical, permeated by a masculine discourse about the supremacy of the free white settler (Woollacott 2015). Australian frontier making has also been denounced
for the recurrent practice of genocide. As described by Rogers and Bain (2016), between 1788 and 1928, extreme brutality was rationalised through the melding of Darwinian ideas about the survival of the fittest (i.e. the white, male settlers) with notions of inferior races that would inevitably die out (i.e. the aborigines). That led to a perverse combination of extinction and extermination, due to the impossibility of pastoralism coexisting with indigenous prairie management. Despite this tragic history, so far, there has been limited academic interest in frontier genocide, which Staner (1968, mentioned by Rogers and Bain 2016) calls the ‘great Australian silence’. There are still unresolved questions about who should be considered responsible for genocidal colonisation, considering the impact of white settlers, local authorities and, ultimately, the British colonial masters in London. Evans (2007) details the full extent of this genocide, the result of a coordinated onslaught on lives, land and culture, which was central to the evolution of capitalism from the age of mercantilist colonisation to the time of industrialisation. Of course, local aborigines tried to resist, sometimes violently, but this ‘does not change the fact that genocide occurred’ (Rogers and Bain 2016: 90).

The self-professed supremacy of white, Western society, and its self-granted permission to conquer and exploit, were potentialised during colonisation by strategic scientific developments (navigation, firearms, production tools, etc.) and the application of scientific and religious knowledge (for instance, geography to support imperialist projects; biology and geology to identify valuable resources; and Christian morality to disempower and subjugate the locals). However, old dualisms have continued to reverberate, resulting in accumulated dualities, long after the end of colonialism. The tension between the advance of novel social and economic relations and the persistence of the old values and institutions is one of the main characteristics of frontier making. The range of interconnected dualisms was felt intensely in the Amazon, where the culture, knowledge and skills of traditional peoples, including those who migrated to the region after the 1970s and their families, were systematically devalued to pave the way for the commodification of production and consumption practices. Barbier (2012) asserts that the expansion of the Amazon frontier was in itself dualist, split between agribusiness farms and family agricultural units, while, in fact, the agricultural frontier is
multiple, and the different categories of farming are materially and socio-culturally interdependent. Nonetheless, the promise of a better life for the large majority of impoverished migrants was never fulfilled in the new reality dominated by large-scale farmers and transnational corporations (Ioris 2017). The appeal of the modern world, at the expense of social traditions and community life, is also illustrated by the ongoing advance of processed, frozen food into the most remote corners of the region (with all the associated problems for health and the local economy), as in the case of the upper Negro River Basin on the border between Brazil and Colombia.

The third ontic feature of socio-spatial frontiers is dialectically related to the previous two: time and space at the frontier are compressed, reconfigured and launched in different directions. Spatial and temporal changes do not necessarily progress in the linear and sequential manner typical of core areas; at the frontier, the basic mechanisms of expropriation, commodification, proletarianisation and so on will follow unique patterns (obviously connected with the wider socio-economic trends and structures). The frontier has different phases, which normally begin slowly and then, when circumstances are favourable, accelerate rapidly. The frontier’s very existence is never guaranteed, but one frontier can open and close several times on different occasions. A particular area that was considered a functional frontier for the purpose of capitalist relations can suddenly lose that status, for instance, due to competition from new products or production areas. Then, after some time, what had become an obsolete frontier can be re-created and incorporated into new rounds of migration and production, as new opportunities and additional technologies become available (e.g. the handling of new products and goods in spaces previously used for others). This means that old frontiers are excavated through the redeployment of knowledge and practices that, once again, are externally imposed from the centre—if the frontier could re-emerge independently of the centre, it would no longer be a frontier. Not only can old frontiers be supplanted by new ones, but different ‘frontier moments’ can be both imposed and superposed on previous socio-spatial experiences. Ultimately, ‘frontier is not space itself. It is something that happens in and to space. Frontiers take pace. Literally’ (Rasmussen and Lund 2018: 388).
New socio-spatial relations are built upon past experiences, not necessarily improving practices or procedures; in fact, a spatial frontier may be new in historical terms, while still replicating some of the oldest and vilest relations and institutions. At the frontier, capitalism is renewed through novel technologies and productive platforms, but is also virtually free to reinstate elements of violence, exploitation, dispossession, racism and other injustices that characterised previous historical periods. This has been the case with the Amazon region, which was a frontier of biodiversity and mineral extraction during colonial times, then the main source of plant latex at the time of the Second Industrial Revolution and, more recently, due to the demand for agribusiness goods, has become a dynamic frontier for plantation production and export. Violence was employed as a central element of colonisation strategy, and the expanding frontiers pushed forward by the invading Europeans did not, in fact, advance civilisation, but rather destroyed social groups and their sophisticated knowledge and art (Hemming 1987). One of the most notorious examples was the legislation introduced by the Marquis of Pombal, prime minister of Portugal, in 1757 (called Diretório), which forced indigenous groups in the Amazon to move to settlements managed by a ‘director’ [diretor], where racial assimilation was encouraged and cultural and linguistic identity subsumed. During the rubber extraction period in the nineteen century, the existence of indigenous groups was ignored, and contingents of very poor migrants were attracted to the region to collect latex, which in the end served to enrich a very small elite in Manaus and Belém, while satisfying the growing industrial demand for natural rubber. This exemplifies how genocide, slavery and violence were not sporadic incidents, but constituted an ongoing, systematic and transnational phenomenon underpinning frontier making.

The fourth element of our conceptualisation is the mystification of the benefits and opportunities available at the frontier of capitalist development. The condition of the frontier is always highly hierarchical and often manipulated to serve mainly the interests of those in more favourable positions (which include land speculators, rural development companies, intermediaries and fixers, opportunistic investors, traders who receive and export goods produced by a large number of individual agents, etc.), but these asymmetries are disguised by the appearance of accessibility and better
prospects for earning a living. The mystification of what frontier areas are really offering is based on deliberate misrepresentations or omissions. There exists a fetishism of the frontier that is nourished by ambiguous evidence of success and vague stories about people who thrived. Turner (1920) misrepresented the frontier as a conduit of democracy and equality, and his account exemplifies the positive narrative constructed by those who gain from the frontier. Along similar lines, Bowman (1927: 64) argued in his work on ‘pioneer fringes’ that a ‘changing environment breeds liberalism if the resources are abundant enough to support close settlements and the development of independent social and political institutions’. However, instead of a political vacuum, the frontier is a space of social control, where autonomy was a clear strategy for governing the territory (Hogan 1985). The mystification of the frontier also determines that success is measured according to the values of central areas and Western standards. Failures are seldom attributed to frontier conditions; rather, the blame is placed on the incompetence of migrants and pioneers who failed to take advantage of the opportunities presented to them.

The memories of those who migrated from the south of Brazil to the Amazon were populated by images of courage associated with their Italian and German ancestors (who moved to South America in the nineteenth century) and the mythology of bravery related to the consolidation of international borders with the Spaniards, and later the Argentineans. Wealthy landowners, subsistence farmers and workers were all products of the same agrarian past who lived in the south of the country, but the symbolism of the frontier was appropriated differently by different social groups. The rhetoric of victory and anticipated success was repeatedly invoked by those who led the opening of new agricultural areas in the Amazon in the 1970s, which helped to downplay the obstacles faced by the newcomers and the crude reality of socio-ecological exploitation. The plan of the military dictatorship was to allocate land to impoverished peasants and landless people (considered troublemakers in their areas of origin), but it was a monumental disappointment as it largely failed to foster agrarian capitalism in the region (Rivière d’Arc and Apestéguy 1978). The majority of those who migrated to the Amazon did not have the means to secure or maintain land and ended up as proletarians in
urban or rural areas (Ioris 2019). In practice, the frontier was less epic and more a daily fight for survival (a significant proportion of migrants did not find success and returned, even more impoverished, to their areas of origin in the south, where many took part in other forms of protests and land occupation).

The Australian frontier-making experience, which has significant differences from that of the Amazon and other parts of South America, is frequently associated with an image of conquest and triumph, but this is largely explained by the construction of a new society that mirrored British values and social hierarchies. Australia in the early nineteenth century was a major destination for convicts and ex-convicts (who the authorities wished to remove from the motherland) and then, after the 1840s, a target for free settlers, encouraged to move to the colony to take control of ‘free land’, in fact, aboriginal land (Woollacott 2015). As far back as 1834, an Australian settler argued that those who colonise a new area ‘are sure to enjoy a greater degree of consideration and importance among their companions than they could reasonably have hopped to attain in the older society’ (Wakefield 1967: 327). Inequalities were not only found between settlers and aborigines; a small squatter elite (described as a ‘squattocracy’, and including, among others, members of the Melbourne Club, established in 1839) controlled most of the land and limited access to new migrant contingents. This created serious resentments and pressure for land reform. New legislation was introduced, such as the 1860 Nicholson Land Act, but its effectiveness was limited, as the powerful squatter elite could still purchase whatever land they required through the use of ‘dummy bidders’. Wealthy squatters also used their knowledge of the land to buy up the best locations, leaving only the least fertile ground for less privileged settlers.

The mystification of frontier opportunities was also an important feature of the conquest of the American Midwest around Chicago. After 1833, the regional population and the economy grew rapidly due to the activity of settlers, investors and speculators. These so-called boosters advanced economic theories and well-crafted rhetoric about the natural endowments of the Chicago area (minimising the obvious need to invest in infrastructure and logistics to make the frontier really flourish). Their actions were typically loaded with enthusiastic exaggeration and
self-interested promotion. Due to improvements in rail and boat transportation, their promotion of the frontier became a self-fulfilling prophecy, and during the nineteenth century, Chicago became a main trade centre for grain, timber and meat (Cronon 1992). The accomplishments of the frontier were internationally celebrated, culminating with the staging of the 1893 World’s Columbian Exposition in Chicago to applaud the progress of American civilisation and the fulfilment of Columbus’ dreams four centuries earlier (obviously discounting the immense social and environmental impacts). It is interesting that, while mystification and ideological pressures were extremely powerful, these phenomena also flourished because people in their daily struggle for survival are often led to express conservative views and put up with the current state of affairs. The most vulnerable and disorganised groups at the frontier tend to have serious difficulty developing coordinated opposition, despite their actual level of consciousness.¹

Fifth, even in a globalised and highly interconnected world, frontier dynamics will not die out. On the contrary, frontier making will continue to expand and flourish around the world either through the incorporation of new areas hitherto subject to less capitalist influence, or with the replacement of previous frontier making activity with novel rounds of capitalist relations of production and reproduction. Accelerated market fluxes and population mobility do not dispense with spatial frontiers because the modern Western world persistently strives for new places and landscapes to conquer (Ioris 2018b). One of the decisive features of capitalist modernity is how it aims to standardise location-specific processes and incorporate them into the same market-centred rationality. Frontier situations favour the reaffirmation of Western modernity because existing socio-ecological elements of their reality are typically disorganised and thus easily replaced with new features associated with the Global North. However, it is important to realise also that capitalism does not need frontiers merely to renew itself, but, on the contrary, frontier making helps the centre to

¹ In his study on territorial conquest and European border disputes, Namier (1942: 69–70) perspicaciously observed that: ‘One would expect people to remember the past and to imagine the future. But in fact, when discussing or writing about history, they imagine it in terms of their own experience, and when trying to gauge the future they cite supposed analogies from the past: till, by a double process of repetition, they imagine the past and remember the future’.
remain largely as it has always been. At the spatial frontiers, capitalism can be more capitalistic, in the sense that it is less constrained and more potentialised by the unique conditions of frontiers. There exists a necessity for new socio-spatial frontiers to work as opportunities to try to erase socio-ecologies and produce novel spaces or new socio-economic relations under the influence of capitalist modernity. Frontier making is intrinsic in the peculiar trajectory of capitalism that combines dualisms and accumulates tensions between old and new, exploitation and production, particularities and universalisms. But the necessity for spatial frontiers needs to be understood in dialectical and non-prescriptive terms. Žižek (2011) claims that historical necessity is really a convergence of contingencies. He argues that the Hegelian notions of totality and historical necessity are, in fact, elements of flexible reasoning that imply a radically open contingency of history. The relation between contingency and necessity is dialectical, in the sense that there is a necessity for contingencies and, more radically, a contingency of necessities (i.e. things became necessary only in a contingent way). The relation between past and present is also dialectical, as the present is obviously influenced by the past, but the past is also reinterpreted and reconstructed by the present. As also observed by Bukharin (1929), necessity is really a chain of historical events that connect cause and effect. Rather than the trends of history being determined a priori by some overpowering force, historical necessities can only be explained retrospectively. In this way, Hegelian necessity should be seen not as a cause, but as the central property of the process of change (Mann 2008). The notions of historical necessity and dialectics are particularly relevant to understanding the Hegelian theorisation of global trends and the interventions of the state apparatus (Ioris 2014), as much as to the search for alternatives to capitalist frontiers, as examined next.
Perspectives of Development, Space and the Environment

The five main ontic features of the trajectory of the establishment of new development spaces discussed earlier constitute an attempt to identify, if only schematically, the basis for the insertion of new areas and reinsertion of old ones into the sphere of influence of Western, capitalist modernity. Socio-spatial frontiers continue to expand, including processes of production, extraction and politico-ideological containment, not only because of favourable economic opportunities but mainly due to the need to stabilise and invigorate core economic and political trends. At its frontiers capitalism can reassert hegemony with much lower costs and fewer restrictions. At the frontier, order, authority and convention are suspended; time and space acquire new meanings; and excesses are committed—Martins (2009: 09) describes the frontier expanding into the Amazon as the ‘scenery of intolerance, ambition and death’—but the compelling symbolism of abundance, potential wealth and a bright future represents a powerful legitimisation tool. Such process has not been interrupted by market-based globalisation because frontier making continues to be predicated in rising tensions in central economic areas and their unstoppable demand for goods and services. This inexorable interdependency between centre and frontier is clearly a process with major ideological and political significance. The evolution of the frontier could hypothetically take any direction and lead to different social arrangements, but, in practice, there is a great deal of constraint due to the hegemony of capitalist relations. It is a self-fulfilling prophecy normally recounted only by the winners. The success of frontier making, from the perspective of Western economists and policymakers, depends on the consolidation of private property, the ability to exploit socionature, incentives for the circulation of capital and widespread commodification, and financialisation. Experiences that deviate from this model are considered anomalies and curiosities rather than genuine, viable frontiers.

The organisation of capitalist frontiers effects the maintenance of what Rancière describes as the police order, a symbolic constitution of the social that both fragments and incorporates, insists on homogenisation
and pushes for consensus. The individual must passively comply, circulate in a space emptied of politics, as ‘the space of circulation is nothing other than the space of circulation’ [l’espace de la circulation n’est que l’espace de la circulation] (Rancière 1998: 242). In agribusiness frontiers such as the Amazon, crop monoculture has disturbing material and symbolic parallels with political and cultural monocultures that permeate highly hierarchical and exclusionary societies. Inequalities have become so widespread and structural that Gross (2019: 14) affirms that it is practically obsolete to mention it and now ‘we now in the age of indecency’ [Nous sommes à l’âge de l’indécence]. If the frontier spatial relations are unique in terms of potentiality and transformation being contained by the hegemony of capitalist prerogatives, these mechanisms of control and legitimisation are not absolute. On the contrary, because of the fluid boundaries and high mobility of newcomers, the frontier contains interstices in which political consciousness and reactions can emerge. Resistance to the capitalist logic of the frontier is not something that flares up by chance, but is located in the very constitution of the frontier that nurtures those interstices. The frontier has multiple time-space discontinuities as much as it shows rugosity (which are leftover characteristics from prior periods, according to Santos 1985), and it is in this context that opposition, almost always silent, but sometimes intense, erupts.

Resistance is therefore also related to the complex translocation of economic and social patterns from the centre to the frontier, considering that both migrants and established residents retain complex memories and experiences from pre-frontier times that allow them, depending on circumstances, the possibility to imagine some form of alternative. Durkheim (On Suicide) demonstrated that the most personal problems have sociological bases and spatial expressions; in our case, the frontier is a sociological process subject to significant individual forces. Resistance and reactions are informed and fuelled by past individual and collective experiences, such as previous conflicts or repression elsewhere. Depending on how people became involved and were relocated to the frontier (spontaneously or via government agencies), they will be more or less willing to question authority and risk whatever they have. The past is mobilised and influences the present because of cultural proclivities and subjective attitudes related to particular experiences, which ensure that particular kinds
of historical consciousness become meaningful (Whitehead 2003). Frontier making is a cross-scale process that arises from national and international pressures, but the interplay between culture and history (beyond any false dichotomy between these) is resolved at the level of landscape change. The crafting of landscapes encapsulates historical and political consciousness that help to shape group identity. In the case of the Amazon, the landscape of large agribusiness areas is the consequence of multiple agencies that both converge and diverge, as the heavy machinery of wealthy landowners contrasts with pockets of family agriculture and those living along roads and in marginalised areas.

The socio-cultural construction of the development frontier as a space of opportunity and likely rewards for those who persevere helps to maintain social inequalities, under the assumption that social mobility merely depends on hard work (and a bit of luck). Although open rebellion and confrontation are rare, the main form of resistance is a silent process that happens through various forms of practices and positions (Scott 1985). Ultimately, the prospects of consciousness and resistance based on daily survival through the production of new landscapes at the frontier have major implications for a critical research agenda. Interrogating the frontier is a formidable challenge for critical, left-wing thinking (primarily concentrated on justice and equality), considering that frontier making is by definition a generation and perpetuation of inequalities. Likewise, critical scholars need to develop the ability to work through the political, apparently chaotic process of landscape change and silent resistance through the interstices of the established, taken-for-granted foundations of the frontier. All this requires a serious reflexive commitment and rejection of positivistic, politically void accounts of frontier making. As advocated by Lacoste (1973, in Quaini 1982), we need to reflect in order to measure, and not measure first to reflect later. That does not mean looking for facts to fit the conceptual model, but rather a firm investigative effort that amalgamates comprehensive empirical data and constant critical thinking. A development frontier may be a tentative, uncertain space where capitalist relations more easily prevail, but it can also be seen as a frontier of resistance and of overcoming the perverse socio-spatial consequences of capital’s ascendancy. Before we could progress further, it is
necessary to understand the structure of the book and how the different parts and chapters relate and complement each other.

Book Structure and Summary of the Chapters

This collective book is the result of extensive and continuous North-South collaboration between academics at different stages of their career and based in various universities and research centres. What has brought all together and in constant dialogue with non-academics is their common interest in questioning development trends and its multiple socio-ecological contradictions. The authors have worked together over the years in several research projects, publications and scientific events, which provided the common ground for different perspectives and disciplinary approaches to meet. Its first part includes mainly authors who took part in the workshop ‘Environment and Development: Shared Twenty-First Century Sustainability Challenges’, chaired by the editor, and that took place in the State University of Campinas (Unicamp, Brazil). This initiative aimed to provide new insights and methodological approaches to understanding the multiple challenges related to the interface between development and environmental sustainability. These are crucial challenges, of greater importance today, as the world is increasingly interconnected, with growing rates of production and trade but also with serious levels of inequality, environmental degradation and mounting socio-ecological risks (for instance, due to climate change, soil erosion, water scarcity, biodiversity loss and social inequality). One of the main policy contradictions explored during the workshop in Campinas was the limits of supposedly sustainable and integrated responses, as well as the reductionism of technical assessments and the narrow consideration of alternatives. These dilemmas were examined and the theoretical and lived experiences of development were critically addressed, paying attention to multiple scales, local realities and economic frontiers. This workshop was funded by the UK-Newton Fund, facilitated by the British Council and managed by Cardiff University and Unicamp’s Institute of Geosciences.

The second part of the book is directly associated with the series of events and other activities of the Agrocultures International Network
between 2018 and 2020 that investigated socio-spatial interactions and historico-geographical transformations of the agricultural frontiers in the Amazon Region (more information at www.agrocultures.org). The initiative created a privileged space for critical discussion and interaction between academics and wider civil society focused on local knowledge, habits, language and subjectivities in the context of a perverse process of market-centred regional development. The Agrocultures Network produced a number of technical publications and specific recommendations for development and policymaking. The initiative was helpful in proposing alternatives to the existing socio-economic trends and to the mounting failures of politico-economic decision-making. It has also enabled knowledge transfer, research networking and cross-agency learning for the actors involved at the local, national and international levels. The series of workshops were directly informed by the input of the publics who live, produce and consume in agricultural frontier areas, and the organisations that advocate for change on their behalf. A vital part of resolving academic debates, and making these relevant to real-world change, was to present practitioners’ views at events where general members of the public do not normally contribute. The activities benefited from the visualisation and representation of the agricultural frontier through the use and recording of images, symbols, maps and artefacts, which informed the understanding of the spatial history of the agricultural advance in the Amazon. The Agrocultures Network workshop was funded by the Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC) and managed by the editor, based at Cardiff University, and his colleague, the historian Vitale Joanoni Neto, of the Federal University of Mato Grosso (UFMT). Financial and institutional support from the Newton Fund, AHRC and the respective universities are warmly acknowledged and much appreciated.

After this introductory pages, in Chap. 2, Rice discusses growing urban health issues around the world, whereby social and environmental living conditions in cities and towns are contributing to poor health outcomes. Empirical evidence and theoretical narratives point to these new urban centres, which have contributed to the proliferation of ill health. As a result, there is growing awareness and urgency of the need for ‘healthy cities’ that support well-being and improve health outcomes for
inhabitants. The chapter specifically deals with the emergence of ‘diseasogenic cities’ and the implementation of Healthy City strategies in the Global South, ranging from embracing alternative ontologies and epistemologies, local knowledge and societal change, through to practical solutions for delivering context-specific sanitation and healthcare. Chapter 3, by Souza and collaborators, examines the trend of urban water problems and river basin degradation, what is based on a case study conducted in Porto Alegre, Brazil. Those tendencies are associated with challenging issues such as poverty, unplanned settlements, social exclusion, lack of basic sanitation infrastructure, poor management of water resources and inefficiencies in environmental governance systems. The responses should necessarily involve the participation of diverse stakeholders in a complex process of dialogue and learning that must deal with the multifaceted ecological and social issues affecting urban water systems and populations inhabiting their surroundings. In this context, social learning is considered a relevant approach to inform collective action towards the sustainability of these socio-ecological systems.

Chapter 4, by Koseoglu, provides a discussion of the importance of water management for development, and vice versa. An effective coordination of water should consider factors beyond economics such as political, social and ecological dynamics in complex interactions between stakeholders to prevent present and future conflicts related to water. In that context, systems analysis (SA) models have emerged in response to this need and allowed for a holistic approach to address a variety of water management issues from regional planning and river basin management to water quality, flooding and drought management, and sectorial water allocation. The chapter offers an introduction to the systems analysis modelling approach and its evolution, as decision support tool since the 1950s, in response to contemporary water challenges. Following a brief conceptualisation, an extensive literature review showcases the major methodological trajectory and practical contributions of the SA field of investigation, particularly in the Global South. In Chap. 5, Lima and colleagues examine the relevance of environmental risk and catastrophe for conservation and development. The analysis is based on large-scale disaster that occurred in the Doce River Basin, in the southeast of Brazil, that led to massive destruction and losses of human life. Following the
tragedy, a series of political and management decisions were taken, impairing ecosystem recovery. The creation of a new governance structure that could potentially deal with river basin reclamation is assessed according to each stakeholder’s decision-making power. Results show that there remain many biases towards funds management, diminishing effective institutional diversity in the decision-making process. Despite the efforts in creating new environmental governance systems to address post-disaster ruptures, the lack of equanimity in the governance structure, combined with frail law enforcement, is still a primary obstacle.

In Chap. 6, Leila Ferreira and colleagues discuss how climate change represents a multilevel challenge, simultaneously relating to the local and global scales. National governments are key actors in developing climate change mitigation and adaptation strategies. Brazil, China and Mozambique are emblematic cases where climate risks may deepen vulnerabilities and undermine development prospects. The analysis is focused on the institutional arrangements and political strategies that have emerged since then in those three countries and how climate issues were considered in their political processes. Empirical results suggest that both Brazil and China have focused much of their efforts on mitigating actions, that is, the reduction of greenhouse gas emissions. On the other hand, in Mozambique, political action on climate change is largely based on the need to respond to the risks and disasters that are intensified by these changes. In Chap. 7, Rafael Ioris and his collaborator revisit the momentous occasion when, on 12 November 2016, the Colombian president Juan Manuel Santos optimistically proclaimed the reaching of a final accord that would put an end to the longest military conflict in modern history. The leader of this violence-ridden nation sought to assuage the stalemate created by the defeat of the government’s position in the referendum held on 2 October, in that same year. The rejection of what had become known as the Havana Accord, signed between the Colombian government and FARC (Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia, that is, the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia), that same month represented an unmistakable and serious warning that, though essential, formal peace negotiations were not all the country needed. Despite the feeling of achievement and the optimism conveyed by the agreement, its implementation has been impacted by the legacy of
past development, growing environmental problems and the many disputes between sectors, regions and groups of interest.

In Chap. 8, Goodwin reflects on the politics of water scarcity and community water associations in rural Highland Ecuador. The author argues that the water that now flows from the tap is the fruit of a long-term process of collective organisation that has united rural families and communities in a struggle to overcome socially constructed inequalities. Through this ongoing struggle, community water associations have developed the autonomous capacity to deliver water services and manage water supplies. Not only has this given them the capacity to supply potable and irrigation water to rural communities but the space to create new relations and practices and transform relations with the state. Community water associations have confronted multiple obstacles in the construction of autonomy, but the process performed a fundamental role in challenging water scarcity, reconfiguring water politics and reshaping capitalist development. The last chapter (Chap. 9) of the first part, by Cremona and her colleague examines a gap in the ecosocialist literature related to the subject of transformative agency, exactly those actors with the capacity and power to realise an ecosocialist vision. The authors explore several emblematic publications to show that five agents feature prominently: social movements, indigenous groups, the affluent capitalist class, left-wing political parties and the state. Their specific capabilities and power resources seem to determine the different roles they could assume in a transition from acapitalist present to an ecosocialist future.

Opening the second part of the book, which is dedicated to environment and development issues in the Amazon Region, Varese (Chap. 10) examines four parallel stories that reveal the relative success of indigenous communities in defending their autonomy and examines how their territory is linked to their ability to mobilise external solidarity around the use of national and international legal instruments as effective shields to protect their rights. Considering the past decades of ecological history, it seems that of all the victims of this violence exercised on the Amazon region by economic sectors in collusion with the national state, many indigenous peoples have been able to endure the aggression and secure some circumstantial victories. Through their political and cultural struggle, these groups have brought to the centre of national and international
politics the ethical and environmental principles that should inform the relation of the rest of the country with the Amazon. In Chap. 11, Gonzalez shows that neoliberal extractivism remains an integral part of Latin America’s economic agenda, particularly in the expanding new frontiers of development. That happens despite widespread societal opposition and adverse socio-environmental impacts. It, therefore, presents significant challenges not only for sustainable development but the relationship between state, society and business. The chapter is focused on Peru, one country which has seen significant neoliberal expansion, particularly in its rainforest Loreto Region. It outlines the challenges facing Peruvian society in holding oil companies accountable for pollution through the political ecology of voice (PEV) theoretical framework. Empirical findings, examined against that conceptual framework, indicate that Peruvian citizens, particularly indigenous people, face major difficulties in holding oil companies accountable for pollution in an environment where inaccessibility, injustice and inequality prevail.

In Chap. 12, Little makes use of ethnohistorical studies to review diverse processes of ethnogenesis in the Americas, involving indigenous peoples and maroon societies, in which the turbulent, often complementary, relationship between frontier processes of ethnocide and subsequent processes of ethnocide take place. The concept of ‘cycles of ethnogenesis’ is applied to the contemporary Brazilian Amazonia where, beginning in the 1980s, a new set of social and ethnic groups emerged in the wake of a previous developmentalist frontier. In this process, the global environmental movement, which emerged as a powerful force in its own right in the debates and decisions regarding the development of the Amazon region, played an important role in assisting emerging socio-environmental and ethnic groups in gaining visibility. The chapter also considers the political and theoretical implications of incorporating a dynamic concept of ethnogenesis into socio-cultural analysis. Chapter 13, by Joanoni Neto and Guimarães Neto, contains a reflection on the interventions of the Brazilian State, especially after the 1964 civil-military coup d’état, which transformed the Amazon into a strategic priority for conservative national development. The authors analyse the general power strategy of the dictatorship and demonstrate how the Amazon became the political and economic axis in this governmental experience, materialising in several
public policies. The text includes a review of the governmental discourses and practices that underpinned power relations, especially by focusing on the assumptions behind laws, decrees, plans, institutional programmes and administrative reforms. The main conclusion is that the business logic that permeated the administrative practice during this period persisted after the end of the dictatorial regime.

Chapter 14, a collaboration between Johansen and Marcelo Ferreira, demonstrates how development policies by different spheres of the Brazilian government (federal, state and municipal) have contributed to the occurrence of malaria in parts of the Amazon. A detailed case study is provided, focused on Mâncio Lima, a municipality in the state of Acre. A state policy in the early 2000s encouraged fish farming by opening fish ponds. The initiative, however, eventually led to massive production of breeding sites for the mosquito that transmits malaria in the Brazilian Amazon. Malaria transmission exploded in the municipality and produced the largest number of cases per inhabitant in Brazil. The chapter finishes with an analysis of the case in relation to development and post-development theories. The authors argue that any intervention in the area must consider social participation, environmental preservation and defence against local health risks. Chapter 15, by Antonio Ioris, interrogates the construction of dams and other related water infrastructure on the Brazilian section of the Amazon. Water infrastructure has been used to propel and celebrate the modernisation of the regional economy and also to reveal how modernity is always partial, fraught with gaps and contradictions. The politics of water management is analysed from a cultural, political and economic perspective that aims to contribute to an understanding of the politics of distribution, recognition and resignification that play an important role in the evolution of water modernity in the region. The chapter proposes a periodisation of regional water management, divided in three moments of intense socio-ecological change and political and economic influences. That is intended to facilitate the understanding of the impact of hegemonic pro-development ideologies and discourses, as well as to comprehend the interface between economic and more-than-economic practices.

Expanding the immediately preceding case study on water infrastructure, Chap. 16, by Figueiredo and her colleague, show that over the past
three decades, a series of global initiatives have promoted changes in water governance adopted by many countries and, in Brazil, resulted in the approval in 1997 of the Water Resources National Policy Act. Some tangible progress has been made ever since, but there is still a clear lack of effective implementation, particularly in the Amazon Hydrographic Region. This authors critically review the process of water governance and the hydrosocial territory of the Teles Pires River Basin (TPRB) in the state of Mato Grosso. Together with the analysis of documents and reports, semi-structured interviews were carried out with members of three river basin committees installed in the TPRB. Results reveal that the water governance model remains centralised, and water management model has been only partially implemented. In Chap. 17, Lagier identifies significant gaps in knowledge within the literature on rural social movements and local ecological transitions in the Amazon. The text is centred on the social movements affiliated with La Via Campesina, the world’s largest international peasants’ organisation, which has adopted ‘agroecology’ and ‘food sovereignty’ as common political principles. Empirical data show that contrary to what is often taken for granted by the more celebratory literature on rural social movements and agroecological transitions, there are complex and contradictory effects on both local ecological transitions and young activists’ capacity to promote agroecology as an alternative to agribusiness. The author argues that studying agroecology’s social and intergenerational sustainability is crucial to countering current devastating ecological and land-use patterns, which means paying attention to Amazonian youth and women’s demands.

The book finishes with the *Oxford Letter for the Amazon*, edited by Antonio Ioris and approved during the fifth workshop of the Agrocultures network, which took place in Oxford in 2020. The event started on 31 January, the same day that the UK departed from the European Union and a period of growing uncertainties related to Coronavirus disease 2019 (Covid-19) outbreak. It was a moment when the Amazon was facing increasing levels of destruction, aggression and nothing short of a genocide. The workshop at Oxford University was planned three years earlier, when the organisers could have hardly imagined how relevant and opportune that date was going to be, academically and politically. One fundamental reason, for instance, is that the governments of the nine
countries that share the Amazon have preferred to invest energy and resources on the perpetuation of troubles, instead of trying to understand and address the fundamental causes and the major consequences of impacts and growing inequalities. After years of intense debate and rich conversations stimulated by the Agrocultures initiative, something was very clear for those attending the workshop: it was necessary to say ‘no’!, ‘enough’, ‘stop!’ Things had to change significantly because the Amazon was much bigger, more complex, more beautiful and more important than the political and economic rulers seem to believe. In many ways, the Amazon has been the most crucial contemporary experiment of environment and development, where irrational, anti-people, anti-nature and anti-intelligence measures are being adopted, regardless of the will and the needs of most of its population. Old and perverse mechanisms of conquest and colonisation have been revitalised in the name of economic growth and national integration. That resulted in a trail of violence, stupidity and systemic abuses associated with new roads, dam construction, mining, timber extraction and, more than anything else, export-oriented agribusiness.

In more recent years, a new round of projects and market-friendly conservation initiatives under the hegemony of global financial capital is threatening even the small concessions secured through a difficult struggle since the 1980s, including the establishment of a few national parks and the recognition of some indigenous lands and peasant areas. Another thorny question was debated in Oxford, considering that the meeting took place in the oldest English-speaking university in the world, considered the best academic centre in the planet, a place that has produced many Nobel Prize winners and for more than a thousand years has offered a monumental contribution in fields such as philosophy, anthropology, biology, geography, history and so on. However, those walls and colleges are also very guilty of the continuous misrepresentation and mismanagement of the Amazon. The treasured Oxford University, as well as all the other universities represented there, encapsulate the failures of Western science and the incompetence of mainstream academics when they insist in maintaining an arrogant position of superiority and decide to ignore the political core of the problems we are going to discuss during this event. That is exactly why the moment of reflection was needed: to go
beyond the conventional, money-driven type of research and teaching that prevails in the universities today. To identify the hidden connections between the past and present of economic frontier making, the links between attacks on local communities in the Amazon and global climatic catastrophe, the synergies between reactionery ideologies, political dishonesty, the reproduction of poverty and the neglect of the Amazon peoples.

The departure point of the workshop was the recognition of the inequalities produced by development-as-economic-growth and the associated asymmetry of gains and losses, as well as an appreciation of the creativity, inventiveness and courage of marginalised, subaltern groups. It was remembered that in October 2019, the Amazon Synod took place, under the leadership of Pope Francis, and ascertained that religion is a collective project radically and truthfully in favour of life, love, tolerance and openness to the other. During the Agrocultures event in 2020, the suffering and the wrong which has been inflicted on the poor, exploited Amazon worker, on women and children, peasant, riparian and indigenous communities; on their ecosystems; and livelihoods were, likewise, discussed, as well as appreciating their knowledge, skills, practices and ability to resist and to dream. As previously noticed by Latour (1996: 5), ‘the presumed vanishing cultures are very much present, they are active, vibrant, inventive, proliferating in all directions, reinventing their past, subverting their own exoticism and removing the monotonous homogeneity of a global market and deterritorialized capitalism’. Despite their apparent material poverty, these groups have a lot to offer and are ready to take on any challenge. Just a few days before the workshop, the indigenous peoples of Brazil had met in Piaraçu (in the Capoto Jarina Indigenous Land), under the guidance of Chief Raoni Metuktire—who was himself the main speaker of the Oxford meeting, considered the moral Head of State of Brazil and a key intellectual and political reference in the world today—to reiterate their readiness to fight and to demonstrate that they are on the right size of history, decency and justice. These are some of the visible invisible affected by the advance of development and environmental degradation, the voices of the silent majority and the many oppressed minorities who represent what is colourful, valuable and alive in the Amazon, the living proof that the region had a long,
miserable past, has a turbulent present, but, because of its people, it can also nourish a much better future.

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