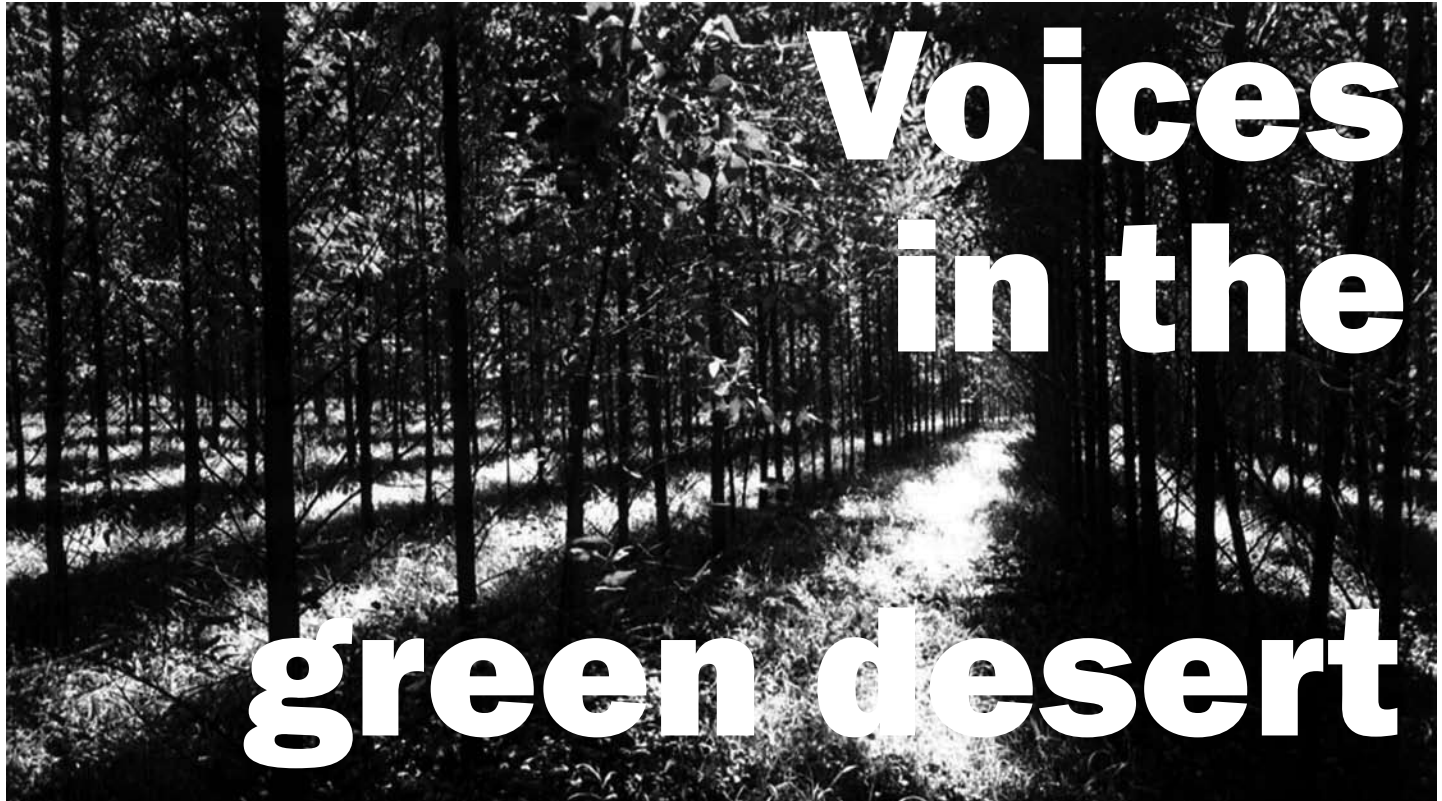


In March 2006 women entered the tree nursery at the Aracruz Celulosa pulp mill in Rio Grande do Sul, Brazil, and destroyed a million eucalyptus seedlings and its laboratory. This was a protest against the serious social and environmental impact caused by the expansion of the “green desert” – the vast eucalyptus monocultures that are spreading across southern Brazil.



SILVIA RIBEIRO

**O**n 8 March 2006, some 2,000 women from Via Campesina entered the tree nursery at the Aracruz Celulosa pulp mill in Rio Grande do Sul, Brazil, and destroyed, according to the company, a million eucalyptus seedlings and its laboratory. According to Via Campesina, this International Women’s Day action was a protest against the serious social and environmental impact caused by the expansion of the “green desert,” as they call the vast expanses of eucalyptus monocultures that are expanding over several parts of the planet and that now invade southern Brazil.

The local press and some of the national newspapers launched a vicious campaign accusing the women of vandalism and immorality, of opposing progress and of promoting foreign intervention (due to the presumed presence of overseas members of the international Via Campesina peasants’ movement). One reporter from the huge media conglomerate ‘O Globo’ went

so far as to create his own (false) “news”, calling the police to a Via Campesina press conference to turn in some of the alleged participants in the actions, whom he had actually just met moments before at the press conference. The State police, even so, did a brutal sweep of the offices of the Movimento de Mulheres Campesinas, the Brazilian peasant women’s movement.

The media that relentlessly attacked the Via Campesina’s action do not notice the vandalism of Aracruz, the world’s biggest producer of bleached eucalyptus pulp, with its own history of devastation and destruction of land, biodiversity and watersheds in the north of Brazil. Nor that the company provoked the displacement of thousands of inhabitants of black quilombos (runaway rebellious slave communities) and indigenous communities. Nor did the media mention that Aracruz bought its plantation land under the dictatorship from land grabbers who had taken over the ancestral lands of Tupinikim and Guarany



indigenous peoples, or that the huge profits Aracruz makes from destroying the environment, peasants and communities are subsidised by publicly backed loans from the World Bank and Brazil's own National Economic and Social Development Bank (BNDES).


Much less did the media recall that, only weeks before the women acted in Rio Grande do Sul, in January 2006, the same Aracruz corporation, with the support of the Federal Police sent in by the Lula government, had bulldozed Tupinikim and Guarani indigenous villages in the state of Espírito Santo, leaving many victims injured and a hundred families homeless, apparently just to give a 'practical' response to the suit filed against it by those local indigenous communities.

Plantations of eucalyptus and other fast-growing trees are just another World Bank policy in developing countries, promoted and subsidised with public funds to benefit a few global transnational corporations. These huge monocultures rapidly degrade the soil, water and biodiversity, as the eucalyptus grows to commercial cutting size in approximately seven years. Generally a plantation can be replanted and cut three times before the soil is exhausted to the point of becoming a useless, barren desert of stumps. The plantations demand therefore more and more land and increasing amounts of chemical fertilisers and pesticides to fight the pests that thrive on uniform ecosystems. Eucalyptus trees also generate toxic substances to repel other species, a "natural" way of defending their own growth.

Quilombo and indigenous communities in Espírito Santo report that they have been driven not only off the plantations but also off neighbouring lands as well. Rivers and creeks dry up, the water and soil are polluted, native food plants and animals are exterminated and they cannot grow their own crops because of chemicals in the environment.

As the World Rainforest Movement has said, an industrial plantation is like an industrial army of trees that wipe out life all around them.

The "logical" extensions of such plantations are pulp mills, which in turn bring new and dangerous environmental impacts. Neither process creates many jobs, and the work is high-risk, heavy, unhealthy and poorly paid. The major market for this process is industrial paper production. This is not, however, paper for cultural or educational purposes, but rather for advertising and packaging in the huge supermarket chains that have replaced local markets. Only 15% of the paper produced in such pulp mills and plantations is used directly by final consumers. All in all, an average US resident consumes 27 times more paper – directly or indirectly – than does a consumer in southern countries.

So much useless paper, violence and media noise intend to hide the real and proven acts of vandalism. Meanwhile, 37 women and men from Via Campesina are being prosecuted for the action against the Aracruz tree nursery, and may be imprisoned for breaking the silence of the green desert. Many social movements are organising a petition in solidarity with the defendants, which we reproduce here. 

## Going further

**You can sign on in support of the Via Campesina women at**

<http://www.sof.org.br/solidariedadeCampesina/form.php>

**or send a protest email to**

- Mr. Germano Rigoto (Governor of Rio Grande do Sul): at [agenda@gg.rs.gov.br](mailto:agenda@gg.rs.gov.br)

**with copies to**

- Claudia Avila (Attorney of Via Campesina Women): [claudiamavila@via-rs.net](mailto:claudiamavila@via-rs.net)
- Daniel Cassol (Journalist from the Solidarity Committee in Rio Grande do Sul- Brazil): [dbcassol@yahoo.com.br](mailto:dbcassol@yahoo.com.br)
- Women's World March (which is Coordinating the National Campaign): [sof@sof.org.br](mailto:sof@sof.org.br)



**Silvia Ribeiro** is a Mexico-based researcher and programme manager for ETC group (<http://www.etcgroup.org>), and a member of GRAIN's board. She has a background as a publisher, journalist and environmental campaigner in Uruguay, Brazil and Sweden. Silvia has extensive experience in social and environmental advocacy. As a civil society representative, she has attended and followed the negotiations of several United Nations environmental treaties. She has been invited to speak at many events around the world on biopiracy, transgenics, intellectual property, corporate control, and indigenous/farmers' rights.

Silvia has produced a number of articles related to biodiversity, genetic resources, intellectual property and biopiracy, among other issues. Silvia can be contacted at [silvia@etcgroup.org](mailto:silvia@etcgroup.org).

## THE SEEDLINGS BROKE THE SILENCE

(Manifesto in support of Via Campesina women)

### **There was a sepulchral silence**

over the eighteen thousand hectares stolen  
from the tupi-guarani indigenous people  
over ten thousand quilombola families  
evicted from their territories  
over millions of litres of herbicides  
poured in the plantations

### **there was a promiscuous silence**

over the chlorine used  
for whitening paper  
producing carcinogenic toxins which affect  
plants, animals and people.

over the disappearance  
of more than four hundred bird species  
and forty mammals  
in the north of Espírito Santo

### **There was an insurmountable silence**

about the nature of a plant  
that consumes thirty litres of water/day  
and does not give flowers or seeds  
about a plantation that produced billions  
and more billions of dollars  
for just a half a dozen gentlemen

### **There was a thick silence**

over thousands of hectares accumulated  
in Espírito Santo, Minas, Bahia  
and Rio Grande do Sul

### **There was an accomplice silence**

over the destruction of the Atlantic Forest and the  
pampas  
due to the homogeneous cultivation of a single tree:  
eucalyptus

### **There was a bought silence**

over the voluptuousness for profit  
Yes, there was a global silence  
over Swedish capital  
over Norwegian companies  
over large national stalls

Finally,  
there was an immense green desert  
in concert with silence

### **II**

Suddenly,  
thousands of women got together  
and destroyed seedlings  
the oppression and lie

The seedlings shouted  
all of a sudden  
and no less than suddenly  
the smile of bourgeoisies became amazement  
became a grimace, disorientation

### **III**

The order raised incredulous  
crying out progress and science  
imprecating in vulgar terms  
obscenity and bad language

Newspapers, radios, magazines,  
the Internet and TV,  
and advertisers  
well-spoken businessmen  
crawling advisers  
clever technicians  
reluctant governments  
the yelling right  
and all the centre extremists  
in chorus, echo,  
assemblies and declarations  
to defend capital:

“They cannot break the silence!”  
And cried for beheading!

### **IV**

Suddenly  
no less than suddenly  
thousands of women  
destroyed the silence

On that day  
on the so-called Aracruz land  
the women from Via Campesina  
were our gesture  
were our voice.

