

Ecology, Value-Form and Metabolic Rift: Conceptualizing the Environmental History of the Amazon in the Capitalist World-System (19th-20th centuries)

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Abstract : In recent decades, Marx's ecological theory of the value-form and the theory of metabolic rift have represented fundamental methodological innovations for social scientists interested in environmental transformations and their relationships with the development of the capital system. However, among Latin American environmental historians, such theoretical and methodological instruments have been used infrequently and very cautiously. This investigation aims to demonstrate how the concepts of metabolic rift and ecological value-form are important for understanding the environmental, economic and social transformations in the Amazon region between the second half of the 19th century and the end of the 20th century. Such transformations manifested themselves mainly in two dimensions: the first concerns the link between the manufacture of tropical substances for export and scientific developments in the fields of botany, chemistry and agriculture. This link was constituted as a set of social, intellectual and economic relations that condition each other, configuring an asymmetrical field of exchanges and connections between the demands of the industrialized world - personified in scientists, naturalists, businesspeople and bureaucrats - and the agencies of local social actors, such as indigenous people, riverside dwellers and quilombolas; the second dimension concerns the imperative link between the historical development of the capitalist world-system and the restructuring of the natural world, its landscapes, biomes and social relations, notably in peripheral colonial areas. The environmental effects of capitalist globalization were not only seen in the degradation of exploited environments, although this has been, until today, its most immediate and noticeable aspect. There was also, in territories subject to the logic of market accumulation, the reformulation of patterns of authority and institutional architectures, such as property systems, political jurisdictions, rights and social contracts, as a result of the expansion of commodity frontiers between the 16th and 21st centuries. . This entire set of transformations produced impacts on the ecological landscape of the Amazon. This demonstrates the need to investigate the histories of local configurations of power, spatial and ecological - with their institutions and social actors - and their role in structuring the capitalist world-system , under the lens of the ecological theory of value-form and metabolic rift.

Keywords : amazon, ecology, form-value, metabolic rift

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