

A stylized, grey-toned graphic of a tree with a thick trunk and several branches, set against a light grey circular background. The tree is positioned on the right side of the page, partially overlapping the title text.

# Jacques Cousteau, and the Amazon Expedition: Environmental Imagination and the Brazilian press in the 1980's

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## ABSTRACT

This paper examines Jacques Cousteau's Amazon Expedition (1982-1983) and its representation in the Brazilian press. Employing a methodological framework of discourse and media analysis, the study scrutinizes the expedition's documentary, its coverage in newspapers like the *Jornal do Brasil*, and the associated bibliographic production. It positions these materials as "environmental texts" to decode the specific environmental imagination they fostered. The analysis reveals that the expedition, framed by a colonialist and Eurocentric perspective, did not produce a cohesive or scientifically rigorous understanding of the Amazon. Instead, it generated ambiguous perceptions, promoting an "on-demand" nature spectacle that emphasized exoticism and grandeur. The paper concludes that Cousteau's work, while documenting environmental degradation, ultimately offered a superficial critique. It failed to engage meaningfully with the region's historical socio-biodiversity and the complex socio-environmental transformations already underway, thereby reinforcing a foreign, mediatized, and consumable image of the Amazon that aligned with both developmentalist interests and a burgeoning global environmentalism.

**Keywords:** Amazon, Brazilian press, Jacques-Yves Cousteau, Environmental imagination.

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Between 1982 and 1983, the French explorer Jacques-Yves Cousteau (1910-2007) conducted the "Amazon" Expedition. After extensive negotiations with some local governments, including Brazil's, the expedition commenced on June 1, 1982. The expedition, which comprised over 40 members and received support from companies such as Iveco, Toyota, and the Brazilian bank Bradesco, garnered significant print and television media coverage. It resulted in a comprehensive survey of the waters of the Amazon and its tributaries and an extensive photographic collection of animal species and accounts of life in the region, including instances of environmental devastation.<sup>2</sup>

The expedition received significant media attention and continues to provide stories that can be analyzed in various ways. TV Globo, Brazilian's leading television network at the 1980s, edited and released a version of the expedition's documentary. The Bradesco Foundation – a Brazilian private bank foundation – was one of the prominent supporters of the expedition's traveling exhibitions. In 1984, the publisher Record released the Brazilian translation of the expedition's book, *A Amazônia de Cousteau*,<sup>3</sup> which had a second print in 1985.

Cousteau's expedition was not the first through the Amazon, but it was one of the most widely covered expeditions when global environmental concerns grew in the context of a dying Brazilian military government. The expedition reshaped the discussion about the Amazon, highlighting the interconnectedness of ecology, economics, and politics. Cousteau led an expedition approaching the region from a colonialist perspective. At that time, little was known about the Amazon, and the expedition was based on images of grandeur, exoticism, mystery, and danger of the region. This perspective reflected the specific choices and situationalities of white and Eurocentric worldview about the Amazon. The expedition contributed to a particular environmental imagination in its discursive and imagery production. The idea of an

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<sup>2</sup> Celso L. Levada, Antonio Gomes Jr., and Miriam M. Levada, "Sobre o Centenário Do Nascimento de Jacques Yves Cousteau," *Enciclopédia Biosfera* 6, no. 10 (2010): 1-7.

<sup>3</sup> Jacques-Yves Cousteau and Michel Richards, *A Expedição de Jacques Cousteau Na Amazônia* (Rio de Janeiro: Record, 1984).

“unknown Amazonian world” influenced the conception of the region as “a kingdom of small beings – insects, birds, spiders, rodents, butterflies, frogs, lizards, and bats”.<sup>4</sup>

In this paper, It is argued that the Amazon Expedition, as depicted in its documentary and covered in the Brazilian press, did not merely produce a cohesive and scientifically oriented understanding of the territory explored by Cousteau.. Instead, it sparked ambiguous perceptions of the territory, leading to an environmental imagination focused on an on-demand nature rather than a historical understanding of its socio-biodiversity. This analysis seeks to position the film and bibliographic production of the Amazon Expedition within an environmental imagination that is deeply mediatized and linked to the 20th-century transformation of the image's importance, scope, and power as a shaper of perceptions about the natural world..

## **MEDIA, NATURE, AND ENVIRONMENTAL IMAGINATION**

Felipe Freitas Chaves emphasizes that examining the evolution of the concept of nature involves understanding how ideas are developed.<sup>5</sup> The author highlights that one of the significant shifts in these perceptions began with the rise and advancement of nature photography from the late 19th century to the early 20th century. Since then, photography has been critical in comprehending wildlife and delineating the boundary between humans and the natural world.<sup>6</sup> Brower noted that wild animals are difficult to visualize when creating these images through any medium other than the image. This contributes to shaping the perspective of nature as a symbol of freedom in contrast to the urban and capitalist world.<sup>7</sup>

The convergence of symbolic, technological, and cultural dimensions in nature photography has favored cultural production, especially since the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. According to Lúcia Santaella and Winfried Nöth,<sup>8</sup> the ability to establish

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<sup>4</sup> Cousteau and Richards, p. 28.

<sup>5</sup> Filipe Freitas Chaves, “A Representação Da Natureza Selvagem No Cinema: Jacques Cousteau, Adrian Cowell & Werner Herzog” (Belo Horizonte, 2023).

<sup>6</sup> Matthew Brower, *Developing Animals: Wildlife and Early American Photography* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2011).

<sup>7</sup> Chaves, “A Representação Da Natureza Selvagem No Cinema: Jacques Cousteau, Adrian Cowell & Werner Herzog.”

<sup>8</sup> Lúcia Santaella and Winfried Nöth, *Imagem, Cognição e Semiótica* (São Paulo: Iluminuras, 2020).

“contiguity with reality” through the photographed or filmed image connects it to the real-life experiences of the photographer or filmmaker and their testimony and presence. From a technological standpoint, advancements in nature photography, transitioning from black and white to color images and from printed media to cinema and television, have solidified the perspective that “images of natural landscapes without the presence of people are also associated with the ideal of representing freedom, symbolizing untouched nature”.<sup>9</sup>

The relationship between the desire to experience an untouched nature and the concept of freedom in the context of Brazil's economic and ecological changes in the latter half of the 20th century can be understood through the idea of “on-demand” nature.<sup>10</sup> The concept of on-demand nature is characterized by the glorification of the natural world, leading to a range of issues such as oversimplifying relationships within ecosystems and disconnecting the public from taking responsibility, commitment, or ethical consideration for a particular territory.<sup>11</sup>

João Meirelles Filho and Fernanda Martins emphasize the media's significant role in shaping perceptions and discussions about the Amazon.<sup>12</sup> They highlight Cousteau's ability to create what they refer to as a “video spectacle” about the region. The authors mention that a year before Cousteau's expedition, the Globo network aired the series *Amazonia: Homeland of Water*. However, Meirelles Filho and Martins note that the messages conveyed in earlier works differed in their discursive meanings compared to those presented by Cousteau.

Thales de Andrade<sup>13</sup> demonstrated that the Brazilian press has been dedicating more attention to these topics in the context of the increasing focus on environmental issues in politics and media. This represents a significant change compared to the 1970s when the Amazon was mainly seen as an industrial and agricultural development

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<sup>9</sup> Chaves, “A Representação Da Natureza Selvagem No Cinema: Jacques Cousteau, Adrian Cowell & Werner Herzog”, p. 90.

<sup>10</sup> Julia P. Jones et al., “Nature Documentaries and Saving Nature: Reflections on the New Netflix Series *Our Planet*,” *People and Nature*, 2019.

<sup>11</sup> Jones et al.

<sup>12</sup> João Meirelles Filho and Fernanda Martins, “Os Viajantes e a Reflexão Sobre a Amazônia Nos Últimos Cem Anos,” *Revista de Estudos Brasileiros* 6, no. 11 (2019): 13–31.

<sup>13</sup> Thales de Andrade, *Ecológicas Manhãs de Sábado* (São Paulo: Annablume, 2003).

region. Publications like *Realidade* portrayed the Amazon as a frontier for development back then. However, in the 1990s, there was a shift towards more frequent and diverse coverage of ecological issues, culminating in the launch of the Globo Ecology program. Although somewhat ambiguous, Brazilian TV and print media began to incorporate environmental themes, possibly laying the groundwork for what Lawrence Buell refers to as environmental texts.<sup>14</sup>

The films, books, newspapers, magazines, and TV articles about the Amazon in the context of Cousteau's expedition are environmental texts. They encompass various aspects, expectations, and perceptions about the Amazon. These texts exhibit characteristics that define environmental productions, including the presence of the non-human environment as an integral part of human history, the acknowledgment of non-human interests, an ethical orientation towards environmental responsibility, and a perception of the environment as a dynamic process rather than a constant entity.

The work of photographers, writers, and expedition leaders shapes media representations of the environment in the Amazon. The interaction between the visual and written aspects of the expedition and the diverse plant and animal life encountered influences these representations. They are also influenced by the public's interest in ecology in Brazil in the late 1980s. The discourses surrounding these representations have social, environmental, and cultural implications. They have the potential to both shape and be shaped by the complex environmental realities of the region, contributing to the development of a specific environmental consciousness. As a celebrity, Cousteau actively contributes to this communication and the formation of this environmental imagination.

The expedition can be seen as an effort to create a way of thinking that focuses on the environment. It aims to educate people to pay attention to ecological issues and see the world differently. The expedition tries to understand how social processes are

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<sup>14</sup> Lawrence Buell, *The Environmental Imagination: Thoreau, Nature Writing, and the Formation of American Culture*. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1995); Lawrence Buell, *Writing for an Endangered World* (Cambridge: Belknap Press, 2001).

connected to the environment and promote ecological education, although it does not cover all aspects of this topic.

It is essential to consider the impact of the expedition's production, press coverage, and product consumption. This includes how the expedition was perceived and the images and texts it produced, eagerly consumed by the public interested in experiencing Cousteau's Amazon journey.

### **JACQUES COUSTEAU, IN THE CONTEXT OF THE EXPLOITATION OF THE OCEANS AND THE EMERGENCE OF ENVIRONMENTALISM IN THE COLD WAR**

Cousteau garnered attention, particularly for his role in popularizing ecology in the latter half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Jones et al. note that the Frenchman's path was marked by ambiguities shaped by the scientific and political backdrop of the Cold War, which manifested in the fluctuation of his political stances.<sup>15</sup> At times, he aligned with conservation or preservation efforts; at other times, he embraced a more moderate and controversial form of environmentalism.

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<sup>15</sup> Jones et al., "Nature Documentaries and Saving Nature: Reflections on the New Netflix Series Our Planet."

Image 1. Jacques Cousteau (1910-1997).



Source: CentralComics, 2024.

Jacques-Yves Cousteau was born in the French commune of Saint-André-de-Cubzac in 1910 and died in Paris in 1997. He played a crucial role in the exploration of the oceans.<sup>16</sup> Cousteau began his career at sea when he joined the French Military Navy in the 1930s. After an accident, he took up swimming to regain his health. During World War II (1939-1945), Cousteau had the opportunity to create and test a lighter diving equipment, the Aqualung. This invention increased underwater mobility, reducing the reliance on traditional diving suits (Grajal, 1998). He also created a manned mini-submarine for exploring the depths of the Atlantic Ocean, leading to the development of a new interdisciplinary field of knowledge, the Tectonics.<sup>17</sup>

From the 1950s onwards, Cousteau established himself as a promoter of the oceans, taking advantage of the growing interest in ocean mapping shared by the

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<sup>16</sup> (Olmstead, 2008).

<sup>17</sup> Society for Science & The Public, "Voyage to the Birthplace of the Atlantic," *Science News* 106 (1971): 118-19.

civilian and military sectors. Through his films, he contributed to recruiting several generations to new areas of knowledge such as Oceanography and Marine Biology.

In this context, the explorer found himself in a complex situation involving political and scientific interests that extended beyond mere curiosity about the oceans. His exploration of underwater environments sparked an interest in a largely uncharted territory, which eventually became the final human frontier following the space exploration of the late 1950s. Simultaneously, he, along with biologists Eugenie Clark and Rachel Carson, helped establish a new realm of scientific possibilities that would not have been explored without the influence of political and military interests.<sup>18</sup>

In 1956, Cousteau won an Oscar for best documentary for *The Silent World*. Thanks to new camera technology and diving lighting, he was able to capture the richness of images of the Mediterranean Sea. The film received awards in the US and in Cannes, making Cousteau an international personality. Following the film's success, the political significance of underwater exploration gained momentum.<sup>19</sup> Shortly after, Cousteau was invited to serve as the director of the Oceanographic Museum of Monaco, due to the admiration of actress Grace Kelly, who was married to Prince Rainier III, for the explorer.

During the 1960s and 1970s, Cousteau became a prominent international figure in promoting underwater science and marine ecology. He effectively used his reputation as a narrator of marine life to influence public opinion on environmental issues.<sup>20</sup>

The first issue concerned France's disposal of nuclear waste in the Mediterranean Sea. Even though Cousteau faced criticism from the French Navy, his influence helped to end this practice. After the Amazon expedition, Cousteau played a key role in negotiating the Antarctic Treaty at the United Nations. His reputation has

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<sup>18</sup> Society for Science & The Public.

<sup>19</sup> Corey J. A. Bradshaw, Barry W. Brook, and Clive R. McMahon, "Dangers of Sensationalizing Conservation Biology," *Conservation Biology* 21, no. 3 (2007): 57–571.

<sup>20</sup> Alejandro Grajal, "Jacques Cousteau and His World's Inspiring Beauty," *Conservation Biology* 12 (1998): 487. Glenn O. Blough, "The Ocean World of Jacques Cousteau," *The Science Teacher* 43, no. 5 (n.d.): 61.

also been influential in the ongoing debate about environmental education in Brazil since the 1980s.

Cousteau emerged as an explorer of underwater nature amid the development of contemporary environmentalism. In the 1960s, political manifestations linked to environmentalism, especially in the USA, already existed in the form of wildlife preservation groups or support for conserving natural resources. These movements were very close to political activism that sought to pass laws aimed at natural exploitation. There was also a significant group of scientists and intellectuals who fought against using nuclear technology to produce weapons. During the aftermath of the Second World War, various factors came into play, including the concept of environmental degradation. This was addressed alongside the transfer of technology for civilian use, encompassing pesticides, machinery, brute force technologies,<sup>21</sup> and nuclear technology. A key aspect during this period was the influence of modernization ideologies.

The Cousteau Society was founded in the USA in 1973, marking a significant moment in the popularization of the environmental movement. By 1980, the society had grown to 160,000 members and established connections with environmental groups in the US and France. This marked a shift in environmentalism from purely academic to inspiring social behaviors, collective actions, and public policies at various levels, from local to global. Cousteau was even considered a potential candidate for vice-president of France in the 1981 elections, seen as the only alternative capable of uniting different currents of French environmentalism.

Cousteau's environmentalism should not be viewed solely from an altruistic standpoint. An example of this is the controversy sparked by him in 1979 when he sought to explore the wreck of the USS Monitor, which had sunk during the Civil War. This was part of his planned trip to South America, and the wreck was located on the east coast of the USA. At that time, the area had been transformed into an ecological and historical sanctuary with strict ecological controls and visitation authorization

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<sup>21</sup> Paul R. Josephson, *Resources under Regimes: Technology, Environment, and the State* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2004).

requirements. Scientific justification was needed for his expedition. The Cousteau Society faced challenges in developing a scientific project for the visit, and their request was initially denied. The American press criticized the decision, stating that it was outrageous to prevent the world's greatest explorer from visiting a reserve and that it showed a lack of interest in promoting science. However, with the guidance of the reserve's professionals, Cousteau eventually obtained authorization and was soon navigating the sanctuary.<sup>22</sup>

Attitudes like this have led to critical analyses of explorers' work, particularly in conservation and marine biology. In a discussion about the role of science communication, Corey Bradshaw, Barry Brook, and Clive McMahon<sup>23</sup> highlighted the environmental impact of expeditions that lack scientific planning and the consequences of the sensationalized journalistic narrative of these trips. This narrative often sensationalizes the natural world to attract audiences who would not otherwise have the opportunity to experience it. According to them:

Nature celebrities like Sir David Attenborough, Jacques Cousteau, Al Gore, and Steve Irwin have helped to increase people's appreciation and fascination with natural systems, especially for those who may not have had the opportunity to experience it firsthand. However, there is a problem. The entertainment industry often prioritizes sensational and eccentric content to attract enough attention to survive.<sup>24</sup>

It is important to note that Cousteau became a prominent figure in environmentalism, particularly in the conservation of aquatic biodiversity. He was interested in environmental conservation, expanding knowledge, and gaining prestige through exploration.

Carson and Clark were focused on advancing scientific knowledge about the oceans, which involved transforming the scientific world and aligning interests related

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<sup>22</sup> Larry E. Tise, "Jacques Cousteau, USS Monitor, and the Philosophy and Practice of Public History Institutions," *The Public Historian* 5, no. 1 (1983): 31–45.

<sup>23</sup> Bradshaw, Brook, and McMahon, "Dangers of Sensationalizing Conservation Biology."

<sup>24</sup> Bradshaw, Brook, and McMahon, 570.

to the seas.<sup>25</sup> Meanwhile, Cousteau contributed to this process by popularizing ocean-related topics and developing technology to improve mobility, enhance understanding of the underwater world, and increase investigative independence for scientists and environmentalists.

This technopolitical thinker is likened to an allegedly neutral conservationist while involved in sponsorship and complex political relations. He depends on technologies and access to national territories, engaging in political negotiations supported by science despite not being a scientist. This person embodies the practical, curious, and empathetic aspects of Cousteau, which were crucial for the dissemination of a science that was developed during the Cold War as a form of entertainment.

#### **THE EXPEDITION, THE AMAZON, AND THE BRAZILIAN MILITARY GOVERNMENT**

The success of the Amazon expedition products resulted from negotiations between the Cousteau Society and the Brazilian military government. The Brazilian press' coverage of the issue shows that the process was marked by enthusiasm as well as technical, political, and scientific mistrust. Cousteau was sometimes identified as a scientist and sometimes as an adventurer.

Nationalism within the scientific community brought about pressures that extended beyond the technical realms of organizations such as the Brazilian National Council for Scientific and Technological Research (CNPq) or the Brazilian Society for the Advancement of Science (SBPC) and reached public opinion. This, in turn, reignited the debate about the region's economic development. As a result, both old and new perceptions about the Amazon were brought to the forefront.

The media also indicates shared views between specific government sectors and Cousteau, particularly regarding the topic of Amazonian development. This could be the government's recognition of the expedition by a globally respected

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<sup>25</sup> Elizabeth S. Bell, "The Language of Discovery: The Seascapes of Rachel Carson and Jacques Cousteau," *CEA Critic* 63, no. 1 (2000): 5–13; Mark Hamilton Lytle, *The Gentle Subversive: Rachel Carson, Silent Spring, and the Rise of the Environmental Movement* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007).

environmentalist to a region that, despite being represented by various perspectives, including nationalism, exoticism, frontier, and integration, has been one of the most economically dynamic areas in the country. However, this growth has come at a significant socio-environmental cost.

Gustavo Gomes and José Vergolino evaluated the development policy in the Amazon from 1960 to 1995.<sup>26</sup> They emphasized that the 1970s and 1980s were the most favorable for the regional economy. In the 1970s, the region's Gross Domestic Product (GDP) grew 12.2% yearly, while the Brazilian average rate was 8.3%. In the 1980s, the region grew 6.3% per year, while the average growth rate of the Brazilian GDP was 1.9% per year. The authors pointed to the "population explosion" in the Amazon as disturbing the ecological balance. They argued that environmental disasters become inevitable in societies with sudden demographic acceleration and without corresponding changes in production technology. During the 1970s and 1980s, federal public investments, especially in the form of companies and the growth of industrial and agricultural products, caused the region to undergo a radical demographic and environmental change following the expansion of national consumer markets.

In the 1970s, the Amazon was seen as a place for future development and the establishment of new companies. It was viewed as having abundant natural resources, although it was sometimes referred to as a "green hell" negatively. However, it was also seen as a space of hope and potential for industrial and capitalist growth. This perspective was captured in an article in *Realidade* magazine in October 1971.

The attention focused on the Amazon region involved a mix of nationalism and developmentalism, all under the guise of a national security doctrine reinforced by the authoritarian government in Brazil since the military coup of 1964. Developmentalism, as noted by environmental historian Warren Dean,<sup>27</sup> was more than just an idea; it was

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<sup>26</sup> Gustavo M. Gomes and José R. Vergolino, "Trinta e Cinco Anos de Crescimento Econômico Na Amazônia (1960/1995)" (Instituto de Pesquisa Econômica Aplicada (IPEA), 1997).

<sup>27</sup> Warren DEAN, *A Ferro e Fogo: A História e a Devastação Da Mata Atlântica Brasileira* (São Paulo: Cia das Letras, 2004).

a robust worldview that united different sectors of Brazilian society with the goal of progress through technical solutions.

In the developmental vision of the Amazon, influenced by the national security concerns of the military regime, the main processes for integrating the region with the rest of the country involved promoting regional economic development through industrialization, building hydroelectric plants on rivers, exploring minerals, establishing monocultures, and expanding cattle ranching. This required opening roads, implementing policies to attract companies and people from other regions to the Amazon, and deliberately relocating indigenous populations. In this context of enthusiasm for the Amazon, the state intentionally ignored the socio-environmental problems resulting from deforestation, pollution, and violence against traditional populations.

The economic growth and industrialization promoted by the military regime were based on exploiting natural resources and led to a deliberate misrepresentation of plans for incorporating, settling, and developing the region. Cousteau favored these views, which are part of the unique history of modernizing the Amazon. This history reveals the relationship between the authoritarian and technocratic Brazilian regime at the time and the use of natural resources through technology and forceful policies.<sup>28</sup>

The interest in the Amazon from a developmental perspective is not recent. In 2012, Rômulo de Paula Andrade discussed the developmental challenges in the Amazon region. He noted that it was the first region in Brazil to undergo regional planning through the Superintendence of Economic Valorization of the Amazon (SPVEA). The author highlighted that various public policies were formulated under the umbrella of development. These policies included the construction of roads to end historical isolation, initiatives to improve nutrition indexes, efforts to eradicate malaria (a long-

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<sup>28</sup> Josephson, *Resources under Regimes: Technology, Environment, and the State*.

standing concern for healthcare professionals), and training technicians and professionals capable of working in the region.<sup>29</sup>

The common belief that the Amazon is a deserted and unhealthy area, known for its untamed nature and seen as a barrier to development, was strengthened by a mix of concepts such as nationalism, concern about the region's international influence, and developmentalism. This resulted in a repeated cycle of attempts to integrate the Amazon into the rest of the country.<sup>30</sup>

The memories of these practices and representations of the Amazon formed nationally between the 1940s and 1960s, reinforce the understanding of the region as a frontier. Nelson Sanjad, Érico Muniz, and Júlio Schweickardt point out that the territory was considered the edge of the state, an area in continuous incorporation, or even a symbolic space where power imbalances, conflicts, and exchanges are evident.<sup>31</sup>

The contrast between these viewpoints became apparent during the negotiations between Cousteau and the Brazilian federal government. In the numerous meetings with the then president of the republic, General João Batista Figueiredo, whom Cousteau regarded as "a great admirer of the Amazon," as well as with various ministries and scientific organizations, these different viewpoints about the Amazon became a prominent topic in public opinion.

As had happened in the case of Cousteau's proposal to enter the National Marine Sanctuary of Monitor in the USA, the society held the first face-to-face meeting with Brazilian authorities shortly before the possible expedition. The JB of December 16, 1981, reported that:

Researcher Jean-Michel Cousteau, son of the famous French oceanographer Jacques Cousteau, met yesterday with the Minister of the Navy, Admiral Maximiano da Fonseca, to whom he requested support from the Navy to carry out a scientific

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<sup>29</sup> Rômulo de P. Andrade, "A Amazônia Na Era Do Desenvolvimento: Saúde, Alimentação e Meio Ambiente (1946-1966)" (Tese (Doutorado em História das Ciências e da Saúde), Rio de Janeiro, COC Fiocruz, 2012), 1.

<sup>30</sup> Andrade, 4.

<sup>31</sup> Nelson Sanjad, Érico S. Muniz, and Schweickardt, "Amazônia Global: Espaços de Circulação e Representação Da Fronteira," *Revista de História* 178 (2019): 2, <https://doi.org/10.11606/issn.2316-9141.rh.2019.163465>.

expedition that he intends to carry out in the Amazon region next year. He said his father would come to Brazil in January next year to agree with the Ministry of the Navy to support the expedition, which will last 12 months. The expedition, which will travel the rivers of the Amazon on the research boat Calypso, will feature Brazilian scientists and researchers. Jean Michel Cousteau told the Minister that he intends to film various aspects of the Amazon region, which he considers essential for the world's ecology.<sup>32</sup>

On January 7, 1982, Cousteau met with the then-president, General João Batista Figueiredo. The explorer was scheduled to meet the next day with the Minister of the Interior, Mario Andreazza, as well as the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Ministry of Agriculture.<sup>33</sup> This was because "Brazilian legislation requires anyone conducting research in the Amazon to obtain legal permission from the Brazilian government" in various instances.<sup>34</sup> The government had already provided the authorization, delivered to the Cousteau Society in Washington, USA.<sup>35</sup>

During his travels between institutions, Cousteau met at the National Council for Scientific and Technological Research (CNPq), where he was approached by Admiral Paulo Moreira da Silva. The admiral asked Cousteau whether he was conducting another "artistic show" or real scientific work.<sup>36</sup>

The perception of Cousteau's expedition as a "show" rather than a scientific endeavor was in line with the concerns of organizations such as the CNPq, the Brazilian Society for the Advancement of Science (SBPC), the National Institute for Amazonian Research (Inpa), and the Navy Research Institute.

The former director of the Museum of Oceanography at the Federal University of Rio Grande (FURG) in Rio Grande do Sul, Eliezer de Carvalho Rios, expressed concern about the explorer Jacques Cousteau's previous actions when he visited the Brazilian coast in the early 1960s. Rios believed that the Brazilian authorities should ensure that

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<sup>32</sup> *Jornal Do Brasil*, December 16, 1981.

<sup>33</sup> *Jornal Do Brasil*, January 8, 1982.

<sup>34</sup> (JB, 8 Jan. 1982, p. 1)

<sup>35</sup> (JB, January 8, 1982, p. 1)

<sup>36</sup> *Jornal Do Brasil*, January 9, 1982.

scientific exchange truly takes place. He also mentioned that Cousteau had previously failed to fulfill the agreement with the government in 1961, which required him to donate part of the collected materials to national scientific institutions:

I am afraid there is nothing left for us. We did not gain any scientific benefit from that expedition. Today, when Brazilian scientists want to study the species collected and have access to Cousteau's research in Brazil, they have to ask the National Museum of Natural History in Paris.<sup>37</sup>

The JB press mechanism significantly impacted Cousteau's expedition from start to finish. It sparked the interest of Brazilian scientists and readers, who had many questions about the expedition. Some reports even revealed the concerns of the national scientific community. For example, researchers from the National Institute for Amazonian Research (Inpa) wrote a letter to CNPq in January 1982, requesting that the expedition project be shared with the Brazilian scientific community in advance.<sup>38</sup>

The SBPC and the CNPq, as stated by JB, clarified that the expedition's purpose was not purely scientific but rather to make films about the Amazon.<sup>39</sup> This clarification may have been prompted by reader comments about the expedition's nature, such as the one sent by Nazaré Franceschi on the JB edition of February 10th:

Professor Jacques Cousteau is planning a scientific expedition to the Brazilian Amazon. He is a distinguished scientist, but we should not permit this kind of research in our region without the involvement of Brazilian scientists. Our country's scientific community must review and approve all such projects. We must not be swayed by the reputation of the mentioned scientist.<sup>40</sup>

Cousteau said: "To get people interested in ecology, we need to make them love it, and the films produced by the Cousteau Foundation are great for that. They will fund a large part of this expedition" (JB, 9 Jan. 1982, p. 3).

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<sup>37</sup> *Jornal Do Brasil*, January 16, 1982.

<sup>38</sup> *Jornal Do Brasil*, February 18, 1982.

<sup>39</sup> *Jornal Do Brasil*, March 27, 1982.

<sup>40</sup> *Jornal Do Brasil*, February 10, 1982.

The Brazilian government authorized the expedition through Decree 87.060 on March 25, 1982. The decree allowed the ship Calypso to conduct scientific research in the Amazon basin, produce scientific documentaries for television, and increase knowledge about the Amazon rivers' hydrographic system. This authorization required the participation of Brazilian researchers and compliance with the regulations in Article 8 of Decree No. 63,164 of August 26, 1968. The authorization was valid from April to December 1982, and the start date was determined in coordination with the Ministry of the Navy.<sup>41</sup>

The Calypso set sail from Belém towards the territory's interior with objectives that went beyond scientific research. According to the explorer, the goal was "to gather precise scientific information about the region, which could guide its best development and use".<sup>42</sup>

The Amazon expedition has drawn attention to the ongoing debates about development, settlement, and the environment in the region. The presence of Calypso in Amazonian waters has reignited these discussions and aligns with a growing environmental agenda featured in newspapers and magazines. Jean-Michel Cousteau's statements about better land use and occupation position a new opportunity to show how public opinion perceives the Amazon amidst the interests of an authoritarian government.

## **COUSTEAU'S ENVIRONMENTAL IMAGINATION IN PRINT AND ON TV**

After reflecting on Cousteau's expedition, JB initiated a broader discussion about the role of environmentalism in the Amazon. This is exemplified in the article "Genesis of the Amazon",<sup>43</sup> which advocated for regional economic development projects, drawing from Cousteau's perspective:

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<sup>41</sup> *Jornal Do Brasil*, March 25, 1982.

<sup>42</sup> *Jornal Do Brasil*, June 1, 1982.

<sup>43</sup> (JB, August 29, 1982)

Failed projects in the Amazon are considered bad, while successful ones have the potential to thrive. According to a recent opinion from a scientist of Cousteau's stature, thanks to today's available technology, it's possible to explore for oil or minerals in the forest without causing damage.<sup>44</sup>

Cousteau was featured in Brazilian newspapers during the expedition, where he shared his opinions on the Amazon territory. Criticisms of his work seemed to have stopped during the first few months of the expedition, and he had gained what some reports described as "unexpected authority" to suggest that future needs would determine the use of the Amazonian space that the scientific community had intended to keep untouched.<sup>45</sup>

In September 1982, a few months before the end of the first stage of the expedition, there was a need to renew authorizations. This was because the decree only allowed Calypso to operate freely until December of that year. Jacques Cousteau published an article in which he mentioned this:

The Amazon region needs to embrace an economic vision. It should be populated by companies, entrepreneurs, and employees capable of contributing to its sustainable development. Jacques Cousteau emphasized that we now have the scientific and technological means to inhabit the region rationally without harming its ecology, although some may disagree.<sup>46</sup>

Impressions about the region, such as the notion that it is not inhabited and lacks economic development by national standards,<sup>47</sup> are contradictory compared to the data presented by Gomes and Vergolino. Their data showed a different trend, indicating significant growth and development in the Amazon region during the 1970s and 1980s.

Negotiations between the Cousteau Society and the Brazilian federal government occurred then. The aim was to continue the expedition for 1983, which was

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<sup>44</sup> *Jornal Do Brasil*, August 29, 1982.

<sup>45</sup> *Jornal Do Brasil*, September 20, 1982.

<sup>46</sup> *Jornal Do Brasil*, February 22, 1983.

<sup>47</sup> *Jornal Do Brasil*, December 13, 1982.

ultimately authorized through Decree 88.099, issued on February 10, 1983.<sup>48</sup> The authorization was valid until July 1983, and Cousteau would have some partnerships in this second stage of the expedition, including a collaboration with a Soviet research ship.<sup>49</sup> This partnership was not unusual, as the Brazilian government had already agreed on broad scientific and technological cooperation with the Soviet Union in 1982. From oceanographic and fluvial research perspective, the USSR was making significant progress and forming agreements primarily with developing countries.<sup>50</sup>

Cousteau shared new impressions of the Amazon during the second stage of the expedition. His ambiguous environmentalist stance drew attention as he compared the level of destruction in the region to that in the country's south. Cousteau stated that while there was destruction, it was not as significant as in the South. He also mentioned that projects like Jari and Carajás, which had already caused considerable deforestation, could still be considered compatible with ecology and, if modified, acceptable.<sup>51</sup>

During Cousteau's speech, the press published statements that softened the economic development processes in the Amazon. These statements found support from the government's perspective. If they proved compatible with the development project that neglected or ignored environmental issues, the press also had to give voice to criticism about this stance.

In July 2, 1984, the Brazilian landscape architect Burle Marx remarked that he found Cousteau's statement that the forest could be devastated without compromise strange. Marx believed there is no absolute knowledge and that it is impossible to know precisely how much intervention can occur without harming the ecology.

In 1984, the echoes of the expedition were heard in different directions. The Cousteau Society released a book and a documentary about the expedition, consisting

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<sup>48</sup> Decree 88.099, issued on February 10, 1983.

<sup>49</sup> *Jornal Do Brasil*, February 22, 1983, 4.

<sup>50</sup> Central Intelligence Agency, "Technical Report on Soviet Oceanography" (Washington: CIA, February 269AD), <https://www.cia.gov/library/readingroom/docs/CIA-RDP86R00254R000100060001-3.pdf>.

<sup>51</sup> February 22, 1983.

of eight episodes. The last episode aired in January 1985. The book was quickly translated and published in Brazil by the Record publisher. Unlike the US edition, which was published by a publisher specializing in environmental issues, the Brazilian translation stands out for being produced by a publisher with a varied editorial line.

The original storyline of the documentary was watered down in the subsequent episodes:

1. Calypso Countdown (1984): Rigging for the Amazon, which presented the preparation of the expedition;
2. Journey to a Thousand Rivers (1984): the first episode of the expedition itself, which included a broad reading of the Amazon's wildlife;
3. The Enchanted River (1984): which covered Jean-Michel Cousteau's team at the beginning of the journey through the Andes towards the Amazon River;
4. Shadows in the Wilderness (1984): aimed at a reading of the contact between Indigenous and non-indigenous populations;
5. The episodes River to the Future (1984),
6. Legacy of a Lost World (1984), and
7. Blueprints for Amazonia (1984), which read about different processes of modernization in the region, and
8. Snowstorm in the Jungle (1985), which discussed the processing and trafficking of cocaine, covering Peru, Bolivia, and Colombia.

TV Globo aired the documentary between 1984 and 1985 as part of the network's 20th-anniversary program. The episodes were translated and commented on for airing on the Globo Repórter program, aired on Thursday nights and presented by journalist Sérgio Chapelain.

The opening vignette of the documentary showcased Amazonian landscapes visited by the Calypso crew, highlighting the expedition's machinery and equipment

and Cousteau's image. The documentary suggests a specific environmental perspective of the Amazon as an exotic place influenced by the machinery and technology used in the expedition.

At the beginning of the episodes, the text indicates Cousteau's perspective on the Amazonian world. Right after the title of the documentary, "The Amazon by Jacques Cousteau", the opening of the episodes was populated, in this order, by the following agents, characters, and objects:

... the famous Calypso boat...

... Parrot, the plane...

... The amphibious truck Jacaré" (sponsored by Iveco)

... The anaconda (snake)

... The Pirarucu boat... (from the team that left Peru for Brazil)

... Felix, the helicopter...<sup>52</sup>

In the opening vignette, an essential character in the entire documentary is introduced as the star of the series: "And starring: the prehistoric pink dolphin...".<sup>53</sup> Chapelain then introduces the creator of the expedition, inviting the audience to enter "an unknown world, the Amazon; This magical world that is a region larger than Europe, with more than 1100 rivers, a fifth of the planet's water and 2 thousand species and fish".<sup>54</sup> The explorer Cousteau is described as an individual capable of discovering some mysteries of this unknown world, being considered "a tireless researcher, a restless adventurer".<sup>55</sup>

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<sup>52</sup> *A Amazônia de Cousteau (Adaptação brasileira)*, Brazilian Version, Documentary (TBS, 1985).

<sup>53</sup> *A Amazônia de Cousteau (Adaptação brasileira)*.

<sup>54</sup> *A Amazônia de Cousteau (Adaptação brasileira)*.

<sup>55</sup> *A Amazônia de Cousteau (Adaptação brasileira)*.

In the first 10 minutes of the first episode aired on TV Globo in 1985, the focus was on a series of images of wildlife and plant life and the modern equipment used by the expedition. The documentary seemed to overlook the presence of people until the eighth minute when they briefly featured riverside dweller Adalberto Pereira, who talked about his daily fishing activities for survival. However, the narrative soon shifted to focus on a piranha that the fisherman had caught, diverting attention from his experiences. The documentary then emphasized the "ferocity" of the piranha rather than the human presence or the expedition team.

The documentary initially needed a focus on the human aspect. This changed later when the team, traveling by land, covered the gold exploration in the south of Pará, specifically in the Serra Pelada mine. Few discussions linked the changes in the landscape to the socio-environmental issues arising from this process. For instance, the team noted the extensive impact of road construction in the region, stating, "In the last 20 years, 10 thousand kilometers of road have been opened in the region." They also likened the expansion of the new Brazilian west to the old American west.<sup>56</sup>

The team observed the impact of cattle ranching, the construction of roads, the growth of cities, and deforestation in the Amazon. They questioned whether the soil in the Amazon, once deforested, could support grazing for many cattle. The team found that the stretch of the Cuiabá-Santarém highway was becoming drier, but rainwater was causing significant damage. They observed that the soil was exposed to heavy rainfall without forest cover and was challenging to maintain, ultimately turning into sand. The team also noted the stark contrast between the rapid development on the Brazilian side of the expedition and the well-preserved Manu Reserve on the Peruvian side.

According to the documentary, "Cousteau realizes that he is entering a realm composed of three elements: rivers, jungle, and animals" (1985). The last two episodes narrated rapid encounters between Cousteau's team and humans (who are not part of the triad of the Amazonian world imagined by the explorer). Throughout the final

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<sup>56</sup> *A Amazônia de Cousteau (Adaptação brasileira)*.

episodes, there are mentions of the contamination of the Amazon River by silver ore (in the case of Iquitos), Cousteau's visit to the Xingu Reserve, when the crew lives with the Kayapó and meets one of their prominent leaders, Chief Raoni, or even pirarucu fishing, "increasingly difficult to catch because it is endangered".

In the case of the Kayapó, attention is given to the process of removal of the nation to the Xingu due to the opening of roads. At the same time that the team made an effort to document a population from the perspective of exoticism, it recalled that the indigenous people led by Raoni proudly displayed a tractor used in the cultivation of corn and cassava. From this image emerged the speech of Cousteau, who "feared the irremediable loss of identity for indigenous people in contact with civilization." Cousteau's civilizing self-image of the indigenous people thus found a point of pacification in the language of the encounter, when camera operators strive to show the abundant catch in a small dike created by the Kayapó, identified and approximated by the French to the Christian version of the miracle of the multiplication of fish.

One of the episodes shows, as already mentioned, the exploration of gold in Serra Pelada, in the south of the Brazilian state of Pará. The images of the manual exploitation of gold made by over 40 thousand workers who uninterruptedly excavate that space, removing 30 thousand tons of earth per day in search of nuggets and gold, are more analyzed and criticized than any other episode of the series. There is talk of the poverty and hope that motivate the miners, all men, to head for Serra Pelada; talk of the intense work and the contracts established between miners and their employers; And talk of hard profit or the illusions and significant losses created by gold. However, there is no mention of the process of subjection of workers to an authoritarian work regime, nor of the environmental problems and socio-environmental consequences of intensive mining that radically modified the demography and landscape of southern Pará in the early 1980s. In the episodes in which the social issues of the people of the interior of the Amazon are dealt with, Cousteau is not the protagonist. His performance lives in the waters.

In the universe of filming the documentary, inhabited by a fauna exotic to European and American eyes, entire of snakes, alligators, rodents, birds, fish, and risks, the expedition's reading of the devastation of the Amazon prioritized the problem of deforestation and forest fires, with their consequences for the impoverishment of the soil. This is especially evident in the documentary coverage carried out by the team that traveled by land, on stretches of the BR 163 and BR 364 highways, amid interruptions in the traffic of the expedition's vehicles by cattle or by the precariousness of the roads.

Another moment even rehearses another environmental criticism about regional problems when the expedition filmed mines from another on the Madeira River and in Serra Pelada, mentioning the mercury contamination of water, fish, and people. In exposing the problem, the documentary only said, "Mercury contamination is severe. The Cousteau Society recommends that the Brazilian government take action." When filming Serra Pelada, the ground crew compared the more than 45,000 miners to a "human anthill" in work "only comparable to the construction of the pyramids of Egypt" where men are "slaves of the other in whom they seek freedom."

An additional poetic exercise and messages from an environmental movement focus on showcasing images of wildlife, plants, and people from a perspective characterized by the exotic nature, dangers, and mysteries of the Amazon. The biographies of Cousteau and his adventures, mostly written by authors from Europe and the USA, have emphasized a passion for the natural world, environmental education, and shaping public opinion in the fight for certain ecological causes in the late twentieth century.<sup>57</sup>

The story of the Amazon Expedition, as presented in both print and television, highlights a point made by Elisiane Zvir in 2019.<sup>58</sup> She observed that Cousteau's portrayal continued the tradition of a foreign perspective on the Amazon. However, this

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<sup>57</sup> John Pickrell, "Keeping Jacques Cousteau's Flame Alive," *Science, New Series* 305, no. 5682 (2004): 332–33.; Michel Cousteau, *Meu Pai, o Comandante* (São Paulo: Companhia Editora Nacional, 2006).

<sup>58</sup> Elisiane Zvir, "Jacques Cousteau Na Amazônia: Olhar Estrangeiro e Ambiental" (Dissertação (Mestrado em História), Irati, Universidade Estadual do Centro-Oeste, 2019).

perspective did not necessarily reflect the environmental critique that was already well-established in the country.

The documentary's broadcast on Brazilian TV during prime time in 1984 and 1985 has sparked critical discussions, both at that time and in the decades since. For example, José Ribamar Bessa Freire recalled the documentary's impact and relevance in a chronicle:

Every Thursday night until June 6th, the flies at the Bagasse Fair in Compensa, Manaus, stopped flying to avoid making noise. Teachers did not protest, the police did not repress, journalists did not write, informants did not snitch, and the governor and mayor did not steal. The whole of Brazil, filled with green and yellow pride, held its breath and watched the TV to follow the oceanographer's adventures.<sup>59</sup>

Freire highlights potential ambiguities or, at worst, colonialist attitudes exhibited by the expedition and depicted in the TV Globo documentary. These include presenting the "discovery" of the pink dolphin, manatee, otter, and pororoca as exotic and showcasing them to the world.

## CONCLUSION

During Jacques-Yves Cousteau's Amazon Expedition, Brazil was under a dictatorship, showing signs of weakening. However, the government still pushed for industrial development and national integration policies in the Amazon while censoring and controlling information about the region. At the same time, the Amazon captured the attention of national and international audiences due to growing environmental concerns focused on the forests. This led to producing documentaries about the forests and oceans, reflecting a perspective of nature as something to be consumed.

Cousteau, his crew, the Calypso, the Cousteau Society, their sponsors, and the Brazilian federal government's interests were all depicted through images and texts of

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<sup>59</sup> José Ribamar Bessa Freire (2018) recalled the documentary's impact and relevance in a chronicle. See: José R. B. Freire, "França Ou Croácia? A Expedição Priquita," Site, *Taquiprati* (blog), July 15, 2018, <https://www.taquiprati.com.br/cronica/1404-franca-ou-croacia-a-expedicao-priquita?reply=28774>.

the Amazon Expedition. These materials created an environmental narrative reinforcing certain perceptions of the region, emphasizing its exoticism and subjecting it to a foreign, supposedly scientific perspective. However, while the expedition documented the destruction of the forest, the construction of roads, and the contamination of rivers, fish, and people with mercury, it needed to critique the projects associated with these events thoroughly. Instead, it offered only a general suggestion for the Brazilian government to take action.

Cousteau, in this sense, represented an environmentalist perspective that aimed to balance development and preservation. His views on Brazilian policy for the Amazon were ambiguous, as he valued the region's unique flora and fauna without considering the economic, social, cultural, and political dynamics that had already transformed the Amazon into a territory undergoing significant socio-environmental changes.

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## Jacques Cousteau y la Expedición Amazonia: La Imaginación Ambiental y la Prensa Brasileña en la Década de 1980

### RESUMEN

Este artículo examina la Expedición al Amazonas de Jacques Cousteau (1982-1983) y su representación en la prensa brasileña. Mediante un marco metodológico de análisis del discurso y los medios, el estudio analiza el documental de la expedición, su cobertura en periódicos como el *Jornal do Brasil* y la producción bibliográfica asociada. Considera estos materiales como «textos ambientales» para descifrar la particular concepción del medio ambiente que fomentaron. El análisis revela que la expedición, enmarcada en una perspectiva colonialista y eurocéntrica, no generó una comprensión coherente ni científicamente rigurosa del Amazonas. En cambio, generó percepciones ambiguas, promoviendo un espectáculo natural «a la carta» que enfatizaba el exotismo y la grandiosidad. El artículo concluye que la obra de Cousteau, si bien documentó la degradación ambiental, en última instancia ofreció una crítica superficial. No logró abordar de manera significativa la sociobiodiversidad histórica de la región ni las complejas transformaciones socioambientales ya en marcha, reforzando así una imagen extranjera, mediatizada y consumible del Amazonas que se alineaba tanto con los intereses desarrollistas como con un creciente ambientalismo global.

**Palabras clave:** Amazonas, prensa brasileña, Jacques-Yves Cousteau, imaginación ambiental.

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