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## BR-163: from “landless men” to “manless land” BR-163: “homens sem terra” para “a terra sem homens”

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### Resumo:

Em 1970, o governo brasileiro deu início ao projeto de construção das grandes estradas na Amazônia, com destaque para a Transamazônica, cortando a região de leste a oeste, e a BR-163, a Cuiabá-Santarém, de sul a norte – estradas que se cortavam em forma de cruz e abriam eixos de penetração e integração. Em 16 de junho de 1970, foi criado o Plano de Integração Nacional (PIN). O deslocamento de camponeses de áreas submetidas à “pressão demográfica” é oficializado e o discurso de *ligar o homem sem terra do Nordeste à terra sem homem da Amazônia* é posto em prática, de forma caótica e socialmente injusta. Em dezembro de 1974, a Cuiabá-Santarém foi aberta ao tráfego. No Mato Grosso, a estrada motivaria a penetração de grandes projetos agropecuários e de colonização comandados por grupos particulares. No Pará, no trecho entre Santarém e Rurópolis (no entroncamento da Cuiabá-Santarém com a Transamazônica), predominaria a colonização dirigida para pequenos proprietários, comandada pelo Instituto Nacional de Colonização e Reforma Agrária (INCRA). Ao longo de toda a estrada, a valorização das terras, a atração de correntes migratórias e a especulação fundiária teriam impactos imediatos sobre a população local – especialmente os povos indígenas. As nossas considerações finais permite-nos, a título de conclusão, afirmar que as sucessivas mudanças dos “planos de desenvolvimento”, ao sabor das conjunturas políticas e econômicas, contribuíram para a falência da grande maioria dos projetos de colonização. A nossa conclusão está voltada para algumas variáveis que apontam para a insustentabilidade do modelo de desenvolvimento regional: *Um modelo excludente*: no esforço de escolher uma imagem que seja reveladora do ambiente da fronteira atual eu diria que esta é o da exclusão. *Um modelo produtivista*: após vinte anos é o agronegócio que, notadamente no Mato Grosso, conhece o mais forte desenvolvimento, sustentado pela necessidade do Brasil obter divisas a partir de produtos exportáveis como a soja. *Deflorestamento e fragmentação contínua das florestas amazônicas*.

**Palavras-chave:** Amazônia, BR-163, PIN, índios, colonos

### Abstract:

In 1970, the Brazilian government started the project of building the large highways in the Amazon, highlighting the Transamazon, linking the region from East to West, and BR-163, known as Cuiabá-Santarém, from South to North – highways that crossed each other opened axes of penetration and integration. On the 16th of June, 1970, the Plan of National Integration (PIN) was created. The displacement of peasants from areas submitted to “demographic pressure” is made official and the speech of *connecting the landless man of the Northeast to the manless land of the Amazon* is put into practice in a chaotic and socially unfair way. In December 1974, the highway Cuiabá-Santarém was opened to the public. In Mato Grosso, the road would motivate the penetration of large agricultural projects and the colonization commanded by private groups. In the state of Pará, in the stretch between Santarém and Rurópolis (at the crossing of Cuiabá-Santarém and Transamazon), the colonization directed to small landowners is predominant, commanded by the National Institute of Colonization and Land Reform (INCRA). Along all the road, the appreciation of the land, the attraction of migratory currents and the land speculation had immediate impacts to the local population – especially the indigenous ones. Our final consideration allow us, for the sake of concluding, to claim that the successive changes in the “development plans” according to the political and economic conjunctures, contributed to the failure of the great majority of colonization projects. Our conclusion is directed to some variables that points to the unsustainability of the regional development model: *An excluding model*: in the effort of choosing an image which is revealing of the environment of the present frontier I would say that it is of exclusion. *A productivist model*: after twenty year it is agribusiness that, notably in Mato Grosso, has the strongest development, supported by the necessity of Brazil obtaining income from exportable goods such as soybean. *Deforesting and continuous fragmentation of Amazon forest*.

**Keywords:** Amazon, BR-163, PIN, indians, settlers

## 1. Introduction

Brazil is one of the few countries in the world where new spaces are continuously integrated on the costs of disrespecting the populations of the Amazon Forest, marginalizing a significant portion of its population and transforming the natural and rural space. This phenomenon, highlighted by recent changes, having on one side the social-economic needs, and on the other side, the consequences to the environment, hinders the definition of a model that would be socially fair and ecologically correct.

The regional development assumed two kinds of action: (a) Public Policies of structure development, so that it could be coherent to the speech of “landless men” to “manless land”, in the chart of the *National Integration Plan* (PIN, in the original) and selection of projects for the agriculture colonization coordinated by the National Institute of Colonization and Land Reform (INCRA, in the original) and Development Poles; (b) Private action based on investments in several sectors of the economy, mainly cattle raising, mineral extraction and industrialization. Consistence and coherence between the speech and the practice was missing: the settlers were orphans of a homeland.

During the government of General Geisel (1974-1978), *Polamazônia* was instituted, as a means of facilitating even more the entrance of oligopolistic capital in the region. In order to attract big economic groups to participate in the projects of the North region, the government offered great advantages: lands in large expansion, available and cheap, as well as subsidized financing and tax incentive.

The Amazon and the Center-West region suffered great impacts of the politics of the military governments. The Amazon, identified with the production of rubber, and the Center-West, identified with the extensive cattle raising, had their economies diversified.

The federal government led the occupation of these spaces in the national territory aiming at its potentialities and at ending a dangerous empty space for the national security. Using the favorable natural conditions, it was about producing cereals, meat, ores and wood for the international market<sup>1</sup>.

In the 21 years of the military governments (1964-1985)<sup>2</sup>, Brazilian politics was led by the principles of security and development. It was about obtaining high indexes of economic development under the control of the State, so that the “permanent national goals” would be reached, synthesized in the target of Brazil-Power: the country joining the developed world until the end of the century.

Being the *capital* an internally scarce factor, the levels of accumulation started to pursue a clear and accentuated tendency for concentration and monopoly – and as a constant directed to all the sorts: agriculture, industry, as well as different sectors such as financial, real estate etc. Under such impulse of diversification, the capital is led to the land (fixed factor) in the broader sense of space expansion, seeking to act and seize the virgin areas of unexplored sectors. A wide movement of multiplying investment opportunities went from the economic “core” in the South-West to multiple frontier in the Northeastern space, Center-West and the Amazon, and the way of going “to the land” started to be covered by an aggressiveness in terms not reached yet.

The displacement of peasants from areas submitted to “demographic pressure” is made official and the speech of *connecting the landless man of the Northeast to the manless land of the Amazon* is put into practice in a chaotic and socially unfair way.

Between 1970 and 1974, the National Institute of Colonization and Land Reform (INCRA) prioritized the settlement of poor settlers in the States of Rondonia and Mato Grosso, according to a proposal from the project POLONOROESTE, serving three basic goals: (1) *economic goal*: promote agriculture aiming at increasing the production of food to supply the domestic market as well as for exportation; (2) *demographic goal*: stop the rural exodus and reorient the flow from the large metropolis in the South-west to the Amazon; (3) *social goal*: decrease the social tensions provoked by large land properties in the

apparently profitable large farms of cattle raising during the time of meat high prices. Brazil was, in fact, the fourth biggest country to be contemplated with loans from the bank, right after Mexico, Colombia and Paraguay, with about US\$ 150 million given to projects like this. After 1970, however, the bank loans to commercial cattle raising in large scale decreased because of many reasons, including a substantial drop in the world prices of meat, and a change in the policy of the institution for programs of integrated development, aiming at “fighting the poverty”, as well as an internal reorganization (Jarvis, 1986).

<sup>1</sup> In 1974, the World Bank lent US\$ 6 million to Brazil for cattle raising, in order to foment the exportation of processed meat, according to its policy, in the beginning of the 1970s, of encouraging the investment in

<sup>2</sup> The military period can be considered as authoritarian in the political domain, modernizer in the economic domain and elitist in the social domain.

Northeast and the small land properties in the South of the country.

The second project concerns the *cerrados* (savannah-like ecosystem in the central part of Brazil), whose soils were assessed as poor and inadequate to agriculture until 1970. After strong investments, thanks to the progress of agriculture and the development of communication, the *cerrados* attracted the southern people to the areas of *cerrado* of *Planalto Central* (central plateau, where the capital of Brazil is located), having the soybean as the main product of an exporting agroindustry. In this case, the producers from the South were prioritized, because they were more capable of developing a modern and competitive agriculture directed, essentially, to international markets.

Even the National Institute of Colonization and Land Reform (INCRA) changes its goals according to the political moment, for example, when it changes the *social colonization* of option for the poorer producers (1970-1974) to the *commercial colonization*, characterized by the sale of land to big farmers (1975-1979)<sup>3</sup>.

<sup>3</sup> The Association of Amazon Enterprises (AEA, in the original), with its headquarters in São Paulo, created in 1968 as an interest pressure group for the southern industry owners, that defended the subsidized financing of their new cattle raising enterprises in the Amazon, had a great influence on the formulation of the official policy for the region and applied decisive pressure to obtain renewed emphasis on cattle raising, on the expenses of small producers (Pompermayer, 1984). The Ministry of Planning, together with the Bank of Amazon (Basa), organized several visits to businessmen from the South of the country to the Amazon, encouraging them to invest in projects of private creation and colonization, under the fundament that only the large companies “*can take rational advantage of the enormous potential of the Amazon*”. During one of these trips, organized in 1973 for 20 big businessmen, including the president of Volkswagen of Brazil (Wolfgang Sauer) and Bradesco (Amador Aguiar), civil authorities defended the role of the private enterprise. The Ministry of Planning, Reis Veloso, criticized the “predatory occupation” by the small producers and appealed to large companies so that they “took over the job of developing the region” (Branford & Glock, 1985, pp. 70-71). The Ministry of the Interior, Gen. José Costa Cavalcanti, endorsed these ideas, claiming that “the future of the Amazon is on the hand on the Brazilian or foreign businessmen, once Brazil has lost its fear of foreign capital” (Branford & Glock, 1985, pp. 70-71). An accentuated difference of opinion between INCRA (Ministry of Agriculture) and its policy of “social colonization” on the one hand, and on the other hand, Sudam (Ministry of Interior), that supported the interests from AEA became clear. Close to the end of the government of Médici, José Francisco Moura Cavalcanti, the new Ministry of Agriculture and former director of INCRA, and Walter Costa Porto, the new president of INCRA, attempted to defend the policy of directed colonization in terms of reducing the social uneasiness and using the Amazon as an “*exhaust valve*” for the social pressures that were taking body in other areas of Brazil (Branford & Glock, 1985; Foweraker, 1981). Sudam, however, continued its attacks to INCRA’s policy and, in 1973, its recently nominated superintendent, Colonel Câmara Sena, described the Amazon as “a region made for cattle raising, with excellent natural pasture and abundance of space for the expansion of this sector that, for this reason, will form the base of its economic integration” (Cardoso & Müller, 1977, p. 158).

## 2. The highway Cuiabá-Santarém

It is undeniable that the visit of the President Emílio Garrastazu Médici to the Northeast region, victimized by the disastrous draught of 1970, was the motivation for, in a speech delivered on the 6th of June of the same year, announcing in a patriotic way that “the government would take all the necessary measures to connect the landless men of the Northeast to the manless land of the Amazon”. Ten days later, the Plan of National Integration (PIN, in the original) was created, which had as its main goal the immediate building of the highways Transamazon and Cuiabá-Santarém<sup>4</sup>.

The immediacy in which these two highways were planned and executed did not minimally contributed to attenuating the social-environmental impacts that ended up appearing even in the building process, and that were managed to the taste of the governors, the availability of resources and improvisation.

In this year (1970), the Brazilian government started the project of building the large highways in the Amazon, highlighting the Transamazon, linking the region from East to West, and BR-163, known as Cuiabá-Santarém, from South to North – highways that crossed each other opened axes of penetration and integration. On the 16<sup>th</sup> of June, 1970, the Plan of National Integration (PIN) was created with a budget forecast of 200 million *crúzeiros* (Brazilian official currency at that moment), during the period of 1971-1974 (later extended to 600 million, until 1978), for the building of highways and projects of colonization in the Amazon and the first phase of the Plan of Irrigation of the Northeast.

The highway Cuiabá-Santarém was an old dream, of exactly 126 years. Its necessity was already felt in 1844 when the first project for the construction of a railway that drained the production of the Brazilian central region to the port of Santarém and from there to the Atlantic, on a route of more than 800 km by the Amazon river. The new BR-163, with 1 777 km, besides allowing the connection of the mining, agropastoral and timber regions with an exporting polo, would open the lands of Mato Grosso and South-west of Paraná crossed by this road to the colonization.

<sup>4</sup> BR-163, also known as Cuiabá-Santarém, has an extension of 1,747 km; its construction started in 1970 and was concluded in 1974. Transamazon (BRs 230, 404, 317 and 364) starts in João Pessoa-PB and goes up to the border with Peru, in an extension of 6,368 km; its construction started in 1970 and, according to Rebelo (1973) would be concluded in 1974.

In December 1974, the highway Cuiabá-Santarém was opened to the public.

In Mato Grosso, the road would motivate the penetration of large agricultural projects and the colonization commanded by private groups. In the state of Pará, in the stretch between Santarém and Rurópolis (at the crossing of Cuiabá-Santarém and Transamazon), the colonization directed to small landowners is predominant, commanded by the National Institute of Colonization and Land Reform (INCRA). Along all the road, the appreciation of the land, the attraction of migratory currents and the land speculation had immediate impacts to the local population – especially the indigenous ones.

The Army, through its operative agent – the 9<sup>th</sup> BEC – established partnerships with public organs on the assumption of improving the capacity of managing the conflicts inherent of such large work, notably being executed in a moment of history in which the territorial dynamics were determined by social-environmental agreements and re-agreements of other parts of the Brazilian territory: draught in the Northeast, flooding of agricultural areas around the large reservoirs of hydroelectric power plants in the South and Southeast of Brazil, frosts and collapse of the colonization model – based on coffee cultivation and installment of the land structure – in the North of Paraná and, still, in the migratory culture of the most varied social-economic levels of Brazilian population.

The implementation of BR-163, from the technical point of view, did not offer great difficulties, as



**Figure 1**  
The lithological conditions of Serra do Cachimbo, on the border of the states of Mato Grosso and Pará, did not resist, and after 5 years of the construction of BR-163, it presents gullies of great dimensions that make the road traffic difficult. Currently, this stretch is paved with asphalt.

Source: Passos, July, 2004.

it can be thought at first sight, for it being the Amazon. The road bed followed the divisor of Tapajós and Xingu basins (Figure 1), reducing significantly the crossing of large and medium-sized rivers and allowing a almost straight track, from South to North. Nevertheless, the crossing of large rivers – Teles Pires and Peixoto de Azevedo – and, still, the stretch inside Serra do Cachimbo demanded the construction of art work (bridges and sewers) and, in Serra do Cachimbo, the implementation of a layer, based on gravel and clay earth, so that it could “coat” the quasi-sand that is predominant in the lithology of this more elevated area.

INCRA was in charge of performing, in a rush<sup>5</sup>, the indispensable discrimination of the vacant land in order to levy the public land, preserving the land patrimony of the Union and, from this realization, ordinate the occupation of the “empty space”.

The occupation of the area of influence of BR-163 happened *pari passu* to the process of its construction and, in the years immediately after its conclusion, from, notably, the public occupation piloted by INCRA, of private colonization done by great colonizing companies and, still, the spontaneous occupation that, generally speaking, generated gold-digging areas, landless men and other orphans of the homeland.

INCRA, however, was not structured to perform such task, aggravated by the accelerated pace of the road constructions and also by the spontaneity and adventure spirit of the migrants who drove themselves to this part of the Brazilian territory. The Law Decree nº 1164, from 1971, defining, arbitrarily, that the untitled land that was located in the 100 km stretch on the both sides of BR-163 belonged to the Union, makes the inability of the department responsible for the colonization clear.

### 3. BR-163: route of conflicts with indigenous

The area of influence of BR-163 is a space whose evolution is articulated in two moments: the long time of a history “without history” or hidden – “and the short time that approaches the process of recent territorialization, synonym of an aggressive human

<sup>5</sup> The policy of Amazon occupation is covered by two variables – among many others – which are extremely negative: (a) as a general rule, the effective action of the State manifested themselves in a downstream of negative effects; (b) the State and the society act as if they were “changing the tire with the car in movement”.

occupation. Until 1970, the center-north region of Mato Grosso was traveled only by the indians, some *bandeirantes* expeditions and by the expedition of Peixoto de Azevedo in the high course of the river Arinos – in the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. In the 1970s, the construction of BR-163 determined a new model of valorization of space: here, as well as elsewhere in Brazil, the road motivated the advance of pioneer fronts.

The building of roads in the Amazon was extremely aggressive to the indians population who lived on hunting, collecting and itinerant farming. The mass arrival of gold-diggers in Yanomani land, between 1987 and 1990, cost the lives of more than a thousand of them, victims of violence and diseases<sup>6</sup>.

Before the Portuguese conquer, the Brazilian Amazon had 8 million indigenous, who lived in a “wild” space, in ecological balance with the forest. Currently, they are no more than 300 thousand. The diseases that came from Europe (from varicella to syphilis) contributed to their extinction; the disorganization provoked by the territorial occupation policies completed the picture.

The brief and rich cycle of rubber (1870-1912) motivated the white people to penetrate, at last, in the interior of the forest<sup>7</sup>, populated by “invisible” indians to whom the white men are not welcome.

Foundation Brazil-Central was created in June 1943 by the coordinator of Economic Mobilization of the government of Vargas, the lieutenant João Alberto. The Foundation was a sort of parastatal company whose goal was to create vias of communication with the Amazon through the countryside of the country, allowing the exploitation and settlement of the central mass of Brazil in the areas of the banks of the river Xingu. It would be, this way, a decisive step to the realization of an aspiration of a “March to the West”.

There was a shock in the national imaginary. The encounter with the indians *Panará* was the most announced “first encounter” of a group in the time of modern telecommunication. During years, the search for gigantic indians was followed by the

Brazilian press, as well as the international press, with generous headlines and fantastic expectations. In the middle of a military dictatorship, with the country in a patriotic fever for the great projects of *Big Brazil*, with the National Integration Plan, the Transamazon and the building of the hydroelectric power plant of Itaipu, the presence of extraordinary indians on the way of progress reactivated the ghosts of Brazilian identity, dramatizing, for the eyes of all, a collision of history to prehistory. Wrapped in the mystic of the “good wild”, the *Panará* were even more noticeable, taller, more noble, stronger and more mysterious – and as improbable as intriguing.

Until 1973, Peixoto de Azevedo and the banks of Iriri river remained untouched and occupied only by the indians *Panará*. The explorer Antonio Peixoto de Azevedo, who first explored and described the region, in 1819, going down the river Teles Pires up to Tapajós River, indicated the presence of large logs on the banks of the rivers, used by the indians to facilitate the crossing. They were the *Panará*, who did not know the canoe as a means of transportation neither its construction techniques.

In 1970, facing the growing penetration of gold-diggers and farmers, the *Panará* went further inside. Frightened by precious massacres, they continued to flee contact with the white people. There was, among them, a constant discussion: the old ones argued that the white people were wild and come to kill all of them; the young ones said that the gifts they left, mainly the wished knives and beads, showed that they were not wild and did not intend to kill everyone.

It was in the same year, during the government of General Médici, that the National Foundation for the Indians (FUNAI) established a partnership with the Superintendence for the Development of the Amazon (SUDAM) in order to promote the pacification of thirty indigenous tribes in the projected area for the construction of the Transamazon highway. The roads became priority, including the Cuiabá-Santarém, and the contact with the secluded indians became imperative. In consequence of this partnership, two indigenous groups would be integrated to the involving society: the *Parakanã* and the *Panará*.

Before the contact with the expedition Villas Boas, the *Panará* occupied ten villages and had a population estimated between 300 and 600 individuals. When they were transferred to Xingu Indigenous Park, on January 12<sup>th</sup>, 1975, they were only 79. From the contact up to the transfer, they became one of

<sup>6</sup> See: *Yanomani, l'Esprit de ka forêt* by Brude Albert and Davi Kopenawa, Fondation Cartier/Actes Sud, 2003.

<sup>7</sup> In 1903, Brazil concluded the Treaty of Petrópolis with Bolivia: Bolivia would give in to Brazil the region of Acre and Brazil would permit Bolivia to build a railway up to the navigable stretch of river Madeira, in Porto Velho, in order to export its rubber through the Atlantic. During the time of the railway construction, in inhuman conditions, Marshal Rondon and his men were in charge of establishing a telegraphic line connecting the states of Mato Grosso and Rondonia through the Amazon Forest.

the biggest victims of the so-called “Brazilian miracle”. In the book *As Vítimas do Milagre* (The victims of the miracle), Shelton Davis claims that the diseases, death and suffering that were massively initiated upon the Brazilian Indians in the 1970s, “were the direct result of the economic development policy of the military governments in Brazil” (Davis, 1977, cit. em Arnt, Pinto, & Pinto, 1998, p. 27).

Although being secluded in the first contact, the Panará were slowly been attracted by the work at the construction of Cuiabá-Santarém road and by the vehicles that arrived with the opening of BR-163 to the traffic. Unable to associate the arising of diseases to the presence of white people, they started using the road and settled a small village only four kilometers from it.

The diseases were spread to other villages, provoking conflicts among the Indians themselves. A detour of the trace of the highway contributed a lot to this, as it was deviated to the left reaching Peixoto de Azevedo, precisely to the direction where the Panará were installed.

On January 11<sup>th</sup>, 1975, two C-47 airplanes from the Brazilian Air Force (FAB) transferred the last Panará from Peixoto de Azevedo to Xingu, 250 kilometers west. That was a military operation of withdraw and rescue.

From then on, the territory of Panará was reserved to the Union domain, according to the terms of the Land Statute (Law n° 4504, from 11/30/1964). In 1979, INCRA would grant the use of 231,111 ha of the Panará Indigenous Area to the Canarana Mixed

Farming Cooperative<sup>8</sup>, located at the county of Chapada dos Guimarães.

#### 4. Back to the lands of Peixoto de Azevedo

On December 31<sup>st</sup>, 1991, six Panará and six white people took a bus, at the Surveillance Post of BR-080, at Xingu Indigenous Park, to a historical trip to Peixoto de Azevedo. It was the first time that the Panará had decided to return to their land since the transfer, in 1975. The group arrived at the city of Matupá, on BR-163, on the following day, and started doing the territorial recognition on November 2<sup>nd</sup>.

The valley of Peixoto de Azevedo showed a desolating aspect. The gold-diggers and the farmers had cut down the woods, polluted and sanded the rivers, mainly Braço Norte (Figure 2).

From a flight, the Indians identified an area, close to Serra do Cachimbo, arriving at the banks of river Iriri, still covered by conserved woods and rivers, with small water flow. Part of the land had not yet been occupied. After several expeditions of recognition, the Panará opted for establishing themselves in an area still without effective occupation: 488 thousand hectares on the banks of the rivers Iriri and Ipiranga, on the border of the states of Pará and Mato Grosso.

#### 5. The environment of the frontier

The objective, at this moment, is to explicit some of the several reflections/ evaluations performed during my study trips on the colorful dust of the road. Therefore, the term “environment” is being used to make reference to the “material and cultural atmosphere” lived in the frontier areas.

The pioneers are plural, because they come from regions whose social-spatial formation happened in a very different way in time and space. Moreover, having the same “region of origin” does not mean having the same social-economic and cultural background. The family clans, small groups of friends can, from the actions of solidarity, aware or not, give “agreed” answers to the success or the vicissitudes of a new world, the world of the frontier, the world of the dreams, realizations and frustrations/desolations. Having the purpose of picturing in an



**Figure 2**  
Gold-digging area in the county of Peixoto de Azevedo/MT: the indigenous land of Kranhacãrore, from the opening of BR-163, was usurped by gold-diggers and farmers.  
Source: Passos, 2004.

<sup>8</sup> See: *Uma Cruz em Terra Nova* – Norberto Schwantes – São Paulo: Scrita Oficina Editorial, 1989.

objective way the subjectivity of this people, these pioneers, we chose to value the spontaneous testimonies of some of these Brazilian who moved, answering the calls of the public policies of colonization as well as the so-called colonizing companies, or in a chaotic way, much more motivated by the difficulties faced in their areas of origin than by the previous knowledge of the possibilities of the arrival places.

There are frontiers where the relations of men with the environment are more direct, more empirical. The pioneers arrive without many financial resources and, then, employ the techniques they know: deforest with axes and match boxes, plow the land with the aim of supporting their families: rice, beans, manioc, corn; raise cattle – with the same concern: pigs, hens, some dairy cows. They reproduce the fests, the same fests from their original area, mainly religious fests. The house, the choosing of the site for their settlement – in general terms, half-way from the water and the road, so that they can have access to these two essential elements. In terms of organization of the rural *habitat*, the corruption and/or isolated *habitat* prevail. The *environment*, despite the ecological differences, is built to the image of the place of origin: it is the place to live, work, and notably, dream. Dream with the future, but, also, with the past. The past is present in the design of the houses, the reproduction of the festivities, diet, singing, pictures on the walls, memories. This *environment* can last, or dilute itself and disappear while other cultures and other techniques arrive at the same territory.

There are places where the “new frontier”<sup>9</sup> surpasses the “old frontier”. At the same time that the encounter of these two frontiers, very different from each other, cultural and technically speaking, promotes new opportunities and invigorates the places, it is possible that the exclusion, partial or total, of less capitalized cultures<sup>10</sup> prevails. From some study trips done in Araguaia Valley, I bring some examples of conflicts and exclusion motivated by the arrival of the “new frontier”: (a) the narrative of Valdón Varjão, from Barra do Graças/MT, son of gold-diggers who even served as a bionic Senator of the Republic – during the military regime – clearly illustrates the contemplative spirit of the “old frontier” and, at the

same time, of revolt and acceptance in relation to the capacity of the “new frontier” to establish itself in an arrogant and absolute way:

the southern people arrived and dominated everything: they bought the best land, obtained the best funding from Banco do Brasil, built the best houses of the city, made noise everywhere with their trucks and stereos, are arrogant to the local people, already have the political dominance of the county and they will dominate the state as well...; these southern people bother too much, but they are good-looking, the women are blonde with blue eyes, the tall gaucho men with white skin... and he concludes: they are making, even the native people from Mato Grosso, with ugly, scorched faces, more beautiful. This is pure progress!”; (b) the interview with Dom Pedro Casaldáliga (7/9/91), the testimony of the conflicts between the “new” and the “old” frontier: “this is conquering territory! Indigenous land! From 1920, the northeastern arrived, the family clan, they came motivated by the speeches of Father Cicero that referenced them to the pursuit of the “Green Flag”, the fertile land and the humid weather. At the beginning, there were conflicts with the Indians, but the accommodation and even the miscegenation prevailed. From 1960, the big landowners arrived, from São Paulo and the South, arrogant people, went on acquiring land, deforesting, forming pasture areas, introducing cattle, expelling people – Indians, northeastern people – those who arrived before. (Passos, 2015, p. 91)

The “new frontier” and its corollary resisted little to the arrival of the southern people – more capitalized, more organized, more numerous, more supported, including by governmental policies.

The “new frontier”, started in the 1970s, was built from inside to outside and from outside to inside. And it had several steps and dynamics.

The colonizing companies – Sinop, Colíder, Indeco, Feliz JAR etc – and the large national cooperatives – Cooperlucas, Canaraba, Coopervale etc – put into practice a management plan that was constituted basically in: foundation of cities, division and sale of rural and urban lots, selection of settlers, that is, a reproduction of the southern patterns (from Paraná, Santa Catarina and Rio Grande do Sul). These first years of the colonizing process of the State of Mato Grosso were done based on empiricism and lottery, in the sense of improvisation and uncertainty. Many migrants arrived and, right after, returned. The difficulties, motivated by isolation – lack of roads, lack of service providers, lack of buyers, the

<sup>9</sup> It is considered “New frontier” the areas whose occupation happened in a dense way – in time-space – from the arrival of southern people, that is, in the beginning on the 1970s.

<sup>10</sup> The system is dual, which means, composed by two antagonistic strands: the small producer and the large company, attached to agribusiness.



loneliness of the Brazilian *cerrado*, the nostalgia of the “wonder South”, the inefficiency/ inexistence of basic services: health and education – are very much present in the narratives of those who resisted and remained. The permanence was only possible due to the grouping spirit, present and valued by the southern people. It is a good example of a frontier that happens “from outside to inside”, that is, with the progressive and continuous arrival of settlers, cooperatives, cultures, techniques and that, even before its sedimentation, needs to be built from “outside to inside”, which means, resisting and overcoming difficulties at the filling of empty spaces, notably from the absence of the State<sup>11</sup>. The first settlers, coming from the region of Cruz Alta/RS, who arrived at Diamantino/MT and, after, moved further north, along the current axis of BR-163, moved motivated by innumerable attractions – fertile and cheap land, perspectives/ promises of the opening of BR-163 etc. These promises from the “outside to the inside”, that is, from the government to the frontier, which remained in the idea of “everything is another thing” cost a lot to the settlers. They had to open roads, built hydroelectric power plants; lost children and other relatives due to lack of medical assistance, according to reports of some settlers connected to the Pioneer Association of Nova Mutum (APINM).

However, this phase, where the “outside to inside” prevailed, which means, a more centripetal model, concerning the flow of settlers, activities and governmental actions, if not totally overcome, it is, at least, attenuated.

Currently, the frontier is very globalized and strongly dominated by external decisions, decision of the international market and large Trades - Cargil, Bunge, ADM... However, the curious fact is that, despite this management tied to the world economy, the frontier is built from “outside to inside”, that is, it is more assumed and more capitalized, aware of the differentiation related to what happens in the South of the country. It still advances forward new areas – mainly transaction forest, once the areas of *cerrado* have already been almost totally occupied.

In the effort of choosing an image/ an expression that is revealing of the *environment* of the

current frontier, I would say that this image is of “exclusion”. And why is that? It is because the current phase is the one of growing from “inside to outside”, which means, “build body”. Build body must be translated by the need of answering the elevated costs of production from the increase of volume. Volume of the machinery field, volume of the extension of the planting area, volume of domain of the production chain: finance the planting, finance the harvest, finance the machinery, finance the truck. Whoever cannot build body, make volume, faces serious difficulties, and is under the risk of disappearing. A pioneer from Nova Mutum/MT, who arrived at the region in the 1970s – initially in Diamantino – expressed a sentence that picture very well this evaluation:

I am stressed out, I have to be a farmer, mechanic, master the computer, know how to purchase, know how to sell, know how to use chemical fertilizers... there are too many things on my mind; and, even worse, I started feeling afraid of not being able to hold my 400-hectare property that is becoming too small for all that, for the costs of the machinery, for the bargain power with the banks, for the companies that buy and sell what we need here in the crops (...).(Passos, 2015, p. 87)

The need of building body so that they can survive leads the pioneers fronts to “change the tire with the car running”, that is, the phase of Settlers, that created planned cities, seems to be out of fashion. We can observe some pioneer fronts which are clearly “producer fronts” (and not settlers). Two of them can be highlighted: (a) Chapada dos Parecis, notably the stretch between Tangará da Serra and Sapezal on the axis of BR-364, whose domains is of large grain producing farms (Figure 3), with outsourced/ temporary workers and with producers, in general, being land leaseholders. The high price of soybean – in great part favored by the exchange rate – leads these producers to expand the crops of soybean for the so-called “marginal areas”, that is, to parts of the territory where the pedological conditions would not recommend this land for growing because of the areinization of this area. The justification for the occupation of this marginal area comes in a very common in the regions: “it is necessary to build the soil”; (b) another “producers front” is located along MT-242 that links, from east to west, BRs 163 and 158. There are, practically, 250 km,

<sup>11</sup> It is never too much to remind that the “occupation of empty spaces”, notably in the Brazilian Center-West, despite all the advertised policy of governmental incentive, taxes incentive etc., happens from the understanding that the Brazilian State is only built and only becomes effectively present from the “actions” and these actions, generally speaking, are together with the arrival of pioneers.



Figure 3  
Farm Branca – Chapada dos Parecis/MT.  
Source: Passos, 7/13/1999.

along dirty roads, where the signs indicate only the farms (names of farms and distances).

## 6. Marginal areas

“Marginal Areas” are considered as the spaces defined by the following characteristics:

Territorial parcels distant from the two main corridors of logistic of transportation support: BR-163 and BR-158;

Areas whose geopedological and climate-hydrological conditions are less favorable for farming;

Despite these conflicts, they have been used by soybean producers due to the good prices of the harvest of 2002/2003 and 2003/2004;

Setting of settlers, defining a more equal farm structure is out of fashion.

These territories are appropriate only for agricultural production, notably of soybean. In the last years, the agricultural frontier has accentuated its “productivist” character, in which the process of colonization as it is (founding of cities) is quite attenuated.

Here, the character of social exclusion is much stronger than the one observed in the phase of the colonizing companies, even though these last had an elitist character. On the other hand, the rush in “building the soil” for planting becomes excessively aggressive, notably in relation to the areas of Legal and Permanent Preserve.

Nevertheless, the occupation of forest areas is no longer a “privilege” of cattle raising. It is very recurrent the fact of observing the planting of



Figure 4  
Signs of the presence of farms and functions as an indication of a marginal area, which means, where the settlers are not present in the role of founding cities.  
Source: Passos, 2004.

soybean from the first year of cutting down the transaction forest. It can be affirmed that the trades and the national cooperatives arrive first (Figure 5), followed by the soybean planters. That phase of “it’s necessary to tame the land”, by planting rice in the first two or three years after deforesting, is totally outdated in the current scenario: “*We already have technology for planting soybean immediately after deforesting*”, claim several interviewed producers.

## 7. Land use planning

“A country of continental dimensions, Brazil had in its frontier economy and in the geopolitics two central cores of its formation.”

Bertha K. Becker (1982, p. 16)

In Brazil, Acselrad (2000) highlights that the EEZ (economic and ecological zoning) has been used



**Figure 5**  
The sign indicating the future installation of Cargill before the soybean planters.  
Source: Passos, 2004.

by the government in several scales in the national territory, especially in the Amazon. According to what was defined by the Ministry of Environment, the EEZ has as its main goal, from the formulation of diagnoses and proposal of future scenarios, to make the sustainable development feasible by the compatibilization of the economic, social and environmental tripod.

The Federal Government has searched, since the 1970s, to command the occupation of the Amazon through different measures of territorial planning, including the creation of Conservation and Indigenous Units and different sorts of Land Reform Settlements. Each of these categories have specific rules related to the use of land, natural resources and also in relation to the different populational categories such as the riverside population, the Indians, the *quilombolas*, besides the so-called “clients” of land reform who would have the right to occupy the land.

From the point of view of the actors who acted in the primary sector, the Ecological and Economic Zoning of the BR-163/ EEZ BR-163 is neither efficient, since it does not meet the proposed objectives and does not reach the intended results, nor effective, as there is no excellency in its phase of implementation, on the contrary, the lack of follow-up and advertising during this phase bring the feeling that the process was lost at some moment of the recent past.

Business agriculture has been expanding in areas of settlement projects, which shows the disrespect to the rules of land use, established by the EEZ of BR-163; part of the producers who sell their

properties to the grain businessmen search for new areas in the forest to reproduce themselves.

The debate about the territorial planning in the Amazon started incorporating environmental issues from the 1980s. The tendency followed by territorial planning follows the chronology of the genesis process and consolidation of environmental issues, that starts to receive more body and importance from the 1980s.

The Federal Government, through establishing and contextualizing of EEZ started to indicate its use, by public and private actors, with the goal of rationalizing the use and management of the resources in a certain territory. Accord to Acselrad (2000), the “ecological planning” intended by the government, mainly in the Amazon, faces difficulties of practical establishment. It is due to, according to Acselrad (2000), the structural weakness that there is in the public sector to advance in terms of territorial planning. The sustainable development has been one of the challenges of the government, mainly federal, in the process of occupying and colonizing the Amazon, initiated in the 1960s.

In the context of territorial planning of the Amazon, in which EEZ is inserted, Becker (2010) criticizes the strategy of centralism adopted by the federal government along the years, which was restricted to the offices of the federal capital and unable to bring positive results in terms of planning and coordinating the occupation of a region which is more than half of the national territory. For Becker (2010), it is essential that the public policies start to see the reality and the historical moment in which the region is and start observing the processes that interfere in the changing and planning of the Amazon territory. It is only possible through local participation in relation to making decisions about plans and strategies for the region.

The private colonizing policy resulted in a “land counter-reform”, in the way that it excluded “agricultural workers, partners and squatters”, unable to invest enough to participate in the projects of the colonizing companies. This model of occupation, which prevails in the area of influence of BR-163, mainly in the middle North of Mato Grosso State (where large private companies from the South and Southeast of the country – JAR, Líder, Sinop, Colíder, Indeco...) early implemented programs of colonizing which generated the cities of Nova Mutum, Sorriso, Sinop, Colíder, Alta Floresta..., respectively), evolved along Cuiabá-Santarém, from South to North.

However, the occupation and colonization of the part of BR-163 belonging to the state of Pará happened (and still does) inside a cultural matrix and a moment when the public policies and, notably, the colonizing companies, did not have (and still do not) the same dynamism observed in the state of Mato Grosso.

## 8. For the sake of final considerations

The policies of territorial development performed along BR-163, although absolutely urgent and necessary, were not enough to promote the economic and social cohesion, reduce territorial asymmetries and mitigate the negative impacts on the environment.

In the present days, the conflicts for land possession are more explicit in the part of BR-163 that crosses the state of Pará, recognizably because of the fragility of the legislation and the inability of the Brazilian government to be the main actor in the definition of the land structure and territorial planning.

This ineffectiveness of the government is due to, mainly, the confusing and ambiguous legislation which is object of definitions and redefinitions which are, actually, overlaps of laws and norms which work towards, on one hand, justifying illegitimate land possession and, on the other hand, motivating deforestation as a way of ensuring the possession.

The legal debates about the legitimacy of the possession and patrimonial chains based on parish documents, register offices, etc. appear in direct consequence of a worsening of the vast vacant (but not unoccupied) areas, which resulted in the expropriation of populations. In other words, the public land, inhabited by settlers, riverside people, indians, local people in general, was sold in large lots to the new investors, who acquired them directly from the land departments of the government or from private companies which re-sold the public land as it was their own.

The creation of conservation units (CU), strictly linked to official projects of timber and mineral prospection (during the execution of the National Integration Plan), was made regardless of those who lived there.

The small producers reached by unfair environmental policies react to the process of “closing by nature” and avoid the “expropriation by conserva-

tion”. Through resistance movements, on the green governance from down to above, the producers search for new agricultural and non-agricultural activities and forms of productive and community organization that allow them to build multifunctional ways of life in the country.

In the academic and political debate, the preservation of the forest in the Amazon has high relevance for the protection of the weather and biodiversity. In national and local levels, the expectation is on economic development. The interest in these resources puts, certainly, in relation the global and local agents, but what can be observed in the Amazon now is an increase of the tension and the capitalist competitiveness for markets and, consequently, by the appropriation and use of natural resources, influencing the worsening of deforestation and social-environmental conflicts.

The market is the main agent in the promotion of development, repeating the logic of influence of global demands on local activities, a process which is rooted and recurrent in the Amazon. The natural resources, notably the soil, have their use directed to, fundamentally, generating products which meet the exogenous determination.

The increased demand for commodities in temporary crops of corn and soybean with expressive liquidity and profitability in the international scenario attracts medium and large rural producers to the BR-163 area of influence.

The movement of frontiers expansion, strengthened in the 1970s with governmental programs that consolidated the colonization on the banks of large road axis, opened space for the reproduction of the small familiar production and its constitution as a social actor who will define in large scale and political dynamic in the current days of some areas like BR-163. The succession on the land by new capitalized actors, great enterprises of port, mineral, energy, timber and agribusiness infrastructure, opposes by the instrumental rationality and practices of management with the logic and models still dominant in certain areas of the cities that are under the influence of the paving of BR-163.

The paving of some stretches of BR-163 has mobilized new actors and activities towards Mato Grosso to Novo Progresso, Castelo dos Sonhos, Moraes de Almeida and to Calha do Amazonas, in the state of Pará, meeting point of old and new economic activities. It is also a space for the increase of tensions and conflicts, local and global, around

economic and political projects, but under the domain of the market.

The reduction of transport costs for the outflow of grains produced in Mato Grosso by the Port of Cargill, located in the city of Santarém, articulated with the Port of Itacoatiara, saving about 1,000 km in comparison to the Port of Paranaguá (PR) and from this city to several places of the world, by water, having shorter distances from European and American markets, constituted one of the main interests of the viabilization of paving BR-163 to large circulation.

The disorganized territorial occupation and the predatory exploitation of resources are equally linked to an urban economy marked by the high concentration of income, precariousness of jobs and absence of access to basic services by the population.

The businessmen of mechanized production in the region of Santarém, in general, are farmers attracted from the South of Brazil by the possibility of buying cheaper land and, in this way, being able to capitalize their production of grain. These producers have come to the region since 1990, in the so-called second wave of grain producers in Santarém. They arrived with their families, even though the arrival of some represents the possibility of undertaking their own business with the conformation of a new family core. Anyway, although mechanized agriculture follows the logic of a business investment, opposed to traditional agriculture, it is firmly based on familiar property.

The migration of peasants expropriated by the cheaper land generated new fronts of deforestation in regions of the revitalized frontier. The peasants sold or lost their land and in exchange, search for new areas where they could develop family agriculture in bigger or similar areas.

The recent measures taken by the Federal Government to restrain predatory and illegal exploitation of natural resources in the areas under the influence of BR-163, as a condition to performing an effective territorial planning, resulting in perceptible impacts on several sectors of activity that have great importance in the generation of jobs in the area, which is the case of timber exploitation.

On the other hand, many of the proposals that today orientate the effort of territorial planning in the area of influence of BR-163 – such as the mosaic of Conservation Unit – were formulated thanks to the relative success obtained by the social-environmental paradigm and by the sustainable development ideas in the state level and international pressure.

Given the current structure of the job market, the persistence of generalized land conflicts and immense inequality that prevail in the access to goods, services and citizen rights, we are far from reaching an ideal situation in which the public policies conceived for the region, even with the best intentions, lead automatically to a more equitable distribution of income.

Our final consideration allow us, for the sake of concluding, to claim that the successive changes in the “development plans” according to the political and economic conjunctures, contributed to the failure of the great majority of colonization projects. Our conclusion is directed to some variables that points to the unsustainability of the regional development model:

*An excluding model:* in the effort of choosing an image which is revealing of the *environment* of the present frontier I would say that it is of exclusion. The frontier organizes itself in function of the markets and momentary conjunctures; it alternates phases of prosperity with phases of depression, of regression. The success in the increase of productivity is not reverted in benefit of the producer and neither is in benefit of the environment. The frontier keeps advancing, even if this mobility is not backed up on a possible necessity of producing more. There are much more deforested areas than the ones which were effectively economically occupied.

*A productivist model:* after twenty year it is agribusiness that, notably in Mato Grosso, has the strongest development, supported by the necessity of Brazil obtaining income from exportable goods such as soybean. The planted surface increased 43% in Brazil, between 1980 and 1990, and more than 150% in the state of Mato Grosso.

*Deforesting and continuous fragmentation of Amazon forest:* recent studies from the National Institute of Space Research, in which the deforestation is qualified from the interpretation of satellite images, show that the total area of deforestation in the Amazon increased in 631 km<sup>2</sup>, in 2003. Official government estimates show that 26.1 thousand km<sup>2</sup> were deforested between August 2003 and July 2004.

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