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# THE MIDDLE AND LOWER XINGU:

THE RESPONSE TO THE CRYSTALLIZATION OF DIFFERENT TEMPORALITIES IN THE  
PRODUCTION OF REGIONAL SPACE<sup>1</sup>

## MÉDIO E BAIXO XINGU:

O REFLEXO DA CRISTALIZAÇÃO DE DIFERENTES TEMPORALIDADES NA PRODUÇÃO DO ESPAÇO REGIONAL

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**ABSTRACT:** While the region of the Middle and Lower Xingu has been a protagonist during many episodes of Brazilian history, it remains unknown to a large cross-section of society. Within this perspective, we have revealed some of the different elements responsible for the production of regional space by joining theoretical exercise with empirical, which signifies combining some of the knowledge that has been produced on the region with the discourse of some of the different agents involved in its transformation. Accordingly, the following processes were adopted as markers: colonization, the opening of the Trans-Amazonian, land conflicts and the construction of the Belo Monte Hydroelectric Power Plant. As part of this collective effort, based on interviews with the central institutions (from the First, Second and Third sectors), and with communities from different locations within the region, this article gathers together arguments that contribute to the debate regarding the accumulated processes in the Brazilian Amazon, and particularly in the Middle and Lower Xingu.

**KEYWORDS:** Medium and Low Xingu region; Trans-Amazonian; land conflicts; Belo Monte Hydroelectric Power Plant; the Amazon.

**RESUMO:** *Protagonista de diversos episódios da história do Brasil, a região do Médio e Baixo Xingu ainda permanece desconhecida pelos mais diversos setores da sociedade. A partir dessa perspectiva, a estratégia utilizada para revelar alguns dos diferentes elementos responsáveis pela produção do espaço regional foi a de conjugar o exercício teórico ao empírico, que nesse caso significa aliar parte do conhecimento produzido sobre a região, ao discurso de alguns de seus diferentes agentes de transformação. Para isso, adotou-se como marcos os processos: colonização, abertura da Transamazônica, conflitos por terra e construção da UHE Belo Monte. Como parte desse esforço coletivo, a partir de entrevistas em instituições centrais (do Primeiro, Segundo e Terceiro setores), bem como com comunitários de diferentes localidades da região, reuniu-se argumentos que permitem colaborar com o debate sobre a acumulação de processos na Amazônia brasileira e no Médio e Baixo Xingu de forma particular.*

**PALAVRAS-CHAVE:** *Médio e Baixo Xingu; Transamazônica; conflitos por terra; Usina Hidrelétrica de Belo Monte; Amazônia.*

**Contribution of each author:** A. theoretical and conceptual basis and problematization; B. research data and statistical analysis; C. producing figures and tables; D. photographs; E. preparation and drafting of manuscript; F. selection of references.

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## INTRODUCTION

In the Brazilian Amazon, particularly in the Middle and Lower Xingu regions, the axis of coexistence described by SANTOS (2012), produced by an overlapping asynchrony of various historical moments, is crystallized in a manner that reflects a wide range of situations and conflicts. Its space, which attests to the decisions of different agents, currently combines elements that start from a local level towards the global, by allowing “the same people to have different moments of their life crossed, sometimes in a single day, by different temporalities of history” (MARTINS, 1997, p. 28, author's translation).

The flow rates of the Middle and the Lower Xingu are different. The speed of rivers is not the same as that of roads, which in turn becomes a mixture with the speed of aircraft and the different means of communication, so as to shuffle them up into a space where the borders are not always discernible. On the other hand, from the ideological discourse of modernity and from the logic of appropriation/violence, structures are (re)organized for the full maturation of capitalism, in order to try and provide naturalness to the social antagonisms present in the region.

Along this trajectory, it is reasonable to say that colonization has only adopted different forms. From the foreign domination that began in the seventeenth century, through to the military dictatorship and the different Brazilian democratic governments, the Middle and Lower Xingu region has always been viewed as a peripheral space of the capitalist world. As such, if on the one hand it should have been defended from foreign interests (since it represented an important source of economic resources), on the other, there has been no commitment to promote its integral development and reduce its vulnerabilities.

As an aggravating factor, the economic policies implemented in the region tend to mask the promotion of local development through discourses such as those of cultural integration (as in the case of several missionary movements), social (as in the case of attracting migrants from various parts of Brazil to develop economies such as rubber) and the installation of infrastructure (as in the case of the Trans-Amazon Highway and the Belo Monte Hydroelectric Power Plant). With this position, the logic of capitalist outbursts is also imposed, which start from economic interests that are very often disjointed and invariably uncommitted to promoting the integral, continuous development of the region.

Within this process, the difficulty of resistance is also intensified, since very often the agents involved in promoting local rights are weakened by the imposition of capitalist demands. These, if not promoted by the state (colonial or otherwise), are often legitimized or even deliberately encouraged by it. This is evident when faced with empowerment from large companies, such as mining, agribusiness and electricity, which, by conquering more and more fields of action within the local context, gradually eliminate the interests of small farmers, traditional populations (indigenous, riparian, *quilombo*) or urban low-income earners.

As an attempt to display some of the invisibility (re)produced along the Xingu Valley between the municipalities of Altamira and Porto de Moz, this article proposes to develop a better understanding of how space and its different transforming agents have changed in the region over time. For this, from a perspective in which events are inserted into a historical conjuncture and that therefore, cannot be understood

separately in time and space, we analyze certain processes triggered in the Middle and Lower Xingu, and how they are manifested and assume different forms in a region that should be recognized as heterogeneous.

Thus, it was assumed that the colonization process, the construction of the Trans-Amazonian Highway, the intensification of conflicts over land and, more recently, the construction of the Belo Monte Hydroelectric Power Plant (Belo Monte HPP), have imposed a broad conversion of the “natural” space into productive space, which together, share the fact of expressing the need to emancipate capital, and consequently of reproducing inequality and exclusion translated into various social and political conflicts across the region.

The strategy used to reveal some of the different elements responsible for the production of regional space was to join theoretical exercise with the empirical, which herein signifies combining some of the knowledge produced regarding the region with the discourse of some of its different transformations. This is intended to outline the coordination of different perspectives, as well as to provide focus to subjects or organizations that often remain invisible. As part of this collective effort, based on interviews with central institutions (First, Second and Third sectors) and with communities from different localities in the region, this article brings together arguments that contribute to the debate regarding the accumulated processes in the Brazilian Amazon, particularly those in the Middle and Lower Xingu.

In addition to the inclusion of references such as those by Miranda (1990), Becker (1990b), Browder and Godfrey (2006), Silva (2008), Schimink and Wood (2012), the structural elements of this article have also been extracted from recurrent reports from both institutional and community interviews.

## **REPORTING THE SEARCH FOR A CARTOGRAPHY OF CONFLICTS IN THE MIDDLE AND LOWER XINGU**

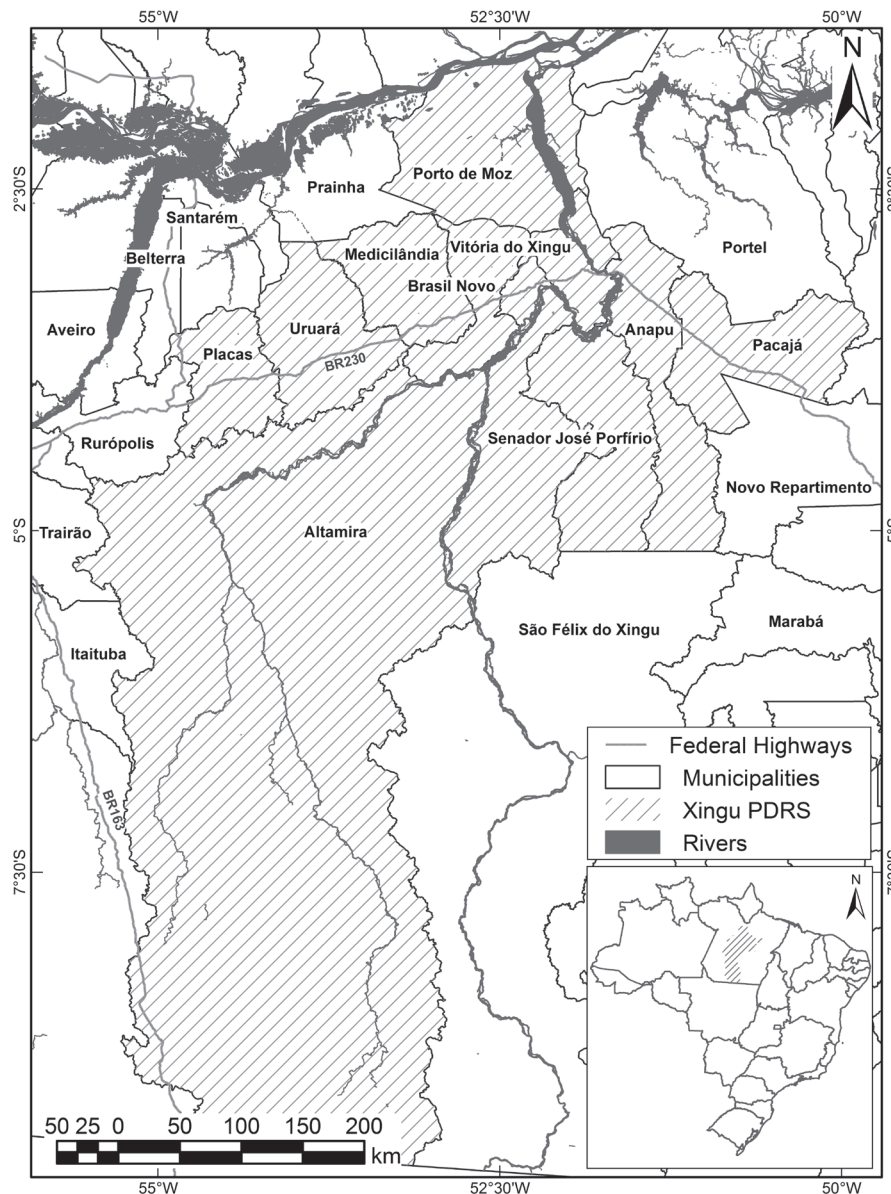
The Xingu Valley, which begins in the state of Mato Grosso and ends in the northern part of the State of Pará, corresponds to the regions that influence the Xingu River, and are described as the Upper, Middle and Lower Xingu. In the present study, the analyzed area comprises the municipalities located in the Middle and Lower Xingu, which are situated within the area defined by the Xingu Sustainable Regional Development Plan (known in Brazil as Xingu PDRS)<sup>2</sup> and the Integrated Xingu Region in the State of Pará<sup>3</sup>, one of the twelve integrated regions of the state.

In this region are the municipalities of: Altamira, Anapu, Brasil Novo, Medicilândia, Pacajá, Placas, Porto de Moz, Senator José Porfírio, Uruará and Vitória do Xingu (Figure 1), which together correspond to 20.1% of the state territory (BRAZIL, 2015). The decision to select this particular area was due to the great amount of common historical processes that refer to the past and present routes of the region.

**2** The Xingu Sustainable Regional Development Plan is the result of a partnership between the Federal, State and Municipal Governments and civil society, as an instrument for promoting public policies regarding major infrastructure works in the region, namely, the Trans-Amazonian and the Belo Monte HPP.

**3** Instituted in 2007 by the Pará State Government, the objective of the Regional Integration Regions is the integration of governmental actions in the many existing territories, through the Participatory Territorial Planning.

Figure 1: Municipalities in the southwestern region of the state of Pará, which are members of the Xingu Sustainable Regional Development Plan/ Integrated Xingu Region



Source: Produced by the authors.

In order to obtain a better understanding of the manner in which the different organizational agents in the Middle and Lower Xingu perform, fieldwork was first carried out during the period from June 19<sup>th</sup> to July 2<sup>nd</sup>, 2014, at institutions in the First, Second and Third sectors, based in the municipalities of Altamira (Table 1)<sup>4</sup>. In this phase, quantitative (when available) and qualitative information were collected on the attributions of different institutions, their historical performance, ideological position, main challenges and projections of future scenarios for the region.

<sup>4</sup> The institutions were selected according to the relevance of their performance within the local scenario and the availability of their representatives.



Table 1: Institutions visited in the municipality of Altamira

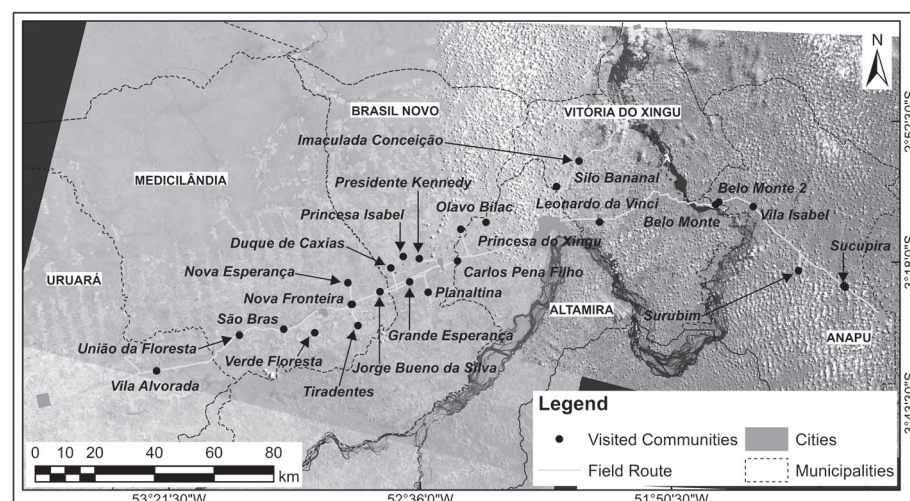
Institution	Sector
Municipal Secretariat of Planning (SEPLAN)	First
Secretariat of Labor and Social Security	First
Municipal Secretariat of Education (SEMED)	First
Municipal Secretariat of Environmental Management and Tourism (SEMAT)	First
Specialized Reference Center for Social Assistance (CREAS)	First
Center for Social and Psychological Assistance for Migrants (NASPM)	Second
The Living, Producing and Preserving Foundation (FVPP)	Third
Xingu Prelature	Third
The Altamira Rural Workers Union (STTR)	Third
Pastoral Land Commission (CPT)	Third

In a second phase, from October 6<sup>th</sup> to 18<sup>th</sup>, 2014, 24 communities located in the region influenced by the Trans-Amazonian Highway were visited, in the municipalities of Uruará, Brasil Novo, Medicilândia, Vitória do Xingu, Altamira and Anapu. On this occasion, local representatives were interviewed<sup>5</sup>, and filled in questionnaires regarding: demographic structure, population mobility, land use, use of forest resources, characteristics of infrastructure, welfare, health, education, and the urban characterization of the different communities and control centers of the municipalities visited.

<sup>5</sup> We sought to prioritize interviews with either a community leader or the oldest resident, who was able to relate the historical processes of the community, a representative from the health area (health visitor, nurses or doctors), a representative from the education area (teacher or school director) and a farmer and/or gatherer.

From the data collected on these two field trips, the qualitative information (from the interviews with the central institutions together with those in the communities) was analyzed from the semi-structured questionnaires. For this, some of the different discourses were included as references for their different historical moments, using the following markers: colonization, the opening of the Trans-Amazonian, land conflicts and the construction of the Belo Monte HPP.

Figure 2: The visited communities in the Middle and Lower Xingu



Source: Produced by the authors.

The association of different data sources and spatial scales, among other items, enabled a better understanding of the historical processes and some of their consequences involved in the production of regional space. In other words, the diversification of viewpoints, whether theoretical or from institutional agents or residents in the region, made it possible to approach the goal of overcoming some of the different temporalities that have accumulated in the Middle and Lower Xingu.

In this work, some of the representative discourses were selected in order to confront, complement and fill gaps in the accumulated knowledge concerning the region. This is intended not to exhaust the possibilities of the discourse analysis of the different interlocutors, but rather to highlight some that revealed past and present processes and future perceptions for the Middle and Lower Xingu.

## **A BRIEF HISTORY OF THE FORMATION OF THE XINGU VALLEY**

### **COLONIZATION – INITIATED IN THE 17TH CENTURY**

The historical formation of the Middle and Lower Xingu, due to the multiplicity of the economic, political and social processes, has become entangled within the historical trajectory of Brazil itself. As evidence of this plurality, it is possible to observe several autochthonous groups, especially since there are 21 demarcated indigenous lands within its basin, where 24 communities live, representing three of the four linguistic macro-trunks in Brazil: Tupi (Asurini do Xingu, Araweté, Juruna, Kuruaya, Parakanã and Xipaya), Jê (Kayapó, Xikrin and Karará) and Karib (Arara) (MAGALHÃES, 2005 apud FLEURY, 2014).

From a narrower viewpoint, even though European settlement processes in the Amazon have been poorly studied, it is possible to establish a milestone in the 17th century, when the region was colonized by the English and Dutch but mainly by the Portuguese and religious missions (UMBUZEIRO, 2000). These settlers imposed a new territorial and developmental logic that produced several different types of conflicts between the different ethnic groups that lived there, and even among the divergent colonialist ambitions (MARIN, 2010). According to Bezzera Neto (1999) *apud* Becker (2013), in 1559 the Dutch had already founded the *Orange and Nassau* trading post on the banks of the Xingu River, and undertook the first attempts to occupy the region.

In the 19th century, especially after 1860, with the world's increasing demand for rubber, the region was particularly outstanding in the national economy for having a high concentration of *Hevea Brasiliensis* (a species of high-quality rubber) located mainly on the banks of the Rio Xingu and its navigable water routes known as *igarapés* (MORAES, 2007). This economic expansion brought about a great migratory flow, mainly from the Northeast, seeking work on the rubber plantations, which often had degrading labor conditions, constant debt and little freedom of production. With regard to the migratory flow at this time, one of the residents in the community Silo Bananal (Vitoria do Xingu), whose parents emigrated from Ceará, recalls that:

We came here because there was a lot of suffering in the Northeast. And at that time there was also a lot of talk about the 'rubber soldier'. The Amazon was very much sought after. My father was recently married, and at the time the Northeast was suffering a very bad drought, so he was brought here by some of the locals. He worked in Upper Iriri.

At the time, despite its navigability restrictions, since the Xingu River is characterized by the presence of waterfalls, formations of rocky beds and a considerable reduction in the volume of water during the dry season, the region was still guided by the logic of the river and trips could take hours, days or even months<sup>6</sup>. With respect to the currents of the Xingu, Prince Adalbert of Prussia in his mission to reveal the previously unknown Xingu River in his travel notes reports:

Fighting against the impetuous current, which today by my calculations did not allow us to advance more than a knot, it was only after three o'clock in the afternoon that we got closer to the Passaí Waterfall, which constituted a serious obstacle to our advance. We could only advance very slowly on one side through a thick bush rising from the water; the rapids and the thicket, which hid the whole perspective, seemed to be unending (ADALBERTO DE PRÚSSIA, 1977, p. 199, author's translation).

According to Andrade and Viveiros de Castro (1988), as the Xingu waterfalls made access difficult for the European settlers, they functioned as midway points where villages would form, since advancing into the region was not easy. Here, the population would gather in order to organize the extraction and transportation of rubber, Brazil nuts, minerals and animal skins, subjugating the indigenous antecedence of the Xingu River (VELHO, 1972; BROWDER; GODFREY, 2006).

At that moment, territorial relations were still not fully established, and thus the land had not yet acquired a market value or the disputes of subsequent decades (BECKER, 1990a).

#### TRANS-AMAZONIAN – THE 1960S AND 1970S

As from 1960, with the geopolitical interventions by the state in the production of the Amazonian space, circulation by means of roads and highways was gaining importance, as was the complexity and diversity of the means of displacement. The main landmark of this process in the region was the construction of the Trans-Amazonian Highway (or the BR-230), announced on June 16<sup>th</sup>, 1970, as part of the National Integration Plan (PIN).

The highway, which currently runs for 4233 km between the cities of Cabelo in Paraíba and Lábrea in Amazonas, was constructed on the rationale that the Amazon (vulnerable and backward) should be integrated with the rest of the country (stable and developed). To that end, the State promoted the migration of Brazilians, with a view to defending the Amazon from international greed and, in turn, reducing the social and agrarian tensions that had been triggered mainly in the South and Northeast of Brazil (SCHIMINK, WOOD, 2012, SILVA, BECKER, 1990b; MIRANDA, 1990; VELHO, 1972).

<sup>6</sup> Despite its rocky formation, according to Miranda et al (1988, p. 83) *apud* Fleury (2014, p. 09, author's translation), "the sum of the average flows of the Danube, Po, Rhine, Rhône, Nile, Loire, Seine and Ebro Rivers represents approximately the average flow of the Xingu River", thus providing a high navigational potential.



Figure 3: Commercial establishments in the visited communities that demonstrated the diversity of migrant origins in the region



Source: Authors.

A resident from Agrovila Nova Fronteira (Medicilândia), born in Rio Grande do Sul stated that:

I was born in Soledade, Rio Grande do Sul. From there, in 1972, we came to Transamazônica. I came straight to the Agrovila on July 15<sup>th</sup>, 1972. We drove here by car. We were the first family to drive onto the “Transa”. We decided to come here, because we found it ugly there, we had a brick house, we had a business, we had two plots of lands, but it was all very mountainous. The land was very difficult to work on. And also there was so little of it. We were always hearing the propaganda from here on the radio... we had 9 children. So I said to my husband: Let's sell or let this place and let's go to Transamazônica, while there's still time to for everyone to get some land. I told him to come up first and look round. We arrived with nothing and bought the land. He arrived in Altamira and came to see what was here, but he had nothing. So he went until kilometer 70, because people were already living there. In fact, people we knew. And so he came to kilometer 70, and negotiated with an “arrendado”<sup>7</sup>.

A resident from the community of Belo Monte do Pontal (Anapu), who arrived from Ceará in 1972, also highlights: “People began arriving from other states when the Trans-Amazonian land subdivision began...from almost every state in Brazil. More people came from the Northeast: Paraíba, Pernambuco, Ceará, Alagoas. Brought by the federal government to populate the Trans-Amazonian: ‘Integrate so as not to surrender.’”

Within this context, land in the Amazon, as already observed in other regions of Brazil, gained expression as exchange value, a commodity, as opposed to its use value. In order to promote, regulate and guide this process, the National Institute for Colonization and Agrarian Reform (INCRA) was created, which, in this context, divided the Trans-Amazonian Highway into three areas called Integrated Colonization Projects (PICs), namely: Marabá, Altamira and Itaituba (SILVA, 2008; FEARNSTIDE, 1989; MIRANDA, 1990).

Between the cities of Altamira and Itaituba, because of their position between two important centers, the quality of the soil and the intention to incorporate positive aspects of other experiences generated in the region, the first attempt of colonization was undertaken directed towards the borders of the Trans-Amazonian. The Altamira

<sup>7</sup> People/families who take possession of the land, and for some reason or other decide not to stay on the land and either return to their places of origin or move onto somewhere else are called “regretful”.

Project, as it was called, followed the “fishbone” logic, an analogy to the drawing formed by the 100 km land strips demarcated along each side of the highway. From this conception, the Trans-Amazonian was crossed every 5 km by secondary routes (denominated locally as “strips” or “crosspoints”), originally in order to form plots of approximately 100 hectares (SILVA, 2008; MIRANDA, 1990).

The project was based on what was called “rural urbanism”, organized according to a hierarchy of social, cultural and economic infrastructures in three types of planned communities called: *agrovila*, *agropolis* and *urópolis*. Thus, *agrovila* was the smallest unit (totaling around 50 houses) and was essentially somewhere for the settlers to live and provided basic services such as a school, health center, commerce, leisure and administration. The *agropolis*, in turn, was a center designed to serve between 8 and 22 *agrovilas* and which therefore had an infrastructure network proportionally more complex. Finally, the *urópolis* was the main reference center for the rural areas and brought together a population of about 20,000 (SILVA, 2008; FEARNSSIDE, 1989; MIRANDA, 1990). With regard to this system implemented by INCRA, one of the residents from *Agrovila Leonardo da Vinci* (Vitória do Xingu), who arrived from Santa Catarina in 1971, recalls that:

INCRA brought people from all over Brazil. They were brought directly by jet plane. We came by ship. The first ones came by ship. Afterwards, they came by jet. The ship dropped us off in Vitória do Xingu. In winter (the rainy season), there was a helicopter, taking people backwards and forwards, bringing in food, the sick, when someone was sick. First they built quarters for the settlers, a place to sell tools, a *Cobal* (supermarket) and a pharmacy. Then they began to build the houses for other people to come.

In order to promote the rational use of land, INCRA established criteria for selecting crops. From this logic, together with subsistence agriculture, they encouraged the planting of varieties such as cacao, sugar cane and black pepper, mainly in the areas of rocky soil found in the region (MIRANDA, 1990). As a reflection of these guidelines, the south of Pará is particularly outstanding as one of the largest cocoa producing areas in Brazil and, despite its spatial and temporal differentiations, a large part of its production is based on the guidelines established by INCRA.

Figure 4: Sugar and alcohol plant implemented under the Pacal Project, which brought about the emergence of the municipality of Medicilândia



Figure 5: Family production of cacao in the community of São Brás in the municipality of Medicilândia



Source: Authors.

From 1974, INCRA's control over the rate of occupation in the region began to decline as the government changed its state policy and began to privilege private colonization. Synchronized with this process, the spontaneous movement of individuals and families in search of vacant lands intensified. With regard to this, a resident from Agrovila Olavo Bilac (Brazil New), whose family immigrated in 1988 from Maranhão, recalls:

At first people came here looking for land. Because most people here came from outside. They came from the Northeast. From very distant places, Paraná, Bahia. At that time the land here was freely available. People just came in and took it. INCRA had marked out the land as far as the agrovila, but from there on there were no people, so the land was freely available. Then people from outside started coming in and taking the land, marking out the lots and staying. At this time people just came in and marked out. Sometimes people marked out the land just to hold on to it, and then later sold it off cheaply, just charging for the service.

As Schimink and Wood (2012) also state, it was common to find families of impoverished farmers who over a period of a few years, had deforested and planted on different pieces of land and had then found themselves once again on the road in search of another piece of land. In contrast to this, a large number of capitalized farmers and cattle farmers coexisted alongside them, who made use of this mobile reserve army of labor that was growing in the region.

#### **LAND CONFLICTS INTENSIFY – FROM THE 1960S**

The second phase of the colonization process is also characterized by the increased selectivity of access to land, which varied according to factors such as land quality, distance to populated centers and the presence of different infrastructures. This differentiation, which in most cases presupposes the prior existence of resources, has caused long-lasting repercussions on the territorial, political and economic structures of the region, in order to invigorate land tenure and induce a new logic of space production. A resident from Agrovila Leonardo da Vinci (Vitoria do Xingu), who arrived from Santa Catarina in 1971, states that: "My land was here. When it finished, it was mine. It was 500m by 2 km. I bought this land for 1000 Cruzeiros to be able to stay nearby. If I hadn't, I would have gone over to kilometer 90. That's how it was. If you had a lot near here, the house was here in the village, but if it was far away, then the house would be there on the lot [...]".

From this new form of territorial empowerment, large population concentrations appeared, often larger than previously-planned centers, as in the case of Pacajás and Anapu. Over subsequent years, especially from 1976 onwards, INCRA extended into the vicinities and released lots of between 1000 and 3000 hectares within the expropriation polygon, which intensified the process of land concentration and the local social and economic differentiation with the intensification of activities such as cattle raising and increased deforestation due to the exploitation of timber (MIRANDA, 1990).

Figure 6: Capitalized cattle farm in the municipality of Vitória do Xingu



Figure 7: Transporting timber on the Trans-Amazonian highway



Source: Authors.

As part of this dynamic, lots under state jurisdiction and even the occupation projects created along the edge of the highways were (re)purchased by land fraudsters and ranchers, often deriving from large tracts of land. This process was considerably aggravated by the performance of the public authorities which, through legal and judicial mechanisms, tended to favor groups from the economic elite to the detriment of the less-favored populations, such as small farmers, riparians or indigenous groups (LOUREIRO; PINTO, 2005).

To this extent, it may be observed that land conflicts all over the Amazon, but particularly in the Middle and Lower Xingu, took on notorious expressions of violence and violation of rights. These abuses, which have existed since the period of the dictatorship and through all the democratic governments since that time, start from the prevailing perspective that occupation in the Amazon should primarily express the necessary capitalist development and modernization so as to become integrated into the Central-South of Brazil. With this intention, the mechanisms of repression towards agrarian conflicts were strengthened, as was the coalition (either through omission or declared support) between the state and agents such as land fraudsters, agricultural enterprises, individual farmers or even gunmen and roughnecks (BECKER, 1990b).

Thus, a vicious cycle was created of inequality, violence and corruption that tended to be minimized by institutions such as social movements and the Catholic Church. This had a fundamental role in the organization of resistance forces to capitalist impositions, so that in 1975 the Church of Amazônia Legal created the Pastoral Land Commission (CPT), as an instrument of organization and dynamization for small producers whose rights had been violated in terms of land access and production.

The most emblematic example of the antithesis that existed between an association of forces between the church and rural workers opposed to the association between big capital and the state's omission in the region must undoubtedly be the murder of the nun Dorothy Stang in February 2005. Sister Dorothy, as she was known, who defended the rights of small producers and gatherers, was killed by gunmen at the order of farmers in the municipality of Anapu. Ten years after the crime, thereby illustrating the tardiness of the Brazilian judicial system in defending less-favored groups, the main culprits (even after being tried and convicted) had still not served the established sentence. With regard to the progression of land conflicts



in the region, a representative from the Pastoral Land Commission, acting in the municipality of Anapu, stated that:

There has been no let-up. Even today, I don't know if you knew, but there on the way to Uruará, they killed a worker. In Anapu there's a worker who's been missing for thirteen days. It's all so subtle. You arrive in these small towns, you arrive in Anapu... I'd compare them to something out of the wild west. Have patience ... But look what happens. There are so many things. Many workers get killed.

In this context, the role of institutions gain notoriety, such as the Foundation for Living, Producing and Preserving (FVPP), the Movement for the Development of Trans-Amazonian and Xingu (MDTX), the Federation of Regional Agriculture Workers (FETAGRI regional) and the Altamira Rural Workers' Union (STTR), which together with the Catholic Church, project the voice of small producers in the region (SOUZA, 2006).

#### **CONSTRUCTION OF THE BELO MONTE HYDROELECTRIC POWER PLANT – BEGINNING OF THE 21<sup>ST</sup> CENTURY**

Far from being any less complex and questionable, as of 2011, another major infrastructure project was being installed in the Middle and Lower Xingu region. This was the Belo Monte Hydroelectric Plant (Belo Monte HPP), built in the vicinity of 11 municipalities in the state of Pará (Altamira, Anapu, Brasil Novo, Gurupá, Medicilândia, Pacajá, Placas, Porto de Moz, Senador José Porfírio, Uruará and Vitória do Xingu)<sup>8</sup> as part of the Accelerated Growth Program (PAC) during the government of Dilma Rousseff. This project forecasted that on completion, the Belo Monte HPP would become the third largest hydroelectric potential in the world, with a maximum capacity of 11,000 MW/h, just behind the “Three Gorges Dam” (22,720 MW / h) and the Paraguayan-Brazilian “Itaipu” (14,000 MW/h).

<sup>8</sup> Although the reservoirs of the Belo Monte HPP are located in the municipalities of Altamira and Vitória do Xingu, the impacts directly and indirectly affect 11 municipalities (Altamira, Anapu, Brasil Novo, Gurupá, Medicilândia, Pacajá, Placas, Porto de Moz, Senador José Porfírio, Uruará and Vitória do Xingu) (ELETROBRÁS, 2009).

Figure 8: The main construction site at Belo Monte HPP



Source: Authors.



Discussion regarding PCI bus supports on the Xingu River is not recent, and has been on political agendas since the military command, and has also headed strategic programs during the democratic governments of José Sarney, Fernando Henrique Cardoso, Lula and finally Dilma Rousseff. Since then, social movements, civil society organizations (environmental partners) and religious movements have strongly resisted the project, condemning its potential environmental and social impacts, in an area marked by the absence of the state in the sphere of local interests.

One of the greatest impacts of the project, which is reflected directly or indirectly in the different spaces of the region, is the population increase caused by the migration of people from different parts of the country. This population influx, which has followed different logics and motivations, began when the first government announced jobs involved in its elaboration and which then intensified when work began. This hypothesis is confirmed by the words of a resident from Vila Belo Monte do Pontal (Anapu), born in Bahia: “I came here 30 years ago, in 1985, I came because of the dam ... now it’s here. But nobody was prepared for such a big enterprise. Altamira was not prepared.”

From an environmental viewpoint, some of the main criticisms of the project are: an alteration in the hydrological regime, a deterioration in the quality of water, silting along the river (due to removal of the riparian forest), high greenhouse gas emissions and the loss of terrestrial and aquatic ecosystem services, including biodiversity and an alteration of biological processes (BERMANN, 2007; TUNDISI, 2007). With regard to some environmental impacts, a resident from the community of Belo Monte do Pontal (Anapu), who immigrated to the region in 1972, from Ceará stated that:

The largest beach in Canarí is being swallowed up by the Belo Monte HPP. We’ve been fighting a lot over this. The beach at Canarí used to be enormous. In the region of 3 km<sup>2</sup>. It used to be a turtle platform. They’re removing it all. Taking it to the dam. They removing all the sand. Until today all the machines are still here, constantly removing the sand. All the sand goes to the works up there.

9 Among the agents who opposed the work, it is possible to highlight institutions linked to the Catholic Church, such as the Xingu Prelature, the Indigenous Missionary Council, the collective Xingu Living Forever Movement, as well as entities representing groups such as riparians, fishermen, rural workers.

With regard to the social impacts, agents opposed to the works<sup>9</sup> condemn the fragility of the affected populations (riparian, indigenous, small farmers, urban population, etc.), when faced with the overwhelming position of the state and companies in the Brazilian energy sector. While hydroelectric power is repeatedly presented as a clean, renewable, cheap source of energy, necessary for national development, high social costs are: reduced capacity of fishing and agriculture, relocation of the local population, cultural and material violence, problems of security and welfare are camouflaged amid expressive (inter) national ignorance regarding the region. According to Pinho and Costa (2012), while there is a proven relationship between sexual violence and the Belo Monte HPP, and an increase in the vulnerability of migrant families and their families, there is no evidence of a link between the increased migration of men and the rise of sexual violence. Representatives from the Specialized Reference Center for Social Assistance (CREAS) in Altamira consider that the construction of the Belo Monte HPP has considerably influenced an increase in demand for the center and with regard to this they state that:

Now, with this hydroelectric plant, there has been a great increase in demand for Altamira. Very great. The population has grown a lot. Our rights here at CREAS have been violated. There has been considerable negligence... especially with regard to the elderly, and children. There is a lot of sexual violence against children. As there are now so many men in the city ... so the rate of sexual violence against children and adolescents is very high. Something else which is appearing a lot now is the use of drugs among adolescents. I have been here for three months and there are more and more cases of teenagers taking drugs, especially crack ... And although work on the hydroelectric plant is ending, I see that some social problems, such as the drug issue ... will stay. There is also the issue of prostitution. If you go out at the beginning of the month to the bars, you will see what prostitution is. And they are children, teenagers. All of them.

From this report, although the enterprise has still not been completed, it is already possible to state that this region has been plunged into yet another layer of conflicts, whether social, environmental, political or economic. It may be proclaimed that once again the Lower and Middle regions need to face the responsibility of acknowledging a Brazil that either ignores it or knows nothing about it, so that, as with the exploitation of rubber and the construction of the highway, many people imagine that is where the Middle and Lower Xingu begins: at Belo Monte.

## **FINAL CONSIDERATIONS**

This study contributes to the understanding of how the accumulated processes in the Middle and Lower Xingu have composed the region's recent scenario. An attempt to decipher these trajectories and to understand the different agents involved, begins with the hypothesis that the region has been repeatedly treated as a simple capitalist periphery and that its contradictions are directly linked to the misunderstandings and invisibilities reproduced in the region. In addition, it should be emphasized that the discretization of these events does not ignore their antitheses and with that, it seeks only to highlight some of the driving forces in producing regional space.

Among these economic regimes it is possible to highlight the beginning of the colonization process initiated in the 17<sup>th</sup> century, the opening of the Trans-Amazonian announced in 1970, an intensified accumulation of land beginning in 1960 and, more recently, the construction of the Belo Monte HPP, which started in 2011. Along this trajectory, it may be observed that the logic of capital in the production of space in the region has gradually been transferred from the river to the road, to the point of navigability and the presence of resources such as fishing and leisure, to be abruptly compromised by the construction of the third largest hydroelectric plant in the world.

Another phenomenon that contributes to the conversion of regional space is the increasing accumulation of land by large landowners, which has intensified processes such as the rural exodus and the swelling of urban centers. The combination of both these problems has resulted in an intensification in conflicts over land, growing peripheries, increased urban and rural violence, and an increase in inadequate housing.

As a result of this, many institutions have found themselves unable to keep up

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with the demands of the changing social scene in the region, which must constantly adapt to the demands imposed by external institutions or those disconnected from the interests of the local decapitalized population. These, in view of the difficulty of defining the desired scenario for the region, have sought to adapt with strategies such as job mobility and flexibility and spatial mobility at various time and space scales.

The methodology adopted, which consisted of the conciliation of theoretical and empirical research, has revealed the unleashing of several economic cycles in the region, all with different responses that have perpetuated until today. On the other hand, it was found that the promise of capitalist progress was always very far removed from the proposal of a sustainable, long-lasting development that, when present, were constantly outdated or inadequate for the reality studied.

Finally, it is possible to infer that this has been revealed in part because, as proposed by Becker (2013, p. 38), as with several other spaces and moments in the Amazon, these outbreaks have not resulted in social, economic and urban dynamics, since they "have not led to a new division of labor capable of changing the content, structure and complexity of the economy." Thus, without distributional advances, spatial and social logic is established in order to suppress the interest of historically disadvantaged groups such as: indigenous groups, riparian people and immigrants with no financial resources, and reaffirm the privileges of privileged groups such as farmers, large companies (state or non-state) or the various institutions.

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