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The Agrarian Question in Brazilian Amazonia: Authoritarian Populism and Neo-Clientalism among Timber Companies and Riberinho Communities in Western Para State, Brazil

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The Agrarian Question in Brazilian Amazonia: Authoritarian Populism and Neo-Clientalism among Timber Companies and Riberinho Communities in Western Para State, Brazil

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Abstract

This paper investigates how authoritarian populism is reconfiguring relationships between timber companies and riberhino communities in Brazilian Amazonia. Specifically, we examine the ways in which institutions of the state, under the Workers Party (PT) Governments of 2003-2016, can be said to be in the service of timber companies, in that loggers are able to use the police force and judicial powers against the traditional peoples and communities, ultimately forcing them into neo-clientelist relations of dependency. We explore these dynamics in Cachoeira do Aruã locality in the municipality of Santarém in Para State, Brazilian Amazonia. Here, communities are experiencing the reproduction of relations of dependency with timber companies. These communities have benefited from the creation of the Agroextractivist Settlement Project (PAE) of Lago Grande, a modality of agrarian reform specifically aimed at formalizing the settlement of traditional communities. However, despite the significance of this initiative in terms of territorial recognition, the failure of the state to implement public policies aimed at traditional communities left the group in a situation where they lacked even their constitutional rights, forcing them into neo-clientalist relations with timber companies. State intransigence vis-à-vis rights of traditional communities contrasts with its pro-active lavishing of benefits on international timber companies. From Lula's first term until the impeachment, in 2016, of Lula's successor, Dilma Rousseff, one notices the collapse of political structures that had been present for decades, and social movements beginning to move away from their traditional bases of support. Simultaneously, unopposed, the latifundio and agribusiness class has consolidated power, both through intensified land grabbing and illegal logging, and as a political force.

Introduction

Forest management has been decentralized in Brazilian Amazonia, moving from central government (the Union) to states and municipalities after the promulgation of the Public Forest Management Law (Law No. 11284/2006). This has led to the emergence of new tensions and conflicts between new timber "entrepreneurs" and traditional communities. Local oligarchies have been left with more power to interfere politically in what are essentially technical decisions, and are empowered in the direct struggle with traditional communities for rights to land and resources. This article explores these dynamics drawing on a case study of some impacts on the social relations of the traditional *riberinho* community of Cachoeira do Aruã, in the municipality of Santarém, in the watersheds of the Mamuru and Arapiuns rivers, tributaries of the Amazonas and Tapajós rivers, respectively.

First we turn to the political context of authoritarian populism which gave rise to this situation. During the mid-2000s, Brazil experienced a dispute which had begun at the start of the first period of the Lula government (2003-2006), over what should be the main features of a new development pathway for the country. According to Erber (2011), Lula spoke at the beginning of his first administration of a "lucid transition", which guaranteed "respect for contracts", breaking with his 2002 campaign speech, when he rhetorically promised "a break with the neoliberal model:"

Responding to the uncertainty, Lula's inauguration speech in Congress reiterated his conviction that the old model was exhausted and that "change" was the key word, even though it should be gradual, pursued with patience and perseverance. To do so, a "national development project" was needed, supported by "strategic planning". (ERBER, 2011: 37)

With regard to the central issues of concern in this article -the agrarian reform program and environmental politics - the formation of a government with Marina Silva as Minister of Environment and with Plínio de Arruda Sampaio to prepare the proposal of the Plan II National Agrarian Reform (II PNRA), created expectations that policy would run contrary to the wishes of the rural Agribusiness elites. Plinio de Arruda Sampa introduced a bold proposal for agrarian reform at the 2003 Earth Summit in Brasilia. According to Carvalho Filho (2004), the main objective of the proposal was to initiate a policy process that would lead to the Lula government having significant impacts on the concentration of land ownership in the country, which would obviously lead to direct conflict with the historic forces of the *latifundia* class

The II PNRA was never carried out because the interests of capital interfered in the government and managed to change the rules. Oliveira (2009) states that the Lula government moved away from effective land reform, because "*the agrarian reform policy of Luís Inácio da Silva's government is marked by two principles: don't touch agribusiness' land and only do reform in areas where it can 'help' agribusiness.*"

The current agrarian question in Amazonia can be traced to the 1970s. Under the auspices of addressing the threat to Amazon from the "external enemy", in 1970 the military dictatorship established the National Integration Program - PIN (Decree-Law No. 1,106 / 1970), to connect the Amazon to other regions and ensure its integration to the national and international economic-political system, as well as the immediate construction of an extensive road network and the federalization of regional lands that, under Decree-Law 1164/1971, were transferred to the Union.

From the signing of this Decree-Law, a strip of 200 km alongside all federal highways, under construction and planned, to pass into the control of federal government. The official argument was national security, however, as explained well by Martin (1984) and Brown (1993), federalization of land served the land tenure policies of the federal government which had the power to distribute the land to a privileged class, making room for national and international capital, while emptying the power from the hands of the local oligarchies.

Few areas (in relative terms) remained under the domain of the state of Para, so that, in 2008, the major portion of unallocated public land (*sem destinacao*) (i.e. not converted into conservation units, or indigenous lands, or private properties etc.) was a continuous area of just over 1 million 300 thousand hectares located on the right bank of the Amazon river in the far west of the state (Figure 1). This portion was collected in five portions, known as Glebas Mamuru-Arapiuns.

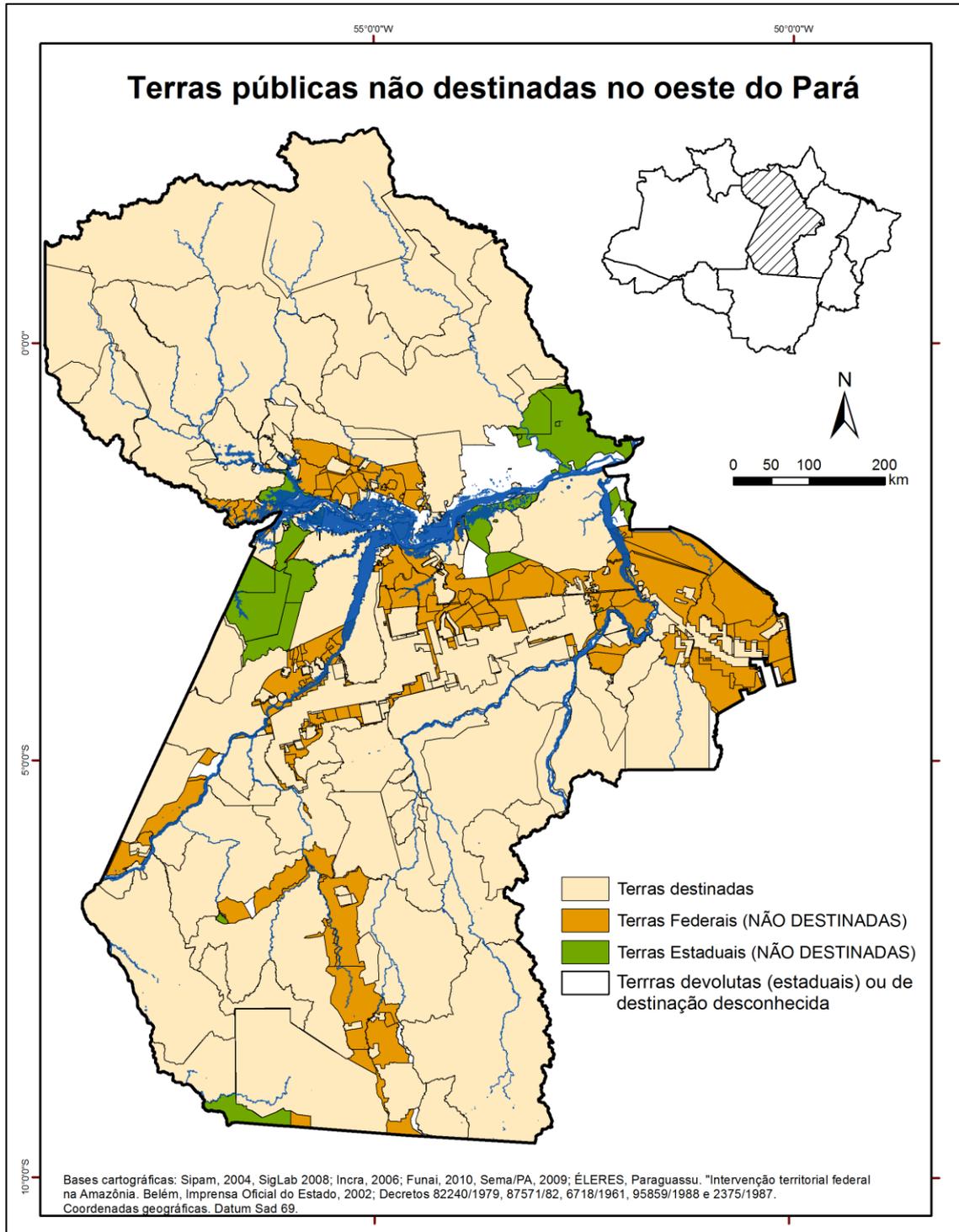


Figure 1. The largest concentration of non-destined public land (that is, not destined to be a reserve such as RESEX or FLONA, Indigenous Land TI, or Agroextractivist settlement PAE) lies in the extreme West of Para, is subject of extreme logging pressure, and is the geographic focus of this paper. Source: TORRES (2012)

The fact that they were lands under the management of the state government of Pará strengthened the local oligarchies that did not have the same power of interference in areas controlled by the federal government. And the fact that these were the only lands they had easy access to made them an intense field of dispute.

Territorial or socioenvironmental conflicts over the control of land and forest reflect divergent and conflictive cognitive universes. For the loggers who criminally plunder the region., forests are merely stockpiles of wood. The Saterê-Mawé and Borari-Arapiuns Indians, who dispute the land with *grileiros* and loggers in within their territory, see the forest in dimensions of value nonexistent to these outside invaders

Whose map, whose territory?

Until 2006, the state government distributed two types of land tenure documents in the region: *titulus de permuta* (land exchange titles) and authorizations to appropriate public lands. Both were issued for territories of traditional peoples and communities (ASSIS, 2010). Moreover, in the case of land exchange titles, the instrument established the obligation for landed entrepreneurs to georeference and demarcate traditionally occupied territories.

In addition to regulating the installation of those holding land exchange titles in Gleba Nova Olinda I, this instrument establishes the obligation of the entrepreneurs to prepare the work of demarcation and geo-referencing "*both of the lands to be occupied by them [entrepreneurs] and of the territories of domination of the traditional populations*"(Assis, 2010, p 171) . That is, "*the State transfers to a directly interested party the legal requirement to map*"(ibid.) traditionally occupied territories. The land exchange titles came with the following clause:

the commitment of the *permutantes* [entrepreneurs holding land exchange titles] is to assume, under a condominium regime [i.e. joint territorial sovereignty with locals], that is, with the contribution and participation of all the beneficiaries of the exchange operation referred to in this deed, **all expenses that are necessary to regularize the areas effectively occupied by the riverine populations traditionally existing around the exchanged lands**, thus considering those members of the fourteen communities already identified and registered ITERPA, including the georeferencing of each of the lots (Official Office of Notes, book 156, p. 268, 2006, quoted in ASSIS, 2010, p.171)

This essentially subcontracts activities that would have before been carried out by the state to private companies, to capital, which in turn obviously conducted the activities aligned with their own interests and not those of traditional peoples.

Needless to say, conflicts escalated at ever-increasing rates (Sauer and Machado, 2010; Assis, 2010). But the communities of the region resisted these processes and by the mid-2000s a network of institutions were aligned in their struggle. These include the Rural Workers Union (STTR), Tapajós Indigenous Council (CITA), Pastoral Land Commission (CPT), Projeto Saude e Alegria (PSA), Federation of Communities of the Lago Grande settlement (Feagle), Ibama, ICMBio and dozens of community associations. They established a cooperation network and one of the most important results was the realization of participatory mapping workshops that enabled the generation of data and maps of the area based on the knowledge and the territorial perception of the traditional communities residing there. This material and the political pressure of the STTR led, in June 2007, the Institute of Terra do Pará (ITERPA) to declare Gleba Nova Olinda as a priority for the land regularization process. In 2008 the government of Para state launched the Decreto No.1149 of July 17, 2008, establishing the Administrative Limitation Area Provisional Mamuru - Arapiuns (ALAP) in the areas of Glebas Nova Olinda, Olinda II, Curumucuri and Mamuru.

In August 2009 the government of Pará deliberated a proposal that defined a mosaic of uses for these public lands. According to official discourse, the mosaic was supposed to have considered the

protection of traditional communities and areas of ecological interest and the long-term planning of the exploitation of areas with economic potential.

The entire territorial development of the region followed, not legal priority, that is, to follow the constitution, to be inclusive of traditional peoples and communities, but rather the whole discussion was based on the objective of delivering the forest to the timber companies for logging. The 2006 Public Forest Management Law, which does not relate to the land, but only to the forest, become an instrument of land tenure.

Assis (2010) is sympathetic to the idea that forest concessions are a vehicle for land regularization. Unfortunately, this publication predates the fact that lots of auctioned forests are "coincidentally" bought by the *grileiros* who has already been exploiting the area, and which this author himself summarizes in his text.

The Forestry Development Institute of Pará (IDEFLOR) called for "consensus building" through the harmonization of interests between expropriators and expropriated, ignoring the cosmetic effect of negotiations in the face of radical power asymmetries (Sauer and Machado, 2010).

Before a series of audiences, with the various interested stakeholders, several maps were elaborated, evidencing the interests of *grileiros* (land grabbers) and loggers over the traditionally occupied territories. For Sauer and Machado, the state government's interest in recognizing, at least partially, the traditionally occupied territories was driven by the greater motivation of catering for the timber entrepreneurs:

From the information that it has been possible to obtain, the State Government has a special interest in the demarcation and destination of the areas, as this will create the necessary conditions for the forest concessions. This is also one of the main points of friction with local peoples' organisations, which oppose such concessions. (Sauer and Machado, 2010)

Case-Study: Cachoeira do Aruã

We take the community of Cachoeira do Aruã as a case study emblematic of current conflicts in the region. The community is located in a geographic position strategic in ongoing processes of public land allocation. The community is right on the border of Gleba Nova Olinda and the Extractive Reserve (RESEX) Tapajós-Arapicuns (Figure 1). Cachoeira do Aruã is a well-known tourist spot in the municipality of Santarém. With a resident population (today) of approximately 125 families (somewhere around 750 inhabitants), Cachoeira do Aruã is a central point for some public services and commercial warehouses of the Alto Lago Grande region .

The availability of energy, with a mini hydroelectric plant, which guarantees the supply of energy 24 hours and the presence of timber companies, have a led to population increases that in recent years transformed what was a small community into a large village of 125 families. It has an "urban area", whose center is formed by the square Prudêncio Matos da Fonseca and an imposing building: the church of Our Lady of Nazareth, patroness of the community. The community is within the limits of the Agroextractivist Project (PAE) of Lago Grande.

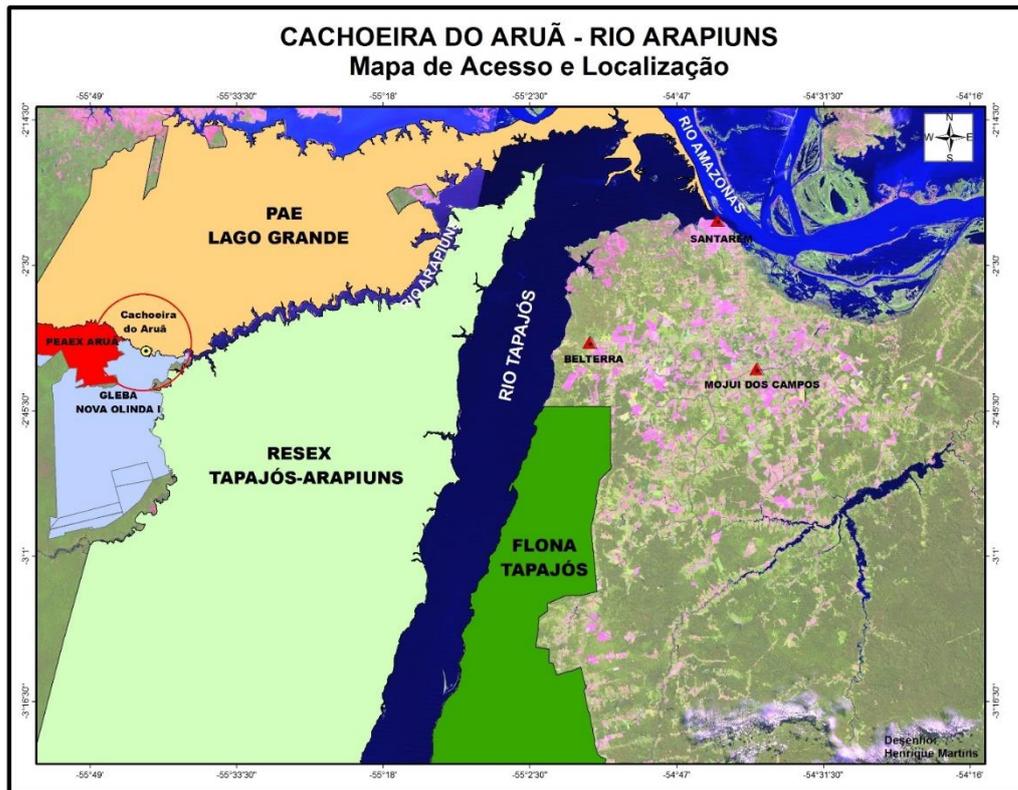


Figure 2: Geographical location of Cachoeira do Aruã, and surrounding territorial units, município of Santarém, Pará

PAE Lago Grande, in which Cachoeira do Aruã community is located, was created on November 28, 2005, by the National Institute of Colonization and Agrarian Reform (Incra), in an area of 2,503.44 km [2] of dense and ancient occupation. Within PAE Lago Grande, there are currently approximately 140 communities, where about 30,000 people live (Folhes et al, 2012: 7). The Agroextractivist Project is a modality of agrarian reform settlement designed for traditional communities that is territorialized in a regime of common use of the land and where livelihood practice involves, commonly, extractive activities. For the monitoring, negotiation and community management of the various processes related to the management and access to natural resources, the Federation of Communities of the Lago Grande Agroextractive settlement (FEAGLE) was created in 2006. FEAGLE aims to accompany INCRA with the collective titling processes, development plans and land use and the release of credits and incentives for infrastructure, housing and production projects. These credits are foreseen in the II National Plan of Agrarian Reform, created by the first Lula government (2003-2006).

The region of the rivers Arapiuns and Aruã and rivers has a history of environmental conflicts which achieved greatest visibility in October 2009. In one of the narrowest parts of the river Arapiuns about 400 people, including Indians and *riberinhos*, organized by the Movement in Defense of Life and Culture of the Arapiuns River (MDVCA), blocked the transit of vessels on the Arapiuns River and captured two barges transporting wood from the public lands of Gleba Nova Olinda, where there are located 11 *riberinho* communities and three indigenous villages, adding up to over a thousand people in the most acute moment of the process.

After about a month of waiting for state and federal officials to discuss a broad range of claims, including logging in their traditionally occupied territories, protesters set fire to 1,500 cubic meters of wood that were on the barges. The case became emblematic and led to the national press showing interest in the region, in particular the struggle of the Borari and Arapiuns peoples and the traditional

riberinho communities for the recognition of their territorial rights, an issue directly related to the conflictive situation of timber extraction in the region, as pointed out by Sauer and Machado (2010).

The act of confrontation triggered a strong persecution of leaders, including threats and attacks, in addition to the criminalization of local leaders, who only were acquitted at the end of 2017. After this most dramatic moment of struggle and resistance, we see communities and leaders seeking to reorganize after the impact of judicial processes and the intensification of tensions in the relationship between local communities and logging companies and new landowners who have licensed the extraction of wood in recent years.

Profesor Jorge Andrade of Cacoheira do Aruã said in an interview that:

Today the village is experiencing a decline with the lack of employment, since the timber companies do not offer as much work as before. Since both the parents of families, and the youth and relied on this means of survival, working in companies that extract wood, this has diminished the economy and increased problems, especially since they stopped practicing the shifting cultivation of manioc [the carbohydrate staple of Amazonian forest peoples]

The community has few jobs, there are 24 employees in the school, 6 health workers, who work in the basic health unit: one nurse, one nursing technician and four health agents. Another source of income is from guest houses and bathing spots, which attract tourists locally and from other regions of Brazil and also few foreign tourists. The other work positions are marked by the relationship with the timber concession owners and companies. These relationships are marked by dependency and inequality – workers are only called for short periods of less skilled work in times of harvest and extraction of wood.

In the case of the relations between the company exploiting forest concessions and the community social systems, it is argued that the introduction of elements of modern labour relations, by the forest management company, without considering elements or characteristics of the local culture, leads to the drawing in labour from outside the region, ending the promotion of social benefits for the communities in the form of employment and income generation. In addition, the worsening of social issues has been observed in community, such as teenage pregnancy, drug use and population increase in some communities. Also, family subsistence production and local patterns of use of natural resources are being affected by the effects of forest enterprise activities on hunting, fishing, water use and the use of timber and non-timber forest products within the framework of community social systems. (Melo Júnior et al 2015. P.330)

Another issue to highlight is

The use of non-local payment schemes ends up not stimulating the local economy, since workers' wages are paid through the banking system, creating a dependency on the host city (Santarém), far from the communities visited, about 12 hours via river transport. This increased dependence on municipal headquarters places community social systems (religious, educational, political, health) closer to co-optation than cooperation. Added to this is the lack of use of local labour and the low purchase of products from local family agriculture, such as manioc flour and fruits (Idem 2015. P.330).

The community of Cachoeira do Aruã has two strong cooperatives that to a certain extent are political forces that centralize the debates on the main issues in the communities relationship with the loggers. These are Association of Residents and Energy Producers of Cachoeira do Aruã (Amope), which assumes the role of association that has the Presidency of the community and the Agroextractivist Cooperative of Aruã (Cooparuã).

With regard to how the community deals with its relationship with timber companies, we found repeatedly in interviews that community members were reticent to speak of the issue. There is

recognition of its economic importance and benefits brought by timber companies, marked by a controlling relationship with community leaders. In an interview with the leadership of Amope also with a local school teacher, we get an overview of good relationship with the timber company Rondobel, which has port very close to the community, citing support community cultural activities and, in urgent health cases, transporting patients to the city of Santarém. The leadership of Cooparuã is more critical and points to a weakening of the community as a result of the loggers presence, a kind of submission and disempowerment when facing the questions of the role of loggers in community development. The leader himself has been working for the timber concessionaires as a chainsaw operator and in other activities in timber extraction. And so he also acknowledges that he cannot be at the forefront of questioning the timber industries presence. **“There is no other option.”**

The relationship of dependence with loggers reveals fissures, understood as forms of resistance, in the daily struggle of the community. In dialogue with Celio de Moraes, one of the directors of Cooparuã, we see that the community members themselves do not respect the PAE Lago Grande Use Plan and the ownership of concessionaires and private landowners, as confirmed by the following passage:

Here in our *Cachoiara do Aruã* the following happens, many family fathers have no other choice but to cut wood to sell ... because we have no support... It is an area that can become very productive for family agriculture, but it does not have support, we do not have support from the City Hall, we do not have the support of the Government, nobody has INCRA support. So there is no way out for a family man to support his house except this option, because he will see his child hungry, his woman in need, him aswell, so he sets out to take a tree, sell a tree for a minimum price to sustain his household.

Interviewer: How much wood that this family can sell here in the community and surrounding areas?

CM: They are asking for 500 reais for an Ipê tree. The value of it we know is much bigger right? **But he has no choice, either he sells it to purchase what they needs or they will go hungry which is much worse than seeing a tree cut – a family man crying with his children with nothing to eat?**

Interviewer: Does he take it from his land, how does it work?

CM: He takes it from his land or finds someone that wants to, the people go and buy from him, he cuts the tree and sells it and he gets this percentage of money to keep his house, his livelihood. Unfortunately this happens in our community.

This situation was presented as a denunciation to the State Department of Environment and Sustainability in the Santarém region (SEMÁS). In December 2017 there was an inspection in the region, having *Cachoeira do Aruã* as its base of support. In January 2018, after information sent by community members, we went to Semas and interviewed an agent that was part of the inspection. The scenario presented by the inspecting agent is of denunciations about the activity of illegal logging in areas of private landowners, holders of legal management plans, with some denunciations about the community of Repartimento, which is closest to the community of Mariazinha.

He explains that there is a network of wood provisioning for large logging companies and the complaint came from smallholders concerning a logic in which smaller companies serve the concessionaires with areas titled by ITERPA and authorization to operate management plans by SEMÁS. The logic is, according to the supervisory agent, the following *"only these smaller companies, do timber extraction for the larger companies. Most are small companies that only do the holding part for the big ones."* When asked if it's a kind of outsourcing, he agreed and said it's also allowed by the contract. This makes proximity a component of the conflict: *"In the area, not only are there concession companies, there are also private areas and these private areas are closer to communities, the concessions are not so close to the communities."*

The intermediary role of SEMAS responds primarily to the complainant. In this interview we can see that the area is marked by a situation of lack of prospects of income generation. This lack of alternatives reinforces the violence. The surveillance agent explains the viewpoint of the loggers about the situation:

According to the loggers of the area they do not conflict with indigenous people, they have more trouble with [riberhino] communities. I've visited various of these communities. Before, community members would go, would go, would collect, take a tree – to make a house, to make a canoe, and some to sell. Only now, as they are seeing a large amount of wood come out they don't just want to cut wood for these things. So they are invading private areas to get wood, especially *Ipê* and *Itaúba*. This is going on a lot and there are many denunciations happening as a result. Mainly in Cachoeira do Aruã.

Asked if such conflicts result in violence he recounts the following event from 2014:

There was this time when they said that a logger had killed a community member, but there was police investigation and that it was an accident. He found the community member in a particular area of land where there would have been this conflict, but the police investigation said that they [the loggers] were travelling by motorcycle and their gun shot accidentally. Unlikely this.

In sum, the impression he gives is that what is happening in the region – the current agrarian question we have analysed in the paper - is a problem for which he sees no solution. Of course, assuming that loggers have their land invaded, SEMAS position themselves the State with a duty to secure property. The situation is one where on the one hand, community members oblige loggers for donations of food and drink to communal parties, transportation of people with health problems, and on the other, negative sense, threaten to close roads or other reprisals.

This text, resulting from research that is still underway, points to the possibility of renewed confrontations in the region, and will bring further evidence of a negative impacts of timber extraction in the region.

This paper has shown how, under the authoritarian populist governments of Lula and Dilma 2003-2016, *latifundio* and agribusiness class consolidated power, which has through intensified land grabbing and illegal logging, and its growth as a political force. This results in *capital taking the role of the state*, to a certain extent, as timber companies take on the role of rights providers, employers and territorial delimiters. We saw how loggers are able to use the police force and judicial powers against the traditional peoples and communities, ultimately forcing them into neo-clientelist relations of dependency. The failure of the state to implement public policies aimed at traditional communities has left local people in a situation where they lack even their constitutional rights, forcing them into neo-clientalist relations with timber companies.

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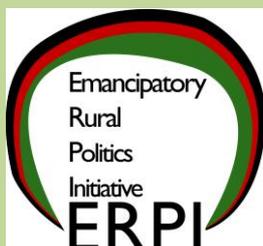
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The Emancipatory Rural Politics Initiative (ERPI) is a new initiative focused on understanding the contemporary moment and building alternatives. New exclusionary politics are generating deepening inequalities, jobless 'growth', climate chaos, and social division. The ERPI is focused on the social and political processes in rural spaces that are generating alternatives to regressive, authoritarian politics. We aim to provoke debate and action among scholars, activists, practitioners and policymakers from across the world that are concerned about the current situation, and hopeful about alternatives.

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