



The Brazilian Amazon and the Sovereignist Discourse: old and new storylines

Bruna Eloy de Amorim¹ 

Drielli Peyerl² 

In this article, we investigated the Brazilian sovereignist discourse about the Amazon, analyzing how it reflects and shapes policies of the Brazilian state for the region. To do this, we used Content Analysis and Discourse Analysis (particularly the Argumentative Approach developed by Maarten Hajer) to examine statements about the Amazon made by Brazilian representatives from 1972 to 2021. This methodological combination allowed identifying the main storylines that contributed to legitimizing the sovereignist discourse, which is grounded in the affirmation that there is a recurring foreign threat to the forest. We conclude that the incorporation of this discourse by different social groups allowed successive governments to prioritize geopolitical and national security interests in the formulation of policies for the region, often at the expense of local socio-environmental problems.

Keywords: Discourse Analysis; Content Analysis; storylines; discourse coalitions; Brazilian Amazon.

Introduction

One of the discourses most deeply ingrained in the Brazilian debate about the Amazon is the need to protect it from “foreign greed”. This discourse is rooted in the perception that a perpetual external threat exists, while the storylines have been adapted to changing circumstances throughout history and during several federal administrations.

¹ Universidade de São Paulo, Instituto de Energia e Ambiente, Av. Professor Luciano Gualberto, nº 1289, São Paulo, Brazil. E-mail: <bruna.amorim@usp.br>

² Universidade de São Paulo, Instituto de Energia e Ambiente, Av. Professor Luciano Gualberto, nº 1289, São Paulo, Brazil. Universidade de Amsterdam, Science Park 904, Amsterdam, the Netherlands. E-mail: <dpeyerl@usp.br>

Storylines, according to Hajer (2000), are narratives that oversimplify complex issues. These superficial and ambiguous discursive practices serve as the essential cement that enables the creation of communicative networks among actors with different or at best overlapping perceptions, thereby contributing to the formation of discourse coalitions. A discourse coalition is a group of actors who, through storylines, develop and support a particular discourse, even though the actors may not necessarily share the same interests and goals.

Building on the assumption that discourses, storylines, and discourse coalitions play a significant role in political decisions, analyzing them allows us to comprehend a spectrum of involved interests, and especially conflicts that emerge between environmental conservation and economic development. By investigating these categories, we can gain a deeper understanding of the complexities surrounding governmental policies and actions towards environmental and economic issues.

Sovereignist discourse is fundamentally based on the use of homogenizing categories, such as "us versus them". In Brazil, it serves to create the perception that all Brazilians equally benefit from the economic exploitation of the Amazon, concealing the unjust distribution of wealth from the region's riches (Zhour, 2010).

The Armed Forces play a prominent role within the sovereignist discourse coalition. This discourse, however, also resonates with other sectors of society, who join this discourse coalition, such as the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, as well as local political elites, commonly known as the "Amazonian caucus." Historically, this group has used the issue of security in frontier areas to justify advocating greater federal government investment in the region (Marques, 2006; Pádua, 2008; Friberg, 2009; Zhour, 2010; Viola and Franchini, 2013; Barbosa, 2015).

This article analyzes the Brazilian sovereignist discourse about the Amazon, which is crucial to understanding the country's policies for the region. More specifically, we sought to verify how certain storylines - centered on a recurring foreign threat to the rainforest - have supported the sovereignist discourse and contributed to the formation of a discourse coalition.

We hypothesize that the incorporation of this discourse by different social groups - united in a discourse coalition - has allowed successive governments to prioritize geopolitical and national security interests in their administration of the region, overlooking its socio-environmental challenges.

Within the Argumentative Approach (Hajer, 2000), we have identified four storylines that have fed the sovereignist discourse in Brazil throughout history: "Integrate not to Deliver"; "The Lungs of the Earth"; "Revolutionary Wars and Asymmetric Wars"; "A lot of land for few Indians"; "Globalism" and "Climatism". We will explore each of them in more detail in the following sections. Finally, we will analyze the false controversies surrounding science and the anti-environmental discourse in the section False Controversies: Science and the Anti-Environmental Discourse and present our conclusions.

Theoretical Framework and Methodology

The Amazon rainforest and its environmental and geopolitical controversies have been extensively studied through various approaches. However, Discourse Analysis remains an underexplored area, with few studies examining the discursive constructions used by the Brazilian state when discussing the region's problems.

Within the framework of Discourse Analysis, we draw on Hajer's seminal work, "The Politics of Environmental Discourse" (2000), in which he introduces concepts that are highly valuable for analyzing the Brazilian sovereignist discourse, such as storylines and discourse coalitions.

As mentioned, storylines provide a set of symbolic references that suggest a common understanding. Due to their rhetorical impact, they are easily invoked, essentially functioning as metaphors. As they become accepted and more people begin to use them, they gain a certain permanence in a debate. Therefore, they become figures of speech, or "tropes," that rationalize a specific approach to what appears to be a problem. Discourse coalitions, in turn, are formed by actors with different interests who converge around the same storyline (Hajer, 2000).

Hajer's Argumentative Approach is based on a Foucauldian perspective, as he contends that the choice of words is not solely a consequence of individual speakers' autonomy, nor does it occur in a social vacuum. It is circumscribed by the context and circumstances in which they find themselves. Discourses, therefore, are not consciously replicated by individuals but are rather something from which they cannot detach themselves.

We employed Hajer's framework (2000) to analyze a *corpus* of statements made by Brazilian representatives regarding the Amazon. This analysis covers the period from 1972 to 2021, starting with the United Nations Conference on the Human Environment (UNCHE) held in Stockholm, which marked a pivotal moment in international environmental negotiations. The chosen timeframe extends until the first half of 2021, encompassing crucial developments in Brazil until the departure of the Ministers of Foreign Affairs, Ernesto Araújo, and of the Environment, Ricardo Salles, from the Jair Bolsonaro administration (2019-2022).

A total of 2,381 documents were analyzed, including speeches, press releases, opinion pieces written by government officials, and interviews. Most of these documents can be found on the Brazilian Library of the Presidency of the Republic website. Additionally, we utilized compilations published by the Alexandre de Gusmão Foundation (FUNAG), which contain official speeches of Brazilian representatives at the United Nations (UN) and other international organizations (e.g., World Trade Organization (WTO)), as well as at some domestic institutions (e.g., *Escola Superior de Guerra*, its leading military academy).

Regarding President Bolsonaro's statements, although the official government website (Planalto.gov.) has a section called "Discursos", we were unable to access his official speeches during the period from which we collected data for this research. Thus, we sought out other websites that provided full transcripts of his statements and those of other government officials. One such site was that of the Pinpoint project in Brazil, which is operated by the Brazilian Association of Investigative Journalism (ABRAJI) and offers transcripts and audio recordings of Bolsonaro's speeches, as well as other documents related to his administration and that of other former Brazilian presidents. The URLs for all the websites used in this article can be found in the Bibliographical References section.

To assist in the Content Analysis, we used the Atlas.ti software (2022). This software enables the insertion and storage of a large volume of text in a single file. Essentially, it automates the coding of texts, facilitating the codification and categorization of data, as well as the creation of a network of relationships among them (Miles and Huberman, 1994).

The analysis, therefore, focuses on the textual dimension to explore both discursive and non-discursive practices. By examining these statements, we aim to understand the evolving discursive dynamics surrounding the Amazon region in official Brazilian statements, thereby providing valuable insights into the relationship between discourse and political action.

"Integrate not to Deliver"

Throughout Brazilian history, the Amazon was often regarded as the final frontier for completing the country's territorial integration (Hecht and Cockburn, 2010; Acker, 2017). During the colonial period, the region's borders were contested by imperial powers such as France and England. After Brazil's independence in 1822, international pressure grew, particularly from the United States (US), to ensure unrestricted access to navigation on the Amazon River (Palm, 2009).

In the 20th century, the military intelligentsia, trained at the *Escola Superior de Guerra*, produced a series of essays in which the national territory was portrayed as a grouping of isolated economic and cultural regions that needed to be integrated through modern transportation routes. The main advocate of this thinking was Golbery do Couto e Silva, who, as a professor at the military academy in the 1950s, connected classic geopolitical theories with the need for economic growth. Not coincidentally, after the 1964 coup, the National Security Doctrine was renamed the National Security and Development Doctrine (Giannazi, 2014; Avelar, 2020; Freitas, 2020).

In February 1966, President Castelo Branco first used the "integrate not to deliver" slogan in a speech in the city of Macapá, in the extreme north of Brazil. In October that year, "Operation Amazon" (1966-1970) was launched, a package of laws that created the

political and budgetary conditions for massive investment in the Amazon region (Moran, 2019; Marques, 2018).

The Cold War instilled in the Brazilian Armed Forces a fear of revolts and seditions in places far from the main population centers, rendering these areas susceptible to cooptation by other spheres of power (Hecht and Cockburn, 2010). Until World War II, Army troops were concentrated in the south of the country, reflecting the historical rivalry with Argentina. However, in the second half of the twentieth century defense of the Amazon increasingly legitimized the role of the Armed Forces in Brazilian society. Since then, the notion that they are the true guardians of the forest has held fundamental importance in constructing their patriotic myth (Gonçalves, 2001; Garfield, 2013; Pinto, 2021).

During the dictatorship (1964-1985), the government constantly propagated the sovereignist discourse that vehemently rejected foreign presence in the Amazon. However, concessions were granted to several foreign groups to operate in the region, as they were perceived as carriers of the development model that should be implemented in the country. The government itself endorsed private projects in the region and provided tax subsidies and credit to private companies from Brazil and abroad (Becker, 2015; Acker, 2017).

From the end of the 1960s, Brazil experienced the so-called "Brazilian miracle" and achieved high economic growth rates, with GDP rising an average of 11 percent per year between 1969 and 1973. In June 1970, President Emílio Médici (1969-1974) presented the National Integration Plan (*Plano de Integração Nacional - PIN*) with the goal of providing means for the physical occupation of the entire country and particularly the Amazon region. To this end, his government undertook significant infrastructure projects, including the construction of roads, urban centers, and hydroelectric plants (Silva, 2007; Petit, 2021;).

Until the 1960s, the occupation of the Brazilian Amazon was mainly concentrated along the banks of its navigable rivers. However, this pattern began to change towards the end of the decade as the fluvial dynamic gave way to settlements around roads. The construction of roads was accompanied by the settlement of migrants near these new routes (Medeiros, 2012; Oliveira Neto, 2019; Soares, 2021; Capellini, 2022).

By the early 1970s, the forest still retained 99 percent of its vegetation coverage. However, the construction of new roads caused profound damage to the forest ecosystem, with many of them cutting through Indigenous lands. These roads became a fundamental vector for the invasion of their territories and the resulting violence (Fearnside, 2006; Pádua, 2017).

By the time President Ernesto Geisel took power (1974-1978), Brazil was heavily dependent on oil imports, which accounted for about 90 percent of the country's oil consumption (Napolitano, 2014). Despite the economic crisis caused by the First Oil Shock of 1973, the government did not abandon its strategy of planning large-scale infrastructure projects aimed at integrating the country and maintaining the growth rates that legitimized the dictatorship. Instead of following the worldwide trend of adopting strict measures to control domestic demand, it implemented countercyclical policies, investing heavily in

state-led development programs (Luna Klein, 2014; Prado and Earp, 2019; Visentini, 2020).

Geisel, therefore, launched the Second National Development Plan to make the country self-sufficient in essential raw materials, especially in the energy sector. The plan also sought to promote a geographic decentralization of the country's industries (Luna and Klein, 2014; Saad Filho and Morais, 2018; Visentini, 2020). For the Amazon region, his administration launched the Amazon Program of Agricultural Poles and Agrominerals ("*Polamazônia*") in September 1974. The program recognized the heterogeneity of the different locations that make up the forest region and identified fifteen poles with different development propensities, such as mining, logging, agriculture, livestock, and manufacturing (Becker, 2015; Freitas, 2020; Malheiro et al., 2021).

By the early 1980s, the discovery of iron ore deposits in the Serra dos Carajás and gold in the Serra Pelada mountain regions in the state of Pará within the Amazon biome, brought positive news amidst the decreasing popularity of the dictatorship. Mineral projects had not been an initial priority for the military government, which did not think that mining would not tie people to the land (Diniz, 1994). However, the economic crisis transformed the tropical forest into a new mineral frontier. The Third National Development Plan, issued during the administration of President João Figueiredo (1979-1985), already listed mining as the primary driver for the development of the Amazon region (Brown, 2012; Becker, 2015; Malheiro et al., 2021).

The Eastern region of Pará, with reserves of iron, gold, manganese, copper, bauxite, nickel, and cassiterite, was planned to become a huge mining hub. The planning included construction of the Carajás-Itaqui railroad and the Tucuruí hydroelectric plant on the Tocantins River, to provide the energy required for mining in Carajás. The viability of the Grand Carajá Project, as it was officially called, depended strongly on an abundant supply of cheap electricity (Hall, 1991; ISA, 2007; Brown, 2012; Malheiro et al., 2021; Soares, 2021).

The official discourse, however, also brought the need for energy security and job creation as justifications for the construction of the Grand Carajá Project. On October 9, 1984, on a national television broadcast, President Figueiredo's declared:

In November, I will inaugurate the Tucuruí hydroelectric plant, which will generate, in this first phase, four million kilowatts for the Northeast and North regions. With Tucuruí's energy, we will finally be able to create an industrial park in the area, take advantage of the immense mineral riches of the Serra de Carajás, and offer job opportunities with better qualifications and better remuneration for the populations of the Northeast and North. If Tucuruí were not ready now, the Northeast would possibly already be facing energy shortages (Figueiredo, 1984, p. 171, translated by the authors).

As in Carajás, despite government policies to attract private capital to the Amazon (tax benefits, tax-free imports of machinery, interest-free loans), private investors were not sufficiently drawn in. By the end of the 1980s, most state-funded agricultural projects had already proven unproductive and were either abandoned or sold, while mineral projects persisted at the expense of heavy subsidies (Acker, 2017; Ioris, 2018). Nonetheless, the geopolitical objective of rapid territorial occupation was successful, resulting in the consolidation of the state apparatus's presence in the region, in line with the recommendations of the National Security and Development Doctrine (Becker, 2015).

On the discursive side, the policies of granting incentives to foreign or national private capital were not enough to undermine the sovereignist discourse. Moreover, it would be readjusted to better fit different historical moments and situations, incorporating new storylines, as will be analyzed in the next sections.

“The Lungs of The Earth”

For many years, the notion that it was necessary to continue expanding agricultural and economic frontiers was almost a consensus in Brazil and globally. International organizations, such as the World Bank, the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB), and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) financed and endorsed large agricultural and mining projects in forest areas, based on the idea that they were underutilized (Gonçalves, 2001; Zhouri and Laschefski, 2010).

However, since the late 1960s, a significant shift in humanity's perception of nature began in various parts of the world. A series of books and articles demonstrated that technological progress and agro-industrial growth were not totally positive but had a direct impact on the destruction of natural ecosystems. Works such as "Silent Spring" (1962) by Rachel Carson, "The Population Bomb" (1968) by Paul Ehrlich, and "The Tragedy of the Commons" (1968) by Garrett Hardin gained traction with world public opinion (Lago, 2013; Acker, 2017;).

The photograph made of the Earth by the astronauts of the Apollo 8 mission in 1968 was a turning point in the human perception of nature. The image of a blue sphere apparently floating aimlessly in a sea of total darkness conveyed a sense of fragility and interdependence between man and nature (Hajer, 2000). In this context, storylines emerged such as "spaceship Earth" or that all of humanity is in the same "boat", conveying the idea that life on the planet would depend on a delicate balance between the needs of the passengers and the capacity of the "ship" to respond to those needs (Dryzek, 1997).

The storyline that the Amazon would be the "lungs of the Earth" appeared for the first time in 1971. The expression is said to have originated from a misconception made by a journalist while transcribing an interview with German biologist Herald Sioli. The biologist's statement that a forest in equal balance between the formation and

decomposition of organic matter would consume just as much oxygen as it produces gave rise to the expression (Fearnside, 1985; Oliveira, 1991; Niebauer, 2018).

Although the metaphor is not scientifically accurate, as marine flora is primarily responsible for oxygen production, the phrase "lungs of the Earth" quickly spread, invoking a storyline about ecological balance and the importance of the forest for regulating the planet's climate (Zhour, 2010).

Since then, however, all Brazilian governments have opposed the "lungs of the Earth" storyline, challenging it as fallacious and environmental movements as alarmists, discrediting arguments that link Amazon deforestation with global warming (Fearnside, 1985; Zhour, 2010). The main reason for this reaction is the concern that the tropical forest could be perceived as a common heritage of humanity, a global public good, rather than a territory under the sovereignty of Brazil.

In 1972, the UNCHE held in Stockholm placed environment issues at the forefront of the international political agenda. At the time, it was the largest UN conference ever. Ecological concerns, however, mainly came from rich countries, strongly influenced by the "Limits to Growth" report published by the Club of Rome a few months before the conference (Hajer, 2000; Lago, 2013).

The "Limits to Growth" report included a series of projections that used graphs to illustrate the swift depletion of Earth's natural resources and warn of an unprecedented catastrophe within a century if corrective actions were not taken. The study embraced a "neo-Malthusian" viewpoint on population growth, with particular emphasis on the concerns related to less developed countries (Dryzek, 1997; Lago, 2013).

Against this backdrop, Brazil and other developing nations perceived the Stockholm conference as an attempt to "kick the ladder" of their economic development, after the majority of the Global North population had already attained good levels of social well-being. As mentioned, Brazil at the time was experiencing its "economic miracle", strongly based on industrial growth. In this scenario, the First World's concern with pollution and environmental preservation was not perceived to be in the country's interests (Najam, 2005; Lago, 2013; Barbieri, 2020).

A speech by Brazilian Minister of Foreign Affairs Antônio Azeredo da Silveira, (1974-1979) at the UN General Assembly in 1976, is emblematic of this viewpoint:

It is alleged that for ecological reasons the economic development of the underdeveloped countries of today is no longer practicable. Now, the stagnation of the poorer areas of the globe cannot be the price to be paid to conserve the environment. What is really necessary is to proceed to a broad reorganization of the world economy so as to correct the acute disparities both in the distribution of the means of production and in the patterns of consumption. Invoking ecological motives in order to frustrate expectations for development would be a new and unacceptable form of domination that would meet with the opposition of all those peoples that have been subjected

to colonialism and that, despite all the predications to the contrary, knew how to organize themselves politically in order to achieve their independence and to preserve it, as well as to struggle for their economic autonomy (Silveira, 1976, p. 430).

Shortly after the Stockholm conference, the Brazilian government created a secretariat for the environment (*Secretaria Especial de Meio Ambiente - SEMA*). It was a diplomatic initiative to counterbalance the country's resistant position at the conference. The secretariat, however, was marginalized within the state bureaucracy (Acker, 2017; Barbieri, 2020). According to Bratman (2019), while Brazilian politicians publicly rejected the influence of other countries in their domestic affairs, in practice, they were quite sensitive to external pressure.

On November 5, 1976, in a speech welcoming Peru's President Francisco Bermudez (1975-1980), President Geisel reinforced the discourse that foreign demands for tropical forest protection were merely a pretext to gain access to the Amazon's strategic mineral reserves: "The inestimable richness of the Amazon's natural reserves cannot escape the realism of foreign interests, and under the pretext of preserving it as the lungs of the Earth, unfounded international concerns arise, albeit fluid and theoretical" (Geisel, 1977, p. 320, free translation).

Against this backdrop, the Brazilian government led the creation of the Amazon Initiative, which included the eight countries of the Amazon biome. The Initiative, a precursor to the Amazon Cooperation Treaty, established a common policy for the region's development and reaffirmed the exclusive sovereignty of the Amazonian countries over its administration. The free use of the forest's natural resources was considered a sovereign right of each participating country, and any foreign interference was a disrespect to this right (Visentini, 2020).

Despite the strong sovereignist discourse, in the second half of the 1970s pressure for increased conservation of Brazilian biomes began to intensify, and the government was compelled to respond. In contrast to the narrative that ecological concerns came exclusively from external actors, and that environmentalism was an ideology originating in rich countries and, therefore, alien to the concern of Brazilian society, several national groups demanded more policies and actions to protect the country's ecosystems. Such groups, with the help of international bodies and groups, managed to mobilize Brazilian institutions (Keck and Sikkink, 1998; Hochstetler and Keck, 2007; Acker, 2017).

There was also an informal alliance between foreign scientists working for intergovernmental agencies and Brazilian civil servants within the government. This alliance persuaded the military government to combine development projects in the Amazon with forest conservation. This was possible due to the "language of science" employed by these groups, which exhibited a significant discursive affinity with the technocratic and modernizing orientations of the military regime (Hajer, 2000; Hochstetler and Keck, 2007; Donadelli, 2016).

In the latter half of the 1970s, the government began investing in an extensive network of national parks in the Amazon. Moreover, by the early 1980s, millions of hectares were designated as the Yanomami indigenous reserve (Hecht and Cockburn, 2010; Freitas, 2020). The "debt crisis" of the 1980s also hindered plans for significant infrastructure projects in that region.

With the country's re-democratization in 1985, the new civilian government, led by José Sarney (1985-1989), sought to balance the influence in his administration of the coalition that promoted the sovereignist discourse with the need to integrate the country into the international community to be able to participate in international agreements (e.g. the nuclear non-proliferation, human rights and environmental regimes) (Fonseca Jr., 2005).

In this context, Brazil's official discourse concerning the Amazon and environmental protection had to change, especially in face of harsh criticism from the international community. During this period, international environmental groups joined forces with Indigenous and extractive communities, leading to increased pressure on multilateral financial institutions. The aim was to discourage the disbursement of funds to countries that degraded their natural heritage. This pressure compelled institutions such as the World Bank and the IMF to introduce new conditions related to environmental conservation as prerequisites for loan disbursement (Hecht and Cockburn, 2010; Hirst, 2013).

In December 1988, the brutal assassination of Chico Mendes brought international media focus to some of the most troubling facets of Brazilian society: environmental degradation, violence, and human rights violations (Fishlow, 2011; Lago, 2013). Mendes, a rubber tapper and union leader who was president of the Rural Workers Union of Xapuri in Acre state, in the western Brazilian Amazon, had garnered worldwide acclaim for his skillfully coordinated resistance against extensive development projects in the tropical forest.

Before his assassination, Mendes had been the target of numerous criticisms from the sovereignist discourse coalition. He was frequently accused of serving foreign interests and being an obstacle to the region's progress (Keck and Sikkink, 1998; Gonçalves, 2001). This discourse touched on binary dichotomies that resonated strongly within a significant portion of Brazilian society, pitting nationals against foreigners and economic development against environmental preservation.

The global attention drawn to conflicts in the Amazon made it a recurring subject in international media. Prominent politicians, artists, and intellectuals criticized Brazil's management of the forest. Figures like then-Senator Al Gore, who reportedly referred to the Amazon as a "world heritage site" (though he denies making this statement)³, and former French President François Mitterrand (1981-1995), who was reported to have

³ The precise phrase was "Contrary to what Brazilians think, the Amazon is not their property, it belongs to all of us." According to Rohter (2012), this statement was in fact made by the Republican Senator Robert Kasten at a ceremony in honor of Chico Mendes in 1989.

suggested that Brazil should accept "relative sovereignty" over the Amazon⁴ are often raised as examples of the constant threat hovering over the country integrity (Martins, 2018; Villas Bôas, 2021; McCoy and Traiano, 2021).

In a speech on March 17, 1989, at the launching of the training ship "Brasil", President Sarney reinforced this sovereignist discourse:

Our glorious Brazilian Navy has the great mission to maintain our sovereign presence and prevent, together with other forces, that part of Brazil [the Amazon] from becoming a green, internationalized Persian Gulf, a greed that has existed for so long.

Behind ecology, there are larger interests. It is a Trojan Horse made to seduce the pure spirits of young people and those who, all over the world, think about the survival of man on the planet (Sarney, 1989, p. 111, free translation).

Sarney was succeeded in the presidency by Fernando Collor de Mello (1990-1992), whose government was less influenced by the sovereignist discourse⁵. The new president was committed to building an image of Brazil as a modern country, in line with Western values, which would require incorporating the environmental protection discourse of developed countries. His declarations about the Amazon were notably different from those of previous Brazilian presidents, as verified in an interview with the German newspaper *Die Welt* on September 4, 1990:

I believe that the ecological issue should not be exclusive to Brazilians or Germans. The ecological issue is a global, worldwide concern. To assume that a foreign opinion on the environmental issue constitutes interference in sovereignty is, in my view, a colonialist syndrome, one that assumes that the presence of the foreigner always implies invasion, meddling, plundering of our wealth, undermining of our sovereignty. We have already passed this phase. We left it behind about 200 years ago. Our government does not understand this as undue interference, as long as it is done, naturally, as determined by the rules of civility, in the same way, which, eventually, we can talk about ecological disasters that occur in Europe or the US (Mello, 1991, p. 13, free translation).

During Collor de Mello's administration, the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED), also known as Rio-92, was held, and was a pivotal moment in transforming Brazil's image, from an outsider in international

⁴ According to reports, this statement was delivered at an international conference on the environment in The Hague on March 11, 1989 (De Sartre; Taravella, 2009; Miyamoto, 2009; Villas Bôas, 2021).

⁵ This was demonstrated, for example, by the new president's readiness to terminate the Brazilian nuclear program, symbolized by the image of Collor de Mello throwing a shovel of lime into the well that had been excavated for secret nuclear tests in the *Serra do Cachimbo* mountains of Pará state.

environmental negotiations to a highly engaged participant. Brazilian diplomacy took a leading role in the conference, contributing to the drafting of the Convention on Biodiversity and introducing the concept of "common but differentiated responsibilities" (Ricupero, 2006; Vigevani and Cepaluni, 2011; Kiessling, 2018).

Therefore, in conjunction with other developing countries, Brazil transitioned from a confrontational stance towards the climate regime, as exemplified in Stockholm, to a more proactive strategy. This transformation helped the country effectively dispell its negative image and establish itself as a pivotal participant in international environmental negotiations (Ricupero, 2006; Vigevani and Cepaluni, 2011; Kiessling, 2018).

This change, coupled with the continuous process of democratization within the country and the increasing impact of globalization, played a substantial role in diminishing the prominence of the sovereignist discourse in Brazil. As a result, the sovereignist discourse coalition had to adjust its storylines, a subject that will be examined in the following sections.

From "Revolutionary War" to "Asymmetric War"

In the early 1990s, the dissolution of the prospect of a direct military confrontation between the US and the Soviet Union brought new elements to what could be perceived a national security threat. The struggle against communism was replaced by concerns about US hegemony in a unipolar global order. Nevertheless, the resurgence of North-South tensions allowed the Armed Forces to re-signify their political position in democratic Brazil. The greatest threats were now understood to come from developed countries and multilateral organizations, notably the UN and the US. Instead of a conventional military invasion, they were seen to have opted for a type of indirect intervention in Brazilian affairs, disguised under causes such as environmental protection and the rights of Indigenous peoples (Castro, 2006; Zhouri, 2010).

In this new context, issues that had been overshadowed by the East-West struggle, such as environmental degradation, human rights violations, international migration, drug trafficking, and terrorism, came to the forefront of global security concerns. The Third World was increasingly viewed as the primary - if not the exclusive - source of these problems (Lidgren-Alves, 2018). Within this framework, problems that were assumed to be within the exclusive purview of national states were re-evaluated (Marques, 2007; Zhouri, 2010).

In this context, from the 1990s onwards, the problem of drug trafficking along Brazil's northern border, particularly near Colombia, offered a new storyline concerning Amazon sovereignty. This became even more pronounced following the establishment of an economic-military cooperation agreement between the US and Colombia in 2000, known as Plan Colombia, aimed at combating drug production and trafficking (Castro and Souza, 2006).

The Plan involved the establishment of seven US military bases in Colombia, which raised concerns within the Brazilian Armed Forces. Unlike other Latin American countries, Brazil declined to take on a law enforcement role against drug trafficking in the region, rejecting proposals for multilateral cooperation, and chose not to designate the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (*Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia - FARC*) as a terrorist organization, instead classifying them as a political-social movement (Miyamoto, 2009; Monteiro, 2011; Spektor, 2012).

The Brazilian military was not concerned about the potential consolidation of the region as a major route for international drug trafficking. This was considered a matter of public safety and therefore outside the jurisdiction of the Armed Forces. The Brazilian military's main concern was the deepening US military presence in the Amazon basin in the name of the war on drugs (Hirst, 2013).

Before the implementation of Plan Colombia, during Sarney's presidency, the Brazilian government launched the *Calha Norte* Project. Initially planned to enhance the military presence along the country's northern border, the Project was conceived in response to concerns about the activities of Colombian guerrilla groups in the region. There was also apprehension about the potential risk of an invasion across the northern border, possibly through Guyana or Suriname, with potential influences from Cuba (Castro, 2006; Nascimento, 2006; Monteiro, 2011).

The *Calha Norte* Project, was conceived within the framework of the National Security and Development Doctrine, which was shaped by perceived communist threats (Castro, 2006; ISA, 2007). However, as Miyamoto (2009) points out, the primary concern was now the "internationalization" of the Amazon and the mounting criticisms that the Brazilian government was facing from international actors due to its environmental practices.

Throughout the 1990s, however, the *Calha Norte* Project faced budget cuts, resulting in a gradual reduction of its importance. The administration of Fernando Henrique Cardoso (1995-2002) prioritized implementation of the Amazon Protection System (*Sistema de Proteção da Amazônia - Sipam*), and the Amazon Surveillance System (*Sistema de Vigilância da Amazônia - Sivam*)⁶. The Sivam/Sipam initiative established an integrated telecommunication and remote sensing network that facilitated the control of air traffic in the region and the monitoring of activities such as fires and illegal mining (Nascimento, 2008; Miyamoto, 2009; Andrade and Lima, 2018).

The Sivam/Sipam was also embroiled in controversies, from allegations of corruption and espionage to criticism of the hiring of a foreign company, the US-based Raytheon, to develop a program for monitoring Brazilian territory, which had obvious repercussions with the sovereignist discourse coalition (Miyamoto, 2009).

⁶ The Sivan/Sipam initiative was approved during the presidency of Itamar Franco (1992-1995).

As seen, the end of the Cold War forced the Brazilian Armed Forces to rethink their role and readjust the sovereignist discourse to maintain their political relevance in the country. The specter of an asymmetrical confrontation with the world's greatest military power gave rise to the so-called "resistance strategy", which consisted of employing guerrilla tactics to oppose a much more powerful enemy (Leirner, 2020; Villas Bôas, 2021;).

Thus, the post-Cold War period presented fertile ground for a new "invention of traditions" in the Amazon. The Brazilian Armed Forces no longer needed to align with the decisions of a superpower, acting as a junior partner in the fight against communism. Instead, they could act directly against a potential invading power, shifting the storyline from the "revolutionary war" to the "asymmetrical war" (; Castro and Souza, 2006; Marques, 2007; Leirner, 2020).

In this context, the founding myth of the Armed Forces had to shift towards a more distant past. The focus moved from the communist uprising led by Luiz Carlos Prestes between 1935 and 1936 to the Guararapes battles, which pitted Luso-Brazilians against the Dutch in 1648-1649. Unlike the fight against the communist coup, which was also a struggle against an internal enemy, the Guararapes conflict was a war against foreign invaders and an enemy considered militarily superior, allowing for a more suitable analogy with the "asymmetric war" storyline (Castro, 2002; Leirner, 2020).

The terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, turned Washington's interest mainly to the Middle East, and drug trafficking in Latin America became a secondary concern (Vigevani and Cepaluni, 2011). The "asymmetric war" storyline lost influence, although it continues to be conveniently invoked when circumstances align.

In 2018, with Bolsonaro's election to the presidency, the Armed Forces re-emerged as a significant player in Brazilian politics. Bolsonaro, a former Army captain, garnered substantial support from this institution, including that of high-ranking generals, effectively leaving his controversial history in the institution behind. During his administration, a substantial number of military personnel were appointed to key positions in the executive branch, even surpassing the numbers seen during the military dictatorship (Godoy, 2021; Souza, 2021; Rocha, 2021).

The press referred to this group within the government as the "military wing", implying that the Armed Forces would provide a moderating counterbalance to the "ideological wing", more aligned with the extreme right's radical ideas. The "military wing" was thus viewed as a "guarantor" of the new administration, serving as an instrument to restrain the President's most extreme positions (Freixo, 2020).

However, this military nucleus was also undergoing a significant process of "ideologization", with a resurfacing of talk about the specter of communism and, consequently of the "revolutionary war" storyline, especially influenced by the extreme right in the US, often referred to as the "alt-right" (alternative right). The ideas of this group infiltrated Brazilian barracks through books like "The Gramscian Revolution in the

West", by General Sérgio Avellar Coutinho, inspired by the ideas of Olavo de Carvalho (Leirner, 2020; Pinto, 2021).

Carvalho, who died in January 2021, is often considered a "Brazilian version" of US strategist Steve Bannon, a prominent figure in the alt-right movement who played an important role in supporting Donald Trump's 2016 campaign for the US presidency. Drawing inspiration from Bannon's anti-globalist ideology and his aspiration to "regenerate the West", Carvalho had been denouncing the dangers of "globalism" and "cultural Marxism" since the late 1990s (Casarões and Flandes, 2019).

Although Bolsonaro had built his parliamentary career on a movement to improve wages for sergeants and low-ranking officers (Santos, 2021), he incorporated many global far-right movement theories to attract this public, and brought the specter of foreign greed over the Amazon back to the political debate, as seen in declarations made about the so-called "Triple A". In a tweet published September 17, 2015, Bolsonaro affirmed:

TRIPLE "A" - ANDES/AMAZON/ATLANTIC

A gigantic "ecological corridor" spanning 130 million hectares poses a new threat to Brazilian sovereignty.

Under the pretext of "combating climate change", global interests are concealed in the world's most affluent region.

During the Environmental Conference - COP 21/Paris/December 2015 - due to the "inability to manage" this region, Brazil could potentially have the northern portion of the Solimões/Amazon River basin "amputated" from its map (Bolsonaro, 2015, p. 1, free translation).

The "Triple A" was a proposal presented by anthropologist and environmentalist Martin von Hildebrand. This concept envisioned an ecological corridor stretching from the Andes Mountains to the Atlantic Ocean, passing through the Amazon. However, segments of the sovereignist discourse coalition utilized this proposal to resurface the discourse regarding the threat to national sovereignty over the Amazon. This is evident in Bolsonaro's tweet.

As shown, the discourse concerning defense of the Amazon has been serving a role akin to that of anti-communism in the past, creating storylines and keeping troops cohesive around the same goal (Penido; Barbosa and Kalil, 2022). The issue of Indigenous territories within the region plays a similar role in the sovereignist discourse, a storyline that we will address in the next section.

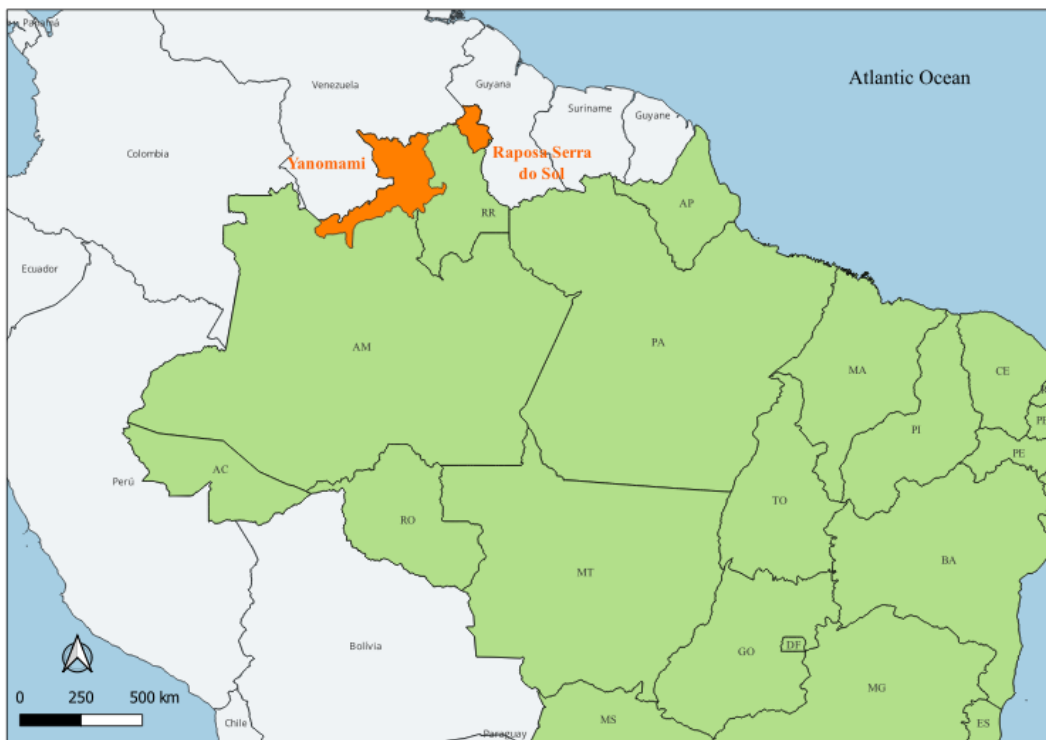
"A lot of land for few Indians"

The matter of Indigenous territories is another pivotal aspect of the sovereignist discourse, as demonstrated by the demarcation of the Yanomami and *Raposa Serra do Sol*

Indigenous Reserves. These territories are both located in border regions (see Figure 1). Accordingly, the sovereignist discourse coalition argues that the involvement of foreign nations and organizations in these reserves could potentially contribute to the emergence of separatist movements, uniting communities residing on opposite sides of the border, as do the Yanomami (Marques, 2007).

Figure 1

The Raposa Serra do Sol and Yanomami Territories



Source: Prepared by the authors, based on IBGE (2021).

In 1991, President Collor de Mello signed a law recognizing the Yanomami reserve, which covers 9.5 million hectares, running continuously along the border with Venezuela. This demarcation replaced Sarney's previous decree, which had envisaged a reserve containing nineteen disconnected territories. The demarcation was met with discontent from both the Armed Forces, who claimed it posed a threat to national security, and local elites, who were concerned about the potential loss of access to mineral and agricultural resources within this territory (Zhou, 2010; Hecht and Cockburn, 2010).

In 1993, a proposal was announced to establish another Indigenous reserve in the state of Roraima: the *Raposa Serra do Sol*. This reserve was formally demarcated during

Fernando Henrique Cardoso's presidency (1995-2002) and ratified in 2005 during Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva's government (2003-2010) in a context that involved a very fierce political and discursive dispute (Amorim; Peyerl and Santos, 2023).

In 2008, the Brazilian Supreme Court temporarily suspended the removal of non-Indigenous individuals, mainly rice farmers, from the area. However, in 2009, it decided that the reserve should occupy contiguous territory and that non-Indigenous peoples should be removed from the area. At the time, the governor of Roraima, José de Anchieta Junior (2007-2014), accused international non-governmental organizations (NGOs) of exploiting the Indigenous issue to take advantage of the Brazilian Amazon. He claimed that it was no coincidence that the demarcation was taking place in areas with significant gold reserves (Barbosa, 2015).

The mineral resources in these areas are often cited as evidence that the creation of Indigenous reserves serves vested interests (Marques, 2007). Emblematic of this was a statement made by Bolsonaro, as a presidential candidate, at the Hebraica Club in Rio de Janeiro on April 3, 2017. He claimed that wherever there is an Indigenous land, there is wealth beneath it. As Brazilian president he reiterated this assertion during his speech at the UN General Assembly in 2019.

The Indigenous peoples do not want to be poor land owners on top of rich lands. Especially the richest lands in the world. This is the case of the Yanomami and Raposa Serra do Sol reservations. On these reservations there is an abundance of gold, diamonds, uranium, niobium, and rare earth elements, among others (Bolsonaro, 2019, p. 4).

In April 2008, the commander of the Army in the Amazon region, General Augusto Heleno Pereira, criticized the size of the land allocated to the Raposa Serra do Sol reserve and stated that its proximity to the borders of Venezuela and Guyana threatened Brazilian security. Other senior members of the armed forces also publicly expressed their dissatisfaction with the demarcation of the Indigenous territory.

According to Leirner (2020), these statements inaugurated a new pattern in the Armed Forces' behavior in Brazil since re-democratization. The military gradually resumed a decisive role in the political scenario, providing a new impetus to the sovereignist discourse. Bolsonaro's rise to the presidency in 2019 consolidated the military's presence in politics and led them to embrace new storylines, such as "globalism" and "climatism", which will be explored in the next section.

"Globalism" and "Climatism"

Bolsonaro's 2018 election campaign was based on a radical right platform that combined economic liberalism and social conservatism (Casarões, 2020). In terms of the

environmental agenda, he was the first president since re-democratization to clearly favor reducing environmental protections (Rocha, 2021; Capobianco, 2021).

On December 1, 2018, President Bolsonaro told Army cadets at a graduation ceremony at the *Academia Militar das Agulhas Negras* (AMAN): “Ibama [the Brazilian Institute of the Environment] fines rural people at an industrial scale. We cannot have people in the government mistreating productive farmers. These shenanigans are about to end”. (Bolsonaro, 2018, p. 13).

Bolsonaro’s statements against environmental protection laws earned him the support of sectors that were dissatisfied with what they perceived as the exaggerated environmentalist agenda imposed on Brazil by international movements and institutions. The military was captivated by the strong sovereignist tone of Bolsonaro’s declarations, especially concerning the Amazon, along with his anti-communist rhetoric, conservative agenda, and support for “law and order” policies (Pinto, 2021).

In 2019, Ricardo Salles, Bolsonaro’s Minister of the Environment, tried to change the structure of the Amazon Fund, which had been established in 2008 to receive donations from developed countries and other entities for environmental protection actions in the Amazon.

Salles extinguished the councils that managed the donations and proposed that the funds be used to compensate rural landowners who were removed from conservation areas, even if their lands were illegally occupied. The result was the suspension of contributions (Viola and Gonçalves, 2019), but the Bolsonaro administration made no efforts to attract new donations.

On August 11, 2019, Bolsonaro made the following declaration to the press regarding Germany, one of the Fund’s donors: “They can use this money as they see fit. Brazil doesn’t need it” (Bolsonaro, 2019: para. 1). On August 14, 2019, he said: “I would like to send a message to dear Mrs. Angela Merkel, who suspended \$80 million for the Amazon. Take this money and reforest Germany, ok? They need it much more there than here” (Bolsonaro, 2019: para. 3, free translation).

These statements make it clear that the Bolsonaro administration understood that permitting foreign powers to intervene in the Amazon through financial donations implied a loss of sovereignty. The underlying belief was that international actors wanted to assume indirect control over the forest. As mentioned, this is a fundamental principle of the sovereignist discourse and aligns with what has more recently been referred to as “Globalism” and “Climatism”.

The term “Globalism” can be defined as the manipulation or control of international organizations by vested interests. These interests can range from the world’s financial elite to so-called “cultural Marxism”, and their purported efforts to undermine conservative values such as the traditional family, religion, and national identity. Consequently, the objective of Globalism is to impose its particular set of values upon sovereign nations. “Climatism”, in turn, is regarded as a facet of “Globalism” and is associated with climate

alarmism. This phenomenon would be coordinated by institutions such as the UN and its affiliated bodies, the European Union, and international NGOs (Casarões and Flemes, 2019; Sagres, 2022).

Ernesto Araújo, Minister of Foreign Affairs in the Bolsonaro administration, said in a speech at the Heritage Foundation in Washington on September 11, 2019, "Globalism" and "Climatism" function as follows:

Today, I think globalism works through three main instruments. One is climate change ideology, or "climatism"—to use another word distinct from climate change itself as a natural phenomenon scientifically observable. Another is gender ideology, and another is what some people call oikophobia, to distinguish from xenophobia: it's the hatred of one's own nation and, as a part of that, the claim to a borderless world. But let's concentrate on what is more pressing today, I think, of those, which is climatism or climate change ideology. Just to insist, one thing is what I call climatism, the other is climate change (Araújo, 2019, p. 385).

In alignment with this perspective, the report titled *Projeto de Nação - Brasil em 2035* (Nation Project – Brazil in 2035), issued in 2022 and authored by the Sagres, General Villas Bôas, and Federalista institutes (all linked to the Armed Forces), addresses "Globalism" and "Climatism" as follows:

Currently in Brazil, it is evident that certain national entities are joining forces with the globalist movement, with the support of significant international actors, in an attempt to interfere in the decisions of rulers and legislators. Their goal is to influence policies that grant benefits to certain minorities at the expense of the majority of the population, interfere with economic development under the guise of environmentalism, and provoke crises that weaken the nation's development efforts rather than serving the necessary preservation of nature (Sagres, 2022, p. 12, free translation).

The report sought to craft scenarios for Brazil's future, scrutinizing how to attain "national objectives" amidst varying geopolitical conditions. Nevertheless, despite its claim to be a scenario-based endeavor, it presented only one scenario, the "focus scenario", without explaining which variables were considered in its selection (Janot et al., 2022).

Moreover, the report presents the idea that preventing external interference in the Brazilian Amazon requires the revival of substantial mining and agricultural initiatives in the region. This, according to the report, could help to substantively inhabit the territory, echoing the longstanding approach to addressing regional challenges that continues to shape the predominant perspective on resolving these issues (Soares, 2021).

For years, the Brazilian military has considered itself the true guardian of the Amazon rainforest and a civilizing agent for its inhabitants. According to this belief,

Indigenous peoples are unable to transcend their transitory condition between barbarism and civilization. As a result, the state apparatus should guide them towards a complete adherence to capitalism, which entails the commercialization or economic exploitation of their lands (Domingos Neto and Moreira, 2021).

Another excerpt from Bolsonaro's statements at the AMAN ceremony on December 1, 2018, unequivocally reflects this idea: "I want the well-being of the Indigenous people; I want to integrate them into society. Our project for Indigenous people is to make them equal to us. They have the same needs as us" (Bolsonaro, 2018, para. 7, free translation).

In September 2019, in the wake of widespread criticism of the substantial rise in the number of fires in the Amazon, associated to "Fire Day"⁷, Bolsonaro transferred the responsibility for fire-fighting operations in the region to the Armed Forces, falling under the authority of the Council of the Amazon, presided over by Vice President General Hamilton Mourão. In line with the tenets of the sovereignist discourse, for the Bolsonaro administration, all issues related to the protection of the Amazon Forest should be managed by the Armed Forces, regardless of the specificity of each problem and situation.

When Bolsonaro assumed office in 2019, he placed military personnel in key positions of environmental protection agencies such as Ibama and the *Instituto Chico Mendes de Conservação da Biodiversidade* (ICMBio). During this period, a deeply ingrained storyline resurfaced about the Brazilian Armed Forces, epitomized by the saying "from pin to rocket". It implies that the Armed Forces have the ability to solve any problem, regardless of its complexity, ranging from public security in major cities to overseeing the scrutiny of electronic ballot boxes. Additionally, due to their presumed strong sense of patriotism, they would be immune to corruption (Leirner, 2020; Penido and Kalil, 2021; Santos, 2021).

However, the dismantling of oversight bodies connected to the Ministry of Environment had devastating consequences and was one of the main factors contributing to the ineffectiveness of military efforts to swiftly combat the forest fires (McCoy and Traiano, 2021).

"Fire Day" generated a new worldwide commotion about deforestation in the Amazon. Statements made by international leaders - such as one from French President Emmanuel Macron, who two days before the official start of a G7 summit in Biarritz, on August 26, 2019, emphasized that the fires amounted to an international crisis and insisted that it should be at the top of the meeting's agenda - rallied the sovereignist discourse coalition and rekindled its discourse.

⁷ "Fire Day" on August 10, 2019, was an orchestrated event to set fires in different areas of the forest to show support for Bolsonaro's policies for the region. The case is still under investigation by the Federal Police (Dias, 2019). It is worth noting that on August 22, 2022, the number of fires was even higher than in 2019.

Bolsonaro accused the French president of having a "colonial mentality" and urged him not to interfere in Brazil's internal affairs, a message that he reiterated during the 2019 UN General Assembly:

Problems, any country has them. However, the sensationalist attacks we have suffered from a large portion of the international media due to the fires in the Amazon have awakened our patriotic feeling. It is a fallacy to say that the Amazon is the heritage of humanity and a misconception, as scientists say, to say our forest is the lungs of the world. Availing themselves of such fallacies, one or another country, instead of assisting, fell in with the press's lies and behaved disrespectfully, with a colonialist spirit. They questioned that which is most sacred to us: our sovereignty! (Bolsonaro, 2018, p. 3).

During the fires, several countries and international institutions offered logistical and financial support. The G7 offered \$20 million in emergency aid. This and other proposals were summarily rejected by the Brazilian government (Exame, 2019). According to the perspective of the sovereignist coalition, acceptance of these contributions would amount to acknowledging the nation's inability to control its own territory, thus contradicting a central principle of the sovereignist discourse.

As observed, although storylines such as "Globalism" and "Climatism" are relatively recent, garnering greater attention in global public opinion with the rise of far-right governments, they have managed to reignite the sovereignist discourse in Brazil, through the reincorporation of elements from the past.

False Controversies: Science and the Anti-Environmental Discourse

To this day, these storylines continue to serve as inspiration for Brazilian political leaders to neglect commitments to reduce deforestation and implement policies that promote sustainable use of the Amazon forest. They are based on false dichotomies between sovereignty, economic growth, social justice, and environmental preservation. These storylines are not supported by scientific evidence or facts, but rather by what can be termed as "pseudo-facts" (Rajão et al., 2022), which may gain credibility due to the reputation of the source (Hajer, 2000; Bomberg, 2015).

Although accusations of data discrepancies or complaints about the release of negative data were made under previous administrations, Bolsonaro's tenure saw a wholesale discursive positioning of environmental science as a conspiracy, paving the way for brazen lies and public confusion by misusing scientific credentials, discrediting data, and creating false controversies (Rajão et al., 2022; Coates and Sandroni, 2023).

In this regard, the contrast between the performance of two important federal agencies during his administration INPE and Embrapa, is instructive. INPE is an acronym

for the *Instituto Nacional de Pesquisas Espaciais*, Brazil's National Spatial Research Institute. Since 1988, it has monitored hotspots in the region through the Brazilian Amazon Forest Satellite Monitoring Program (PRODES). In August 2019, despite his best efforts, Bolsonaro could not hide INPE's data on the increase in deforestation in the Amazon. He attacked the institute, claiming it was publishing false data and threatened to hire a private company to monitor the Amazon. He also pressured the Ministry of Science, Technology and Innovation to fire the agency's director general, Ricardo Galvão (Capobianco, 2021).

In November 2021, during an event with investors in Dubai, Bolsonaro claimed that the Amazon forest had been untouched since the arrival of Pedro Álvares Cabral in 1500, contradicting deforestation data. He also denied the occurrence of fires, despite PRODES' satellite images. "We want you to really get to know Brazil, and a trip, a tour of the Amazon is fantastic, not least so that you can see that our Amazon, being a rainforest, doesn't catch fire", he said at the event. "The Amazon is a [national] heritage, the Amazon is Brazilian, and you'll be there to prove it and really bring a picture that matches reality. The attacks Brazil suffers when it comes to the Amazon are not fair". (Bolsonaro, 2021, p. 1, free translation).

Between August 2020 and July 2021, 13,235 square kilometers of forest were destroyed in the Amazon, reaching a fifteen-year high (MCTI, 2021), showing that Bolsonaro's statements in Dubai had no scientific basis. Almost all of the fires in the Amazon are man-made. At the same event, Bolsonaro stated that:

We have one of the most thriving agricultural sectors in the world. We feed more than 1 billion people around the world. We know our responsibility. Everyone knows that any country seeks food security. Brazil's doors are open to businesses focused on agriculture" (Bolsonaro, 2021, p. 1, free translation).

The storyline that Brazilian agricultural production is essential for feeding the world, often described with terms like "the world's breadbasket" or "the world's farm" (Amorim; Peyerl and Santos, 2023), supports the notion that clearing forests for farming is justified in the name of a noble cause: global food security. As noted by Rajão et al. (2022), Bolsonaro's views on agriculture and farming production in Brazil are heavily supported by research conducted by Embrapa Territorial, a division of the Brazilian Agricultural Research Corporation (*Empresa Brasileira de Pesquisa Agropecuária*), a federal agricultural research and development agency.

As have other Embrapa researchers on the fringes of scientific opinion (Rajão et al., 2022; Coates and Sandroni, 2023), a study published by Contini and Aragão (2021) caused controversy at the time of its publication because of the methodology used. According to their findings, based on 2020 data, Brazilian agriculture fed approximately 10 percent of the world's population – equivalent to 772.6 million people, more than 500 million outside Brazil. The study assumed that the entire Brazilian population has a

satisfactory diet, a claim refuted by several reports (e.g., Rede PENSSAN). It also assumed similar food consumption levels worldwide.

The study's conclusion was based on the fact that Brazil produces approximately 10 percent of the world's grains (including soybeans, corn, wheat, barley, and rice), suggesting the country could potentially feed a proportionate share of the global population. However, as we have seen, this analysis overlooked factors such as differences in consumption, losses along production chains, and food waste (Pomar, 2021; Copelli, 2021; Amorim; Peyerl and Santos, 2023).

These types of publications, coming from prestigious applied research institutes such as Embrapa, have contributed to the argument that global population growth requires the expansion of Brazilian agriculture (Embrapa, 2018; Rodrigues, 2018; Giacobbo and Frota, 2021), which has gained considerable traction given that the agribusiness caucus in the Brazilian Congress has a strong majority, even under the new government that took office in 2023 (Coates and Sandroni, 2023).

Conclusion

In this article we have identified four storylines that have fed the sovereignist discourse in Brazil throughout history: "Integrate not to Deliver"; "The Lungs of the Earth"; "Revolutionary Wars and Asymmetric Wars"; "A lot of land for few Indians"; and "Globalism" and "Climatism". Under the storyline of "integrate so as not to deliver", the Brazilian state, during the military dictatorship, promoted a rapid occupation of the Amazonian region, often granting concessions to foreign corporations, some of them associated with Brazilian capital.

Regarding the "The Lungs of the Earth" storyline, successive Brazilian administrations have consistently sought to counter this understanding, arguing that it undermines the country's right to exploit its natural resources autonomously. We also saw, throughout the article, how the storyline of "Asymmetric Wars" was replaced by that of "Revolutionary War", which implied that traditional principles of Brazilian foreign policy - such as autonomy and the desire to exercise the role of regional power in South America - were suppressed in favor of other agendas.

The issue of Indigenous territories is another key aspect of the sovereignist discourse, encapsulated in the storyline of "A lot of land for few Indians". The sovereignist discourse coalition argues that foreign involvement in the demarcation of Indigenous reserves, such as the Yanomami and *Raposa Serra do Sol*, could potentially fuel separatist movements. Regarding the "Globalism" and "Climatism" storylines, they gained prominence during Bolsonaro's administration, with his rejection of foreign aid for Amazon conservation efforts, asserting that it threatened national sovereignty.

As shown, according to the sovereignty discourse, criticism of the Amazon's socio-environmental challenges is seen as a pretext to challenge Brazil's sovereignty over the

forest, paving the way for its internationalization and transforming it into a global public good. The incorporation of this discourse by a large portion of the Brazilian population has enabled different governments to prioritize the management of the region primarily through the lens of geopolitical interests and national security concerns.

This does not mean that storylines lack any foundation. They are based on historical facts that tend to be exaggerated. They are repeated throughout history, usually imprecisely or poorly substantiated, to give cohesion and identity to the discourse coalition and legitimize specific political projects. This has resulted in the neglect or underemphasis of the socio-environmental issues faced by the Amazon region. By focusing on geopolitical and security aspects, this discourse overshadows the urgent need to effectively address the region's socio-environmental challenges.

Additionally, it is important to highlight that these are not the only discourses, storylines and discourse coalitions that explain Brazilian policies for the Amazon. We hope that further research will expand this study to include other discursive elements and show how they have also guided governmental policies for the region. By incorporating different perspectives, we can gain a more comprehensive understanding of the complex dynamics influencing policies towards the tropical forest, leading to new approaches that foster balancing environmental preservation and socioeconomic development for local people.

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Resumo

A Amazônia brasileira e o discurso soberanista: velhas e novas linhas narrativas

Neste artigo, investigamos o discurso soberanista brasileiro sobre a Amazônia, analisando como ele reflete e molda as políticas do Estado brasileiro para a região. Para isso, utilizamos a Análise de Conteúdo e a Análise do Discurso (particularmente a Abordagem Argumentativa desenvolvida por Maarten Hajer), a fim de verificar declarações sobre a Amazônia proferidas por representantes brasileiros no período de 1972 a 2021. Essa combinação metodológica possibilitou a identificação das principais linhas narrativas que contribuíram para legitimar o discurso soberanista, o qual se fundamenta em uma ameaça estrangeira recorrente à floresta. Concluímos que a incorporação desse discurso por diferentes grupos sociais permitiu que sucessivos governos priorizassem interesses geopolíticos e de segurança nacional na formulação de políticas para região, frequentemente em detrimento de problemas socioambientais locais.

Palavras-chave: Análise do Discurso; Análise de Conteúdo; linhas narrativas; coalizões discursivas; Amazônia brasileira

Resumen

La Amazonia brasileña y el discurso soberanista: antiguas y nuevas líneas argumentativas

En este artículo, investigamos el discurso soberanista brasileño sobre la Amazonia, analizando cómo refleja y moldea las políticas ambientales de la región. Para lograrlo, utilizamos el Análisis de Contenido y el Análisis del Discurso, en particular, el Enfoque Argumentativo desarrollado por Maarten Hajer, para examinar las declaraciones sobre la Amazonia hechas por representantes brasileños desde 1972 hasta 2021. Esta combinación metodológica nos permitió identificar las principales líneas argumentativas que contribuyeron a legitimar el discurso soberanista, el cual se basa en la recurrente amenaza extranjera a la selva. Concluimos que la adopción de este discurso por parte de diversos grupos sociales permitió que gobiernos sucesivos priorizaran intereses geopolíticos y de seguridad nacional en la formulación de políticas para la región, a menudo a expensas de las cuestiones socioambientales locales.

Palabras-clave: Análisis de Contenido; Análisis del Discurso; líneas argumentativas; coaliciones discursivas; Amazonia brasileña

Résumé

L'Amazonie brésilienne et le discours souverainiste : anciennes et nouvelles lignes argumentatives

Dans cet article, nous avons examiné le discours souverainiste brésilien sur l'Amazonie, en analysant comment il reflète et façonne les politiques environnementales de la région. Pour ce faire, nous avons utilisé l'Analyse de contenu et l'Analyse du discours (notamment l'Approche argumentative développée par Maarten Hajer) pour examiner les déclarations sur l'Amazonie faites par des représentants brésiliens de 1972 à 2021. Cette combinaison méthodologique a permis l'identification des principales lignes argumentatives qui ont contribué à légitimer le discours souverainiste, ancré dans une menace étrangère récurrente envers la forêt. Nous concluons que l'incorporation de ce discours par différents groupes sociaux a permis aux gouvernements successifs de prioriser les intérêts géopolitiques et la sécurité nationale dans l'élaboration des politiques pour la région, souvent au détriment des

problématiques socio-environnementales locales.

Mots-clés : Analyse du discours; Analyse de contenu; lignes argumentatives; coalitions discursives; Amazonie brésilienne

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