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On the road of Transamazônica (BR 230), territory and occupation of Amazon: an overview of two influenced cities – Balsas (Maranhão State) (MA) and Medicilândia (Pará State) (PA¹)

Doctor Nilson Cesar Fraga

Professor at Department of Geosciences of the State University of Londrina and in the Geography Post-graduation Program of the Federal University of Paraná. POBOX 6001, *Campus Universitário*, Zip Code: 86051-990, Londrina, Paraná, Brasil **E-mail:** nilsoncesarfraga@hotmail.com

Graduate student in International Relations Thiago de Oliveira Gonçalves

Scientific initiation fellow of the National Foundation of Development of Private Higher Education – FUNADESP. Academician of the International Relations Course of Curitiba University Centre – UNICURITIBA. POBOX 240, Rua Cícero Vieira Torres, Zip Code: 84.200-000, Jaguariaíva, Paraná, Brasil. **E-mail:** jim.thiago@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

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This work aims to associate the discussion of the concept of territory and also the phenomenon of the Amazon occupation. The dynamics of territorial occupation of the cities of Balsas (MA) and Medicilândia (PA), both cities that were strongly influenced and directly linked to the establishment of BR-230 (that is called Transamazônica) in the region, what is discussed under the Political Geography's perspective. From this holistic apprehension of the Amazon's occupation phenomenon some observations are pointed out regarding to the economic, social, political and environmental consequences of these processes that mark the cities net in the whole regional and even national road network.

¹ (MA) corresponds to Maranhão and (PA) corresponds to Pará, both are different federated states in the Brazilian Amazon. The states are respectively located in the Northeast and North regions of Brazil.

PALAVRAS-CHAVES:

Território
Ocupação
Amazônia
Balsas (MA)
Medicilândia (PA)

RESUMO – NA ROTA DA TRANSAMAZÔNICA (BR-230), TERRITÓRIO E OCUPAÇÃO DA AMAZÔNIA – A VISÃO DE DUAS CIDADES INFLUENCIADAS – BALSAS (MA) E MEDICILÂNDIA (PA). Este trabalho visa associar a discussão sobre o conceito de território e o fenômeno da ocupação da Amazônia. Nele as dinâmicas de ocupação territorial de Balsas (MA) e de Medicilândia (PA), ambas cidades fortemente influenciadas e diretamente ligadas à instalação da BR-230 (Transamazônica) na região, são discutidas sob o olhar da Geografia Política. Partindo desta apreensão holística do fenômeno da ocupação amazônica são feitas algumas observações a respeito das conseqüências econômicas, sociais, políticas e ambientais de tais processos que marcam a rede das cidades no conjunto da rede viária regional e, inclusive, nacional.

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“The different kinds of forests generate various influences over the peoples’ life... separating people in small groups, don’t permit the formation of a strong political organism, and the traffic difficulties, obstruct agriculture’s development.”(RATZEL apud Souza, 2007, p. 199)²

1. Introduction

In this study a discussion that associates the Territory and Amazon’s occupation is performed, with emphasis in the power relations impregnated in the formation of two cities directly linked to the establishment of BR–230 (the “Transamazônica”). In order to do so, the influence of the actors involved in this process ought to be considered, as well as the discussion of the concept of territory, wich “tries to answer to the problematic of the relation between the society and its space (EDUARDO, 2006, p. 174), and its evolution in order to adapt it to the complex Amazonian reality. Therefore, is conceived a brief analytical addressing about the occupation dilemmas of the cities of Balsas and Medicilândia, two disparate pieces of the Amazonian reality³. This overview attempts to expose the antagonisms – or negligence – of the

² SOUZA, Rita de Cássia M., Geopolitics and territorial formation in Brazil. In: **Contributions to the history and to the epistemology of Geographies**, VITTE, Antônio Carlos (org.). Rio de Janeiro: Bertrand Brasil, 2007.

³ Even when the cities share a common road network!

territorial planning policies in Brazil, implanted by the iron fist of the military governments and perpetrated until today by the nonsense of the power centers.

2. The territory and the power nets

In the last decades occurred the dynamization of the nets of production and transmission of capital, making feasible the “moments convergence” all over the world and the “technical integration” of all the sectors inserted in this logic. These particular facts originated several debates about phenomena like the partitioning of the territories or their fragmentation. This kind of discussion considers varied regionalisms and diverse power poles, which have their inter-relationships expressed in territorial occupation. In times of “refusing the general and valorization of the instant and local”⁴, the attempt to adapt the territory concept to a geographic analysis more and more unbound to the limitations of the classical definitions shows itself with a remarkable importance. Following this bias, a brief resumption of the classical analysis perspective of the Political Geography, highlighting the assertives of Friedrich Ratzel is appropriate.

Márcio Freitas Eduardo infers that the essentially inductive approach made by Ratzel on a trial to create a science to join “the search for general formulations about humanity dynamics” was restricted to the State role in the territorial definition/formation/occupation. The geopolitical only conceived the territory as a “synonym of earth”; more than this, it would be “an eminently political dimension whose epicenter of power, whose hegemony and sovereignty, would reveal themselves in the picture of Nation-State in its full form”⁵.

There is a need to untie Political Geography from the ropes of the Nation-State aiming to obtain an elucidative panorama of the territory concept. In this debate the territory, although not retaining itself only to the state actions, may be shown as “a political excellence space, the field of the idea and the action of the trumps of power and dominance” (FRAGA, 2007, p. 26).

Despite being a central concept in Geography, Rogério Haesbaert apud Fraga recognizes it as a common point of current discussion in many Human Sciences, because it refers to human spatiality. This author gives examples of interpretation of the concept in Political Sciences “referring to the relations space-power or legal-political”; also to the territory as production basis in the analysis made by the Economy; the increased emphasis on the study of the meaning systems, that diverge in each ethnicity, influencing the territory's conception in Anthropology; and yet is exposed the sociologic bias, that considers its strength in the social relations; and even a psychological approach (FRAGA, 2007, p. 17-18).

The territory is the place of the “There’s folks here!”⁶, where the “being-there” is manifested. It is marked by the regionalisms and “its formation is always a result of competitions and draws on the construction of a produced space”⁷. As shown by Milton Santos apud Fraga⁸ “the territory is alive, marked by the conflicts and

⁴ In: BECKER, Bertha K., **Political Geography and Territory Gestion in the threshold of XXI century – a representation from the Brasil**. R. Brás Geogr., Rio de Janeiro, 53(3): 169-182, jul./set. 1991.

⁵ See EDUARDO, M. F. (**op. cit p. 180-181**), where the author remembers the condition of Ratzel's studies (that he worked for the German State of his age, that was in phase of territorial definition and affirmation of its capitalist production basis).

⁶ SILVA, Cleide Helena Prudêncio, **The reorganization of the territory in the Ocidental Amazon. The Acre state's issue – Brasil**. *Diez años de cambios en el Mundo, en la Geografía y en las Ciencias Sociales, 1999-2008. Actas del X Coloquio Internacional de Geocritica*, Universidad de Barcelona, 26-30 de mayo de 2008. [HTTP://www.ub.es/geocrit/-xcol/146.htm](http://www.ub.es/geocrit/-xcol/146.htm). This term appears in the document of foundation of the National Council of Rubber Tappers.

⁷ *Idem*.

⁸ (p. 20).

cooperation, agreements and negotiations, reveals the past and present actions and that is marked by the total experience of space” – that is the human manifestation over a physical basis. Consequently, the conception of this “stage of all human passions” should respect the plurality of actors that launch their respective works in space and, there, produce their representations.

According to Claude Raffestin, “any project that is expressed by a representation reveals the desired image of a territory, of a place of relations” So, intentions are conceived for the spatial reality and an actor, when territorializing itself, applies its own rationality in the space. Following this author’s line it is perceived that

“The notion of territory expresses the relation maintained by a group with a portion of the space, every actor sees and represents itself as a center and as many territorial images can be written as different objectives may exist [...]”⁹.

Thus, actors/groups, with varied values and methods, will shock on the attempt to print their own territoriality, enforcing their interests of appropriation of the spatial resources.

Santos shows his point about this:

“The territory of the group is conceived as a terrain in which the rules that underlie the identity enjoy an absolute and undisputable validity. The predominance of the collective level is total, the opposition and the differentiation are established onto the image of someone else, that is external to the group, space as conflicts’ object, because building a territory of a group’s dominion means the affirmation of its differences over the others”.¹⁰

Raffestin infers that “each territorial system segregates its own territoriality, lived by the individuals and by society”. The group or system that possesses a more stable political condition will have more chances of managing the territory. Until recently, this greatest agent of territorial planning was the Nation-State in its best form, capable of exercising jurisdiction in almost every issue of its lived space, mediating struggles between local organizations.

Nowadays, when the flows of trade and capital exceed state borders, “political and economic textures” as writes Raffestin, the territorial selectivity according to external demands is a fact. The wealth situated in the territory is shown as a constant and the different politic actors are on a fight to enforce their own project, be them the organized civil society, a cultural secular community searching its rights and even the state diffused in the middle of this battle.

This plurality of actors seeking to be inserted on the nets, in order to build/defend its place gives subside to describe the territory as the space shaped by the power relations and, once that where lies power lies resistance, marked by the continuous fight.

The occupation of Amazon: a secular phenomenon

⁹ RAFFESTIN, Claude, **For a Geography of Power**, São Paulo, Ática, 1993.

¹⁰ SANTOS, Milton. “**The Money and the Territory**”. Transcription of the Conference of i da Conference inauguration of the Mastership in Geography, Universidade Federal Fluminense and opening of the school year 1999, issued on 15 / 3. In: GEOgraphia, Ano 1, n^o 1. Niterói: Post-graduate in Geography of Federal Fluminense University, 1999 (p. 7).

The future of Amazon was speculated since when Euclides da Cunha, for his noble ambitions to remove the Amazon of the “margins of history”, ventured into the wild rainforest where he found

“the man inferiorized upon the portentous nature and the earth as an enemy to beat, the formation of a regional inferiority feeling, socially, economically and culturally, given the conditions of the abject insertion, ‘different’ of the Amazon on the Brazilian civilization”¹¹;

As in this excerpt of the author of “Os Sertões”: “where, sooner or later, will be concentrated the civilization of the globe [...] by the centrifugal expansion of its own movement”¹².

The solidity of this observation in that moment about an amazonian territory just annexed and yet with a matrix of border, marked by the resourcefulness in the dealing of the “Rio Branco diplomatic era” is amazing. The territorial width of Amazon was bargained – and obtained at last - by the use of the principle of effective occupation (*uti possidetis*) associated to the setting of the Amazon river as a “natural border of the brazilian territory, that could obstruct the bids of expansion of Spain”, consolidating the “Brazil-island” and creating “two Brazils”, one of them was the effectively occupied and the other this still unknown territory, the Amazon.¹³

Euclides da Cunha did many observations about the approaches with the neighbor nations in order to explore the possibility of reaching the Pacific Ocean, even by a multimodal transport axis.¹⁴ However, there’s a need to bring this debate about the “huge green heart of the Earth” to the contemporaneity – how today’s condition of the Amazon was achieved?

Since 1930 Everardo Backheuser tries to refuse the european influence attempting to establish a genuine brazilian geopolitical thinking and dissolve the ethnocentric judgements of the europeans about the tropical jungle. After the World War and with the coming of the Superior School of War, the Military sector of the society could develop the geopolitical action parameters of the State that would be used during the military period – with emphasis in the binomial “security and development”.

From 1964 to 1985, with the power centralized on the hands of the federal executive power “the military geopolitical project became feasible [...] the non-integrated territory is the scope of the territorial policies of the authoritarian State”. As says Souza (op. cit, p.189) “Brazil’s emerging power is shown as possible”, from this moment the military could realize the march of Brazil towards the west territory.

Then, the project of Brazil’s modernization was structured, based on a National Security Doctrine, a scientific plan’s based discourse. The action in Amazon was preconized. Come the slogans: “integrate, not surrender”, “an earth without men for

¹¹ RAMON, Ieda Valquíria Magalhães, **The Amazon and the Pacific in Euclides da Cunha**: in the Center of History? 2005. Tese (Master degree in Sociology) – Universidade Estadual Paulista, Araraquara, 2005. p. 50. And also “Green hell”.

¹² (Idem., p. 15)

¹³ This whole discussion about the origin of the brazilian borders is developed by Demétrio Magnóli em MAGNÓLI, Demétrio. **The body of the Fatherland**:. Geographical imagination and Foreign Policy in Brazil (1808-1912). São Paulo: Ed. da Unesp; Moderna, 1997; the other rivers taken as natural borders were the Silver (Rio de la Plata) and the Paraguay. It is interesting to cruise the references and notice that Euclides da Cunha, envoy of the Rio Branco's baron to the state of Acre to Seal the Petrópolis Treaty, had a particular view of the region. He approaches the work of the tapper as if was Sisyphus', the tents and roads surrounding the plantation "in the manner of twisted tentacles of an octopus unreasonable. It is the monstrous and expressive image of a society that busies itself tortured in those parts" - is ironic to win a diplomatic negotiation by a principle of effective occupation of the territory when they had this view of the channels of access to this territory and its occupants.

¹⁴ As shows Ieda Valquíria Magalhães Ramon (p. 92).

men without earth”, the ideal of fighting the indolence and the laziness of the hillbilly” and occupy this “demographic empty, searching the nation’s growth”.

Under these conditions happened the pharaonic measures as the stimulus for the massive migration of people toward the North of the country (at about 2 million), the ambitious project of encrusting of an Transamazônica highway (BR-230) in the middle of the jungle, the building of a Cuiabá-Santarém highway (BR-163), of a Belém-Brasília highway (BR-010), of a Pará-Maranhão highway (BR-316)¹⁵ – it’s the exhibition of the opulence of a dictatorship.

In a show up of State’s power that can even be faced as *ratzelian*, imposing “orders in a top-down scheme and with no negotiation, a centralizing management that entails a social and ecological disorder that persists until today”¹⁶. Since then, the Amazon is eminently urbanized, an “urbanized forest” as Bertha Becker says.

Becker remarks to the fails of this enterprise when infers that:

“The geopolitical project tried to complete the territorial project extending the borders beyond its power to maintain and control them. Thus, the territory was instrument of the consolidation and growing of the State, but also of its vulnerability expressed in the fragmentation of the territory.”¹⁷

Aldomar Ruckert, when analyzing the contemporaneity of the brazilian territorial planning¹⁸, explicit the absence of an adequate geopolitical thought used in an adventure as the Transamazonica and links the rupture with this kind of thinking with the facing of the macroeconomic crisis of the developmentist State in the end of the 80’s. Then, with the flexibilization of capitals becoming ordinary, occurs the subordinated insertion of the periferic national territories in the finance globalization process. The author continues and exposes a panel with the conditions of Amazon today, which possesses territorialized systems of production working for the interest of capitals that have no obligations with the places – “a territory of Money and fragmentation”.

Milton Santos complements: “when the presence of the public power in the traffic system isn’t enough, the possession of the fix and the fluxes pass to the trade dominium in its quantity and frequency”. Appear “new territorialities referred to the spatiality of the capitalist system” (Becker, 1991, p. 170).

What is the vision of today’s amazonic territory? A space marked by the selectivity of territories according to external demands – “in Brazil, the territory logistics is turned to the exportation under the command of the private sector” (Becker apud Ruckert, p. 5). The strait relation between the transport services and the agroindustrial production is identified, that Territorial Division of Work imprint contrasts and presents “real risks of internal disaggregation”. Once that

“the places that have wealth and technology tend to be managed by hegemonic powers of the corporate interests in experiences of development in which the local power won’t be necessarily the synonym of local government.” (Ruckert, p. 3)

¹⁵ In CHAVES, Ernani. **On life’s Road: the transa-amazônica of Paula Sampaio**. Cinética, vol. 1, 2007.

¹⁶ BECKER, (op.cit, p.169)

¹⁷ (*Idem.*)

¹⁸ RUCKERT, Aldomar, **The National Policy of Territorial Planning, Brasil. The Construction of Contemporary Territorial Policy..** Revista Electronica de Geografia y Ciencias Sociales – Universidade de Barcelona, 2007.

The belief on the existence of a territorial planning that fits the social and economic Brazilian reality is undermined when it is noticed that the elaboration of these planning schemes occurred only 15 years after the promulgation of the 1988's Federal Constitution (Idem). There are many actors in the amazonian territory, what makes difficult for the state to act as an hegemonic power in order to rule the social relations *in loco*.

The result of these arbitrary policies, charged with a single thought¹⁹ was a

“National integration project that entailed social and environmental perversities. But with blood, sweat and tears the positive sum of this process should be recognized, because its fruits are the elements in witch the region counts for its development. And they can't be forgotten.”²⁰

Bertha Becker elucidates about the current policy that involves this territory. Based on the easy accessibility to the flux and information nets, many actors try to interfere in this territory's management, everyone fights to take part on the construction (or deconstruction) of tomorrow's Amazon. Bertha Becker claims for the need of developing policies and basic strategies as a worthy budget to the Amazon and, so, calls for the attention of the State representatives, of the governments, to apply their efforts in the region to “compatibilize the economic growth with social inclusion and the preservation of the natural resources”.

In its construction, this project should respect the interests of the minorities, our traditional communities or would it have end in the same blunder of establishing the same standard for “different geopolitical projects”²¹. That would engender a collective action in order to the enjoy maximum possibilities of its hidric reserves, the biotechnological potential, the non-predatory expansion of the agro-frontiers, a push in the Latin American integration as well as its potential to be a pole of production of durable goods.

It is not only about one more obsolete regionalism, but also the desire expressed on the general lines of a strategy to guarantee the brazilian State autonomy upon its territory, against the hegemony of the rich countries²² in the nets of power, a serious political activity, able to show the world the capacity of taking care of what belongs to Brazil – never discarding the international cooperation, only putting the correct efforts in the right places.

Ignacy Sachs agrees with Becker's analysis:

“We're all amazonians, without justifying the internationalization of Amazon. On the contrary, the future of of Amazon is responsibility and, I'd say, a privilege of the brazilian nation. In its own interest and of all mankind.”²³.

¹⁹ No respect with the cultural and biological diversity of Amazon, not considering the specific place.

²⁰ BECKER, Bertha K., **Amazon's Geopolitic**, Conference of the Month Institute of High Studies of the University of São Paulo - USP, april, 27, 2004.(p. 73).

²¹ BECKER, Bertha K. (2004,op. cit., p. 80-81).

²² Which, by the way, have turned their ecology into their economy, as says professor George Pring in BESTER, Gisela Maria; VENTURI, Eliseu Raphael. **Representatives of Research group of the Master Degree in Law of UNICURITIBA took part of the Workshop “Environmental Law: na approach in the north-american system”, with Professors George and Catherine Pring, from the University of Denver.** Curitiba: 2008. In: <http://www.unicuritiba.com.br/webmkt/mestrado>>. Access in: December, 21, 2008.

²³ SACHS, Ignacy, **Amazon – laboratory of the future biocivilizations**, Le Monde Diplomatique Journal: <http://diplo.uol.com.br/2008-11.a2646> Accessed in 12/12/2008.

For Sachs, this effective presence of Brazil would happen by the action of a strong FUNAI²⁴, of a strong IBAMA²⁵, of a determined INCRA²⁶, of an Embrapa²⁷ with power to help the “peoples of the forest”²⁸ in the exploitation of its resources without devastation and, after all, a strong army” (Idem). In what concerns the agriculture interests, the ecossocioeconomist suggests their concentration where it is already a reality. Sachs highlights that this awareness with the amazonian heritage needs political pro-activity from Brazil, otherwise, the rest of the world won't ignore the magnificent space that can become a “pioneer laboratory of the future civilizations” (*Ibidem*).

Our objective is to insert one of these flux nets in this discussion about the way the virgin Amazon of the past has been urbanized and how it now suffers various influences in its political process. It becomes clearer when CARDOSO & LIMA punctuate

“The transamazônica highway was constituted in a vector of installation of cities in the amazonian region, both in the economic and spatial point of view. The types of cities observed along the margins of the road are linked with the development project conceived for the region and its conception of occupation of the geographic space, taken from the regional scale; all the same, when regarding to the urbanistic formulations vinculated to the process are considered, it is verified that very few was realized and only a sparse memory of what was proposed in the federal plans remains.” (CARDOSO & LIMA, 2008, p. 162)

Following these parameters, the specific analysis of two cities, witch existence was severely changed or even caused by the highway BR 230, closes this argumentation; with a look over the reality that, although brief, is fitted with a conceptual background.

2. Medicilândia and Balsas: two cities to think the world Transamazônica

Medicilândia, PA, Brazilian Cocoa Capital

Located in the southwest of the state of Pará, in a distance of at about 500 kilometers from its capital, Belém, Medicilândia will serve as a basis to apply the

²⁴ National Foundation of the Indian, created in december, 5, 1967, by Law nº 5.371 during president Costa e Silva's government, substituting the “Indian Protection Service” that that was founded in 1910.

²⁵ Brazilian Institute of Environment and Renewable Natural resources, most known by the acronym IBAMA, it is a federal autarchy vinculated to the Environment Ministry (MMA) It's the executive organ responsible for the execution of the National Environment Policy (PNMA), instituted by the law nº 6.938, of August, 31,1981.

²⁶ The National Institute of Colonization and Agrarian Reform is a federal autarchy created by the decree nº 1.110, in July, 9, 1970, with the prioritary mission of realizing the agrarian reform, maintain the register of the national rural property and manage the public Union earth. It's working in the whole national territory with 30 Regional Superintendences.

²⁷ In december 7, 1952, the president Emílio Garrastazu Médici, sanctioned the law nº 5.881, that authorized the Executive Power to institute a public enterprise, under the denomination of Brazilian Enterprise of Agropecuary Research.

²⁸ This therm is utilized in brazilian mainstream media to define the people who live in the north of Brazil. However, it should be considered that the greatest part o the amazonic populations live in cities, although small and average cities or great metropolis, as Belém and Manaus. In some cases, as in Roráima and Amapá, the most of the population is found in the capital cities of these Federated Unities. This is a discussion that demands further debates in the future, because, when used, these nominations can produce prejudice about the inhabitants of the so called Brazilian Legal Amazon.

concepts discussed above. In the context of the National Integration Program (PIN) of the 70's decade by the Federal government, whose objective was to instigate the massive migration under the agrarian reform alibis.

The Transamazonica was the ordination axis of the whole program and, in the Pará state, the segments of the cities "Marabá-Altamira and Altamira-Itaituba were target of special investments and planning" (Medicilândia City Hall, 2010). Medicilândia was the target of such investments due to its high fertility soils what justifies its privileged position in the whole planning of colonization in the Amazon during the 70's decade²⁹. The axis of colonization presupposed the mutual help of the established focus that were divided in "agrovillages", agropólis and Rurópolis:

"the agropolis' construction was part of the program: an reunion of agrovillages, whose polarization was turned to a urban services core. Apart from the agrovillages services, the agropólis would have bank services, post office, and telephone posts, secondary school and so forth. The objective of the agropólis was to answer the demands of all agrovillages, situated in a given segment of Transamazonica. Actually, agrovillages were implanted, but only one agropolis - the Brasil-Novo (New-Brazil), in the km 46 of the path Altamira-Itaituba. Finally, the Program previewed the construction of a Rurópolis, a groupment of agropolis In practice, only one Ruropolis was constructed - the President Médici. Medicilândia had origin in the agrovillage installed in the km 90 of the road, in the path between Altamira and Itaituba." (Medicilândias's City Hall, 2010)

In spite of being well situated in the km 90 of the road, this Ruropolis proved to be a dynamic depot and received a sugarcane project, part of the Pro-Alcohol program, with a sugar cane processing plant: "the Abranham Lincoln Sugarcane Project (also known as Project PACAL)"³⁰ (Medicilândias's City Hall, 2010). Its urban core arose when a little restaurant was installed on the roadside, attracting many plant's workers, farmers and their families instigating its growth and demanding materials and workforce for the house building to set the population that was gradually being established.

This migration process was intensified and ran out of the control of the city halls all over the highway, the absence of a guarantee of rights incited the "organizations of the population for the achievement of better conditions of life, there were furious

²⁹ Which is an expression of the territorial planning of the entire Amazon.

³⁰ Not taking this as a reference source scientifically valid, but as a daily report that reflects the current Medicilândia and that can give benefit to the reader to consider the local reality, it is interesting to see this blog post from 2008 about the project PACAL: [...] claimed the Minister for a solution to farmers who have been brought to the region for the implementation of the Project PACAL in the Transamazonica.

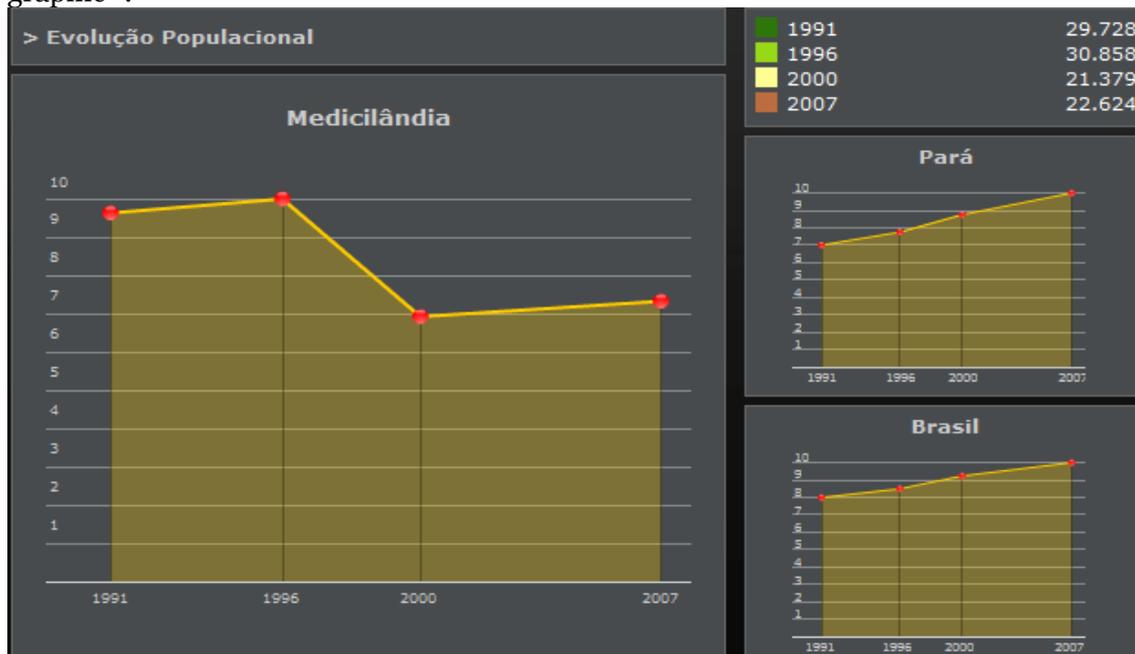
Parliamentarians stressed that, when installing the "Project PACAL" on Transamazonica, producers were brought to the region with the obligation to clear 100% of their land to plant sugar cane, otherwise they wouldn't have released the deeds of their properties.

At that time, the government installed in Medicilândia, the Plant Abraham Lincoln, which, unfortunately, by poor management of government, was closed, leaving farmers in the region with bulky and totally failed agrarian debts to the banks.

Mr Lira Maia, charged, along with other lawmakers, a solution to the problem of indebtedness of farmers in the region. "The Government needs to give a solution to the farmers of that region who were drawn there by promises of a better future for their families, and that cannot, at the end of an unsuccessful government project, pay for the damage caused as a result of this mismanagement of the plant, as it did not sell their products at the time; the producers cannot and have no condition to pay this account," said Mr Lira Maia. (Jotaparente.blogspot.com, 2010)

insurgences and even real aggression occurring. It has to be clear that this loss of control by the State is consequence of a budget crisis initiated in Brazil after the first Oil Shock of 1973, making the projects of development of Amazon during the dictatorship simply unfeasible, once that was predicted gain only in the long term.

In May 6 of 1988, the city was elevated to the level of municipality, its name was an homage to the president Emílio Garrastazu Médici. In 1989, 460 families invaded the Arara Indian Reserve, motivated by the lack of a place to live, and that generated strife. These episodes that come from fundiary questions are managed by INCRA and by FUNAI since then. The population of Medicilândia now is stabilizing, after have severely diminished since the year 2000 as is possible to see in this graphic³¹:



Fonte: IBGE Cid@des, 2010

The decrease of population of Medicilândia follows a very common standard in Brazil in the last decades, the loss of population in the small cities and the swelling of the cities with average and big size.

Balsas, MA, a secular amazonic city

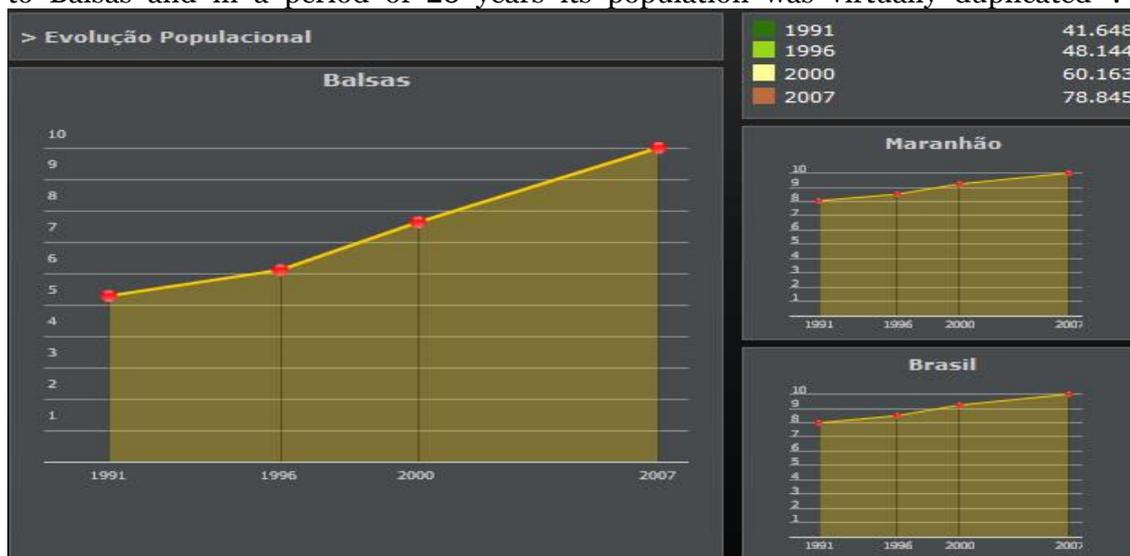
The city of Balsas in the state of Maranhão has a very rich history, that reminds the Imperial Brazil times and that has its own traditions and legends (1879). The “princess of the south of Maranhão” becomes interesting to our problematic, when that is shown by BECKER:

“The striving situation among development and environmental protection could be seen through the policies of the decade of 1990, which were, at once, expression and induction of a struggle. By one side the Environment Ministry did the policy of Forest protection and, on the other side, the Budget and Planning Ministry has created exporting

³¹Accordingly to the latest Brazilian National Census, the population of the city in 2010 was of 27.442 habitants, number that confirms the stabilization. See the IBGE Cities website:<http://www.ibge.gov.br/cidadesat> - Access in January 1, 2010.

corridors. Evidently, the exporting corridors have coincided with the ecological ones.”³²

In this panel starts a new turn on tax exemptions and public policies to promote the development in the Amazon, that was already in this time an “urbanized forest”. This spatial segment where the environmental policies were disputed with economic foment measures is now known as the “Amazon’s Arc of Fire”. There, where the territorial occupation is consolidated, is found the city of Balsas, capital of the soy and of the mechanized agriculture. These policies attracted people all over the Brazil to Balsas and in a period of 20 years its population was virtually duplicated³³:



IBGE Cities (2009)

For Bertha Becker, “the Maranhão was never Amazon” and the “Legal Amazon was a geopolitical construction”. Therefore, the spaces where agropecuary poles were consolidated should be the place of continuing this kind of activity, seeking to collect the benefits of this project, managing the Brazilian political autonomy – given the power of the region that most exports soy in the world

The city disposes of asphalt exits to all the capital cities of North and Northeast Regions’ and even a small airport. There, are installed many transportation enterprises, demonstrating the high level of its connectivity. The benefits of the arrival of the exporting corridors made the city grow more than 1700% in the period between the years 1991-2002. The south of Maranhão is one of the regions in which the economical advances grew most in the whole planet. That is a trail to answer from where comes its accentuated political autonomy – in the National Congress transacts the process of creation of the state of the South Maranhão and Balsas is quoted to be its capital city³⁴.

³² BECKER, Bertha K. (2004, op. cit., p. 80-81)

³³ Accordingly to the latest Brazilian National Census, the population of the city in 2010 was of 83.537 habitants, number that that the city keeps its growth. See the IBGE Cities website:<http://www.ibge.gov.br/cidadesat> - Access in January 1, 2010.

³⁴ JUNGBLUT, Cristiane, **Plebiscite for the creation of South Maranhão Approved**, O Globo Journal, In: <http://oglobo.globo.com/pais/mat/2007/03/14/294924788.asp> access in February, 20, 2009.

5. Final considerations

The occupation of Amazon isn't anymore an exclusive fruit of State action, there are many actors operating there, with different interests and, trying to achieve their own and specific and sometimes contradictory objectives, looking for their insertion on the flux nets. For distinct motives, many segments of society as ranchers, wood entrepreneurs, landless, Indians - all of them demand a position of the State.

Thus, there are territories incredibly dinamized, linked to the flux nets and corresponding to this liaison in its municipal policies and even social organization – the south of Maranhão state is an example of a compartmentalized and diligent territory, that operates corresponding with external demands and, hence, searching for a greater autonomy from the federation; and there are “islanded territories”, as Medicilândia, the “capital city of the cocoa”, whose growth hasn't been much significative.

About these current processes, must be clear that

“It is patent that, if there is a valorization of the Nature and of the Amazon, there is also a relativization of the virtuality power of the fluxes and nets of contemporary world with globalization that ends with the frontiers and States.³⁵”.

But, it is important to remark that: even though there is a constant trend to the fragmentation of the territories, in a process that can be called “contiguous discontinuity”, the Amazon has, for sure, potential to develop Brazil and it depends of the interest of managing alliances and resources in order to apply real and effective State policies there. And this issue has to be discussed, specially in a period of mandate transition, that Brazil lives in this year.

The exemplified cases, of Balsas and Medicilândia, two cities in the same geographic space, but with different sociospatial formations, shows the regional development challenges of the Amazon in the XXI century. The region, its cities and peoples, will continue to pay the price of this process that goes farther than the organization impetrated by the dictatorial State, whose finalities, wanted to integrate and not surrender the territory. But it is known that this is an empty speech, because the Amazon never ran the risk of breaking away from Brazil, since it is recognized in international agreements as Brazil's territory and can only be credited in the context of menace perception in the Cold War

A part of the discourses were convenient for the notorious public policies by shady criterions in their historical times, these are represented today, in earth demarcation in Pará, where Medicilândia is or even in the social and environmental problems that come from the advance of the Soy plantation in Maranhão, where Balsas is. Then, the Amazon will continue to draw political and environmental attention in the XXI century, just like it was since XVI century.

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³⁵ BECKER, Bertha K. (2004, op. cit., p. 86)

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