

Mining-Railroad-Port:

“at the end of the line”, a city in question

Horácio Antunes de Sant’Ana Júnior; Elio de Jesus Pantoja Alves

Universidade Federal do Maranhão - UFMA, São Luis, MA, Brasil

Abstract

The effects of iron ore mining carried out in the Southeast of Pará state, located in Northern Brazil, are present alongside the *Estrada de Ferro Carajás* (Carajás Railroad), especially in the city of São Luís do Maranhão, located in Northeastern Brazil, which is the port of export. Combined with the processes of mining, transport and exportation of the iron ore, infrastructure projects, factories, extensive cattle farming and monoculture, and lumber exploitation damage the landscape of the Eastern Amazon region and impair the local traditional way of life. Regarding the city of São Luís, such effects are more strongly felt in the rural zone, where they result in environmental conflicts. The present article discusses the relationship between the extended effects of mining and the backlash provoked by them in São Luís. Such a discussion comprises, among other subjects, the demands for Extractive Reserve, ways to guarantee the control over the territory, debates on urban legislation, opposition to the building of port terminals.

Key words: Mining; mining-railway-port system; environmental conflicts; extractive reserves; territory; urban legislation.

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Resumo

Efeitos da extração de minério de ferro realizada no sudeste do estado do Pará se estendem ao longo da Estrada de Ferro Carajás com destaque para o município de São Luís do Maranhão, onde está localizado o porto de sua exportação. Articuladas ao processo de extração, transporte e exportação do minério, obras de infraestrutura, indústrias, fazendas de pecuária extensiva e monocultivo, exploração de madeira alteram a paisagem da Amazônia oriental brasileira e comprometem modos de vida locais. Em São Luís, esses efeitos são sentidos mais diretamente na zona rural do município, gerando conflitos ambientais e a relação entre efeitos estendidos da mineração e a reação aos mesmos em São Luís - MA. Compõem a análise temas como: demanda por Reserva Extrativista; busca de formas de garantia de controle de território; discussão da legislação urbanística municipal; resistência à instalação de terminal portuário.

Palavras-chave: Mineração; sistema mina-ferrovia-porto; conflitos ambientais; reserva extrativista; território; legislação municipal.

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Introduction

Contemporary mining activities produce effects which extend well beyond the geographic space where these activities are conducted and involve more than direct effects on social and economic relations in the region. Eduardo Gudynas (2016) calls these extended effects “spillage effects” (*efectos derrame*). This article¹ will discuss the spillage effects of iron ore mining activities of the southeastern region of Pará State (located in Northern Brazil). The period covered will be from the start of these activities in the late 1970s and early 1980s as they spread across the Eastern Amazon region of Brazil², reaching Maranhão State (located in Northeastern Brazil). The study will focus, in particular, on the spillage effects in the municipality of the state capital, São Luís, especially its traditional communities in rural areas.

The Eastern Amazon region of Brazil has undergone profound transformations since the 1970s in its landscape and in the way of life of peoples and communities which inhabit the region. One of the principal factors responsible for these transformations was a large governmental program created and implemented during the period of the civil/military dictatorship initiated in 1964³, the Grande Carajás Program (PGC⁴). The PGC was created by Legal Decree 1813, of November 24, 1980, issued by the then President of the Republic, General João Figueiredo (Sant’Ana Júnior 2013). This action followed several decisions taken by the Brazilian Federal government, as well as initiative of the Companhia Vale do Rio Doce (CVRD), a state owned firm at the time⁵, with the objective of extracting, transporting and exporting iron ore of the highest quality and other minerals extracted from the gigantic mines located in the southeast of Pará State.

The central focus of the Program was to guarantee the extraction, transport and export of iron ore. More broadly, the presidential decree, which provided for a coordination of several ministries, also had as a goal the stimulation of the economy of the Eastern Amazon and its insertion and integration into the national economic model and capitalist expansion which marked this period. In geographic terms, the PGC was planned to extend to a distance of nearly 900 thousand km², covering part of the States of Pará, Maranhão and, today, Tocantins (at the time the northern section of the state of Goiás). Besides mineral production, the Program promoted infrastructure projects and installation of industries, as well the exploitation of lumber, monocultures of grains and eucalyptus, and cattle ranching, all inserted in a set of State actions and private initiatives (Carneiro 2010; Sant’Ana Junior & Cardoso 2016). According to Anthony L. Hall (1991), until the creation of that program, nowhere in the world was there such a large-scale integrated development program in terms of geographical extension as well as the volume of projected investments.

1 The article will present results from two research projects: “Mining, territories and environmental inequalities in Brazil: sociocultural diversity and the struggle for rights”; and “Repertoires and Arguments of Political Mobilization”. Both projects were financed by FAPEMA, the Foundation for Support of Scientific and Technological Research and Development of Maranhão, through Incentive Grant for Research Productivity to Professor Horácio Antunes de Sant’Ana Júnior, and the doctoral fellowship awarded to Professor Elio de Jesus Pantoja Alves. We thank FAPEMA for this important support.

2 The Eastern Amazon is composed of the States of Pará, Amapá, Tocantins and part of the State of Maranhão.

3 In this article, we follow the suggestion of Porto Gonçalves (2005) who uses an alternative to the commonly employed term of military dictatorship for the dictatorial period cited. The purpose is to underscore the civil component in the conception and implementation of the dictatorship, in which large-scale international capital, national enterprises and landowners had roles as protagonists and sponsors, in addition to having been amply benefitted.

4 Portuguese acronym of Programa Grande Carajás.

5 CVRD was privatized in 1997 and, since 2007, has called itself Vale S.A.

Thus, a large number of extractive projects were established and implemented as part of that wide-ranging governmental program. We define extractivism here in the broad sense and related to the extraction of local wealth in the interest of external actors, involving, therefore, economic activities “such as open-pit mega-mining, oil wells or monocultures such as soybeans” (Gudynas 2016: 168).⁶ In order to meet the goals of the PGC, it was necessary to construct a mining-railroad-port system. This consists of the Carajás iron ore mines, the approximately 890 Km of the *Estrada de Ferro Carajás* (Carajás Railroad) and the *Terminal Portuário da Ponta da Madeira* (Port Terminal of Ponta da Madeira), in the municipality of São Luís, state capital of Maranhão. This entire production and transportation conglomerate is controlled by Vale S.A. The expansion of the varied economic activities in the Brazilian Eastern Amazon is directly related to the optimization of logistics employed in iron ore mining, thereby constituting one of its spillage effects. According to Gudynas (2016: 28):

... the pressures from extractivisms spill and spread consequences throughout the country, such as changes in public policies, functioning of the economy, interpretations of justice and democracy, or conceptions of Nature... The spillage effects unfold well beyond the spatial location of each enterprise. Their major effect is not in local impacts at one site, but rather in those affectations which, in turn, have consequences which can be duplicated in many other regions of the country.⁷

The process of capitalist expansion in the Eastern Amazon, as demonstrated by the implementation of large development projects in the region, especially during the 1970s and 80s, had significant deleterious effects on various social groups and traditional peoples and, consequently, produced continuous conflicts. In this context, Jean Hebette (2004) used the metaphor “the fence is closing” to describe polarization in the region: on the one hand, the process of capitalist expansion in Amazonia, with resulting territorial control; on the other, “life environments”, with reference to historically constituted ways of life (peasants, indigenous peoples, riverine populations, *quilombolas*), noting the mode of production based on the logic of family labor and collective appropriation of resources and territories. To a certain extent, this polarization reflects the confrontation of different logics of production, appropriation and social uses of resources, which are key factors in shaping conflicts and reinforcing various forms of violence affecting local ways of life.

As mentioned above, mining activities of Vale S.A. are currently experiencing an extraordinary expansion, with the opening of a new mine and processing plant in the Carajás National Forest (Flona), the S11D, which affects (directly or indirectly) local social groups. In addition to port expansion, the opening of a new mine increases annual iron ore production in Pará from the current level of 100 million tons per year, to approximately 220 million tons per year in 2020. This sharp increase has required the doubling of the *Estrada de Ferro Carajás* (Carajás Railroad), which passes through 27 municipalities, 28 conservation units and affects 86 *quilombola* communities and 05 indigenous peoples (Dhesca 2013). On the one hand, State economic agents account for an enormous growth and increase in the production capacity and flow of iron ore and related productive chains, considering that mining is one of the major activities in terms of Brazil’s Gross Domestic Product (GDP). On the other hand, there has been an increase in the occurrence

6 However, in this article, it is important that we consider that, in Brazil, the term “extractivism” has differentiated connotations. On the one hand, it refers to large-scale extraction with powerful social and environmental effects. As we will see below, the term may also be used to refer to small-scale productive activities, related to the traditional extraction of vegetables, raising of small animals or even family agriculture. Historically, this second connotation allowed rubber tree tappers, babaçu coconut breakers, riverine residents, artisanal fishermen, shellfish pickers and many other social categories to claim to be known as extractivist.

7 In original: “... el empuje de los extractivismos derrama consecuencias hacia el resto del país, como modificaciones en políticas públicas, en el funcionamiento de la economía, en los entendidos de la justicia y la democracia, o en las concepciones sobre la Naturaleza... Los efectos derrame se despliegan mucho más allá de la localización espacial de cada emprendimiento. Su énfasis no está en los impactos locales en un sitio, sino en esas afectaciones que a su vez tienen consecuencias que se pueden repetir en muchas otras zonas del país”.

and seriousness of conflicts and of human rights violations of affected social groups (Dhesca 2013). In this context, we will now situate the municipality of São Luís within the broader picture of the route of the international mining market and its most direct consequences.

The municipality of São Luís, located on the island of Maranhão⁸, was selected in the 1970s as the point of arrival of this mining-railway-port system on the basis of the reasoning that the deep waters of the São Marcos Bay, at the margins of which the capital of Maranhão is located, would be ideal for the installation of ports with capacity to dock large ships. Thus, in addition to the Port Terminal of Ponta da Madeira, two other large ports were constructed. The construction of the oldest of these, the Port of Itaqui, started in the 1960s and its operation began in 1974. It is administered by the Maranhão Port Management Company (EMAP⁹), a state government entity. The Alumar Port, property of the Aluminum Consortium of Maranhão (Alumar)¹⁰, began operation in 1983. Together with other smaller port terminals, these ports form the São Luís Port Complex (Moreira 2015). More recently, there are various state and private plans and implementation of expanding and establishing new ports. Examples are the recently concluded enlargement of the Ponta da Madeira port terminal¹¹ and the construction project of the São Luís port terminal, headed by the company WPR, a subsidiary of the WTorre Company of São Paulo.

The principal factors in this port expansion are the increased in iron ore production, mainly by means of the doubling of Vale's capacity of iron ore extraction in southeastern Pará (see note 11) and other mining activities; planning and implementation of petroleum and gas exploration projects in the interior of Maranhão; federal government policies of agribusiness expansion (soybeans, corn, eucalyptus) in the contiguous savannah (*cerrado*) regions of the States of Maranhão, Tocantins, Piauí and Bahia¹² which provide for the transport of production by means of the *Estrada de Ferro Carajás* (Carajás Railroad) (now connected to the *Ferrovía Norte-Sul* – North-South Railway –, which is extended to the States of Tocantins and Goiás), the *Ferrovía Tansnordestina* (Trans-northeastern Railway – which connects São Luís to other states in the Northeast region) and the ample highway network¹³.

This process of port expansion, which can be thought of as one of the spillage effects of iron ore mining in Pará, has resulted in significant consequences for ways of life of rural communities of the municipality of São Luís, especially those located in the proximities of the Port Complex, and environmental conflicts of a territorial character (Acseirad 2004; Zhouri & Laschefski 2010). Leaders of affected communities have sought forms of confrontation and ways to form a network of allies, positioning themselves in the public

8 The Island of Maranhão (Ilha do Maranhão) is the official name of the island in which the municipality of São Luís is situated. It is also called Upaon-Acú (Large Island), the name given to it by indigenous peoples during the pre-colonial period; and also known as Ilha de São Luís. The Island of Maranhão is composed of an archipelago with more than fifty islands of various origins and dimensions. The capital of Maranhão State is located in the largest of these islands. The municipalities of São Luís, Raposa, Paço do Lumiar and São José de Ribamar are located on the Island of Maranhão.

9 Portuguese acronym of *Empresa Maranhense de Administração Portuária*.

10 Portuguese acronym of *Consórcio Alumínio do Maranhão*. "The Alumar consortium (the principal owners of which are the American (U.S.A.) company Alcoa, one of the major aluminum-producing companies in the world; Rio Tinto Alcan, large aluminum producer of Canadian origin; and BHP Billiton, large Anglo-Australian Company engaged in mining and oil production), possesses in São Luís one of the largest alumina production plants in the world. Despite having practically doubled its industrial plant in recent years, in the beginning of 2016 it deactivated its aluminum production, concentrating only on alumina production, an action which resulted in many dismissals" (Sant'Ana Júnior & Cardoso 2016: 187).

11 According to Vale S.A., in order to guarantee the transport of S11D, "the largest project in Vale's history and in mining worldwide, the inauguration of a new mine in the Southern Mountains (Serra Sul) of Carajás, in Pará...it was necessary to build an additional pier at the Ponta da Madeira port terminal. The largest port infrastructure project in Latin America, the construction of Pier IV, an investment of more than US\$ 2 billion, was begun in 2010 and completed in 2013". Available at <http://mundo.intranetvale.com.br/PT/Unidade/Content/Brasil/MA>. Access on 02/10/2017.

12 MATOPIBA Program, created by Presidential Decree N° 8.447, May 6, 2015, by President Dilma Rousseff (Silva Junior, Wichinieski & Costa 2016).

13 For a more detailed description of the set of economic activities and infrastructure and logistics projects resulting from the PGC, see Sant'Ana Júnior and Cardoso (2016: 185-192).

arena through the demand for legalization of a conservation unit, the Tauá-Mirim Extractive Reserve¹⁴, as mechanism of territorial control; participation in on-going municipal discussion regarding the review of the Master Plan and the Law of Zoning, Use, Occupation and Subdivision of the Soil; resistance to the installment of the São Luís port terminal (Moreira 2015; Alves 2016), which would cause compulsory displacement¹⁵ (Almeida 1996; Magalhães 2007) of part of the residents of the community of Cajueiro; complaints of pollution resulting from these processes made to the press and to State and Federal Public Ministries.

This article describes results of research projects which have been conducted within the Study Group “Modernity and Environment” (GEDMMA¹⁶) since 2005, focused on environmental conflicts in the rural zone of São Luís-Maranhão. In recent years, the relation between these conflicts and the iron ore spillage effects in Pará led to the planning and implementation of the on-going research projects “Mining, territories and environmental inequalities in Brazil: sociocultural diversity and the struggle for rights”, and “Repertoires and Arguments of Political Mobilization”. These research projects are carried out by a group of researchers in varying stages of academic training, with significant participation of people affected by mining, who collaborate with the discussion of the research methodology employed and with fieldwork activities. Bibliography includes references dealing with development projects, extractivism, mining, traditional peoples and communities, environmental conflicts, and struggle for recognition of rights. These studies are conducted in coordination with ethnographic studies of traditional peoples and communities affected by iron ore mining. Ethnographic studies include field investigation, interviews with local leaders, monitoring meetings, public hearings, popular assemblies, cultural and religious events. The research is supplemented by surveys in public, private and community archives; internet sites; periodicals.

The extractive reserve of Tauá-Mirim – from demand to practice of territorial autonomy

A social conflict has a historicity, involves experience and learning and is continually reinvented and re-signified, as circumstances and contexts influence forms of collective action and interests at issue (Tilly 1978). It is not a spontaneous manifestation; it reflects the social condition and awakening to the political world in everyday life. In the rural zone of São Luís, the conflict is fruit of the process of capitalist economic modernization and expansion via development projects and can be portrayed as a mining spillage. The visibility of these effects and conflicts is also the result of the perception of politically mobilized groups (Leite Lopes 2004). A conflict can be initiated by a collectivity, but also can emerge from an individual, personal problem, which becomes transformed into a broader, “de-singularized”, process of claims (Boltanski 1990).

The intensification of the processes of demands for the installation of the Extractive Reserve in the context of local mobilizations occurred at the same time as the conflict triggered in the rural zone of

14 Extractive Reserve is a mode of environmental conservation unit provided for in the National System of Conservation Units (SNUC - portuguese acronym of *Sistema Nacional de Unidades de Conservação*), as instituted by Law number 9.985, July 18, 2000. The SNUC establishes two modalities of conservation units: 1) Integral Protection; and 2) Sustainable Use (Brasil 2000). Extractive Reserves are classified in the category Sustainable Use Units, the objectives of which are “[...] making conservation of nature compatible with sustained use of a segment of its natural resources” (Brasil 2000: 15). The Extractive Reserve is defined in SNUC as being: “... an area utilized by traditional extractivist populations whose subsistence is based on extractivism and, complementarily, on subsistence agriculture and small animal raising, and has as basic objectives to protect the ways of life and the culture of these populations, and assure the sustainable use of natural resources of the unit (Brasil 2000: 15).

15 According to Almeida (1996: 30), compulsory displacement is the “set of factual realities in which people, domestic groups, social and/or ethnic groups are forced to leave their houses, their historic places of immemorial or dated occupation, through constraints, including physical constraints, without the option of opposing and reversing the effects of such a decision, dictated by circumstantially more powerful interests”. Similarly, for Magalhães (2007: 14), this “is the process by which particular social groups, in circumstances over which they have no power of deliberation, are forced to leave or to be transferred from their houses and/or their lands. There is, therefore, an element of restriction of decision-making power in the interior of the social group itself, coming from an external intervention”.

16 Portuguese acronym of *Grupo de Estudos: Desenvolvimento, Modernidade e Meio Ambiente*.

São Luís as a result of the threat of displacement of at least twelve rural communities by the installation of a steel complex. The principal proponent of that venture was the former Companhia Vale do Rio Doce, in partnership with the Federal Government, the Maranhão State Government and large foreign investment firms, such as the largest Chinese Steel company, the Baosteel Shanghai Group Corporation, Arcelor (of French origin), the Pohang Steel Company-Posco (originally South Korean capital) and Thyssen Krupp (German capital). The installation of this project required an area of 2,471.71 hectares, located between the port of Itaqui and the community of Rio dos Cachorros. The steel complex was considered non-viable in late 2005, in large part due to pressure exercised by the React São Luís Movement (*Movimento Reage São Luís*), a popular movement formed by residents of villages threatened with displacement, liberal professionals, professors, students, union activists and clerics concerned with the potential social and environmental effects of the project.

According to Alves (2014), the React São Luís Movement had as its central theme the social critique of the installation of the steel complex. The Movement argued that the island of Maranhão, which already suffered from industrial pollution, would not be able to sustain the proposed model of a new steel plant, due to incalculable harm to the environment and to public health as a result of the pollution. In addition, there would be loss of mangrove areas and displacement of fishermen-farmer communities, including centennial communities responsible for cultural preservation and preservation of ecosystems important not only for the rural zone but also for the entire island.

Because of the Movement's pressure, 13 public hearings were conducted, delaying state and local government timetables. One result of this pressure, requiring debate over urban legislation in the Municipal Council of São Luís, was the reduction of the area proposed in the original project. This popular pressure, combined with the sharp drop in the international price of steel, led to the withdrawal of international investors from the project.

In late 2006 and 2007, when the height of tensions regarding the steel complex issue had passed, during the state government administration of Governor Jackson Lago,¹⁷ activists of the React São Luís Movement, in statements analyzed by Alves (2014), indicated that the Movement's victory in reaction to the steel complex proposal, and, consequently, the strengthening which took place of demands for the Tauá-Mirim Extractive Reserve, can be related to what the author described as a "political opportunity structure", taking into consideration the following aspects: the importance of local civil society social movement organization demands to implement the Extractive Reserve; conflicts of interest of local political groups during the political conjuncture in which the steel complex was under discussion; the fact that the Ministry of the Environment was under the direction of Marina Silva¹⁸, and the relative autonomy of the Brazilian Institute for the Environment and Renewable Natural Resources (IBAMA¹⁹) and its organisms, in relation to lobbies of economic agents and their respective interests; the actions of the State Public Ministry, which required compliance with environmental norms; the technical-academic training of activists of the React São Luís Movement, especially their well-founded testimony at the public hearings. Furthermore, it is noteworthy that at the outset of both governments of President Lula (2003-2006 and 2007-2010) the federal government maintained dialogue with social movements, facilitating important negotiations involving movement demands. It is important to take these aspects of the political context into consideration because in this analysis, the dynamics of a social movement change within a given "political opportunity structure".

¹⁷ The governor at that time, Jackson Lago (PDT), who had a history of approximations to social movements, was elected in October, 2006, by a diversified network of political alliances and coalitions led by parties of opposition to the political group of Senator José Sarney, which had dominated electoral processes in Maranhão since 1966 (Costa 2009).

¹⁸ The Minister of the Environment at that time, ecologist Marina Silva (2003-2008) maintained a policy of relative control with regard to the approval and release of funding for projects which generated major environmental impacts.

¹⁹ Portuguese acronym of *Instituto Brasileiro do Meio Ambiente e dos Recursos Naturais Renováveis*.

It is worth of note that, during the decade of the 1990s, even prior to the proposed implantation of the steel complex in the area, the installation of a conservation unit in the rural zone had already been proposed, according to the Socio-Economic and Biological Technical Report by the Brazilian Institute of Environment and Natural Resources (IBAMA 2007: 9):

[...] leaders perceived that it would be very difficult for enterprises in the region to give up their areas which had been made available by the state government, and so they began to consider an alternative. Beginning in 1997, in the context of meetings of the Carajás Forum and Human Rights Society, suggestions initially emerged to create an extractive reserve, with the understanding that this model would be the one most appropriate as an instrument to protect the community and its way of life.

In the process of discussion among leaders, initially in coordination with residents' associations and other groups, such as the Maranhão Human Rights Society (SMDH²⁰) and the Carajás Forum²¹, in addition to the Catholic Parish of Nosso Senhor do Bonfim, mobilization in defense of the Extractive Reserve was strengthened. According to the interview with Alberto Cantanhede, fisherman and community leader of Taim²²,

[...] I joined the movement in [19]90, after I had begun to attend meetings of the Amazon Work Group (GTA)²³. [...] I began to observe other articulations related to the environment and the issue of creation of reserves is the main issue of the GTA, of the potential for its creation, as well as those already existing, so when I began there and here, I began to see that we could create a conservation unit here, that the model of resettlement that we had didn't work [...] We didn't have a coordinating committee, we didn't have by-laws, so I said: look, we can preserve what is still left, we can transform several resettlement areas into a conservation unit (interview conducted on January 11, 2012, published in Alves, 2014: 182).

In 2000, the National System of Conservation Units (SNUC) was established, but concerns regarding preservation were already part of the agenda of discussions and of mobilizations of leaders by means of local organizations, including the Fishermen's Colony and residents' associations. Among the latter, the performance of the Taim Residents' Union and the Rio dos Cachorros Residents' Association was noteworthy.

Between 2004 and 2005, in the confrontation with the project of installation of the steel complex, members of the React São Luís Movement were advised to contact the Secretariat of the Patrimony of the Union (SPU²⁴), an agency of the Ministry of Planning, in Brasília, when they discovered the existence of a document from the Government of Maranhão requesting lands of the rural zone to install the steel complex. During this same period, they also discovered that the lands requested by the state government to install the steel complex were situated in an area which had been decreed in 1998, by the Land Institute of Maranhão (Iterma²⁵), as a rural resettlement and, in addition, according to the Law of Zoning, Use, Occupation and Subdivision of the Soil of the Municipality of São Luís, it was a rural zone, factors which subjected the potential viability of the steel complex to legal entanglements (Alves 2014).

20 Portuguese acronym of *Sociedade Maranhense de Direitos Humanos*.

21 According to its site, the Forum Carajás is an NGO founded in 1992, composed of a network of groups in Maranhão, Pará and Tocantins, and focused on environmental, social and economic effects of large projects. It acts in the politics of projects for the Carajás Region, promotes activities of sensitizing public opinion and in the training of leaders; it conducts studies related to the strengthening of the Popular Movement (Forum Carajás 2006).

22 Taim is one of a dozen communities which are part of the Tauá-Mirim Extractive Reserve.

23 Network active in the Brazilian Amazon region, composed of social movements, non-governmental organizations and common citizens. GTA is the Portuguese acronym of *Grupo de Trabalho Amazônico*.

24 Portuguese acronym of *Secretaria do Patrimônio da União*.

25 Portuguese acronym of *Instituto de Colonização e Terras do Maranhão*.

According to the account of Alberto Cantanhede and Clovis Amorim, the latter a fisherman and community leader of Cajueiro (interview conducted on March 20, 2013 and published in Alves 2014), the management model of the territory, based on rural resettlement, did not correspond to the singularities of the local way of life. Although agricultural subsistence activities based on small family agriculture were significant, the reality was the presence of social groups whose economic activities were based principally on artisanal fishing. That is, for these leaders, the rural resettlement project was essentially a “top-down” process imposed on the community, without dialogue with local social organizations.

It was in this context of mobilizations that these leaders, who coordinated with the Amazon Work Group (GTA) and with the National Fishermen’s Movement (MONAPE²⁶), contacted the National Center for Sustainable Development of Traditional Populations (CNPT)²⁷, an agency which, at that time, was directly subordinated to IBAMA.

During this process of mobilization, then, rural leaders began to use the category of “traditional populations”, to refer to those communities included in the proposed area for the creation of the Extractive Reserve. They researched the history of occupation of the territory, connecting common ancestors to the first residents of the site, including indigenous people and groups who were enslaved (Gaspar 2009) and came to identify their cultural and religious manifestations as being inherited from these initial inhabitants, such as the festivities and devotion to Saint Benedict and the *Tambor de Crioula*²⁸ (Silva 2009).

In 2003, residents of the villages of Taim requested IBAMA, via a petition with many signatures, to initiate the process to create the Extractive Reserve (Nº 02012.001265/2003-73, of August 22, 2003). Two technical reports were conducted as legal requirement to install the Extractive Reserve. The first was published in 2006 and the second concluded in 2007. The first public hearing to present studies and for decision-making concerning creation of the conservation unit took place in 2006, under the coordination of IBAMA. The proposal to include six additional communities in the Extractive Reserve was made at that public hearing (Miranda 2009).

In the Socio-Economic and Biological Technical Reports, it is important to underscore the attention to the adverse effects of activities connected to the industrial processing of iron ore on the productive areas of the communities if the steel complex were to be installed (IBAMA 2007: 7).

The installation of the São Luís Steel Complex will result in the destruction of approximately 10 thousand hectares of mangroves (deforestation and landfill), both for the installment of the plants, as well as for the construction of the port. That area includes extensive areas of lowlands which form the springs of rivers and streams.

As part of the Technical Report of 2006, the Extractive Reserve proposal included the communities of Cajueiro, Limoeiro, Taim, Rio dos Cachorros, Porto Grande, part of the Village of Maranhão (all of these were subject to the threat of displacement in the process to install the steel complex) and was called the Taim Extractive Reserve (IBAMA 2007). Later, in 2007, the second Socio-Economic and Biological Technical Report was conducted, including the island of Tauá-Mirim, where the communities of Amapá, Embaubal, Portinho, Jacamim, Ilha Pequena and Tauá-Mirim are located. As part of that technical report, their high

26 Portuguese acronym of *Movimento Nacional de Pescadores*.

27 Portuguese acronym of *Centro Nacional de Desenvolvimento Sustentável das Populações Tradicionais*. At the present time, the CNPT is institutionally connected to the Chico Mendes Institute for Conservation of Biodiversity (ICMBio, Portuguese acronym of *Instituto Chico Mendes de Conservação da Biodiversidade*), and was converted into the National Center for Research and Conservation of the Associated Biodiversity to Traditional Peoples and Communities, maintaining the same initials.

28 The Creole Drum (*Tambor de Crioula*) is an Afro-Brazilian matrix cultural expression which involves a circular dance, singing and drum percussion. It is practiced especially in honor of St. Benedict, without a pre-fixed specific, location in places such as outdoors, in squares, in *terreiros* (cleared land in front of a farmhouse or any locale where Afro-Brazilian rites are practiced) or associated to other events and cultural manifestations (IPHAN 2014).

degree of environmental conservation was taken into account. Following the conclusion of the studies and their submission to the Ministry of the Environment, the name of the conservation unit was changed from Taim Extractive Reserve to Tauá-Mirim Extractive Reserve since, during the processing of the installation request, it was learned that there was a Biological Station in Rio Grande do Sul State also named Taim. In the proposal submitted to the Ministry of the Environment, the total area was 16,663.55 hectares and a perimeter of 71.21 km (Sant'Ana Júnior et al. 2009).

With regard to the formal process of installation of the Extractive Reserve, the following stages were carried out formal request by residents of the area; on-site technical assessment by CNPT/IBAMA to conduct survey of resource potential; elaboration of socioeconomic and biological technical report and conduct of public consultation of residents. Nevertheless, currently, it is increasingly challenging to evaluate the correlation of forces established in the environmental arena in the country, in the context of the innumerable changes and uncertainties regarding governability and, in particular, environmental policies. The Federal Government, circumstantially, has radically changed the environmental orientation, and during recent years has resumed investments in large infrastructure projects. The Ministry of the Environment, currently under the direction of former Federal congressman Sarney Filho, of Maranhão and leader of the Green Party, has taken a position opposed to the Extractive Reserve of Tauá-Mirim, publicly declaring himself favorable to large investments in the region (Mendes 2016). This conjuncture presents a challenge to new local collective actions.

The assessment of Sant'Ana Júnior et al. (2009: 28), conducted in 2009, regarding the situation of the process, continues to be valid,

[...] those who demand the creation of the Extractive Reserve currently live in a moment of expectation, since there is a general orientation of the Presidency of the Republic that new conservation units managed by the Federal Government would only be installed with the formal acceptance of the governments of the states in which they would be created. Consultation is currently being made with the Government of Maranhão, which is subject to strong pressures from state planners, national and international mining (sand and stone) business interests which have activities in the area or perceive the area as a strategic location for new investments, considering the infrastructure (ports, railway, highways) available. On the other hand, the potentially affected social organizations of the villages, with the support of social movements, researchers and social organizations, have sought to intervene in decision-making process in defense of their interests.

According to the Socio-Economic and Biological Technical Report (IBAMA 2007: 44):

The area in question has an ecological and social vocation for the consolidation of an Extractive Reserve. The installment of a steel complex would be inappropriate, since it would not fulfill any social function and would bring a serious impact to areas significantly important for preservation. The creation of an agro-extractive conservation unit in the region would represent a symbol of community resistance and conservation of biodiversity, rethinking contemporary models of society. This unit would include the Island of São Luís with an additional natural fortification protected by law, promoting support to the way of life of traditional peoples, attributing value to, and helping make possible, the continuity of their existence.

The unfeasibility of the steel complex has not, however, guaranteed the permanence of these communities in the territories, not even the legal installment of the Extractive Reserve. If, on the one hand, the threat of the steel complex awakened interest in the political organization of resistance to displacement and intensified demands for the installment of Extractive Reserve, on the other hand, there has been a visible advance of industrial occupation in the areas around its borders. However, this is not to

underestimate the capacity for political action demonstrated by the communities in recent years, as we can perceive by the evaluation attributed to the success of the resistance to the steel complex by a young resident of Taim:

[...] when a person fights by himself he is not very successful; the lesson we learn is this: when a person joins with another person, then another, forming a network; we're stronger and we're proud when people there say we're the strongest community resisting the steel complex, that we don't like progress, that's what they were saying, that it's Taim, that was the only community which was not painted²⁹ by them, we didn't accept and they always wanted to come here to talk, maybe try to soften, weaken the movement [...] that's what they said, we wanted to transform this here in the industrial area, that's what they wanted (Jean Carlos, leader of Taim. Interview conducted on January 31, 2012, published in Alves, 2014).

Local leaders have attempted to establish unity among the communities and partnerships with other political and movement actors to sensitize them to understand the importance of the Extractive Reserve, not only for those communities permanently threatened, but also for the entire island of Maranhão. Their process of recognition has made explicit the conflicts and tensions between those actors who claim permanence in the territories and those who consider those territories as areas of "industrial vocation", denoting the divergent interests and logics of use and of territorial occupation on the southwest portion of the Island of Maranhão (Carvalho 2009).

After eight years without having obtained the Presidential Decree for the creation of the Extractive Reserve, on May 17, 2015, community leaders, with the support of social movements, in a popular assembly in the community of Taim, in a politically autonomous manner, declared the creation of the Tauá-Mirim Extractive Reserve, electing and instituting their Management Council composed of representatives of communities, social movements and academic institutions.

According to Alves (2016), the diversification of the manners of making claims reflects the differing strategies of confronting the forces of politically stronger economic agents. The movements of resistance sustain the arguments that the political struggle is not limited to the communities, but rather is of interest to the entire Island do Maranhão, considering, in addition to other factors of public interest, the environmental service provided to the city as a whole. In this perspective, the political struggle of the communities in defense of their territories has been thought as indissociable from struggles in defense of the Island of Maranhão; thus, the importance of the debate over the alteration of the Law of Zoning, Use, Occupation and Subdivision of the Soil (which, henceforth, we will call simply, Zoning Law) and the alteration of the Master Plan of the municipality of São Luís and insertion in the debate over the Tauá-Mirim Extractive Reserve of the City Council of São Luís³⁰.

29 This refers to the fact that, in 2004, together with the various announcements in the local media about the installation of a steel complex, the consulting firm Diagonal Urban, under contract to Vale S.A., sprayed black paint to mark residences and commercial buildings which, supposedly, would be guaranteed to receive indemnification (Mendonça 2006). Residents of Rio dos Cachorros and Taim resisted that marking.

30 The City Council of São Luís was instituted in 2006 (Municipal Law N° 4.611, of May 18, 2006), and is defined by that law as a deliberative and consultative collegial organ, with equal representation between public authorities and Organized Civil Society, with operational responsibilities in the public sector of urban development policy; with permanent, deliberative, consultative and investigative character, linked to the Municipal Secretary of Planning and Development (Conceição 2009: 5). The installation of the Council is a normative requirement according to the Federal Law of the Statute of the City, Law 10.257, of July 10, 2001, for municipalities of more than 20,000 inhabitants, state capitals, and municipalities with tourist activity and with the presence of large industrial establishments. According to this law, municipalities should conduct a revision of the Master Plan every ten years (Brasil 2008)

Municipal urban legislation and resistance to the continuation of colonial practices in territorial decisions

The municipality of São Luís is one of the principal ports of entry and exit of large capital in Amazonia, through its Port Complex. According to Ferreira (2001), iron ore is the principal mineral substance produced in the country, accounting for approximately 25% of the total. The Carajás Mountains (*Serra de Carajás*) has one of the largest iron ore reserves worldwide, the exploration of which is conducted by Vale S.A. On a daily basis, “the railway of this mining company transports 576,000 T of the best iron ore in the world, with a purity of more than 65% hematite. It is equivalent to the cargo of 17 thousand heavy trucks and the daily cargo was worth 60 million dollars, in 2012, when it arrived at its destination” (Pinto 2013: 56).

Legal conversion of the rural zones into industrial and/or port zones is required so that projects connected to mineral production, or its follow-up processes, may be installed in the territories of the communities of the rural zone in São Luís. As counterpoint, resistance movements have pressured municipal authorities to widen debate about revision of the Master Plan of the city of São Luís and of the Zoning Law.

As we mentioned in the Introduction of this article, it is important to understand that the insertion of the State of Maranhão and, specifically, the municipality of São Luís, in the chain of mineral production since the 1960s, when construction was initiated on the Port of Itaqui, had the objective of fulfilling a logistic function at the service of large international capital, with strong presence of national companies and landowners. These are the forces which, over the course of the civil-military dictatorship (1964-1985), as they do today, possess an enormous amount of political influence and pressure in decision-making processes in urban planning in the city.

In São Luís, international capital is allied with and articulates with, a set of local agents, proponents of projects and group interests represented principally by the Federation of Industries of the State of Maranhão (FIEMA³¹) and by the Civil Construction Union of the State of Maranhão (Sinduscon³²), exercising important activities in conjunction with state and municipal governments, as well as the City Council (*Conselho da Cidade*) (Alves 2016).

The reactive strategies of social movements have presupposed the understanding that the city of São Luís should be discussed as a whole, rather than as isolated parts. This was the view adopted by the React São Luís Movement between 2004 and 2006 in opposition to installation of the steel complex, as well as the actions of the Movement of Defense of the Island,³³ created in 2015, as instrument of resistance to the attempt by the Municipal Government to change the Master Plan of São Luís and its Zoning Law, that same year, without significant popular participation. Within the Movement, there are struggles which involve coordination between residents of the rural zone and the urban zone, especially in defense of the principle that discussions about the city should take place with ample publicity, in accord with the Statute of the City. In an attempt to alter urban legislation, the Municipal Government attempted to conduct only eight public hearings in the entire city, as well as approve the Zoning Law at the same time as the revision of the Master Plan, which is not legally permitted, since the approval and validity of the latter, precedes the discussion and approval of the former.

31 Portuguese acronym of *Federação das Indústrias do Estado do Maranhão*.

32 Portuguese acronym of *Sindicato da Construção Civil do Estado do Maranhão*.

33 The Movement in Defense of the Island is composed of popular and union movements; secondary school and university researchers, teachers and students; clerics; liberal professionals; artists. Formed in the context of the debate regarding changes in the Master Plan and the Zoning Law of the Municipality of São Luís, its agenda includes processes of resistance and social struggles conducted by communities affected by development projects in the Island of Maranhão.

Following intervention of the State Public Ministry, through the District Attorney for the Environment, the Municipal Government increased the number of public hearings to fifteen. However, these public hearings began to take place in mid-July, 2015, with minimal publicity (contrary to legal provisions), with debates fragmented by areas of the city established for this purpose (without providing for a general discussion for the city as a whole) and, consequently, with insignificant popular participation. The hearings were supposed to be held until mid-August, but were interrupted following a strong intervention by residents of the rural zone in one public hearing in opposition to major changes proposed for their areas in the Zoning Law.

During the course of the public hearings, it became increasingly apparent to the group of social agents who were part of the Movement of Defense of the Island that the project of the Municipal Government consisted in changing only three articles of the Master Plan in effect since 2006, without conducting a meaningful review. Those articles dealt with the city's macro-zoning, which would permit the alteration of the Zoning Law in the two axes which were of most interest to economic agents who had demanded the changes in the agenda.

On the one hand, there was the proposal for increased templates of the buildings (that is, in the number of floors allowed), from the current maximum of 15 floors (counting garages and foundation pile work) to 31 floors in some areas of the city, and a general increase in the template of construction, with variations in accord with the zoning itself. This radical change would occur without monitoring of specific legislation for basic sanitation, urban mobility, revitalization of degraded areas, environmental conservation. During the public hearings, the monitoring and defense of the project on the part of economic agents linked to civil construction, particularly of Sinduscon, was notorious.

On the other hand, the other axis of changes proposed for the Zoning Law was the enlargement of the areas for Port and Industrial Zones, as well as significant enlargement of industrial uses permitted in the municipality. These changes would directly benefit those interests linked to the industrial expansion of the city and would also correspond to demands for the enlargement of mineral production and of agribusiness in the Brazilian Eastern Amazon. That axis would bring about direct consequences in the rural zone of São Luís, since in addition to transforming part of the rural zone into an industrial or port zone, increasing the threats of displacement of the population by increasing industrial uses, it would also increase the possibilities of various types of pollution, the indices of which, currently, are cause for concern.

To understand this process, once again we refer to Gudynas (2016: 30), when he remembers that the spillage effect of mining requires the imposition of new territorialities and that these "... new territorialities overlap, in many cases, other preexisting ones... generating spillage effects where new external territorialities are imposed which weaken and nullify others"³⁴. Thus, we can think of the attempt to alter municipal legislation of São Luís, to accommodate it to interests external to the municipality, as a spillage effect of mining; and which originated from a colonialist posture on the part of government planners and business agents.

The pressure of the recently created Movement of Defense of the Island, denouncing the lack of publicity and the reduced number of public hearings to discuss the city, led the State Public Ministry to recommend the suspension of the process, nullify the public hearings already conducted and separate processes of discussion and approval of the Master Plan and of the Zoning Law, with the discussion and approval of the Master Plan to occur first, as accepted by the City Council. As a result of these actions, the entire process has been suspended since that time.

34 In original: ... nuevas territorialidades se superponen en muchos casos sobre otras preexistentes... se generan derrames donde se imponen nuevas territorialidades externas que debilitan o anulan otras.

Resistance to the installation of a new port terminal

The community of Cajueiro is a territory composed of five small nuclei named: Parnauçu, Andirobal, Guarimanduba, Morro do Egito and Cajueiro. These communities are represented politically by the Residents' Union Bom Jesus do Cajueiro. Due to their location in the proximities of the facilities of the São Luís Port Complex, since the 1980s, residents of Cajueiro have been subject to continuous threats of displacement. Between 2004 and 2005, one of these communities was to be displaced to install the steel complex and, in 2014, this community was again the target of displacement by the attempt to install the São Luís Port Terminal, by the company WPR – São Luís Port and Terminal Authority, a subsidiary created for this purpose by the company WTorre of São Paulo. Throughout 2014, there were innumerable meetings of directly affected residents to discuss the situation and forward complaints. These residents were assisted by researchers of GEDMMA, by the Catholic Church's Land Pastoral Commission (CPT³⁵), by the Human Rights Society of Maranhão (SMDH) and by the State Public Defenders' Office. In addition, there also were coordinated public demonstrations by neighboring communities, blocking the federal highway BR-135, which connects the port zone of São Luís to the continent, and innumerable demonstrations within the community denouncing the presence of armed security agents hired by a third party company without legal authorization, considered by residents as "thugs".

On October 16, 2014, residents blocked the conduct of a public hearing, scheduled to take place at the Gomes de Souza State School, in the Vila Maranhão, and to deal with the licensing of the installation of the São Luís Port Terminal, by WPR. The action by residents was carried out under the allegation that WPR would be employing an armed militia to intimidate and coerce them to sell their possessions. Residents also alleged non-compliance with the legal time frame to schedule the hearing as well as the unavailability of public consultation of the Study of Environmental Impact and the Summary Report of Environmental Impact (EIA-RIMA³⁶) elaborated by the company.

In retaliation, the State Secretary of Environment convoked a new public hearing for October 29, but that was now scheduled to take place at the General Headquarters of the Military Police, located approximately 20 km from the community. The Residents' Union then convoked a Popular Hearing for the same day and hour to discuss the situation. That event took place at the union's main office, in the community itself, with the presence of approximately 200 participants. On that occasion, various institutions and representatives of public agencies were present in defense of the rights of the traditional communities, including the Land Pastoral Commission (CPT), the Sisters of Notre Dame, university professors, researchers and students, the State Public Defenders Office (DPE³⁷), the State Public Ministry, the Police Office for Agrarian Conflicts, State Assemblyman Bira do Pindaré of the PSB party, a representative of the then city councilwoman Rose Sales, of the PCdoB (political party), and the Popular and Union Central Coordination (CSP-Conlutas³⁸).

However, with government endorsement, the company continued to conduct strongly asymmetric negotiations, seeking to buy houses of residents, demolish these houses as well as buildings of small businesses, taking possession of the land. A series of contrivances of power were used to create a climate of juridical insecurity and fear among residents in relation to the future of their territory, favoring undesirable negotiations, which lacked careful evaluations. A brief analysis of occurrences in 2014 is illustrative of the violent and illegal character of the company's negotiation process with residents. During the Popular Assembly of October 29, 2014, in Cajueiro, statements by residents included a variety of serious allegations:

35 Portuguese acronym of *Comissão Pastoral da Terra*.

36 Portuguese acronym of *Estudo de Impacto Ambiental – Relatório de Impactos ao Meio Ambiente*.

37 Portuguese acronym of *Defensoria Pública do Estado do Maranhão*.

38 Portuguese acronym of *Central Popular e Sindical – Conlutas*.

[...] if you want to build in your area, they won't let you bring in construction material. I think this is wrong because if you didn't sell your area you have the right to work there and they don't want to let you work, build your house. I think this is wrong. Because if you sold your area, they would have the right to come and tell you what to do. But since they still didn't indemnify me, they didn't indemnify me, do they have the right to come and give me orders?

[...] Another day they came and stuck two tubes in the ground, one on each side and dug a hole, blocking, closing the street of the people who live at the corner of the high school! Then, suddenly, my sister's son got here and said "Zé, there's a bunch of people over there at the entrance to the high school, because they opened a ditch there and they're going to put the metal chain there". I couldn't believe it! We got in the car and went down there. When we got there, there was a bunch of people. There was a big guy, probably the boss, but I'm not sure. He had a radio in his hand and was ordering people around, pressuring people. When we got there, the President and Vice-President were already there.³⁹ We pressured them to pull out one of the poles – the one which was not as wide. The boys got there and pulled one out (notes from field notebook).

Drawing on the "living memory" of resistance experiences, the residents recall features, stories, reports which establish the dividing line between those people who "were born and raised" there, as opposed to "outsiders"⁴⁰ whose displacement would not have a great influence in the process of land negotiations. This can be perceived in the following excerpt from the meeting of October 17, 2014, at the Cajueiro Residents' Union:

Participant 1: Not everyone wants to leave Cajueiro, but fifty percent (50%) want to leave here. Am I wrong?

Participant 2: (in a loud voice): Who wants to leave? Of those of you here, who wants to leave? If you want to leave here, raise your hand (few raised their hands).

Participant 2: (in a loud voice): Now, those who want to stay, raise your hand.

Other participants: I...

Participant 3: Fifty percent (50%) are people who are outsiders.

Participant 4: Did anybody film a video saying that you wanted to leave here?

Participants: No... (notes from field notebook).

According to statements by old residents, the majority of those who sold their lands to WPR are residents from other areas who came to the territory of Cajueiro with the objective of land speculation, since they neither live in, nor cultivate, the areas they occupied. The traditional communities in the rural zone of São Luís, in addition to facing, for decades, attacks by the government and private companies, seeking to expropriate their territory, now also have to deal with speculators who have contrived to raise doubts about their identity as traditional communities and have made it more difficult for the proposed creation of the Extractive Reserve of Tauá-Mirim to become a reality.

Historically, the State of Maranhão has taken a frankly partial position in regard to conflicts between companies and traditional communities over a period of decades. In practically every situation we have mentioned here, the State has acted to create conditions to displace communities in favor of the installment

39 Refers to the President and Vice President of the Bom Jesus do Cajueiro Residents' Union.

40 In recent years, due to displacements in other communities or expectations of obtaining indemnities from state or private enterprises, among other factors, there was a significant establishment of new residents or land possessions in some communities located in the rural zone of São Luís. As a result, residents who have lived in the area for a relatively long time (some families have, in fact, been there for a very long time) make the distinction between residents "who were born and raised" in the region and those "outsiders". Mendonça (2006) emphasizes that, until 2006, about 183 families lived in the community of Cajueiro. Due to the process of intense land speculation, approximately 600 families live there (MRS 2014). That is, the number of families triplicated in less than a decade. Many of these people have only fenced-in land, without any exercise of possession, a clear demonstration of speculative appropriation of the territory.

of industrial ventures and/or infrastructure, even when these activities create negative social, economic, cultural and environmental impacts.

Generally speaking, strategies of entrepreneurial groups in cooperation with governmental agencies to gain profits and capital expansion, to the detriment of traditional groups and communities, has been common in practices of multinational companies which pillage and expropriate the common assets of peoples all over the world. Harvey (2012), analyzing the process of “spoliation by accumulation”, demonstrates how large corporations have guaranteed territorial control, for capital expansion, by the use of the state apparatus. In the case of São Luís, these maneuvers of all types against the territories of traditional peoples and communities have been what drives the action of the State’s legislative, judicial and executive agencies. The expansion of worldwide logistics for the circulation of capital assets has disregarded any territorial rights of traditional groups.

The Government of the State of Maranhão, blocked judicially from displacing and community in the area solicited for the creation of the Extractive Reserve of Tauá-Mirim, preferred not to see what was happening in the community of Cajueiro for almost six months. According to reports of residents, there were all sorts of threats, intimidations, psychological pressures, harassment of every type sponsored by the company WPR – São Luís Ports and Terminals Authority Ltda. and those they hired to guarantee “cleaning the area”, that is, removal of the community which has traditionally lived in the territory.

Since 2014, the conflict which involves construction of the São Luís Port Terminal and the threat of compulsory displacement of the community of Cajueiro has had innumerable developments, including public debates in the media; judicial disputes initiated by the State Public Defenders’ Office and the State Public Ministry; attempts by the company to coopt residents; the emergence of groups which support community resistance, such as the *Grupo Nodoa*, composed of university students; courses and workshops in social cartography and concerning Convention 169 taught by professors of Maranhão State University (UEMA⁴¹), in conjunction with professors of Maranhão Federal Institute (IFMA⁴²); the intimidations of public agents who support residents who are resisting displacement (Mendes 2017). The conflict is dragging on and had not been definitively resolved by the time this article was written. The company continues to be present in the area, but is still unable to begin construction of the port. Residents who are resisting, continue to seek support and develop strategies which will guarantee that they will remain in the territory. The conditions of confrontation between the company and residents who resist are characterized by economic, social and decision-making power asymmetries. Nevertheless, the tenacity of the resistance has allowed for unexpected delays and postponements.

The young girl Rafaela, of the community of Taim, of the Extractive Reserve of Tauá-Mirim, translates into poetry the asymmetric relation between the communities and the pair State-Company.

*“Nós somos tainos
somos herdade boa de onde só vem dor,
povo humilde, honrado e trabalhador,
o bem é o que nós temos para dar
quem há de me dizer quem somos?
Se nem acaso tu sabes quem és,
quem há de me dizer quem somos?
Querem nos lançar fora como se fossemos pragas
nas plantas das construções,*

41 Portuguese acronym of *Universidade Estadual do Maranhão*.

42 Portuguese acronym of *Instituto Federal do Maranhão*.

quem há de me dizer quem somos?

Se nem acaso tu sabes.”

(Rafaela de Sousa Mesquita)

“We are from Taim

Our ancestry is good, but brings only pain,

Simple, honest and hard-working people,

What we can give is the good that we have,

Who are you to say who we are?

If you do not even know who you are,

Who are you to say who we are?

They want to throw us away as if we were pests

On the plants of the buildings,

Who are you to say who we are?

If you do not know yourselves”.

(Rafaela de Sousa Mesquita)

Considerations about on-going processes

The academic articles and ethnographic records which we have presented, together with the available bibliography about processes of industrial expansion and infrastructure in São Luís (Gistelinck 1988; Andrade 1981; Andrade & Correa 1986/87; Adriance 1996; Sant’Ana Júnior et al. 2009; Moreira 2015) make very clear that, in the case of the Island of Maranhão, specifically in the rural zone or São Luís, the governments of the State of Maranhão have been conniving with the advance of economic development which seeks to annihilate attempts to allow the traditional communities to maintain their own ways of life and livelihoods, compatible with the times of the ecological systems to which they belong.

That is the way that it was with the implantation of the Companhia Vale do Rio Doce and Alumar, in the 1980s; (Gistelinck 1988; Andrade 1981); with the attempts to install a steel complex in the rural zone of São Luís, between 2004 and 2005 (Mendonça 2006; Sant’Ana Júnior et al. 2009); with the construction of the Porto Itaqui Thermoelectric (Pereira 2010) and continues now, with the insistence in building the Port Terminal of São Luís, also in the territory of these same communities.

The experiences of resistance which we have analyzed here alert us to the need to broaden horizons of analysis about processes of market expansion in one of the most coveted sectors for large capitalist corporations. We need to observe how this process of expansion occurs in territorialized resources, where social groups and their respective ways of life are situated. We need to understand the relation State-Private Company in Brazil and the physiognomy of this relation, especially regarding the granting of voluminous public financial resources and concessions for use and exploration of large extensions of land for private initiative; that allows private companies to concentrate and multiply their profits and investment. At the same time, social groups, traditional peoples and communities that use resources and territories differently are left to live permanently with threats of expropriation of their material bases of social reproduction and/or submission and spoliation of their labor force to the logic of capitalist organization of production.

These conditions of existence are painfully present in the world we live in today and present a challenge to the men, women and young people of the communities of the rural area of São Luís. They sadly gaze at the horizon, watching the black clouds of smoke, the soot that sadly colors the vegetation, the blood of the

smelly fish, the presence of heavy metals in the water, the dust that comes from the industries and, finally, all the ailments and material possessions are torn into fragments and spread onto their lives. But they have shown that their lives are not torn into fragments and dispersed. Their life histories have revealed struggles filled with hope, inspiring and renewing the spirit of struggle and unity among the communities and for the island of Maranhão. Like an inexhaustible source of energies, from Cajueiro and from the communities of the Tauá-Mirim Extractive Reserve sprout experiences, learning and processes of territorial political autonomy and propositional actions. Advances and setbacks are evaluated, strategies and alliances are modified. Between meetings, assemblies, demonstrations, marches, the territory, the way of life, the culture, in summary, the “feeling of belonging” is activated.

As counterpoint to the development discourse of these “modern times”, the communities have sought to articulate the mobilization networks of new social subjects of collective action. As Castells (2013) would say, they are “networks of indignation and hope” which combine meanings, values, communicational autonomy, emotion and new meanings of contesting established powers. Currently in Brazil, new social subjects confront large development projects, such as indigenous leaders, quilombolas, fishermen and fisherwomen, traditional male and female farmers who, in fact, are the ones who inspired the autonomy of the decision for the political creation of the Extractive Reserve in the popular assembly of June 17, 2015, which took place in the *Casa das Águas*, in the community of Taim. During that event, representatives of indigenous peoples of Maranhão and of the Indigenist Missionary Council (CIMI⁴³), an organism linked to the National Conference of Brazilian Bishops (CNBB⁴⁴), peasant and quilombola leaders, fishermen and fisherwomen, representatives of rural and urban workers, both male and female, were all present and, upon relating their experiences in political struggle in other regions, inspired the deliberation for the creation of the Tauá-Mirim Extractive Reserve.

In various regions of Brazil, these new social subjects have confronted large transnational capital by means of their actions and organizations. They have revealed the importance of “place”, of collective knowledge and memory, thereby denaturalizing the linear logic of the rural-urban continuum, and/or traditional-modern or simple-complex dichotomies. Upon questioning these dichotomies, that can serve the conveniences and tastes of capital, these social subjects reinvent forms of confronting hegemonic projects.

Translated by Franklin Rothman

Revised by Andréa Zhouri

Received on: March 27, 2017; Accepted on: June 4, 2017

43 Portuguese acronym of *Conselho Indigenista Missionário*.

44 Portuguese acronym of *Conferência Nacional dos Bispos do Brasil*.

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Horácio Antunes de Sant’Ana Júnior

Professor, Department of Sociology, Federal University of Maranhão – UFMA, Coordinator, GEDMMA-UFMA, São Luis, MA, Brazil.

E-mail: horacioantunes@uol.com.br

Elio de Jesus Pantoja Alves

Professor, Department of Sociology, Federal University of Maranhão – UFMA, Coordinator, GEDMMA-UFMA, São Luis, MA, Brazil.

E-mail: elio@ufma.br