4

The Brazilian State and Resistance to Amazon Deforestation

Enabling Dynamics of Deforestation

Extractivist capitalist agents do not operate in a vacuum; they actively try to shape their operational context and the political system, while seeking support for their expansion from social trends and state resources. There are also processes in the society that have their own impetus, such as moral economic changes from forest-based livelihoods to a greater appreciation for the ranching lifestyle and its accompanying deforestation-based income. States have actively promoted and kick-started deforesting extractivist sectors and provided support and aid to corporations; however, there are also regime differences, which I discuss. A particularly important enabler of deforestation is installing roads and infrastructure by the state–corporate nexus, while the recognition of ethno-territorial rights by a regime can ease the pressure on forests and their people. Ethno-territorial rights not only allow for greater leeway for resistance, but are cocreated primarily by resistance efforts, which I discuss at the end of the chapter.

Moral Economic Changes that Support Amazon Ranching

The creation of a ranching-grabbing RDPE is supported by moral economic changes, where cowboy and ranching lifestyles are seen in positive light, despite the violence that accompanies them related to removing forests and adversaries. These lifestyles are often assumed to lead to prosperity, as ranchers are rich. A pro-ranching moral economy is common among Amazonian frontier peasants, visible in their attempts to "emulate their richer ranching neighbors and to capture some of the prestige associated with this activity" (Hecht, 1993: 692). Taravella and Arnauld de Sartre (2012) note how smaller ranchers in Xingu express their gratitude toward and admiration of the large ranchers. This is a sign of a dominant and hegemonic system, which is not questioned. This shows the key aspect

of the ranching RDPE in the Amazon – there is a clear unequal class structure, which is legitimized and symbolically hidden. Large ranchers are respected as the key actors who bring in "local development," while simultaneously these ranchers frame the state as absent and detrimental for local development due to its conservation measures. This discourse justifies their power and position, while creating symbolic power that hides the inequalities within the RDPE.

Given the broader moral economic changes that the establishment of RDPEs seem to produce in municipalities and states, further social and political capital starts to agglomerate for those making economic gains. Many ranchers become politicians, due in part to the ample opportunities to buy votes and tie people to clientelist patronage relations, and in part to the numerous benefits that are granted to those holding state power, especially in relation to having greater impunity and the possibility to siphon resources for the RDPE.

There is a particular moral economy – a cowboy culture – that is crucial for retaining and expanding cattle capitalism. Ranchers, and many other rural people, including ranch workers, have acquired the taste and cultural capital for ranching lifestyles; they are familiar with this business. Thus, many prefer the ranching business and its attendant lifestyle even though they could gain more with soybeans. At some point, however, regions may turn more from ranching to being dominantly soybean enclaves, as the soybean system can typically generate even more yearly returns. I asked Mayor Climaco whether soybeans or cattle were a better business, to which he replied that it depends. At that moment, cattle were better for him, but he could turn to soybeans, and then back to cattle if it is better again. This attitude signals a primarily capitalist culture, which seeks the maximized profit, which will be mostly reinvested (and not consumed or spent on luxuries) to make even more profit in a spirit of never-ending growth and private capital gain. However, he added:

> But I am passionate about ox, I like it a lot since small, I know well, I know what ox is sick, which is a good one to fatten. So, I have large knowledge on ranching, I am a large trader and I do not have doubts about the growth of our region, we want a Pará like the municipality of Sinop, very productive.

He referred to Sinop in northern Mato Grosso, which is a key hotspot of soybean, ranching, and sawmill activities, and where hardly any forest remains. This kind of moral economy where ranching and cattle knowhow and "production" is valued reproduces the system, even when it would be irrational in capitalist terms (i.e. considering the productivity and gains) to continue producing beef in that territory. While I studied Acre, where the pastures closest to the road were being transformed into soybean and corn plantations, a similar future is foreseeable for the Itaituba soybean plantation expansion. Climaco argued that it would be possible

to plant soybeans in the region, "soy is the next step, to do soybean plantations, of corn, to not need to buy feed and to produce all on the farm to be profitable." Soybean and corn plantations are likely to be expanded even by extractivists who mostly engage with ranching, at least to the degree that they offer the possibility of not needing to buy feed. This benefit is in addition to being able to produce one's own corn ethanol locally and it will allow proprietors to gain more money through soybean exports. However, this is likely to occur only in the regions where pioneering soybean/corn plantation consultants venture, as they push expansion and work to change the minds of ranchers farm by farm – a process I observed in 2022 in Acre.

Discourses shape the moral economy toward pro-deforestation attitudes and actions. Telling of the pressure civil society felt, activist and president of STTR Dona Ivete, shared with me in 2019, that:

> It is difficult … the government articulates all this against us. This talk by him is to say: "meat got expensive only because there are many reserves … there are many occupied lands, so there is a need to put an end to these territories to be able to create more cattle." The government extinguished the Ministry of Agrarian Development, which was a very important ministry for us [as there are so many settlements in Brazil, with] so many people in need.

Ivete saw the power of the regime rooted in the corrupting role of capitalist advance, which could be seen as a key mechanism in expanding extractivist moral economies, she asserted, "Capitalism is introducing [itself to the people in the Amazon rural movements], capturing leaders in a way, it entered demoralizing the social movements, wanting to end them, and is succeeding in this." I asked Mayor Climaco, who is one of the most successful capitalists in the Amazon, what were the secrets to his success. He responded, "Not doing business to lose money, have a good team, one in the municipal council, another one in the farm and the gold mine." In this sense, in Itaituba, a key to consolidating an RDPE was to make profit over profit in a capital cycle of M-C-M′ (money capital turned to commodity capital turned to increased money capital, M′, via profit, which is then invested again in a cycle of increasing money capital to M′′, see Marx, 1976 [1867]: 163–173) and control the political and rural territorial power.[1] In answer to my questions about why he chose to ranch in this region, Mayor Climaco emphasized his own hard work and framed himself as bringing development, blessed by God:

> I came to meddle with garimpo, constructed my properties, and thanks to God I am now the manager and mayor of the city carrying out great administration, the city's construction site, leveraging involvement and we only know how to work, progress, the whole family

[1] With this general formula of capital, Marx explained how one becomes a capitalist, as the sole motivator is the pursuit of ever-larger amounts of money, in a never-ending cycle, with a will for boundless wealth increase.

works, everyone is involved, son to wife. Thank God we were successful, and the tendency is to produce, it is a country that is on the path to growth, the president of the republic who talks about growth and development and we are believing a lot in Brazil.

This answer exposes the gold- and ranching-based growth-focused framing of so-called development in Brazil. The mayor can be seen as an emblem of this system. Furthermore, this kind of discourse is, in terms of the work by Pierre Bourdieu, an exemplar of symbolic power in the making, where reference to or a focus on personal qualities are used to hide or draw attention away from the territorial changes and violence actually used to accumulate economic and other types of capital. Once the economic capital is solidly situated it can be used to gain cultural, social, and even more economic capital. Yet, the power behind the capital accumulation is hidden by the symbolizations of this accumulation as a product of personal qualities, rather than the true source, which is questionable and/or outright illegal acts such as violent deforestation. This creation of symbolic power is discursively connected to the most powerful people – political figures. In this context, these extractivist mayors who link their role in development to wider framings promoted by Bolsonaro, the government figurehead, embedded by cajoling agribusiness and Amazon gold-mining actors (see Evans, 1995).

When the Brazilian situation is considered through Bourdieu's (1991) objectified symbolic capital, the moral economic transformation happens primarily through the image of cattle and pasturelands, as smallholders see rancher wealth flowing from cattle (Hoelle, 2011). In fact, as I have discussed, this is mostly a mirage, because, as the land values rise, the key to becoming wealthy is land control by fraudulent or violent means. This misconception is likely because cattle ranching and clearcutting are more easily observable phenomena, unlike the flows of financial capital. Major systemic changes between the social and symbolic spaces take place through shifts in the key objectified symbolic capital whose meaning is disputed, according to Bourdieu (1991). In the Brazilian case, cattle, and the grasses that are planted for the cattle to graze, are either the involuntary accomplices of the deforesting rancher villains for the contemporaries of Chico Mendes, or increasingly, the harbinger of wealth and good things for post-2000 ex-rubber-tapping families in the CMER in Acre (Kröger, 2020c). These shifts in key objectified symbolic capital – cattle and pastures – are tied to specific types of physical spaces and, in turn, they affect these spaces by translating the social and symbolic capital tied to cattle into power and subsequent physical dominance over the territory. In practice, this means turning forests into areas where cattle are reproduced and herds expanded solely as a form of capital. The cattle are not intrinsically considered to be worthy as a living being, but only as a means of gaining capitalist wealth.

To curb these negative effects, the state has tried to create protection areas and has made other pro-forest-dweller policies; however, these are the exception, not the rule, as the bulk of the policies enable further expansion of ranching-grabbing, as discussed next.

State Actions as Enablers

It is essential to look at which sectors the state supports and in which ways, to understand which sectors and practices get consolidated, territorially rooted, expanded, and become dominant. For any budding sector to take root, state subsidies, credit, infrastructure, and other perks are typically needed, and in their absence, it is hard to expect new product lines to grow. The Brazilian Amazon states have experienced policies that strongly favor ranching. In Pará, the state's overall support for agriculture, through credit and other incentives, has been concentrated on ranching, while viable noncattle activities that receive any credit are only a small fraction of the overarching picture (Pereira et al., 2016). Thus, in practice, there is no alternative to the RDPE in the eyes and the actual policy mix of the state, which is a sign that this is an RDPE situation within a locality.

To have any hope of challenging the ranching-grabbing and plantation economies, states, and the international development apparatus, should offer at least a fraction of the kind of support, which has been provided to ranching activities since the 1960s, to noncattle- and nondeforestation-based agroforestry production (e.g. fruits, nuts, tree oils). An essential step would be support for creating production transportation chains for nondeforesting products (Pereira et al., 2016); however, this is very hard politically, given the dominance of agribusiness in ensuring that only their product lines get the limited state and international support. A further problem is the pervasive poverty and overall low quality of education in the region, which makes it hard to obtain quality workforces (e.g. for developing product marketing and logistics) and creates pressure on inhabitants to sell out or become corrupt as a means to gain power. Since 2005, I have personally observed numerous development cooperation attempts to foster Amazonian cooperatives that would export rubber, fruit, and nut products. These efforts were often too politicized to function properly. Even though people in key positions, such as treasurers of cooperatives, were chosen by election, the people who were ultimately elected proved to be untrustworthy or incapable of running the operations. This led to the expensive equipment donated being wasted and the estrangement of the professionals involved, who realized that they could not soundly manage the business due to this corruption and/or low-skilled supervision set in place by the local political processes.

Key factors in the process of deforestation are the policies and investment decisions made by the Brazilian federal state, as the state has allowed the

ranching-grabbing system to appropriate large areas, for example by building large dams and opening and paving highways. These actions can be seen as necessary enablers for the drivers of deforestation, but alone are not sufficient to explain deforestation (in the absence of extractivist RDPEs). If there are simultaneously enough conservation efforts that are put into practice and upheld by active state–civil society socioenvironmental actors, the dams and highways alone would not cause too much deforestation beyond the immediate points of deforestation (i.e. under roads and the areas affected by flooding when the dams are built). However, the highways, such as the Interoceanic Highway running from Acre to Peru's Puerto Maldonado and from there to Cusco, have visibly caused far more deforestation on the Brazilian side than on the Peruvian side. This discrepancy is evidence that there is something more at play, which is the ranching-grabbing system I have described. As this RDPE is Brazilian rather than Peruvian, it stays on the side of the Brazilian polity. The ranching-grabbing RDPE is the key driver that has the power to turn infrastructural development into an enabler of deforestation. This dynamic has been misunderstood or downplayed by the so-called progressive proponents of the neodevelopmentalist projects, who have assumed that zoning and control would be enough to avert the risk of deforestation. However, practice has shown that there is a high correlation between highways, dams, and deforestation due to the deforesting RDPEs in power in Brazil. This became evident with Dilma Rousseff's presidency and the subsequent approval of the 2012 Forest Code, which dramatically weakened forest protection and created new tools for land grabbers, such as CAR (which was supposed to work for environmental protection), and it was especially evident in her ousting from office in 2016, which was driven by the ranching-grabbing landed elites in parliament.

Soybean and ranching interests gained a lot from the coup against Dilma Rousseff; for example, soybean baron and meat company owner Blairo Maggi became the Minister of Agriculture in the post-coup Temer interim government. He has been characterized by Alceu Castilho from the critical agribusiness analysis group, De Olho nos Ruralistas, as a "catalyst of forces that promote agribusiness at any cost" (Gonzales, 2017). Allegedly, employees in his ministry tried to protect Maggi's agribusinesses against the public interest (Gonzales, 2017), which showed signs of state capture-like qualities in the expanding national dominance of agribusiness. Yet, it was the 2019 start of the Bolsonaro regime that made it very clear that the prior years' infrastructural expansions in the Amazon were a mistake, as they had been made without considering the possibilities of rising deforestation in the face of shifts and changes in political power. Furthermore, several PT policies supported agribusiness and allowed land mafias to continue their land-grabbing operations, as not enough attention was being paid to curb corruption. The lopsided utilization of laws, and tailoring of state policies to favor

extractivist activities, are indispensable enabling settings that explain deforestation. As the Rural Caucus is so strong in Brazil, dominating to a large extent what the state and governments can and cannot do, and having hegemony in many areas of the society, it should be held as the key driver of deforestation, with the elite landholders of that system as the key agents. The state is then steered by electoral, institutional, and judicial politics (shaping the content, rules, and power relations within these political games, see Kröger, 2020a) into a powerful enabler of further deforestation, especially by using state funds to build extractivist-supporting commodity export infrastructure and tailoring suitable policies.

Besides regime changes, as illustrated with the above example, what affects the extent of rule of law depends on the issue and investment context at hand. That is, the same government can expand and uphold the rule of law in some parts of the state, but also allows the operation of land mafias and land grabbing in other contexts, such as areas deemed essential for national development (which they cast as sacrifice zones). Scholars of Latin American neoextractivism have emphasized how the rising commodity prices alongside wishes by so-called progressive governments to gain windfall rents and distribute a part of these to new social policies (Gudynas, 2012; Svampa, 2019) made it possible to form cross-class alliances. For example, the PT became one supporter of neodevelopmentalist agendas like the creation of soybean export ports in the Amazon (Kröger, 2012; 2020c). The PT rule (between 2003 and 2015) was a significant enabling factor in the expansion of land grabbing and deforestation in the Cerrado, which represented a significant shift in the agribusiness frontier from the Amazon. Furthermore, the PT governments pushed for highly destructive neodevelopmentalist infrastructure and dam projects in the Amazon, which led to the violence that attended building the Belo Monte Dam despite several breaches of law. Lula wanted to industrialize the eastern Amazon, aiming for new steel mills, railroads, mining expansions, pulp investments, and agribusiness to take over rural lands, turning the whole area that fell inside a line drawn roughly between Belém, Altamira, Carajás, Palmas, Imperatriz, and São Luis into a key neodevelopmentalist frontier for Brazil and global capitalism (Kröger, 2013a; 2020c). There were judicial orders to discontinue building the Belo Monte Dam, but the government referred to legal provisions from the dictatorship era (1964–1984), which allowed the use of eminent domain for investments that were of high national economic interest (Bratman, 2019; Hall & Branford, 2012).

The State's Stake in Corporate Deforestation

The state not only enabled and drove deforestation, even during the progressive era, but also became a key owner of deforesting companies, including taking a shareholder position in the biggest meat companies that buy Amazonian beef. Especially

notable in this sense was the PT's National Champions developmentalist strategy, which aimed at creating globally leading companies, especially in the commodity export sector. The PT injected huge amounts of money through Brazil's National Development Bank (BNDES) into export- and agribusiness-expanding infrastructure, but also into the key corporations, which created mergers. In the crucial meat sector, BNDES gave billions in financing to the meat companies Sadia and Perdigão for them to form Brazil Foods (BRF), a large extent of which was owned by Marfrig, of which the state now owned approximately one-third, due to the state's stake in BNDES. In 2009, BNDES also injected 2.8 billion dollars into JBS, one of Brazil's largest meat-packing firms, to allow for foreign expansion, which also made BNDES the biggest shareholder (Phillips, 2019). The PT governments placed very high importance on expanding the cattle industry, for example, by providing in the 2008/2009 Agricultural and Livestock Plan 65 billion reais (USD 41 billion in 2008) credit for ranch production and export increase (Brindis, 2009: 6). As $55 billion reais of this was directed to corporations, it can be said that the state really supported the creation of huge deforesting agribusiness corporations. Due to this support, these corporations have subsequently become even more regionally and nationally dominant and have used this new clout and revenue-making capacity to introduce more flexible laws that work in their favor. The state has also become a key shareholder in the companies' profit making, forming joint ventures, as by 2009 it owned 10–20 percent of all the largest meat-packing and exporting companies. According to Brindis (2009), it is these large meatpackers, which are owned by the Brazilian private–state capital nexus, that dominate the Amazon ranching business.

The windfall gains that the commodity consensus offered – especially the high commodity prices between 2005 and 2014 – lured the Latin American progressive governments into the trap of boosting extractivisms as the key national development strategy (Gudynas, 2015; Svampa, 2019; Warnecke-Berger et al., 2023). Brazil's PT government and the beef and leather companies saw a good opportunity to try to make use of the 2009 financial crisis by cheaply buying companies in these sectors globally; thus achieving global dominance. They also acquired foreign funding for expanding the key slaughterhouse facilities in the Amazon. For example, the Bertin Company was given USD 90 million by the International Finance Corporation (IFC) of the World Bank to double production in Marabá, which is in Pará's fragile and key deforestation hotspot. The BNDES, and another state-owned bank, Banco do Brasil, are by far the key financers responsible for providing credit to deforesting operations (Forests & Finance, 2020). Banco do Brasil gave USD 30 billion to rural credit seekers between 2016 and 2020, while BNDES was the largest provider of investments to deforesting companies, mostly beef and pulp plantation companies. This was on top of the already exceptional

exemptions and privileges given to agribusiness company exports; for example, unlike other exporters, they do not need to make federal social security payments (Gonzales, 2017).

Regime Divergences in Supporting Ethno-Territorial Rights

Meanwhile the PT governments simultaneously upheld the rights of Indigenous and other traditional forestholders to a much greater degree than the regimes since the 2016 parliamentary coup. The Temer and Bolsonaro regimes gave even greater perks and legislative support for deforesting sectors (de Area Leão Pereira et al., 2020; Guimarães Filho, 2021; Souza, 2019). In contrast, during her last month in office before the parliamentary coup, Dilma Rousseff designated 14.8 million hectares of land as Indigenous lands (Fearnside, 2016). Temer started to reverse these measures, as he was facing impeachment and could only be saved by supporting votes from the Agribusiness Parliamentary Front (the Agrarian Caucus), which he gained, according to Pereira and Viola (2021), by announcing a set of laws, decrees, and provisional acts allowing for greater deforestation, just before the vote on his impeachment. In contrast, Lula ordered the Army to drive away illegal land grabbers from conservation and Indigenous areas in the northern Roraima state (Kröger & Lalander, 2016). Since 2016, under Temer and Bolsonaro, Roraima has seen a rapid escalation in very violent and destructive gold-mining expansion inside Yanomami Indigenous territories, which has been analyzed as a genocidal process (Bedinelli, 2022), and the opening of a new palm oil plantation frontier that drives ranching deeper into the areas Lula helped to protect for tenure holders by sending the Army to reinforce the law (Ionova, 2021).

Lula's 2023 victory raised hopes for better Amazon protection, especially due to Marina Silva's positioning as the Minister of Environment and the creation of a new Ministry of Indigenous Affairs, headed by Sônia Guajajara. In early 2023, Lula started a vehement crackdown on the gold miners responsible for the Yanomami genocide by trying to drive out over 20,000 illegal gold miners from the Yanomami lands, but this action has not completely solved the problem. Many frontier states, including Roraima, voted predominately for Bolsonaro, due to the high concentration of Bolsonaristas. This continued show of support for Bolsonaro is one example that highlights how the struggles over land and achieving a durable rule of law in the Amazon continue. These struggles do not solely affect the Amazon, as the rest of Brazil has a similar dynamic, but in some ways they are more pronounced in the Amazon due to the high concentration of multiple-use conservation areas, Indigenous territories, and state forests.

These government policies, including the analysis of key international negotiations, need to be studied in their international setting. The failure of the 2023 Amazon countries summit in Belém to come to any meaningful guidelines or

rules on curbing Amazon deforestation is an example of how drawn governments are to extractivist paradigms and international forces. This failure showed how extractivist RDPEs are better able than mere electoral politics to explain the socio-political dynamics that are driving key policies. The role of international developmental agencies, and of the Amazonian governments, continues to be focused on so-called developmental projects, which often in practice cause large-scale deforestation. For example, the IIRSA (Initiative for the Integration of the Regional Infrastructure of South America) is a development project whose primary aim is to connect the Amazon commodity frontiers, through new infrastructural projects, to export hubs on both the Pacific and Atlantic oceans. Several national and international development banks, investment banks, and companies are participating in this high-level opening of deforestation, as detailed by Simmons et al. (2018); including, among others, BNDES, the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB), the World Bank, the China Development Bank (CDB), the Japan Bank for International Cooperation (JBIC), the Nordic Investment Bank (NIB), the Swedish Export Credit Corporation (SEK), and companies such as Odebrecht, Bunge, and Cargill. The 2023 Lula government coalition so far seems to be strongly engaged in continuing to open the Amazon via these types of infrastructural projects. It seems that the key lessons on how to curb rather than enable the expansion of deforesting RDPEs have not really been learned, as neodevelopmentalism is still pursued as the key growth strategy.

Of the Amazon countries' heads, Colombia's president Gustavo Petro did suggest a ban on Amazon oil drilling in 2023, but Lula did not back this, as his regime supports oil drilling in the estuary of the Amazon River, which is yet another extractivist megaproject in the Amazon. The government overruled court decisions and granted oil-prospecting rights to Petrobras without conducting environmental impact assessments. Such major oil developments, in addition to wreaking havoc in the unique biodiversity hotspot of the Amazon estuary, would bring a major influx of people, infrastructure, capital, and thus deforestation to the most affected Amapá and Pará states. These government policies suggest that the Amazonian governments do not yet understand the unique and important role that this forest holds in terms of endemic species and global climate tipping point aversion. Pereira and Viola (2021) agree that the strategic importance of the Amazon has not yet dawned on the region's presidents; a situation that has started to change with Petro's election in Colombia. In Brazil, the actions of Marina Silva as Environmental Minister in Lula's 2023 starter Cabinet also seemed promising, although her scope of action was severely delimited by the Rural Caucus and PT developmentalist powerholders. As part of the EU–Mercosur trade pact negotiations in November 2023, Marina and Lula demanded that the EU drop its demand for greater deforestation-curbing measures. Meanwhile, key social movements supporting the PT, such as the MST,

members of whom I talked to in Belém in November 2023, were not critical of the oil prospecting or even the drilling initiated in the Amazon estuary. Rather, they saw this as a countermove to Western-based hegemony in energy geopolitics that would ensure the increase of national wealth and oil production within the BRICs countries (Brazil, Russia, India, China), which stands as a counterforce to what they conceived as North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO)-driven, Western, and double-standard imperialist politics. The fate of the Amazon is still closely tied to these international settings where states and governments jump at quick returns and growth possibilities, while sacrificing forests and justifying their actions in relation to competition in the international setting.

Next, I will discuss how the contradictory state policies of simultaneously expanding roads and conservation areas in the Amazon have played out and further enabled RDPE expansion.

State Designation of Roads and Conservation Areas

Multiple-use conservation areas offer possibilities for effective conservation if they are inhabited by people who resist deforestation and who have sufficient opportunities to sustain themselves through nonlogging activities, which has proved difficult in many cases for various reasons. There are several types of conservation areas with some key differences. The national forests (FLONA) allow for greater logging and extractivist activities within their borders but are otherwise often in practice similar to RESEX. An example of this is the FLONA Tapajós south of Santarém, which has Indigenous communities and rubber-tapping traditional populations who are allowed to live inside its borders due to their customary rights. Officially, the people living inside FLONAs should be moved, but in practice other laws protect their residence. Brazilian laws give ample de jure rights for posseiros to retain their place and it is hard to evict people even from protection areas or state forests, provided they can prove that they have stayed in a place long enough to establish land control rights (Silva et al., 2019) and they can defend these effectively. The national forests are destined for future extractive operations and thus, since the 2010s, a logging scheme has expanded rapidly inside the FLONA Tapajós, degrading its ancient forests and allowing for the export of illegally logged wood by Forest Stewardship Council (FSC) through certified, yet corrupt, local sawmills who place the legal and illegal wood into the same piles (see Figure 4.1). These activities are driving the Indigenous populations within the area to create Indigenous lands and make claims for their recognition within the state forest (Kröger, 2018).

Despite these problems, most of the multiple-use conservation areas have been major obstacles for the expansion of land grabbing across the Amazon. They were mostly a product of the broad socioenvironmentalist movement of the 1980s–2000s,

Figure 4.1 Logs from an FSC-certified timber operation in the FLONA Tapajós, Pará, February 2018. Photo by author.

which also helped the PT to gain more power (Domingues & Sauer, 2023). Once in power, the PT politicians started drafting a framework where they would create a barrier to key deforestation and land-grabbing sites, turning huge swathes of lands close to federal highways into different kinds of multiple-use conservation units. However, as stated, the PT also simultaneously expanded infrastructural projects, which started with paving key highways such as the BR-163 and allowing irregular and highly destructive soybean harbors to be built along the Tapajós River in Santarém and Itaituba. The fallout of this development could be observed in the 2016 parliamentary coup, which I see as a result of the weakness of key progressive parties in significantly altering the political-economic decision-making power, which led to an accumulation of power by large corporations and agribusiness elites as their expansion projects were amply financed by the state.

One of the key politicians in the process of creating both new Amazon infrastructural projects and de jure/de facto forestholders' rights and protection areas was Airton Faleiro, a PT member of the Pará state legislature and later an MP in the national parliament, from the Santarém region. His interview sheds light on the fine line the neodevelopmentalist PT government was trying to walk, appeasing both large farmers and peasant constituents. In my November 2019 interview in the parliament in Brasília, he explained the process:

When Lula was elected, I was elected state deputy for the region, [and] a process began to discuss the paving of the two highways. Initially there was only one, only the BR-163. Later we managed to include also the Transamazônica (BR-230), because the BR-163

was seen a lot as a corridor for the export of soybeans, grains from the Brazilian Midwest, while the Transamazônica was not, it had a colonization, a diversified production of cocoa, family farming with cattle, black pepper, food production and such. So, we also fought to include the Transamazônica in the PAC [the Project of Growth Acceleration], so to speak, so as not to have asphalt just to solve the problems of exporting from the Brazilian Midwest.… BR-163 is completing the paving, right? The government of Lula and Dilma left only 140 km unpaved there. The rest was all paved. The Transamazônica, we have only 50 percent paved. It's all kind of stopped.

Well, what I would say happened there in the meantime, right, is … along with the asphalt debate, there was a discussion about how to make asphalt in the heart of the Amazon and at the same time ensure its preservation. Then came the debate on the creation of, I will call here the macro-ordering of territorial and environmental occupation. And then the federal government worked out a process of public hearings, etc., and created and earmarked these lands because they were unallocated public lands. These were as-of-yet undesignated, yet still occupied public lands. So, some agrarian reform settlements were created, also REBIO was created, on the border between Mato Grosso and Pará, in Serra do Cachimbo. FLONA Jamanxim came, FLONA Altamira came, FLONA Itaituba came [were created]. So, in other words, a macro-ordering was made, right? There is [also] a *garimpeiro* (gold miner) reserve there that is not from the Lula government, it is from before, etc. The forest district for forest management areas was created. Then there was a macro territorial and environmental planning.

However, as later events showed, it was increasingly ineffective to create conservation units without establishing sufficient policing support against intruders and removing the land grabbers who were already inside the area. The asphalting proved to be a more powerful tool for deforesters. However, these conservation units did play some role in curbing, or at least allowing for progressive state actors to try to curb deforestation. However, the key problem is that roads are for land grabbers like sugar for ants, making them come in packs to try to grab the roadside areas as fast as possible, marking them for themselves.

At this point of the interview, Faleiro turned his attention to addressing what I call the power of regional political economies; that is, the deforesting extractivist groups, which did not and have not accepted the macro-ordering of territories by creating set-aside areas, a green corridor. Instead, they have continued to push for land grabs:

And these segments, let's say … that had a greater greed, they didn't want this ordering, right. So, they always reacted against the order, you know? And many people do not even recognize the importance of this order. If it hadn't had that territorial and environmental planning, that place might not have had it anymore, it wouldn't have the amount of forest it has today. No.

Well, then the Baú Indigenous Reserve was approved, yes, there was a reorganization there and in the Munduruku [lands]. So, from this reordering, these two Indigenous areas were also included in the macro-ordering package.

Well, so these [greedy] sectors, in public hearings, always took a stand against it [the macro-territorial ordering], in what they called the "stunting of the economy." They didn't

want it. Because? Because they wanted to farm, right? It was like that, to cut down and put pasture or else for logging, disorganized and illegal, right? And, also, mineral exploration, mainly gold, they mine a lot of gold also very illegally, etc.

So, even so, the macro-order was made and then we approved another important one, we approved it in the Legislative Assembly of Pará, I was a deputy, and I approved this, the economic and ecological zoning. So, there's the economic and ecological zoning of BR-163, right? Made by all federal agencies, it wasn't even very expensive, right?

Why was this a good thing? Because in our reading, if you had not done that, what would have happened? In addition to being a corridor for the economy of the Brazilian Midwest, it would also be the object of deforestation. Not just for livestock, but for grain production. Because grain production was already moving there to Santarém, there in Belterra … right? And it was coming from the Midwest.… So, what happened? This macro-zoning is also ecological, it dictates what can and cannot [be done], where it can and where it cannot, understand? So, they never accepted this macro territorial and environmental planning, right? That's important to say, right?

In this sense, it was first essential in my analysis of ultimate causes to turn more attention to the political-economic groups most relevant for understanding this illegal land grabbing. This is a faction within the broader agribusiness and large landholders' lobby that is essential for their expansion. This faction does the dirty work but distinguishes itself from the so-called more modern or legal parts of the business. For this reason, I have addressed in detail the characteristics of this mafia-like illegal and violent land-grabbing sector in Brazil. Next, I will discuss the resistance efforts against deforestation.

Resistance to Deforestation

Both the progressive parts of the state and the civil society, which together compose a broad socioterritorial movement for socioenvironmental justice, have long advocated for curbing Amazon deforestation in Brazil (Hochstetler & Keck, 2007). This process gained the most traction during the first Lula period. A series of methods, especially by a pro-forest civil society and a progressive state–actor coalition, brought the Amazon deforestation rates down by 84 percent between 2004 and 2012. However, it should be noted that these measures resulted in shifting deforestation to the Cerrado rather than stopping it completely (Dou et al., 2018). This is extremely problematic, since conserving the Cerrado is essential for avoiding the ecological tipping points (in terms of creating a water deficit) in southern and southwestern Amazon (Malhado et al., 2010).

In both civil society and state actions it is important to "interfere with the economic logic," not, if we are talking about state actions, to "just send the police and the army to prohibit burnings," Ladislau Dowbor, one of Brazil's leading economists, shared with me in 2019 in São Paulo. He understood, as I also argue,

the cruciality of changing the economic logic to gain environmental and political changes – not simply using command and control tactics. Therefore, actions like boycotting deforestation-causing products and production lines were seen as effective means and threats by both the large ranchers and civil society. To this end, Amazon rancher Valmir Climaco said to me that boycotts have and would immediately cause major losses to Amazon ranching business. Neuri Rossetto, a top leader of the MST, Brazilian Landless Workers' Movement, told me in 2019 interview in São Paulo that

> One way to inhibit this advance of capital could be this, a boycott of their products. It does not make sense to produce the way they do now produce as there will not be those who buy. I think this pressure on the other side is valid yes, it is a way to oblige them to have a social and environmental commitment in their ways of producing.

New hopes were raised when Lula won again in 2023. Lula's words, following the coup attempt on January 8, 2023, in Brasília when thousands of Bolsonaristas ravaged the Congress, presidential palace, and Supreme Court premises, aided by a significant part of the armed forces, suggested that he might be fighting strongly against the deforesting extractivists:

> A lot of the people who were in Brasília today, maybe they were gold miners, you know, illegal gold miners, or illegal loggers. A citizen does not have the right to cut a tree that is 300 years old in the Amazon, which belongs to all the 215 million Brazilians, to earn money. If he wants to cut [a tree] to earn money, he plants and waits for it to grow, and then cuts as many trees as he wants. But he cannot cut that what is the heritage of humanity, and above all the heritage of the Brazilian people. These people [miners, loggers] were there today. The evil agribusiness, that agribusiness that wants to use agrotoxics, with no respect for human health, was possibly also there. And all these people will be investigated, sorted out, and punished.

These words by Lula were a strong and novel reaction to agribusiness, mining, and logging illegalities, promising to curb land mafias in Brazil. The claims are confirmed by reports on the people participating in the protests, including notable ranchers, illegal land grabbers, and loggers, operating in the Amazon and involved in violence (Lula da Silva, 2023).

Many state officials are also resisting and trying to curb illegal deforestation; for example, the Federal Police have had many operations to uncover the ranching illegalities. I was told by civil police chiefs that deforestation actions should be taken by the Federal Police because they have more resources/people, are better structured, and are specialized. However, even with all this, they cannot continue to take care of everything as there are so many violations. In 2017, the Federal Police uncovered a major and rampant corruption scheme within the meat industry, which was certifying meat without effective inspection (Gonzales, 2017). There are state actors who would like to stay active to quell illegalities independently of

the regime, but the Bolsonaro era showed how much their power can fluctuate, as in practice institutions are not as independent as they should be according to the constitution.

In this situation, civil society actions have been crucial, especially in the hinterlands – cast as resource frontiers. In the Munduruku Indigenous villages south of Itaituba along the Tapajós River, which I visited in November 2019, the Indigenous people told me about their struggles against deforestation, including a long struggle against a hydroelectric dam that would destroy their way of life and grab their lands. A series of important activist strategies surfaced from these discussions with socioterritorial movements in the Amazon, such as that which occurred in the Sawré Muybu Indigenous village. Rozeninho Munduruku, a young Indigenous activist, explained to me the importance of auto demarcation of Indigenous lands as a form of resistance and observing the perimeter. The Rousseff government did not want to demarcate these lands as it was pushing for a major dam in the Tapajós, which the Munduruku were resisting. He explained the process, which took several years, culminating in 2016 during the Dilma period when the government finally officially ratified the Indigenous land, just two weeks before being ousted:

> The *Caciques* [Indigenous leaders] gathered in Brasília to demand FUNAI to sign the government study demanding demarcation, but when we returned to the aldeia they said: "now we will do the autodemarcation since FUNAI does not want to do it." The autodemarcation took 2 years, and we were showing in the pressure our struggle of resistance. Besides fighting for our territory, to get the decree, we also fought against the dam, and then when 2016 arrived, it was published in the *Diário Oficial da União* that the official demarcation had been issued, on the 19 of April, the National Day of Indigenous People.

This demarcation of Munduruku lands set an important precedent to create rights for the original inhabitants of a region. In this case, it was also important as the creation of that area meant that the major dam project did not advance, which was a step toward preventing deforestation and degradation as it would have wreaked havoc on a very large area. Dams in forest areas are key projects that advance ranching and land-grabbing interests, opening huge areas for deforestation, as the Belo Monte and prior dams have shown (Bratman, 2015; Fearnside, 2015). Dams and the process of building them can be seen as a particular system, a political economic sector which is trying to expand in the Amazon and is partially dominant. In this sense, the Munduruku success is a key example of anti-extractivist action as it created a nonextractivist space and allowed nonextractivist agency to influence the outcome.

Rozeninho Munduruku explained to me the reasons behind the success against the Tapajos Dam. He said the key reason was that they put "a lot of pressure" on the situation. This included the auto demarcation of their land, where they cut a walking path on the borders of their territory and patrolled this border regularly.

In practice, these patrols have managed to stop heavy illegal logging schemes, the Cacique explained, "Here we confiscated 14 heavy machines [to log woods]. On the day we took out them [the illegal loggers], we had 140 leading fighters, coming here during the night when they were trying to get the machines out of here." I traveled with the Munduruku several hours by a small boat upriver from the aldeia on Jamanxim River to where the action had occurred, to see the logging roads and the land laid to waste, including a barge they had destroyed: "This all here was our campsite then, all filled with our people, no one slept here that night." The Cacique said they would establish an outpost with a few families living there on a rotational basis for a few weeks at a time. While there, they would live from and plant forest gardens, which would help to prevent the existing logging road being used to further expand logging. This action by the forest people of setting watch posts in logging hotspots is key to control deforestation. These watch posts, manned by the people living there, are much more efficient than the creation of empty picnic areas, which are also unjust, a form of "fortress conservation" (Büscher, 2016), and prone to corruption. We explored this key place for a couple of hours but did not venture deeper into the forest by the logging road, since we heard a sound of a motorboat and needed to escape by another waterway before they could spot us. The Munduruku drones helped to check what was happening from the air.

In this setting of violence and absence of law, a crucial strategy, according to the Munduruku, was targeting the key economic and technical capital owners of the dam-building system, who in this case were in Europe. Rozeninho explained: "The elders and us others went a lot to the exterior, to Europe principally, to denounce the companies that sold or built turbines that generate electricity. We said that "you will destroy us" and other peoples. We placed a lot of pressure. I think that this fight that we showcased abroad functioned as in Brazil it did not work."

Many emphasized to me that in the Brazilian Amazon international actions are essential when it comes to forest policies. They can effectuate quick results and are essential to force the government –under pressure by the dominant extractivist political economic systems – into action. Meanwhile, local strategies should not be forgotten. During our days in the village, Aldira Munduruku, a young mother who had trained herself to protect the village by using drones to detect the presence of illegal loggers, also explained to me in a separate interview some of the other important strategies of activism for forest protection. She mentioned that if their village had internet access, they could do much more, for example spreading the drone imagery faster (see Figure 4.2).

Currently, the villagers were quite isolated and often had to rely on the illegal loggers, even for basic things like radio access. In other parts of the Amazon, such as Acre and the Peruvian Amazon, prior research has shown that the expansion

Figure 4.2 Aldira Munduruku, operating the drone that is used to detect the presence of illegal loggers, with the Sawré Muybu Cacique Juarez Munduruku. Jamanxim River, south of Itaituba, Pará, Brazil, November 27, 2019. Photo by author.

of drone use and other methods of remote sensing by villagers is effective in forest protection. These effects are amplified when coupled with telecommunication centers and when done correctly (González & Kröger, 2023). Rozeninho emphasized the importance of setting up "audiovisual groups" that can then gain more sophisticated tools and access to the internet to denounce the invasions, such as an important episode when the patrols removed illegal loggers: "I saw a video of her [Aldira] showing what happened here recently when they did the taking out of *madereiras* and if they had had access to internet, they would have already made the denunciation more safely. And as they cannot do this directly, we must give the material to an outsider to pass."

The need to give this information to outsiders creates the problem of the information not passing fast enough, which increases the possibilities of corruption and leaks. There are still many places where NGOs and others have not brought drones nor set up communication links; the latter would save time, as currently the Indigenous people and RESEX inhabitants need to physically walk long distances to adequately check for intruders. The lessons related to resistance strategies that

follow, shared by Aldira, are also indicative of the things that outsiders can do to join the struggle more effectively. It is also useful for NGOs and development cooperation actors to understand these.

First, she mentioned that it is important to gather together many Indigenous leaders – elders whose talk is powerful, emotional, and "many times" affects people, even some of those governing. Interviewed separately, I talked also to the Cacique of the aldeia, whose response to my question on what they do when threatened by arms is an example of this powerful, emotional speech: "If we die for territory, for the struggle, we die trying to defend the territory, not that what is others'. These people on top, they kill one, another appears, they kill two more, two hundred appear. If they kill a leader, ten leaders appear due to one. All the time increasing."

Other caciques in different parts of the Amazon used similar framing and similar speech. In 2023, Cacique Gilson Tupinambá from the aldeia Papagaio near Santarém in the lower Tapajós, explained the pressure they were facing:

> We know that the large investments they will not stop. They came in the past on a robbery and today they come by another version. They never stop to persecute us. We know very well that our lands are rich lands, and that we do not have an attachment to money, we have an attachment to our *mãe Terra*, we have zeal for her [Mother Earth], have respect. Earth is a mother, the mother we do not give away, do not sell, do not plunge a chainsaw on, do not butcher; the mother we respect.

Due to their key role and impactful speeches and guiding actions, caciques and other social movement leaders are especially targeted by *pistoleiros*, as Gilson shared:

> We know well that today the eye of large capital is on the leadership, the leaders who create strategies, who are a type of political articulator of the aldeia. We are persecuted and they threaten us by cellular, by messages, to intimidate. But we know that we came to this land to fight. We know that in the past they cut the tree trunks, cut the branches, but we stayed, the root stayed. We are the root of the Tupinambá people. A united people … we are always working by a collective form together with our *Pajé* [shaman], thinking of the strategies by which we will continue to manage our territory.

Second, Aldira explained that due to the threats, it is important to create documentaries with outside helpers, spreading news by "video documentaries of what has been happening and could happen" to the villagers and forests. Dona Ivete from Santarém, who has been featured in several documentaries on female Amazon defenders, also mentioned the crucial importance of video documentaries, created with the help of outside experts.

Third, Aldira mentioned the importance of protesting, a strategy which has been found essential in resisting extractivist expansions (Kröger, 2013b; 2020a): "We already made many protests to happen here in Itaituba. The BR-163 was already

closed close to Itaituba, I think for 10 days. It was a lot of people, and peaceful, nothing [violent, bad] happened, all knew to converse." With these protests they managed to attain their goal, which was to reinstall a coordinator to FUNAI, as the previous coordinator had been forced to leave by the government.

In these ways, social movements are a crucial part of the actual working of rule of law. Protest acts and mobilizations with varied strategies of resistance are themselves expressions of democracy in action and tend to result in more democratic state and territorial governance. Aldira emphasized that protesting is essential and typically has good results, while absence of protesting seems to result in being harassed by the government, "We are getting results in many protests. If not protesting, the government is always on top of the Indigenous, always against the Indigenous." The Kayapó, a powerful and established Indigenous group, also emphasized the importance of protesting and street blockades, when I talked to their spokesperson, Carlos, in Novo Progresso in 2019: "They shout, they already closed this highway here many times. There was already a row of more than seventy kilometers of trucks full of soybean not passing here. For the Kayapó it is very clear, what is ours is ours, what is yours is yours." These speeches demonstrate the importance of rights discourse; the understanding of territorial control, sovereignty, and autonomy to which the Indigenous people have the right; and, based on which they see, and frame, show that physical protesting that causes disrupting is completely justified. The aim is to affect government policies, to get the state to act: "They seek for help, and we already had many situations … when they shout, fast the government comes to solve the problem, the justice and so on." In Santarém, Dona Ivete from STTR echoed the efficacy of protesting strategy, "That what can effect a change are the marches, the manifestations, those struggles that we people do to confront them." There, the inhabitants of the Tapajós-Arapiuns Extractive Reserve, with leaders who are members of the CNS, the National Council of Extractive Populations', stopped a barge full of illegally logged wood by *madeireiros* going down the Arapiuns River. Ivete explained, "They [the resistance] made a movement in 2009 that burnt [illegal] barges." During visits to the site along the Arapiuns River in 2005, 2007, 2011, 2018, 2019, and 2023, I talked to several people who had been involved: those who lived next to the river and could see the logs leaving their areas, who stopped the barges, and who set the fires. These tactics were successful in establishing de facto control and stopping the illegal logging.

There have been many larger campaigns in the Amazon by forest people to directly confront the installation of deforesting RDPEs in their regions. The STTR had a campaign in the northern parts of BR-163 and the Santarém region to quell the heavily deforesting and violent entrance of soybeans after the 1999 installation of an irregular Cargill export port in the city. Dona Ivete explained, "Our role was to denounce and make a confrontation, for example through campaigns such

as 'Do not give away your land,' which was to conscientize the people about the value of land, the impacts of leaving the rural zone to go to the city … the idea was to oppose." This kind of politicizing is essential to try to make people conscious about issues such as land value.

It is also important to create networks and share lessons, to gain broader support on a national, Pan-Amazonian, and international level. Many informants indicated that much more needs to be done in this sense, to bring together the currently fragmented and isolated civil society networks, actions, and activists. Dona Ivete shared how they have organized seminars inviting other movements, such as, "Weaving resistance against capital": "[W]eaving since we see that the movements are fragmented, each one doing on their way. So, we want to join the forces so that the Indigenous movements, those who were affected by dams, trade unions, fishers, federations, have a unified voice and try to resist, and we can be seeing the localities where we can do our resistance."

Next, I will summarize this chapter on ranching-grabbing in the Brazilian Amazon and its curtailment.

Summary

This chapter has argued that a RDPE of ranching-grabbing has gained hold of substantial parts of Brazil, and is the main explanation for Amazon deforestation. Ranching and agribusiness, including soybean exports, are seen as having the greatest importance for the Brazilian economy and society, and therefore they are framed as national projects and strongly supported by state subsidies, tax perks, infrastructural projects, legalization of illegal land grabs, and other robust political and economic policies from government at the federal, state, and municipal levels. This has led to several regions becoming territorially dominated by ranching-grabbing, especially regions in the Arc of Deforestation, and in other areas where pastures or plantations cover large areas. The sector frames the attempts to curb deforestation by highlighting how international actors infringe on national and local sovereignty. However, locals have little say over these developments, as large beef and soybean-trading corporations are the true key players, with the most power to influence decision-makers into making anti-environmental and pro-agribusiness laws. Simultaneously, from a financial perspective the state banks offer cheap lines of credit for these endeavors. As Hecht (2005) argued, in this setting the "Real space for politics is relatively narrow," which is a situation that has worsened since 2005, as shown in the 2016 coup of Dilma Rousseff, the pro-ranching measures of Temer and Bolsonaro, and the 2023 election of the most pro-agribusiness and conservative Congress. In concert, these factors have created a setting where alternatives are not seen by the most powerful as alternatives

at all. Although in practice there are also several large areas with interests other than ranching, for example, large multiple use conservation and Indigenous areas, these places are increasingly threatened, as the inner logic of ranching-grabbing requires a continuous expansion to new resource frontiers, partly because older pastures become degraded, but mostly since the primus motor of the whole system is the insertion of new land from which to draw speculative rents. Specific land-grabbing groups, called land mafias, are responsible for this process, where the larger the scale the more benefits are provided. Bolsonaro further cemented this organizational model between political and agribusiness elites. Typically, these are one and the same, as they have common interests that tighten in what can be called a feedback cycle (de Area Leão Pereira et al., 2020). The problem is international, since the deforesting ranching expansion groups, such as Brazilian beef corporations, are still largely funded by European and other international banks. This creates a specific situation of investment lock-in, as investors and credit lending banks want returns from their investments, which means they are not interested in curbing illegalities.

These dynamics are also resisted by many state and nonstate actors from inside and outside the Amazon region. Furthermore, the heat waves, droughts, and fires that are indicative of the Amazon Rainforest tipping point to savannization and desertification are making ranching and plantations themselves less profitable and productive. Paradoxically, this agro-suicidal process could potentially support the tendency to curb deforestation. However, whether these material changes can really lead to meaningful changes in the business model depends on politics and economic power, wherein, as I have shown here, the biggest hurdle is to cut off the key pillars of power in the RDPE of ranching-grabbing. Policies which target the political economic bases of power, such as cutting state subsidies, credit, corporate support, infrastructural access projects, tax exemptions, export perks, and trade deals have a very high potential to curb deforestation. The adverse direction, where the power of agribusiness is increased in key political economic decision-making, does not – according to my theory – promise success for curbing deforestation, even if conservation areas are increased or other pro-civil society actions are taken. To be able to devise policies that get to the core of the issues and effectuate change, it is essential to understand these deeper causes of deforestation and the systemic causalities and dynamics behind forest losses.