

Land Conflicts and Violence in the Brazilian Amazon Region

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Abstract

The Brazilian Amazon region is the scene of the greatest number of deaths resulting from land disputes in the democratic period (1985 onwards). Such territorial conflicts occur at the time of the growing concentration of this natural resource in the hands of a few owners, whether of the old landowners or the modern structure of agribusiness. Data will be analyzed on agrarian violence, pointing out its main victims and the perpetrators in this type of conflict. The concentration of land has a new face with the acquisition by transnational conglomerates and countries interested in the food sovereignty of their populations, where large tracts of land are purchased to produce food and energy.

Index terms— federalism, re-federalization, resource control, political restructuring, nigeria.

1 Introduction

The Brazilian military government created the Land Statute at the beginning of its governance on 11/30/1964 by Law 4.504. This was the strategy used by the rulers to appease the peasants and reassure the great landowners. Its goals were basically two: (1) the implementation of agrarian reform and (2) the development of agriculture. Such goals seemed at first contradictory. After more than half a century of its creation, the Land Statute managed to achieve the second goal only, not carrying out a serious agrarian reform, which would distribute land to those who needed the most. Direction pointed to the continued concentration of land in the hands of big landowners, primarily the landowner and later large agribusiness conglomerates, since the call for state land distribution, especially in areas sparsely inhabited in the country, such as the Amazon region, was from 'land without men to men without land'. However, it was not for the poor, but for businesses (usually from non-landowners) and large investors. Even so, many families without resources came to the region and settled on land as squatters, giving the necessary ingredients for land conflicts in the country. Another change that was part of the goal of developing the country, especially in remote locations and close to borders, was the creation of a tax-free zone for industries in the city of Manaus, capital of the state of Amazonas, encouraging the mobility of people and companies to those regions, aiming to ensure safety for . 1 Based on interviews in 2007 with agrarian leaderships and representatives in the sector.

the Brazilian territory from aggressions coming from other countries or armed groups through the development and increase of the population. We must not forget the historical context where the Cold War was at its height and the military regime felt the need and the duty to protect against the communist threat and guerrillas that would be more hidden in places with low population density and the Amazon region.

From the mid-1980s onwards, the country became democratized and several governments signaled towards agrarian reform with timid measures since there were strong interest groups that wanted the status quo on this issue, including creating a ruralist bench by parliamentarians from various parties who were claiming privileges for owners of vast tracts of land who were opponents of agrarian reform. This group was formed by several political parties that comprised governmental alliances with the democratic administrations, passing through the governance of presidents Jose Sarney (1985-1986) (1987-1988) (1989-1990), Fernando Collor de Melo / Itamar Franco (1990-1994), Fernando Henrique Cardoso (1995-1996) (1997-1998) (1999-2000) (2001-2002), Luís Inácio Lula da Silva (2003-2010), Dilma Vana Rousseff (2011-2016). Therefore, there was ambiguity in voting on land distribution and agricultural activity in general as far as the National

Congress (Chamber of Deputies and Federal Senate) was concerned. Just so to have an idea, in 1994 and 1998 there were about 150 parliamentarians who formed this Ruralist Bench with parties ranging from the ideological spectrum from the right to the center left, rendering agrarian reform unfeasible ??HAMMOND 2009: 164).

Poverty affects more the rural population than the urban population, where three quarters of the world's poor live today and Brazil also follows the same path (BORRAS Jr. and FRANCO 2012: 36). Less industrialized regions are the poorest. For instance, in 1998, the average family income per capita in rural Brazil was R\$ 102.90, representing only 35% of the per capita income of the urban area, which was R\$ 292.40 ??SCHNEIDER and FIALHO 2000: 120) The vast majority have been left out and are fighting for better survival conditions, since the number of families who live in the countryside and support them but are not the formal owners of the land is far greater than those benefited by the state redistribution of land. This includes small owners who own insufficient space to survive than they produce.

2 II. The Amazon Region and Agricultural Violence

We cannot talk about Brazil on the subject of agrarian violence, without addressing the data from the Amazon region, which presents 64% of all the deaths caused by land disputes in the country during the democratic period. This situation derives from what has been mentioned previously and encompasses, in addition to the growing concentration of land, a distribution of land by governments of the military regime to large companies that did not belong to the agrarian sector. The poor mass of rural dwellers barely benefited from this policy. And yet, in democratic governments, the correction was small and even in governments considered center-left and left with strong social and popular appeal, many 2 were left out. Among the regions with unproductive land and distribution potential, the Amazon region stands out, and is where a good part of the conflicts occurred in the country, as suggested in the table below. Certainly the states of Pará, Maranhão, Mato Grosso and Rondônia stand out negatively for agrarian violence, where 890 (or 55% of the deaths) occurred in the last 31 years of democracy. In Pará, this number is much higher when compared to the others. In order not to compare states of different size or with discrepant populations, we included two more indexes: deaths by municipalities and deaths per 100,000 people. The first one is related to territories and the second one is related to population size. In Pará, this number is still higher in both cases amongst Mato Grosso, Rondônia and Roraima with high rates of deaths from land disputes.

However, besides the number of deaths per state and also the Legal Amazon, who is dying in these conflicts? The Pastoral Land Commission (CPT) publishes an annual report with disaggregated data. The report allows us to slightly understand these numbers. The following table gives us a description of this phenomenon. The largest 4 The Pastoral Land Commission only considers the deaths of peasants or their supporters. group of those who die from land disputes are squatters. Even this percentage is higher than the Brazilian average of 22 points. In the Legal Amazon region itself, squatters represent 27.33 percent of the victims of agrarian violence. Recovering from interviews with leaders of social movements, it is very likely to say that a large part of these victims arrived in the region because of the distribution that the then military government gave to companies and big investors and simply took possession of a piece of land without any formal documentation and began to work on it. Such a feat caused conflicts with the formal owners, who hired security guards and were threatened and even killed by them, even if such lands were unproductive. Moreover, the new Federal Constitution of 1988, Article 186, requires proof to the owners that the land performs its social function and is not unproductive, not to be expropriated and redistributed to peasants without (or with little) land ??FEDERAL CONSTITUTION 1988).

Such a fundamental law contradicts the Brazilian Civil Code that defends private property. Courts often rule in favor of property owners. These legal contradictions can intensify conflicts over land disputes ??ALSTON et al., 1999: 137), and encourage the use of violence as a means of defending each side in this current model. On the side of the large landowners, many of them in the Amazon region, there was a part that falsified documents with the help of local notaries, placing them in drawers with crickets (grilos as in Brazilian Portuguese) to give an old and yellowish appearance to the supposed documents, and which became known as Grilagem de Terra, equivalent to Land Grabbing (ZIMERMAN 2012: 45).

However, apart from squatters, other categories that add to the number of victims of these conflicts are rural and landless workers, leaders of social movements, small landowners and settlers, among others. The boundaries of the agrarian units generate a lot of conflict, since there is usually no fence in the entire land belonging to an owner, and the pressure of the large is strong for the small ones to feel threatened. There are even small conflicts with victims as well. The landless are organized in movements that have strategies to influence the distribution of land, occupying unproductive areas to be expropriated by the State and later indemnified and transformed into settlements.

It attempts to explain the large number of deaths from land conflicts justifying that land is a valuable natural resource just like in other conflicts which result in many deaths in order to possess other precious resources. Examples in this regard may be the extraction of valuable minerals (diamond, gold, silver), fossil fuel wells (oil), extraction of wood, extraction and production of illicit drugs (coca leaves, cocaine; cannabis sativa leaf, marijuana and hashish; poppy, opium) and several other items that have a high added value for criminals to appropriate and fight for such resources / products (ZIMERMAN 2016). The Amazon region is very rich in several ores (Vale exploits a good part of them in the area in question), besides legal and illegal extraction of wood. That is, there

is much to explore and there is marked deforestation, where state control is small. There is no basic structure for government agencies to account for monitoring and avoiding such delicts and offenses.

We have shown data of fatal victims in conflicts over land disputes in Brazil and in the Amazon region specifically, in addition to the categories of victims. It is worth presenting data on the most violent municipalities, with the highest number of fatalities in the country. Therefore, there is a table with the Brazilian municipalities where 10 or more victims have died in land conflicts since the redemocratization process. There are 14 municipalities located in the state III. Democracy and the Role in Reducing Agrarian Violence of Pará, which include the 8 most violent in the country. Of all 25 municipalities, there is none outside the Amazon region. This impresses and places this region in prominence, making us wonder the reasons for this negative phenomenon. The death rate per 100,000 inhabitants was included to give the proportional notion of victims and to regulate the population size of each municipality.

There were many more fatal victims in the post-1985 democratic period than during the military regime, according to the data analyzed (LANDLESS WORKERS MOVEMENT 1986; PT 1985 PT -2015)), and this goes against the logic of at least what it should be. The Democratic Peace Theory (RUSSETT et al., 1995) shows that democratic countries do not wage war against other democratic countries. But, they decide their differences based on dialogue and negotiation. The same is not true of countries that do not have a democratic regime. We could infer that the same should occur within countries with a democratic regime, with an emphasis on negotiation and internal dialogue, interest groups and the State and government. Thus, we would not have this violence that actually occurs in the countryside. However, the numbers show opposite tendency and how to explain such phenomenon?

However, if we use the quantitative literature of civil wars, we will see that rigid autocracies and consolidated democracies are not as vulnerable to the onset of civil war as hybrid regimes (known as anocratic in this literature), indicating a mixture of democratic and autocratic regimes which are located in the midst of a gradation of democracy (HEGRE et al. 2001; ZIMERMAN 2005), as some instruments that measure the democratic level do (eg, Polity). Clearly there is no civil war or danger of impending civil war in Brazil. But our democracy is not so consolidated and therefore, there is freedom of speech alongside repression against protests. Such contrasts can lead to escalating violence.

3 IV.

4 Final Considerations

The Amazon region presents alarming data on agrarian violence due to land disputes and the difference between this part of the country and the rest in this area is very high and worrisome.

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Clearly there is a behavioral pattern in this region that is peculiar in the production of violence resulting in land disputes:

1. Greater concentration of agribusiness, financial investors, and unproductive latifundia;
2. Production of raw materials for energy, such as sugar cane, and biodiesel material;
3. Severe deforestation, with livestock raising and burning, deteriorating the regional environment, besides projects to create hydroelectric plants with irreparable environmental damage;
4. Exploration of ores and large companies involved in this productive sector (Vale);
5. Acquisition of land by foreigners and directed to food sovereignty and production of energy (ZIMERMAN 2014);
6. Low population density and natural wealth, which makes it possible to distance authorities and impose force (almost) without resistance;

7. Social movements that organize groups to resist through varied strategies, increasing the level of conflict between opposing groups.

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The State is the only entity that could avoid something worse and try to reduce violence between opposing parties. However, even in interviews conducted in the region, many inquired that the state is not present to avoid confrontation and impose negotiation and agreement with rival parties. Thus, there is the tacit green light that if the state is not present to impose order and propose alternatives (either through agrarian reform, reparation, legal enforcement, among others), each side will seek to strengthen and enforce its own rules. Thus, many more people should die by land conflicts and the violence will not end.

¹Of what we call the Legal Amazon, which includes the states of Rondônia, Acre, Amazonas, Roraima, Pará, Amapá, Tocantins, Mato Grosso, and the western portion of Maranhão.

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³The estimate is for the total population in 2015 and not rural population as we do not have this data, which would greatly increase the index in question.

1

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[Note: Source: By the author (based on data from CPT 1985 -2015 and IBGE).]

Figure 1: Table 1 :

2

Region	State/Region	Deaths	Municipalities (deaths / municipality)	Deaths per 100,000 3
Legal Amazon	RO (Rondônia)	104	52 (2.0)	25,17
	AC (Acre)	18	22 (0.82)	8,94
AM (Amazonas)		54	62 (0.87)	7,41
	RR (Roraima)	28	15 (1.87)	26,51
	PA (Pará)	507	143 (3.55)	21,22
	AP (Amapá)	6	16 (0.38)	8,76
	TO (Tocantins)	43	139 (0.31)	14,66
MT (Mato Grosso)		131	141 (0.93)	23,72
	MA (Maranhão)	148	217 (0.68)	6,07
Total Legal Amazon		1039	808 (1.29)	14,47
Total other regions in Brazil		587	4756 (0.12)	2,59
Total Brazil		1626	5563 (0.29)	5,45

Figure 2: Table 2 :

3

Figure 3: Table 3 :

4

Category / Profession													
Lawyer, civil servant	Settled	Miner	Indigenous people	Leader	Other	Small tenant	Small owner	Politician	Squatter	Religious figure	Rural unionist	Rural worker	La
8	65	41	62	94	45	8	74		284	9	56	151	13
0,77%	6,26%	3,95%	5,97%	9,05%	4,33%	0,77%	7,12%	0,58%	27,33%	87%	5,39%	14,53%	12

Figure 4: Table 4 :

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