



National sovereignty vs. sustainable development lessons from the narrative on the internationalization of the Brazilian Amazon

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A B S T R A C T

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Sustainable development changes the governance of modern states and more precisely the way in which they exercise their sovereignty. How does the governance of states strongly subjected to sustainable development undergo transformations when guided by international standards? A debate has emerged within Brazilian society surrounding the concerns about internationalization of the Amazon. Through analysis of this subject matter (considered as a meta-narrative), we show how it reveals a redeployment of national governance in the Amazon. The comparative significance and scalar politics of this merits further research.

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Under the modern conception of the construction/reconstruction of territories by state public policies, the nation-state claims exclusive jurisdiction over a territory's activities, which are then labeled domestic (Ansell & Weber, 1999). This inalienable right of the state, also called sovereignty, is universally recognized, and is formalized around the principle of non-intervention: only the state has the capacity to decide actions concerning a national territory. In this perspective, public policies are formulated on the concept of the "national interest", updated by experts, and reflect the classic process of political development.

This paradigm presided for a long time over the way we conceive the actions of a state within its own territory (Murphy, 2002). Nevertheless, globalization, which can be divided into an economic aspect (i.e., neo-liberalism) and a socio-environmental aspect (i.e., sustainable development), has profoundly jeopardized this view (Adams, 2001) by inducing a transformation from "government" to "governance" (Reinicke, 1998). Our contribution fits into this new context and examines more closely the socio-environmental aspect related to the emergence of global environmental governance and its consequences on the regimes of territorial legitimization of modern states (Murphy, 2002). Indeed, "post-sovereign environmental governance" (Karkkainen, 2004) has profoundly reconfigured the concept of nation-state sovereignty. A new scale of reference has emerged that has complicated inter-relationships between conventional scales, so

that the conventional hierarchy no longer holds. At first glance, sustainable development can give the impression that it strengthens the role of international stakeholders because it seems to give a direction to state public policies regarded by some as interference (Najam, 1994). However, the success of the sustainable development paradigm has disturbed the traditional frame of reference. First, it encompasses several spatial scales (local, national, regional, international, and global). Second, it stimulates the emergence of a hybrid form of governance (public-private partnership), or even purely private governance. Third, it gives crucial and strategic political importance to "local stakeholders", i.e., to actors who are not the main policy legislators. Furthermore, an international forum for debate is not an easily identifiable entity, but a constellation of stakeholders (from international organisations to small associations) (Bäckstrand, 2003; Betsill & Bulkeley, 2004; Haas, 2004; Pattberg, 2005; Witte, Reinicke, & Benner, 2000).

Consequently, the various foundations of nation-state territorialities are no longer taken for granted in the geographical and geopolitical literature. The boundaries of the nation-state are no longer seen as "static naturalized categories located between states", but as "social, political and discursive constructs" (Newman & Paasi, 1998: 187). The nation-state is seen as an ideological construct whose aim is to legitimize every action of the central power (Taylor & Flint, 2000). Flint contends that "moving away from the dominance of nation-states in thought and practice and the emergence of networks" requires "the study of networks in their totality and to emphasize the role of power and scale" (Flint, 2002: 391, 395).

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This assertion leads to a debate on scale. Although, for human geographers, it has become a truism that scale is no longer an ontologically given category (Brenner, 2001), when we think about scale, especially the position of the nation-state scale in a globalized world, scale is structured into at least three “choices”:

We can, first, affirm hierarchical scale and, to the extent that it fails to capture the myriad socio-territorial configurations we encounter, augment it with some other concept(s); second, we can develop, as others have attempted to do, hybrid models that integrate vertical and horizontal understandings of socio-spatial processes; and third, we can abandon hierarchical scale in its entirety and put in its place some alternative (Marston, Jones, & Woodward, 2005: 420).

Depending on how we “choose” to think about scale, we can either seek the linkages between the state and other scales, as Brenner (2004) and Bulkeley (2005) do, or see the state as a stakeholder trying to defend its own interests and to appear to be a legitimate scale of reference (Cravey, 1998). Both perspectives should challenge, like Brenner, Jessop, Jones, and Macleod (2003) argue, “the notion of the state as the primary arena of political power”, should lead to “analysis of the changing nature of the state or sovereignty” (p. 2), and should avoid falling into what Agnew (1994) has called the “territorial trap”, i.e., the naturalization of the state space as the assumed demarcation of political power.

The denaturalization of boundaries, scales, and states can be seen, finally, as a consequence of globalization issues at stake in geopolitical debates. But does this mean that the nation-state is losing its power and its legitimacy? We think that rather than making the state disappear, this context makes it impossible for the state to base its sovereignty solely on naturalized scales. The nation-state has to reinvent itself in a world that is increasingly structured by networks and in a world in which the hierarchical organization of scale is neither evident nor legitimate.

To analyze this process, we will draw attention to a tropical case study – the ongoing Brazilian Amazon rainforest management. To explore in depth the current change in the nature of the state, its sovereignty, and its close relationship with the process of social construction of scale, we examine a specific narrative that vigorously denounces the “internationalization” of the Amazon. Some discourse denounces the international forces that have been trying to intervene and determine what the Brazilian state is allowed to do in the Amazon. But this is not what we call the “anti-international discourse”. Indeed, this discourse refers to a supposed global conspiracy that is planning to internationalize the Amazon, i.e., that transfers sovereignty over the Amazon to an international organization or major power that would then use the region for its own interests, whether for conservation or exploitation of the Amazon’s “tremendous natural resources”. This narrative is sustained by many different channels of communication, which we used as sources. The vectors are four types of media (official texts and public speeches (Brasil, 2005, and some National Assembly (House of Commons and Senate)) discussion reports), press articles, essays (Dias Mendes, 2001; EIR, 2001; Fregapani, 2000), and websites. For instance, a press review of two national newspapers (*A Folha de São Paulo*, *O Estado de São Paulo*) and two television channels broadcasted on the Internet (*Manchete and Globo*) has highlighted more than fifty articles since 1997 on the topic of the Amazon’s internationalization; while a simple Internet search using the keywords “internacionalização” and “Amazônia” (or their English and French language equivalents) produced a considerable number of sites.

Their reach to different audiences, the diversity of the voices conveying the message, and the forums in which they take part are the bases of their effectiveness. Belief in this conspiracy is supposedly shared by 75% of the Brazilian population: a survey

carried out by the Brazilian National Survey Institute, IBOPE, on behalf of the NGO Renctas (Rede Nacional de Combate ao Tráfico de Animais silvestres, National Network for Combating the Traffic of Wild Animals), on perceptions of the NGO in Brazil, showed that the latter’s mainly negative image is partly due to the fact that 75% of Brazilians “believe that there is a risk of invasion of Brazil with the aim of controlling its natural resources”, in particular in the Amazon. Nineteen percent of respondents believed this was impossible and 6% were unsure. Of course, this percentage does not mean that these people agree with the military view we will study. As in every survey, this survey does not say anything about what the respondents mean by their assent or about the complex reasons for their assentments.

This belief raises a number of questions concerning the reality of national sovereignty during a time of environmental internationalization. The objective of this article is not to judge whether conspiracy theorists regularly overstate the case or fabricate non-existent forms of imperial planning. What we aim to do is to analyze how the rhetoric and discourse of international domination of the Amazon play out, and the logic employed. From this perspective, while using data from empirical research on the Eastern Amazon, we first demonstrate that, contrary to appearances, the internationalization narrative is translated into an ongoing struggle between two national actors: the federal state and the local bourgeoisie. With the construction of scales, the anti-internationalist discourse represents a strategic action instigated by both parties to reconfigure the conflict over control of the Amazon territory. The internationalization narrative revives the old Brazilian opposition between the local/regional oligarchy and the central state. Going further, we show that the persistence of this narrative in Brazil means something else. Indeed, it crystallizes the attempts made by the Federal government to reinvent its modern sovereignty over the Amazon through the strategic adoption and implementation of the sustainable development paradigm.

We will develop our argument in four steps. First, we present what could be seen as the historical background of the anti-internationalization discourse, i.e., the long established globalization of the Brazilian Amazon. Second, we will present, in detail, the anti-internationalist discourse, by examining its history, voices, and arguments. Third, we will focus our analysis on today’s narratives in order to examine how, in the context of the pioneer frontier of the Eastern Amazon, the discourse is concretely used. We shed light on the conflict between the local oligarchy and the Federal government. This conflict sustains the anti-internationalist discourse and underlies Federal state’s reinvention of sovereignty regarding the concept of sustainable development in the Brazilian Amazon.

The historical globalization of the Brazilian Amazon

The occupation and settlement of the territory that eventually became Brazil is only one episode in the wider process of the maritime expansion following the development of European commercial enterprises (Braudel, 1961). During distinct phases of Brazil’s incorporation into the world economy, which was formally opened by the signing of the Treaty of Tordesillas between Spain and Portugal in 1494, Brazil’s political economy has exhibited three distinct patterns: colonial, mercantilist imperialistic, and peripheral industrial political economies. But each of these patterns has been profoundly structured by the evolution of recurrent asymmetric relationships with foreign nations (Becker & Egler, 1992).

In the Amazon basin, the general characteristics of Brazilian colonization – the enterprise for exploring and exploiting the tropics – were revealed in all their crudeness and brutality. Here, they were not offset, as in other parts of the colony, by the emergence of parallel and counterbalancing elements that matured with

time to produce aspects of civil society and democratic culture. Indeed, being the oldest periphery of the capitalist system, Latin America, especially Brazil and the Amazon, was profoundly marked by the “economy of the frontier” stimulated and driven by foreign centers of power (“Centers”), i.e., Europe (Becker, 1988; Bunker, 1985). Through their economic and political domination, these Centers imposed a paradigm of territory and natural resource use in which progress was seen as endless growth and prosperity based on the exploitation of natural resources. In the Amazon, this paradigm took the form of several “cycles” of natural resource exploration and exploitation, which gave rhythm to the development of the region (Furtado, 1961). It began with the invasion of the tropical forest of *várzea*, along the rivers, in search of “*drugs of sertão*”, used as condiments and pharmaceuticals in Europe. In the Amazon basin, colonists found an enormous variety of commercially valuable natural commodities, including clove bark, cinnamon, Brazil nuts, sarsaparilla, cacao, timber, and other products of the animal kingdom. Without these sources of wealth (and their extraction), it would have been impossible to occupy the Great Basin. Colonists would never have attempted to settle, and missionaries would not have found the material resources for subsistence while they evangelized the natives (Prado, 1967).

When Brazil became independent, the settlement of the Amazon was organized as a function of Portuguese needs. The Grão Pará capitania (for which boundaries fit, more or less, with the Legal Amazon boundaries) had not been, during colonization, under the jurisdiction of the colonial capital, Salvador, and later, Rio de Janeiro, but rather Lisbon, the Imperial Capital. This status gave the Grão Pará oligarchy important autonomy, and made problematic the sovereignty of the emerging Brazilian administration. When the Brazilian State embarked on the processes of self-construction, imposing sovereignty and deciding ways to develop to territory, it was forced to deal with this heritage.

Then came the well-known “cycle of rubber”, initiated by the industrialization of the United States and Europe. This cycle’s dynamic explains the strong dependence of the Amazon on foreign nations. For example, even if the cycle of rubber resulted in an influx of population, it did not increase wealth, because money was concentrated in major cities or in industrialized countries that took great advantage of low rubber prices. In addition, at the beginning of the 20th century, the British Empire relocated its production to Asia, where rubber trees could be exploited by highly productive plantations, causing the dramatic collapse of the Amazonian economy. The Amazon experienced years of lethargy until World War II (“WWII”) momentarily suspended the Allies’ supply of rubber from Asian rubber plantations. The Washington Accord mobilized the “Rubber Battle” (*Batalha da Borracha*) and caused a brief revival of the Amazon rubber economy until the end of the war and a return to low market prices (Weinstein, 1983). The sense of great dependence on world markets, which were hardly concerned about the interests of local people or sustainable development, strengthened in Brazil (Hecht & Cockburn, 1990). But at the same time, the rubber cycle showed that the local oligarchy was more interested in investing revenues from rubber in superficial face-lifts of towns, rather than making more productive investments (Weinstein, 1983).

In order to face this double development problem in the Amazon, new state plans were devised. They conceptualized the “new Amazon” that Brazil was dreaming of. The “delayed” Amazon rubber economy was to be replaced by a modern and, or at least, modernized, Amazon. It meant an Amazon integrated with the rest of the country. After WWII, there was a rise in economic nationalism (in particular, with import substitution industrialization programs), for which the Amazon had a crucial stake. Amazon occupation and security became the official top priority after the

military takeover of 1964. Based on a national security doctrine, the basic objective of the military government was a national project of modernization, which accelerated a radical restructuring of the country. During this period, large foreign investors (such as Ford and Daniel Ludwig), sometimes driven by grand ideas for the Amazon, benefited from tax breaks and favorable land laws in implementing large projects in the Amazon (Little, 2001). Indeed, believing that small and medium-scale farmers were properly incapable of assuring rapid and extensive occupation and development of the region, the federal government devised policies to attract large investors to the Amazon. Several foreign multinational companies acquired huge properties, such as Suiá-Missu (678,000 ha), Georgia Pacific (500,000 ha), or Toyomenka (300,000 ha) (Becker, 1990). Even the Grand Carajás program, another famous example of Amazon modernization through the POLAMAZONIA program, still reflects the dependence of the Amazon: the Federal government justified the importance of developing a nationwide project for exploration and exportation of iron by highlighting the need to supply the country with hard currency to overcome a critical economic period arising from the global crisis in the 1970s (Becker, 1990). The project left very little of its relatively large economic profits to the local population, and instead created social and environmental problems (Hall, 1989). The modernization of the Amazon should be understood as a new pattern of the integration of Brazil, as a peripheral country, into the global order.

However, the emergence of environmental issues since the mid 1980s reinforced the Brazilian anxieties about the Amazon. In fact, a triple action initiated by foreign countries and organizations changed the way the Amazon had been managed. Identified as a global ecological challenge, Amazon conservation was stimulated by other nations, such as the United States, that pressured Japan to not give resources for the end of the BR-364 highway, which would link Rio Branco (Acre) to Pucallpa (Peru) and thus defeat continental integration that was planned 20 years before with the Trans-Amazon Highway. There was also pressure from transnational environmental groups that actively denounced the impact of projects financed by multilateral banks, such as the World Bank and the Inter-American Development Bank. Third, there was pressure on other multilateral banks, which shifted their funding policy to only agree to finance development projects if and only if they had limited negative social and environmental impacts. Thus, internationally cooperative “green” programs, such as the National Program on the Environment (PNMA) or Pilot Program for Protection of Tropical Forests of Brazil (PPG7), constitute powerful and influential tools that affect the ongoing territorial dynamics in the Brazilian Amazon.

International pressure on Brazil to change its destructive management of the Amazon, was embodied in the creation in 1992 of the “Ministry of Environment and the Legal Amazon”. The wave of environmental projects in the Amazon could be interpreted as the successful imposition of a European or North American cosmography, a far cry from local cosmographies (Little, 2001). Just as there is “orientalism” (Said, 1978), it is no exaggeration to speak of a growing “Amazonism” to describe the symbolic interference of the outsider’s vision for Amazon management.

For most of its colonial and post-colonial history, outsiders have regarded the Brazilian Amazon as an infinite resource that could be tapped at will to serve a range of economic, political, and geopolitical interests. The strong and recurrent interference of foreign states in Amazon territorial management and an unequal exchange between foreign states and Brazil have been, without a doubt, a core element of Amazonian history for more than 500 years. This history has fueled a Brazilian subjectivity that is undoubtedly the

source of the perceived threat of internationalization and the popular belief in anti-internationalist narratives.

Anti-internationalist narratives: history, main voices and arguments

The anti-internationalist discourse vigorously denounces the threat of “internationalization” of the Amazon. On one hand, they stigmatize any policy aiming to support the alleged interests of foreign powers (notably the United States) as damaging to the national interest. On the other hand, they denounce an underlying geopolitical conspiracy to establish a foreign occupation of the Amazon forest in order to appropriate and exploit its natural resources. Internationalization then implies the exercise of territorial sovereignty by a third country. A historical approach regarding the construction and use of the anti-internationalist discourse indicates its importance in Brazil.

History of anti-internationalist narratives in Brazil

It is interesting to note that no one spoke of the internationalization of the Amazon at the end of the 19th century, when, in fact, the boundaries of Brazil were the most contested. The first mention of the “internationalist conspiracy” occurred in 1948, and can be explained by the fact that anti-internationalist narratives are closely linked with the history of nationalism in Latin America. It is only with the First World War that the peripheral and subordinated economic position of Latin America became a key agenda and a strong and sometimes archaic nationalism began to rise. This national consciousness became stronger with the 1929 economic crisis, which revealed the weakness of Latin American economies. Two strands of nationalism emerged during this period: an aggressive nationalism, which sometimes imitated European fascism, and an intellectual nationalism, which characterized the “1930 generation” who wanted to base Latin American development and consciousness on national arguments (Quattrocchi-Woisson, 1997). It created an atmosphere favorable to every initiative based on national and/or anti-international arguments.

In this context, in 1948, the first important mention of the supposed internationalist conspiracy in the Amazon occurred concerning the creation of an international research institute, *o Instituto Internacional da Hiléia Amazonica* (International institute of the Amazon Rainforest), by the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO). This project, which came after WWII rubber boom, was strongly rejected by Brazilian intellectuals, congressional and local actors because it seemed to herald a loss of national sovereignty over the Amazon (Maio, 2005). Two things must be stressed. First, there was no such denunciation in the early 20th century, when most Amazonian frontiers were being disputed by imperial powers such as France, Holland and Britain, and when the American Monroe Doctrine could have been a basis for internationalizing (or appropriating) the Amazon. We will see further how this paradox might be accounted for. Second, the fact that the first denunciation of an internationalist conspiracy was linked with an international research institute could be related to the fact that domination of a country begins, as Said (1978) contended, with the appropriation of discourse concerning the country. The Brazilian response to this attempt by UNESCO took the form of the creation of the National Research Institute on the Amazon (INPA) in Manaus (Magalhaes & Maio, 2007).

This period is also the moment when the Amazon began to assume a strategic importance in the narratives and projects of Brazilian politicians. In 1948 in Manaus, Getúlio Vargas formalized the first narrative referring to colonization of the Amazon in close connection with nationalist discourse (Hecht & Cockburn, 1990).

The Amazon became part of economic nationalism. This narrative preceded the launch in 1954 of an Amazonian policy, “SPVEA emergency plan” (*Superintendência Plano de Valorização Econômica da Amazônia*), which had been in the administration’s sights since 1946 and would prevail until “Operation Amazon” in 1966. This first formal link between the denunciation of internationalization of the Amazon and the support for a Brazilian settlement policy gave motion to an important aspect. Indeed, this connection serves not only to justify colonization, but also to make it ontologically possible (Haesbaert, 2004; Ó Tuathail, 1998). That narratives on internationalization of the Amazon developed in parallel with Amazonian settlement operations can be understood as a process of symbolic territorialisation. Isolated from other Brazilian regions until the first half of the 20th century, the Amazon had never been appropriated by the collective imagination. Integration of the Amazon occurred not only through human settlement (i.e., through new infrastructure and accessibility and management policy), but also through appropriation of an identity. Colonization could not be understood as mere physical occupation: it implied ideological incorporation as a prelude to physical occupation.

The second time an internationalist conspiracy was formally denounced occurred in the 1960s and 1970s. This was spearheaded by leading strategists and theoreticians during the authoritarian period in Brazil, who envisaged Amazonian development in their discourse about security: “the military’s national security concerns for political stability and secure international borders necessitated the settlement of the Amazonian frontier” (Simmons, Caldas, Aldrich, Walker, & Perz, 2007: 131). Under the influence of the Sorbonne Group of the Higher War College (*Escola Superior de Guerra*), the settlement of the Amazon under the direction of a technocratic, centralized state machine would serve mutually reinforcing development goals (Hall, 2000). Since then, security, and specifically national security, seems to have been closely linked with the Amazon. We should observe here that the geopolitical writings of the Brazilian authoritarian period formed the theoretical foundation of modern Amazonian geopolitics (Hepple, 1986). In a way, any discourse about the Amazon, from a political perspective, must include a security perspective. The link between Amazon integration and national security is captured by slogans of the Integration National Program (Plano de Integração Nacional), which were launched by the “hard line” military leadership of Emílio Garrastazu Médici: “*integrar para não entregar*” (integrate to not forfeit) or “*dar uma terra sem homens para os homens sem terra*” (to give a land without men for men without land).

The third instance came in the late 1980s and early 1990s, a period that proved to be a turning point in Brazilian history. The year 1986 put an end to the period of dictatorship in Brazil, and with the return of democracy, the military had to surrender power (Prost, 2003). This caused a true “identity crisis” among the military, which coincided with the rise of environmental concerns regarding the Amazon. Thus, in the early 1990s, during the months before the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED), which was organized in Rio de Janeiro, military spokesmen were making weekly declarations on the future loss of sovereignty over the Amazonian territory (Zhoury, 2002).

The fourth wave of anti-internationalist conspiracy theories is what we are experiencing today, and the subject of our empirical analysis. The discourse emanates from several kinds of actors, who denounce two aspects. First, the military sector, the Federal government, and large Amazonian landowners situated in old or new pioneer frontiers worry about the growing international concern over the environmental conservation of the Amazon. Their discourse is consistent with the discourse of the 1980s–1990s. Second, there is a resumption of a pro-Amazon colonization discourse by the Federal state (Pasquis, Valeria da Silva, Weiss, &

Machado, 2005). In fact, successive Multi-Annual Investment Plans (*Plano Plurianual de Investimento* – PPI) since 1997 have provided for investment in infrastructure intended either to consolidate settlements in already colonized zones, or to open up new areas to colonization, thus giving rise to forecasts of considerable deforestation in the long run (Laurance et al., 2001).

This historical overview of the anti-internationalist discourse puts three main points into light. First, we understand that the current anti-internationalist arguments are not new. On the contrary, they are merely the most recent manifestations of an old and vivid debate. Second, we notice more precisely that the contemporary discourse is derived directly from former arguments and perspectives that have been fused and reworked. Finally, the historical approach demonstrates the importance of the contextualization of the discourse – in other words, the narrative and arguments evolve with time as a function of the political context and the actors. Additionally, the general “anti-internationalist” narrative exists in a variety of narratives belonging to a given period of time. To characterize the current anti-internationalist narrative, the next section will consider the discourse that is heard today, its main features, and key elements of its logic.

Voicing the narrative

To specify the contemporary anti-internationalist narrative, we will present the perspectives of the three main voices: the Federal government, the military, and the large landowners of the Amazon pioneer frontier.

The new colonization policy launched by the Federal government finds useful justification in the nationalist argument, prompting unity around a national cause, while quelling opposition (Arnauld de Sartre, 2006). The name of each PPI clearly reflects this “nationalist-colonizationist” revival: *Brasil em Ação* (1996–1999), *Avança Brasil* (2000–2003) and *Brasil para Todos* (2004–2007). To go further, we can pay attention to Brazil’s National Defence Policy (PND), which was adopted by decree on June 30, 2005 (Decree 5484). It states that “*the Brazilian Amazon, with its great mineral wealth and biodiversity potential, is the focus of intense international attention*” (Brazil 2005: 8), and that “*given the strategic importance and the wealth it possesses, the Brazilian Amazon and the South Atlantic are priority zones for national defence. To counter the threats that weigh on the Amazon, it is essential to carry out a series of strategic activities geared to reinforcing military presence, to effective state action in socio-economic development and to an increase in cooperation with neighbouring countries, with the aim of defending Brazil’s natural wealth and natural environment*” (Brazil, 2005: 13). In this document, the matter appears clear: there is, in the long term, a risk of Brazil losing its sovereignty over the Amazonian territory, and this demands preventive measures. However, this account is weakened by the fact that the “threat” is identified in terms of “international attention”, and that the action is conceived as a policy of deterrence to reinforce the presence of the state, in particular by deploying its armed forces. This ambiguity is one of the fundamental characteristics of the narrative on internationalization of the Amazon: each narrative gives an account of international pressure, but remains vague as to the nature of the threat and seems, rather, to be used to legitimize a specific action (such as the reinforcement of the presence of the state).

Military voices that denounce the strengthening international concern over environmental conservation of the Amazon could be summarized in the words of Gélío Fregapani. This former Brazilian army general headed the Forest Warfare Instruction Centre (*Centro de instrução de Guerra na Selva*) and was the defence secretary of Roraima State. In an essay on the internationalization of the Amazon, he wrote:

“There is a high concentration of renewable energy sources in the tropics. Brazil is the largest tropical nation in the world, and has vast mineral resources and huge energy potential, including solar power. We believe that, at present, leading financial circles are concerned about over-production of gold and are trying to prevent mining in the mountains of the North, influencing native peoples to demand their autonomy and to separate from the rest of the country. We also believe that the imperial powers will run out of oil within 30 years. We also believe that our territory has the advantage of harbouring 50% of all humid tropical lands, which means 50% of the only region in the world that contains proven and permanent sources of energy that may well suffice to supply the entire world. This huge potential will one day be developed and exploited, either by the Brazilian people or by people with greater capacities. With such a prospect in view, one cannot avoid in thinking in terms of a possible war. We might, in the future, become a war zone, such as the Middle East is today” (Fregapani, 2000: 93, 94).

The arguments here are very often used in denunciations of the Amazon’s internationalization. As Castro (2002, 2006) showed, soldiers benefit directly from fears of internationalization of the Brazilian Amazon. On a symbolic level, the fears reinforce their self-conceptions as defenders of the nation. On a material level, they influence policy decisions in their interests (Marques, 2006).

Large landowners (*fazendeiros*) are the third main voice for anti-internationalist narratives. These actors are located in old and new Amazon pioneer frontier regions. They represent only one component of the complex social and cultural Amazon mosaic. Their repeated discourse against Amazon internationalization, which they legitimize by presenting themselves as “inhabitants” of the region, should not overshadow other local actors, such as native people, extractive producers, or small farmers, who do not “take to the floor” to denounce internationalization. To illustrate their position and discourse, we focus on the pioneer town of Altamira, the city of the Trans-Amazon Highway, which is situated in the Pará State. The issues of the regional *Hoje* magazine, financed by large landowners and published in Altamira (Pará) in March and September 2005, give an idea of the arguments that are being used by such actors (Fig. 1).

The explanations for the left-hand cover of Fig. 1 are supplied on page 3 of the magazine.

“The doom-laden atmosphere represents the impenetrable and sinister aspect of current discussions on the environment. The main figures are a two-faced Uncle Sam and Viking barbarian, who wears an expression of mercenary glee. The body language of this frightening character is clear. While he is extending his hand to give a bill to an Indian, he is hiding his left hand behind his back. What is he holding? Is it a weapon? We do not know his real intention. The figure’s solid gold crucifix and cassock represent the influence of the Catholic Church and its responsibility for the Amazon’s internationalization because the Church publicly endorses the conservation of the social and biological diversity of the region. The small red cross on the figure’s chest represents the condescension shown by the Workers Party (the red cross is the Party’s emblem). The Indian in the foreground and the rainforest landscape in the background are pretexts for foreign interference. The gagged toucan represents the PSDB (Partido da social democracia do Brasil, Social democrat party of Brazil), which, through Simão Jatene (Governor of the State of Pará), has so far failed in its struggle against environmental policy implemented by the federal



Fig. 1. Covers of *Hoje* magazine, published by the bourgeoisie of Altamira – Pará. Reproduced by kind permission of Mário Barbosa, former chief editor of the magazine *hoje* and webmaster of the website: www.ecoamazonia.com.br.

government. The 1-réal note (less than € 0.40) means that the conspiracy is appropriating our assets for the price of a banana”.

The idea conveyed by the right-hand cover of Fig. 1 can easily be explained as well. We meet the same two-faced character. This character is strangling an Amazonian small farmer, as explained by the sentence in bold under his feet: “International pressure is strangling productive sector”. The third character, who is well-dressed, is stabbing the farmer in the back, which represents a member of the Federal Parliament who adopts national laws in favor of environmental conservation of the Amazon rainforest. The reference at the bottom of the picture, which gives an answer to the previous bold words, makes all the elements clear: “Meanwhile the congressmen stabs in the back, destabilizing, once and for all, Amazonian production”. Finally, the Brazilian congressman is trampling on the national flag. The analysis of the two covers is quite simple: the bourgeoisie of Altamira contests the legitimacy of activities undertaken in the name of sustainable development in the Amazon region, contending that they are driven by internationalist interests.

A dramatic narrative based on an interpretation of the changing nature of state sovereignty

This denunciation of foreign interests is a strategic card in the power game for the Amazon. Fear pits some interests against others through analyses of a particular fact. The narrative persuades, not so much because of the often dubious quality of the arguments put forward, but because of its aptness and the way it propagates, or over-propagates, through a process that continually refers back to the terms of its own arguments, because most articles in the magazine quoted above refer to other denunciations of the internationalist conspiracy. Authors quote themselves and each other, drawing repeatedly from the same pool of arguments that make up the basis of the main argument, which adds further circumstantial arguments that revive anxieties at a particular time. These characteristics are typical of conspiracy discourse. According to Girardet

(1986), these theories are based on actual facts that are incorporated into a single, coherent logic; this logic gives meaning to the facts and aims to satisfy a society’s need for understanding by accounting for various facts that disturb certain members of society members, by means of a single and simple causality.

Two types of arguments can be found in all anti-internationalist texts, both of which return to the question of the sovereignty of the state. The first argument analyzes the world order by drawing a parallel between the simultaneous emergence of the sustainable development issue, the end of the Cold War, and the principle of non-interference, which, up to that point, had governed international relations. Soldiers, in essays, press articles, and reviews, have offered a vision of post-Cold War geopolitics that is dominated by a single great power (the United States) which, since the North Atlantic Treaty Organization’s intervention in the former Yugoslavia, has ceased to abide by the principle of non-interference (for instance, see Fregapani, 2000). All military intervention, even those which pretend being based on humanitarian goals, is justified by the national interest – a vision that the recent war in Iraq has only reinforced in the perspectives of these soldiers. The new world order, or at least a certain representation of it, can thus appropriately justify anti-internationalist fears. In any case, it makes it possible to spread fears that interests in the Amazon never fail to arouse, and at the same time, to dramatize and direct these fears in accordance with a very specific logic: the transformation of official sovereignty.

The question of official sovereignty underlies, this time directly, the second set of anti-internationalist arguments. These refer to the words of Western politicians, who all recommend a partial or total transfer of sovereignty over the Amazon to a supranational entity. The sources we consulted almost invariably take up the same set of quotations from international politicians declaring themselves in favor of an internationalized Amazon. The initial compilation of these quotations was carried out by Carlos Chagas, a journalist and academic, in *Manchete* magazine (July 5th, 1997):

“If the underdeveloped countries do not manage to pay their foreign debt, then they will sell their wealth, their territories

and their richness” (Margaret Thatcher, British Prime Minister, 1983).

“Contrary to what the Brazilians think, the Amazon is not with them, but with us all” (Al Gore, Senator and vice-president of the United States, 1989).

“Brazil must accept relative sovereignty over the Amazon” (François Mitterrand, President of France, 1989).

“The destruction of the Amazon would spell the destruction of the world” (Italian Parliament, 1989).

“Brazil must delegate part of its rights over the Amazon to qualified international agencies” (Mikhail Gorbachev, President of the former Soviet Union, 1992).

“The Amazon is the inheritance of all humanity. Possession of its immense lands by the Amazonian countries is mainly circumstantial” (World Council of Christian Churches, Geneva, 1992).

These quotations all have the same characteristics: they emanate from influential and well-known politicians, leaders of the greatest nations of the world, and are only referred to by year. There is no way of finding out either the exact date or the place where the comment was made, making it difficult to place in context. The only context to which one can refer for these quotations is not the context in which they were made, but the context in which they are used in narratives denouncing internationalization. However, the theme of these quotations is the same every time: the Amazon is an area of global environmental investment of interest to the great economic powers of the world who want to interfere in its management. This results in a loss of sovereignty for the Brazilian nation-state. These sentences should be linked with the global environmental awareness that has arisen since the 1980s and the strong pressure applied on the Brazilian government to change its management and care of the Amazon (Hurrell, 1992). We could roughly present this new context of action on Brazilian sovereignty as the emergence of a global environmental governance.

This presentation of the narrative could help us draw the main factors of its power. Three identified speakers have, in appearance, a convergent discourse and have frequently taken to the floor at three different scales: local (a large landholder in the Amazon pioneer frontier), regional (a military spokesman), and national (a Federal government official). At the same time, their narrative fuels and is fueled by a pool of unverifiable sources and anonymous speakers (especially those using Web resources). The dynamics of auto-referencing leads to a process of auto-catalyzing and self-reinforcement of arguments. The blurry side of sources and amplifying mechanisms contrast strongly with the two basic arguments that sustained the discourse and that are derived from the real ongoing change in the state’s sovereignty. So, the attractive force of the narrative comes from the combination of an obvious transformation of the political context of the Brazilian state and a diffuse auto-reinforcing dynamic that takes advantage of historic effective globalization of the Amazon. In order to reveal other features of the narrative, it seems necessary to examine a specific case study in which the different speakers are involved.

The anti-internationalist narratives in practice: a case study of an active Eastern Amazon pioneer frontier

On February 18th 2005, the Brazilian President Luis Inácio Lula da Silva promulgated a decree creating two protected areas in the Amazon region. The Serra do Pardo National Park and the Terra do Meio Ecological Station are situated in the South Pará state in an area known as Terra do Meio (municipality of São Felix do Xingu and Altamira). Altogether, these areas cover more than 3.7 million hectares of “*terras devolutas*”, i.e., lands whose location and size were formally unknown to the state due to a very chaotic Amazon

land tenure history (Treccani, 2001), or “unoccupied government land not earmarked for public use” (Article 3 – Law 601 of 1850) (Caldas, 2008). Before the creation of the protected area, this lack of knowledge and what is commonly described as the mere “absence of state” opened the door for all kinds of occupation, including areas rampant with violence, corruption, and disorder (Simmons et al., 2007). By creating protected areas, the Federal government’s aim was to withdraw public lands from an ongoing process of occupation and subsequent sale that generated ever-multiplying social, economic, and environmental problems (Brazil, 2004).

Local use of the anti-internationalist discourse

The Federal policy creating of protected areas in Terra do Meio has been formally rejected by the *Associação agropecuária dos produtores das Terras do Meio* (Ranchers Association of the “Middle Land” producers), whose corporatist goals aim to support “the economic and social development of the community [of the members of the association] and of the area” (XINGURI, 2003). Its opposition has resulted in two complaints, one against the National Park and the other against the Ecological Station, which have been brought before the Supreme Federal court (STF – Supreme Tribunal Federal) and aim to block the creation of protected areas. The Official Journal of the STF (n°98 of 24.05.2005) reports the first complaint (lawsuit n°25.246) in these terms:

f) Attack on national sovereignty, since the administrative process [of the creation of protected areas] used data that was collected, worked out and finalised in record time by international organisations, mainly because of international pressure resulting from the death of missionary Dorothy Stang: beginning of the administrative process (November 18th, 2004), death of the nun (February 12th, 2005) and publication of the Decree (February 17th, 2005), clearly setting out the “supremacy of international power over the national interest” (l. 27).

Official Journal n°112 of 14.06.2005 reports the second lawsuit (n°25.348) as follows:

But the plaintiff does not stop there, alleging that the decree mentioned above was also heavily influenced by the “presence of international organisations” in the studies making up the administrative process and announcing that “the administrative process was disturbed by the international commotion” (l. 42).

Faced with the threat of losing control over the lands they were occupying, the settlers in Terra do Meio immediately built and publicized a scenario of domination of the nation-state by the international community, of which they claimed to be the first victims. However, setting these territorial scales against each other did not entirely blur the issue concerning the focus of the government’s intention, which was to reoccupy illegally settled and deforested public lands. This example clearly shows how, through the construction of the anti-internationalization discourse, the scaling process is being manipulated to serve particular interests. In order to resolve their conflict with the federal state, the large landowners promote a conspiracy theory whereby the international community, by acting against their vested interests, which they describe as national interests, acts against the actions of the state itself, which loses its own legitimacy as a result. Here, we find a key element of the most important strategy in politics, i.e., the capacity to define the scope and scale of any conflict (Taylor & Flint, 2000). Indeed, large landholders are clearly in a weak position at the local/regional level in their conflict with the Federal government due to the blatant illegality of their activities in the region – from the violent occupation of land to the deforestation of huge

areas of rainforest without any legal authorization. To change the balance of power, they attempt to widen the scope of their conflict. They strategically reframe the issue in order to bring the entire Brazilian nation against foreign powers. The opposition is not yet between a group of local actors and the Federal government but between the Brazilian Nation and a foreign assailant. Most importantly, however, local actors are not the only actors capable of using the anti-internationalist narrative to legitimize their position. The Federal government does the same.

Federal use of anti-internationalist discourse

The nationalistic mobilization that followed this denunciation can be read as what Roger (2001) describes as a functionalist interpretation of nationalism. What is played out is nothing more than a conflict between the Federal state and the local bourgeoisie for control of Amazonian territory, with each seeking its own legitimacy. Roger states that:

To maintain its sovereignty, the modern state must proclaim its monopoly over a sphere of power that it indicates as public. Since power, like territory, is a finite quantity, the emergence and expansion of this public sphere results in a proportional shrinking of the hitherto hegemonic private sphere. (...) The rise of the modern state cannot fail to arouse resistance within the political community. Each part must find justification (both moral and political) for the definition it postulates of the optimal balance between the public sphere and the private sphere, a definition which is in fact conditioned by the perception of its own interests (Roger, 2001: 114).

The struggle for sovereignty in the context of the Amazon pioneer frontier actualizes the historical interplay between the local oligarchy and the central state. Indeed, the country has had to deal with wide regional diversity and, since its organization into “*capitanias*”, has experienced tension between a centralizing tendency (represented today by the federal state) and a certain amount of regional independence (in particular in the Amazon, which for a long time was hierarchically under the authority of Lisbon and not its own capitol city). In a country profoundly marked by antagonism between state and local (or regional) oligarchies, relationships between the national and local levels are fraught with difficulties (Perreira, 1970; Théry, 1990).

In this context, it is possible to understand part of the conflict over internationalization as stemming from the desire of the Federal State to restore its often disputed authority and to assert, like any modern state, its sovereignty over national territory. The sovereignty concerned is thus not national sovereignty in conflict with international governance, but national sovereignty that any modern state seeks to exert over its entire national territory, including against its own national citizens, should they build countervailing local powers. The declarations in the National Defence Plan can thus be interpreted as meaning that this plan must not only provide for the “reinforcement of military presence”, but also for “effective state action in socio-economic development and an increase in cooperation with adjoining countries”. Nothing indicates that soldiers are to be deployed to prevent foreign intervention. On the contrary, the last deployment to date of Brazilian armed forces in the Amazon was against local elite that had denounced the action of the state. Indeed, the deployment of 2000 soldiers in the Terra do Meio area was a Federal state response to the assassination of a 72-year-old nun by two assassins hired by Amazonian landowners. With this action, the federal state aimed to take back control of the region. This use of the army and federal power shows that, from the Government’s perspective, sovereignty must be asserted not only against international actors, but also

against local oligarchies. The South of Pará State is rife with violence from a deep-seeded “land war”; most of the Federal State’s actions in this region can be interpreted as aiming to reinforce national security not just against foreigners, but also against its own elite (Simmons, Caldas et al., 2007).

The conflict is not so much a conflict between national scales, but a conflict between a social group and a state, where everyone mobilizes internationalization and a narrative of national independence to strengthen and legitimize its action concerning territorial control. Even if this social group is present at the local level, and even if the group aims to show that the largest national scales are not legitimate because they are opposed to “local people’s interests”, a reading of the situation in light of a scale-based analysis alone will not capture all the issues involved in the problem. Even if national scales are present at different stages of the analysis, the question is not merely relationships between national scales but relationships between social groups in each national scale.

Reinventing the modern sovereignty in Amazon

The national scale has not always been favorable to the creation of protected areas. The former chief of the protected area department of the Brazilian Ministry of the Environment (MMA), whom we met on several occasions between December 2005 and June 2006, explained how the creation of these UCs may be understood. According to him, the Brazilian state cannot be understood as a cohesive whole. On the contrary, it is highly fragmented and riddled with tensions. In his words:

“The creation of protected areas has always occurred in obedience to favorable contexts or specific circumstances. The process has not been continuous, nor has it proceeded at a steady rate. This is because there has always been opposition within the government itself. Nevertheless, under the present government, a consensus to create protected areas has emerged, which, together with governmental capacity, has ensured that the policy of protected area creation is not just the will of the MMA, but advocated by the government as a whole. Obviously, this position thwarts other interests that are represented within the same government”.

But even if this ministry is opposed to ministries whose objectives are more clearly geared to Amazonian development based on unsustainable natural resource use, the federal government is trying, in the name of sustainable development, to formulate a new policy for the Amazon that could bring together these different perspectives. This policy also aims to strengthen federal sovereignty over the Amazon.

As we noted above, the history of anti-internationalist narratives can be understood as a way of symbolically nationalizing the Amazon in order to colonize it. Although it has been an argument of populist or militarist governments, and although it is still an argument today for certain social groups, the future of the Amazon is very much in debate within Brazil as a whole, both locally and within the federal government. But even if there is discussion about the kind of policy to be applied, the Federal government aims to control what is occurring in the Amazon; although it has, and continues to do so in the name of security (Simmons, 2002), it also does so in the name of sustainable development.

Some authors have urged Brazil to “reinvent itself” around alternative projects for the occupation of the Amazon (Leite, 2005). Becker (2001, 2002) advocates the construction of a national project for the alternative occupation of the Amazon in the name of national sovereignty. These concerns have developed into the “*Plano Amazonia Sustentável*”, which is a policy that was developed

by the Ministries for the Environment for National Integration of the Brazilian Amazon.

The reinvention of a national policy as encapsulated in the Sustainable Amazon Plan is not thought to be in opposition either to projects under Multi-Annual Investment Plans, which form the development policy of the Amazon (Laurance et al., 2001), or to the Conservation Unit policy (Silveira et al., 2006), which can be understood as a conservation policy that aims to bring together the different policies being applied in the Amazon.

“When we talk about the Amazon today, we are talking about the Sustainable Amazon Plan. The policies that are going to be applied in the Amazon, environmental policies, planning policies, sure they will be applied. But what we aim to do is to organise those policies, to break with sectoral policies (...). The Sustainable Amazon Plan aims to organise the development of the Amazon from a territorial perspective. Talking about territories, and sectors even more so, means that actions need to cut across ministries, state governments and the secretaries of state governments. What we are fighting for and want to put in place is a federal principle: what we need, because we are working in a region as vast as the Amazon, is to link up the three spheres of government: federal, state and municipal.”

This quotation, from one of the former chief developers of the Sustainable Amazon Plan, explains that the aim of the plan is to coordinate the policies to be applied in the Amazon, and to transcend the different levels of government. Ideally, this plan would guide the actions of different ministries and levels of government to ensure the Amazon's “territorial coherence”. This is advocated in the name of sustainable development, in order to overcome the conflict between conservation and development in applying territorial policies.

Finally, what the Brazilian Federal Government is seeking is a new definition of modern sovereignty and its relationships with the natural environment and the territory. But its sovereignty does not appear in development policies at first glance. The Federal State gives direction to policies, but seeks to develop them in collaboration with the local population and local governments (state and municipal) and to control conflicts liable to emerge around the management of the territory. And it does so in order to assert its own sovereignty.

What seems to be at issue here is the transformation of Brazilian discourse about the country itself. For a long time, national development supported by the use of natural resources was the meta-narrative that justified Brazilian modernity. Nowadays, this discourse can no longer be used in the same way. Brazil has to reinvent a modern identity of its own that includes the sustainable use of its forests (Todd, 2003). This transformation of the national meta-narrative is partly the result of international pressure. But it is used by various groups to promote their own agenda, including the Federal state, by reinventing a national meta-narrative on the Amazon using sustainable development as a pretext.

Ultimately, the debate on the internationalization of the Amazon deals not so much with the issue of international determination of Brazilian territory as the redeployment of scales of reference. When we analyze fears of internationalization as narratives, in which we examine the substance, voices, and recipients, we recognize that they are part of a debate on the way in which Brazilian territory in the Amazon is being redeployed.

The conflict revealed by anti-internationalist discourse does not appear to be vertically structured by opposition between international and national scales of reference. The lines of friction between actors are horizontal, and they stand between various projects for the Amazon in particular and for Brazil in general. In this sense, the debate on the internationalization of the Amazon reveals current tensions, both within regions and within the Federal Government,

over the management of the Amazonian territory and its resources. These tensions, ultimately, are the same tensions that characterize the concept of sustainable development.

Additionally, these tensions, which, not without a certain amount of bad faith, are transmuted into tensions between national interest and international pressure, are certainly based in Brazil's position within the world order. As in many South American States, there is fertile ground to build support for these accusations, but this should not be confused with the reality of management of the Amazon.

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