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ARAGUAIA: MAOIST UPRISING AND MILITARY COUNTERINSURGENCY IN
THE BRAZILIAN AMAZON, 1967-1975

A Thesis Presented

by

THAMYRIS F. T. ALMEIDA

Submitted to the Graduate School of the
University of Massachusetts Amherst in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

May 2015

History

ARAGUAIA: MAOIST UPRISING AND MILITARY COUNTERINSURGENCY IN
THE BRAZILIAN AMAZON, 1967-1975

A Thesis Presented

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THAMYRIS F. T. ALMEIDA

Approved as to style and content by:

Joel Wolfe, Chair

Barbara Krauthamer, Member

Julio Capó, Member

Joye Bowman, Department Chair

History Department

DEDICATION

To those who kept me going, challenged me, made me stronger, and helped me grow.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This thesis is the product of the mentorship, training, and support I received from family, friends, and faculty members. I would like to thank family members for answering every question and translating those tricky to figure out words. I would also like to thank Dan McDonald for being a patient and supportive editor, advisor, and friend. My friends for listening to me drone on about this topic for longer than necessary. In addition, I would like to thank the supportive, group of women who have provided me with both intellectual and emotional support, as we venture on this academic path. Lastly, I would like to thank the faculty and staff of the University of Massachusetts, Amherst Department of History: Professor Joye Bowman, Professor John Higginson, Professor Heidi Scott, Professor Brian Bunk, Professor Alice Nash, Professor Marla Miller, Professor Jennifer Heuer, Professor Brian Ogilvie, Mary Lashway, Amy Fleig, Adam Howes and Suzanne Bell. As well as faculty members in other departments: Professor Laura Briggs and Professor Daphne Patai. Lastly, I would like to thank my committee: Professor Joel Wolfe, Professor Barbara Krauthamer, Professor Julio Capó. Thank you for your feedback, your encouragement, and kind words. You have all shaped my growth as a person and a scholar and for that I am eternally grateful.

ABSTRACT

ARAGUAIA: MAOIST UPRISING AND MILITARY COUNTERINSURGENCY IN THE BRAZILIAN AMAZON, 1967-1975

MAY 2015

THAMYRIS F. T. ALMEIDA,

B.A., UNIVERSITY OF MASSACHUSETTS, AMHERST

M.A., UNIVERSITY OF MASSACHUSETTS, AMHERST

DIRECTED BY: PROFESSOR JOEL WOLFE

This thesis argues that the Maoist guerrilla movement headed by members of the Communist Party of Brazil (PCdoB) chose Araguaia as the stage for its insurrection based on perceived ideological and physical advantages. It examines the founding of the PCdoB as it split from the Brazilian Communist Party (PCB) over the issue of armed resistance in 1962. While the PCB did not promote the use of violence against the military dictatorship, the PCdoB sought an environment in which they could foster revolutionary fervor. Though the war's longevity demonstrates that the PCdoB accurately assessed some *camponeses'* willingness to help the *guerrilheiros*, their inability to foster loyalty within their ranks hindered the party's mission. The movement's leaders policed the bodies of pregnant guerrilla members and this lack of reproductive freedom led two members to abandon the revolutionary cause. Pedro Albuquerque Neto and his wife Tereza Cristina successfully abandoned detachment C in favor of keeping their child. Pedro was imprisoned in Fortaleza leading to the discovery of the guerrilla camps in Araguaia and the end to a revolution that never truly got off the ground. Thus, this thesis proposes that while the PCdoB's choice in Araguaia was thought to garner the best

possible opportunity for a rural revolution, their mission to radicalize the *camponeses* was cut short by the Brazilian Armed Forces in April of 1972.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Teço, irmãos laborais,
as guerrilhas e as esperanças,
os versos e os romances da liberdade,
a plena vida que o coração do homem ilumina.

Não me matarão

- Paulo Fonteles Filho, *Osvaldão, o poema*¹

I weave, labor brothers,
the guerrilla wars and the hopes,
the poetry and the romances of liberty,
the full life that man's heart lights.

They will not kill me.

- Paulo Fonteles Filho, *Osvaldão, o poema*

State-sanctioned violence is a reoccurring theme in the history of the United States and of several countries the U.S. has funded over its hegemonic reign. The United States government politically, financially, and militarily supported Brazil's military dictatorship. From the American-owned Hanna Mining Company trucks that transported military soldiers to Rio de Janeiro for the coup, to the napalm dropped on Araguaia residents – the cooperation between (mostly U.S. American-owned) multinational companies, the U.S. government, and the Brazilian military had oppressive and traumatic consequences for the Brazilian people. The U.S.-backed coup cannot be divorced from its Cold War context; João Goulart's plan for agrarian reform threatened U.S. business

¹ Paulo Fonteles Filho, "Osvaldão, o poema," *Fundação Maurício Grabois*, published April 6, 2014, http://grabois.org.br/portal/noticia.php?id_sessao=53&id_noticia=13016.

interests in Brazil and this apparent socialist move disrupted a delicate class hierarchy in Brazilian society. From 1964 to 1985 those who showed opposition to the regime lived under constant intimidation and threat of force from those meant to defend them.

Resistance to the military dictatorship took many forms and lacked cohesion. Movements against the regime represented a variety of ideologies on the political spectrum. One of the more infamous displays of opposition was that by the Revolutionary Movement 8th of October known as MR-8. The Marxist-Leninist organization kidnapped American ambassador Charles Burke Elbrick, bringing national attention to grievances against the military regime. However, not all leftist movements advocated the use of arms in their opposition to state-sanctioned violence. Some members of the Catholic Church in Brazil embraced liberation theology during the dictatorship years and advocated for better treatment of and services for the Brazilian poor, which became increasingly politicized. For instance, clergy in the Araguaia region were persecuted alongside the communist guerrilla. The Maoist guerrilla movement in the Amazon shared similar preoccupations with the liberation theologians – the plight of Brazil’s poor and disenfranchised – however the Araguaia Guerrilla focused more narrowly on rural peasants whose limited options rendered them voiceless in the urban-centered movements.

Due to repressive censorship policies during the dictatorship, the history of the Araguaia Guerrilla War remains obscured despite its significance to twentieth century Brazil. Unlike other notable guerrilla movements, such as Vale do Ribeiro in São Paulo (1970) and Serrado Caparaó in Minas Gerais (1966), the three years of armed resistance in the Amazon basin by a group of Maoist-leaning communist guerrillas was heavily

censored despite its magnitude.² While newspapers such as *O Estado de São Paulo*, *Coojornal*, and *Movimento*, managed to publish reports on the conflict, it was not until the *Abertura* that more substantive works on the topic began to surface.³ With the controlled liberalization, journalists were finally able to publish the findings they had accumulated about the Araguaia Guerilla. In their 1978 publication, the authors of *A Guerrilha do Araguaia* state, “Today the situation is different. Finally, we have the opportunity to publish the material patiently collected over five years.”⁴ These early reports provide important information on the active resistance to the military regime and, given the political affiliations of the guerrilla group, to imperialist capital in the Amazon basin.

While there exists ample secondary sources regarding this three-year long rural uprising, there are few English-based narratives on the history of Araguaia’s armed resistance.⁵ This thesis affirms that the location for the Partido Comunista do Brasil’s (Communist Party of Brazil - PCdoB) insurrection was not picked at random; rather, it was a highly calculated arrangement intended to garner the best possible chance of spurring a socialist revolution.⁶ Though other works mention the intentional choice of Araguaia in passing, they do not offer a complex study of the PCdoB’s pick for a Maoist

² Palmério Dória, et al., *A Guerrilha do Araguaia* (São Paulo: Alfa-Omega, 1978), 4. According to the authors’ note these guerrilla movements were “amply divulged by the press.”

³ The *Abertura* was the formal political opening begun by the Geiseil government in 1977.

⁴ Dória, *A Guerrilha do Araguaia*, 4.

⁵ Various English-writing scholars have mentioned Araguaia in their various works dealing with Brazil’s military dictatorship. However, there are no works in the field of history that focuses solely on this movement. Jeffrey Lesser includes a chapter on the deaths of Sueli Rumiko Ramayana and André Massafumi Yoshinaga in Jeffrey Lesser, *A Discontented Diaspora: Japanese Brazilians and the Meanings of Ethnic Militancy, 1960-1980* (Durham: Duke University, 2007).

⁶ For brief mentions of the PCdoB choice of Araguaia, see Rubim Santos Leão de Aquino and Regilena Carvalho, *Araguaia: da guerrilha ao genocídio* (Rio de Janeiro: Editora Multifoco, 2011), 39. See also, Romualdo Pessoa Campos Filho, *Guerrilha do Araguaia: A Esquerda em Armas* (Goiânia: Universidade Federal de Goiás, 2003), 79.

uprising. By tracing the physical and ideological aspects of the party's decision, I analyze the characteristics thought to be most advantageous for fostering social change.

Section one explores the ideological reasoning for staging a rural insurrection in Araguaia. It charts the development of the PCdoB as a distinctly Maoist communist party, with an emphasis on opposition to U.S. imperialism in Brazil. This ideological stance, coupled with the presence of U.S.-based multinational corporations in the area, led to the choice of Araguaia as an optimal location for a communist uprising. This first section analyzes the political development of the PCdoB as its members splintered off from the Partido Comunista Brasileiro (Brazilian Communist Party - PCB) in favor of a violent uprising for a socialist transition in the early 1960s. Drawing on documents produced by the communist party, I deduce that the choice of Araguaia was based on its large population of poor *camponeses*, the lack of government attention to the area and police brutality in the region. Though these factors fostered social grievances among the rural and mostly poor residents of Araguaia, the guerrillas overestimated the *camponeses'* willingness to join the movement. Section two expands on communist ideology regarding U.S. imperialism in the context of Araguaia. It focuses on the presence of U.S.-based multinational corporations (encouraged by the military dictatorship) as an essential aspect to the rural struggle. This section utilizes the Jari Project, an expansive business venture by American billionaire Daniel K. Ludwig, as a case study detailing the context of U.S. imperialism in the region. Thus, it includes a narrative of a multi-faceted resistance: to both foreign labor exploitation and a domestic authoritarian government.

The following section highlights the physical aspects of Araguaia the PCdoB believed would aid their guerrilla movement. These advantages included: familiarity with

the terrain, knowledge of natural resources necessary to survive in the forest, protection from heavy artillery due to thick density of the jungle, and a vast space into which the guerrillas could escape. It concludes that the landscape proved a significant obstacle to the Brazilian armed forces. With a total of approximately eighty-nine militants (including the *camponeses*), the *Guerrilha do Araguaia* resisted military attacks from 1972 to 1975, a significant feat for such a small group. This endeavor involved three military campaigns and mobilized twenty thousand men; a size comparable to the Brazilian Expeditionary Forces sent to fight for the Allies in Europe during World War II.⁷ Such a large movement of troops, coupled with intense censorship on the subject as a means of discouraging similar uprisings elsewhere in Brazil, indicates that the regime viewed the potential of a communist uprising in Araguaia as a serious threat. By 1975 the majority of the PCdoB militants was captured, tortured, and/or killed by the military. Though the party accurately analyzed the environmental advantages of Araguaia, the guerrillas were attacked before fully realizing their ideological mission — radicalizing the people and eventually inciting the masses into a prolonged popular uprising.

I use the term Araguaia to signify the general area wherein the PCdoB militants set up their camps and social networks. This space encompassed towns in three different states, Pará, Maranhão, and what is today Tocantins, connected by a series of Amazon tributaries, including the Araguaia River. The mineral wealth located between the Araguaia and Tocantins rivers drew foreign and multinational companies to the region. Their presence provoked tensions regarding work conditions, an important concern to the communist cause. Thus, this community also became a refuge for the militants who had

⁷ Maria Helena Moreira Alves, *State and Opposition in Military Brazil* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1985), 121-122.

previous skirmishes with the law, such as Helenira Resende de Souza Nazareth, vice-president of the União Nacional dos Estudantes (National Student Union - UNE).⁸

⁸ Helenira Resende was imprisoned along with 800 other students at the 30th UNE Congress in Ibiúna, São Paulo. See Bruno Ribeiro, *Helenira Resende e A Guerrilha do Araguaia* (São Paulo: Editora Expressão Popular, 2007), 23. Resende was also one of the few women to take on a leadership role in the student movement, she was one of multiple vice-presidents of the UNE, see Victoria Langland, *Speaking of Flowers: Student Movements and the Making and Remembering of 1968 in Military Brazil* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2013), 138.

An investigation of Araguaia's role in communist resistance in Brazil places politics in the context of geographic spaces. The various students, PCdoB leaders, and communist-affiliated peoples who fought in Araguaia expanded the term's association from a river and region to a guerrilla war — one of the most important armed movements in rural Brazil.

CHAPTER 2

IDEOLOGY FROM PRESTES TO ARAGUAIA

Founded in 1922, the Partido Comunista Brasileiro was highly influenced by the success of the Russian revolution and remained within the Communist International's (Comintern) sphere of influence until party tensions peaked in 1962. Ronald Chilcote chronicles the party's extensive history in his work *The Brazilian Communist Party: Conflict and Integration 1922-1972*; his analysis of the PCB's history demonstrates the volatile nature of the party's legality, specifically during the Cold War era. While at times the party operated from the margins of society, it actively worked to improve the rights and amplify the voices of rural laborers. During a brief period of legality, 1945-1947, party leader Luis Carlos Prestes campaigned for the election of PCB members running an electoral program that demanded agrarian reform, a new democratic constitution, and support for the United Nations.¹⁰ As newly-elected members of the Constituent Assembly, PCB candidates criticized President Eurico Gaspar Dutra and his government for their efforts to attract foreign investment; such criticisms led to suppression of party activities, culminating with the outlawing of the PCB on May 7, 1947.¹¹

Operating as a clandestine organization, the PCB adopted a revolutionary stance that was partly shaped by the Cold War, in that member theorists considered U.S.-Brazil relations to be semi-colonial in nature. The theses of the PCB's Fourth Congress point to

¹⁰ These elections were held in 1945 and although Eurico Gaspar Dutra received 55% of the presidential votes the PCB received the largest party votes in industrial cities and state capitals making them Dutra's most formidable opposition. See, Ronald H. Chilcote, *The Brazilian Communist Party: Conflict and Integration 1922-1972* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1974), 51-52.

¹¹ The illegalization of the PCB was also a response to the U.S. who pushed to eliminate communism from the hemisphere. Cliff Welch, "Keeping Communism Down on the Farm: The Brazilian Rural Labor Movement during the Cold War," *Latin American Perspectives* 33 (2006): 29. See also, Chilcote, *Brazilian Communist Party*, 53.

a policy shift reflecting increased tensions between the communist and non-communist worlds. More specifically, such a shift meant greater antagonism towards capitalist governments and a more militant opposition to U.S. imperialism.¹² This perspective also emphasized the connection between imperialism and the persistence of a “backward state of development bordering on feudalism” in Brazil.¹³ It called for a break from imperialist, resource-extractive, corporations so as to restructure Brazil’s agricultural sector in favor of supporting a domestic market. Despite a common anti-imperialist viewpoint, members of the PCB disagreed on the method for combating rural labor exploitation. Luis Carlos Prestes first advocated the use of violence in his 1950 August Manifesto; however, ten years later the party (once again) shifted its stance towards the peaceful models supported by the USSR.¹⁴ Chilcote asserts that, “the strategy of relying on all social strata from the urban proletariat to the national bourgeoisie stemmed from the Soviet Communist Party’s renewed emphasis on moderate reformist movements as appropriate to all dependent societies.”¹⁵ Thus, the PCB’s history was volatile both politically and ideologically, reflecting Cold War relations on a broader scale.

These constant alterations led to a major party split by the PCB’s Fifth Congress. At this time, party dissidents who disagreed with the Soviet policy of “peaceful coexistence” turned to Communist China for guidance. Among them were João Amazonas, Maurício Grabois, Ângelo Arroyo, and Pedro Pomar, important leaders in what became the PCdoB. These dissidents defended the path of violence while notable figures such as Luis Carlos Pretes, Gioconda Dias, and Astrojildo Pereira upheld the need

¹² Chilcote, *Brazilian Communist Party*, 54-55. The fourth congress was originally scheduled for May 23, 1947 but was postponed due to the party’s illegal status.

¹³ Welch, “Keeping Communism Down on the Farm,” 30.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 30, 33.

¹⁵ Chilcote, *Brazilian Communist Party*, 64.

for peaceful coexistence.¹⁶ The two factions officially split in 1962, though both parties continued to focus on the plight of rural farmers and agricultural workers, specifically at the hands of multinational corporations. The newly constituted PCdoB distanced itself from the Soviet Union and turned towards the communist regime in China; this relationship promoted violent rural resistance as opposed to peaceful social change. In 1966, the PCdoB sent fifteen militants to China in order to undergo technical guerrilla training at the Military Academy in Beijing. These guerrillas believed that the contradictions of capitalism and conflicts stemming from social inequality coupled with abuses from the dictatorship justified the use of violence against the regime.¹⁷ Along with physical training, the PCdoB militants also engaged in practical and theoretical courses regarding field combat, which emphasized the importance of a mass popular uprising. Thus, in 1969 the PCdoB's central committee officially approved of a violent insurrection in its resolution entitled *Guerra Popular - Caminho da Luta Armada no Brasil*.¹⁸

Following the lead of the Chinese Revolution, the PCdoB was intent on generating a fight for the people; thus the importance of a rural setting for the insurrection. Drawing on Maoism and Che Guevara's writings (the concept of *foquismo*), the communists considered the disenfranchised peoples of Araguaia to be the source of the revolution's legitimacy. In their evaluation of Araguaia's ability to sustain a revolution, documented in "Copy of the PCdoB's Study For the Implementation of the Rural Guerrilla War in Araguaia (1968-1972)," the unknown author(s) stresses the

¹⁶ Taís Morais and Eumano Silva, *Operação Araguaia: Os Arquivos Secretos da Guerrilha* (São Paulo: Geração Editorial, 2005), 34. See also, Romualdo Pessoa Campos Filho, *Guerrilha do Araguaia: A Esquerda em Armas* (Goiânia: Editora UFG, 1997), 82.

¹⁷ Morais and Silva, *Operação Araguaia*, 28.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 35.

importance of the land and its population. It asserts that the party's two strategic tasks in the region were to ensure its own survival and guarantee constant growth.¹⁹ While the resource-rich landscape facilitated survival, the large population living on the margins of society provided a potential support system and social network.

The extreme poverty in the Araguaia region, due to labor exploitation and government neglect, led party leaders to deem it highly susceptible to subversive ideology. The author(s) goes into a detailed explanation of the socio-economic conditions of the area in their study of Araguaia, heralding the poor migrant population as a key factor in the guerrilla movements's success. The document describes the migrants from northeastern states, the *nordestinos*, as pauper-like, lacking any kind of assistance and living on dispersed *roças* (small, subsistence-level, rural households).²⁰ The possibility of radicalizing the economically oppressed peoples of the region meant that, through family ties stretching across northern Brazil, the PCdoB could eventually mobilize a mass popular army. While the assertion that the region was plagued with poverty and virtually ignored by the federal government is not particularly far-fetched, it is important to question the extent to which such a description was projected onto the peasant population in Araguaia. Perhaps the communists' view of the power relations within this community was substantial reason for a call to arms, however the voices of those native to the area would have strengthened the PCdoB's claim to the necessity of an uprising.

The *camponeses* were, in fact, poor and desolate; their livelihood was neither guaranteed nor secure. A considerable number of those living just outside the small cities came from the northeastern states of Brazil where food and jobs were (and still are)

¹⁹ "Copia do Estudo do PCdoB Para A Implantação da Guerrilha Rural do Araguaia (1968-1972)," undated, p. 44.

²⁰ "Copy of the Study," p. 43.

scarce due to frequent periods of drought. For people like Joaquim Rodrigues Araujo the jungle was pure and empty, it provided opportunities for unobstructed subsistence whether by farming or simply gathering the fruits of the forest.²¹ Once in Araguaia, these people became a part of the subsistence economy or found employment as seasonal workers of various sorts. Some of the more notable seasonal jobs in the area included picking *castanhas* (chestnuts), working on cattle breeding farms, or in wood extraction – notoriously exploitative jobs.²² Given the oppressive economic environment and the high population of those living in poverty, the PCdoB felt that the residents’ only option was a revolution.²³ Once again, the assertion that there was a lack of alternate solutions to the peasants’ abject poverty appears to be projected onto the population of Araguaia. The PCdoB’s study for the implementation of guerrilla warfare in Araguaia obscures the agency of the very people they aim to liberate from their assumed state of oppression.

Agency is both important and illusive in this narrative. Despite bearing witness to (and bearing the brunt of) the militarization of Araguaia, the local residents are absent from both the PCdoB’s study of the region and military reports regarding the counterinsurgency. However, journalists, researchers and human rights organizations have been working to uncover those voices since the early 1990s. At first, every humanitarian, academic, or media interviews conducted in the area was followed by military presence and a separate investigation into the information being divulged. This show of intimidation, and ultimately force, did not always keep residents for talking and

²¹ Camponeses describe how they arrived at Araguaia and reminisce their lives pre-militarization of the region in *Camponeses do Araguaia: a Guerrilha vista por dentro*, documentary, directed by Vandr e Fernandes (2011; S o Paulo: Funda o Maur cio Grabois).

²² The PCdoB makes this claim in “Copy of the Study,” p. 3 however residents interviewed in the documentary *Camponeses do Araguaia: a Guerrilha vista por dentro* echo this sentiment.

²³ Ibid.

did eventually subside as the conflict in Araguaia became harder to deny. Indeed, Professor Romualdo Pessoa Campos Filhos has noticed an increasing willingness, on behalf of the Araguaia residents, to discuss the *guerrilha*.²⁴ For the past twenty years the presence of news trucks in the region has been anything but a novelty; thus while the *camponeses* remain subaltern in the documents produced by both the PCdoB and the military, their voices have been amplified in contemporary media.

Though the guerrilla movement consisted of mostly middle-class college students trying to speak for the poor and working poor in Araguaia, it accurately portrays the residents' marginalization. The Araguaians confirm their precarious financial situation in a recent documentary produced by the Maurício Grabois Foundation. Araguaia at that time was a nascent community as most of the residents were part of a migratory peasantry in search of land who had settled in the region between the late 1950s and into the late 1960s.²⁵ Coming from poor communities around the Brazilian Northeast, the Araguaians maintained a humble lifestyle. Their communities lacked doctors, medical supplies and teachers. Social services that the guerrilla helped fulfill.²⁶ Such contributions did, as predicted by the PCdoB leadership, cultivate close ties between the *guerrilheiros* and the local populations of Marabá, Xambioá, and Imperatriz.

While the militant party members' motives are seemingly admirable, they also convey a rather patronizing perception of the rural peasantry. The PCdoB's assessment of rural guerrilla warfare as a means of advancing the socialist agenda stresses the

²⁴ Romualdo Pessoa first notes this change in 1996 and echoes the statement in an interview about his latest work *Araguaia: Depois da Guerrilha, Outra Guerra*, (São Paulo, Editora Anita Garibaldi, 2012).

²⁵ *Camponeses do Araguaia — a Guerrilha vista por dentro*, directed by Vandrê Fernanes.

²⁶ The guerrilla members provided crucial services to the Araguaia community; they helped deliver babies, provided medicine and refused to accept payment for it, they helped the community build a school and brought in a teacher for them (Maria Lúcia Petit), see *Camponeses do Araguaia*.

importance of learning the mannerisms of the rural poor so as to create greater understanding of their lives before infiltrating a chosen area. This document betrays the (imagined) egalitarian disposition of the PCdoB; in urging the guerrillas-in-training not to ridicule the *camponeses* who still used herbal remedies and justified death and disease as the will of God, the document's author creates a condescending caricature of the rural poor.²⁷ They characterize the *camponeses* as ignorant and incapable of helping themselves. In addition, the author claims that this particular demographic is unaware of their strength as a group, that they are "always awaiting a leader (a great man) that will find a solution to their problems."²⁸ In judging the peasants for being passive actors in their own lives by waiting for a savior, the author also provides justification for the PCdoB to infiltrate marginalized communities. They construct communism (specifically the *guerrilheiros*) as the potential savior in this narrative.

The document goes on to outline the steps necessary for organizing and leading the peasants to revolution. These steps include, but are not limited to, gaining the population's confidence and establishing good relationships.²⁹ The creation of these social networks was thought to aid the guerrillas in their sustained growth and in their survival. While the PCdoB did hope that many *camponeses* would take up the fight for a communist revolution, they also had more realistic expectations from their new neighbors. In tapping into the residents' sensitivity to revolutionary ideas, the party believed that these poor and miserable people could "supply and feed the combatants of

²⁷ "Analysis by the PCdoB about a Rural Guerrilla (Análise do PCdoB sobre a guerrilha rural)," undated, p. 6.

²⁸ Ibid., p. 7.

²⁹ Ibid.

the people by whatever means they are able.”³⁰ The relationships forged with the members of this specific rural society resulted in a sympathetic community allowing for varying levels of protection for the guerrillas: whether physical or in terms of protecting their identities and whereabouts.

Despite long distances between neighbors, a characteristic of life in the wilderness, the *paulistas* were well known in the area. They would trade crops and livestock in the market, paid people like Joaquim for helping transport the goods they purchased in the towns, and had a general sense of camaraderie with certain residents.³¹ This established network kept the *guerrilheiros* fed and hydrated during their standoff with the Brazilian armed forces. Some of the *camponeses* interviewed claimed to have fed and clothed the *guerrilheiros* secretly, and in some cases because they did not know the *paulistas* were being hunted by the armed forces.³²

³⁰ “Copy of the Study,” p. 4

³¹ Joaquim mentions helping the guerrilla members transport supplies to their camp in Xambioá by donkey and Fogoio says he used to hang out with Osvaldão but does not seem to have approved of the political conversations with the *paulistas*, see *Camponeses do Araguaia*.

³² *Araguaia: Campo Sagrado*, directed by Evandro Medeiros, documentary, (2011; Rio de Janeiro: Grupo Tortura Nunca Mais).

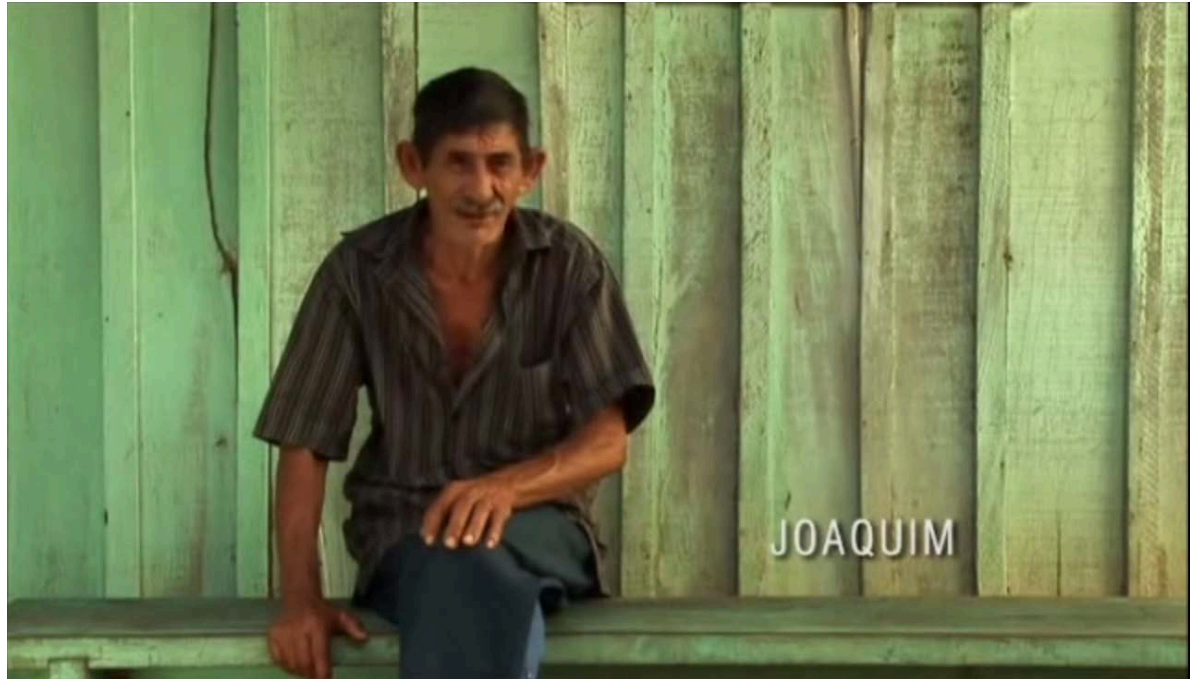


Figure 2: Joaquim talks about his experience living in Araguaia during the Guerrilla War. Source: *Araguaia Campo Sagrado*.

Interviewees reject the notion that the *guerrilheiros* and those who helped them were terrorists, insisting that for all they knew the young revolutionaries were good people, the people who nursed them back to health and were integral in the delivery of their children. That bond is representative of the PCdoB's knowledge of the area. Their study of the region allowed for an accurate analysis of the socioeconomic hardships and the areas wherein the insurgency could be most helpful.

The importance of an exploited, rural, workforce was central to the PCdoB's plan for a socialist uprising. Though the party aimed to follow in the path set forth by Mao Tse-tung's revolution in China, realistically its trajectory reflected a mix of Mao's and Che Guevara's theories. They combined Mao's focus on the masses of the peasantry with Che's "insurrectionary nucleus" tactic for creating the conditions necessary for a

revolution.³³ Writing in 1967, the same year members of the PCdoB began infiltrating Araguaia, Ernst Halperin notes that as of August 30, 1963 the Chinese communist government had yet to recognize the Partido Comunista do Brasil despite recognizing another pro-Chinese Latin American splinter party five months later. An article in the *People's Daily* criticizes Brazil's revolutionary left when stating,

The peasant question is a key question in the national democratic revolution of the Latin American countries...Brazil's national democratic revolutionary movement has suffered a setback precisely because it did not have a broad united front with a strong leadership. It has not truly aroused and organised the broad mass of peasants and other sections of the peoples. Hence it could not organize a powerful counter-attack in the face of the armed rebellion organised by imperialism and its lackeys.³⁴

It is possible that such a bold statement coming from the Chinese government's official newspaper galvanized members of the PCdoB to action. It also reinforces the choice of a rural location, such as Araguaia. The party viewed this peasant community as the best possible location for successfully carrying out the PCdoB's strategic tasks; both because of the marginalized community and their exploitation at the hands of foreign businesses.

³³ Ernst Halperin, "Peking and the Latin American Communists," *The China Quarterly* 29 (1967): 124.

³⁴ *Peking Review*, vol. VIII, no. 19, May 8, 1964 in Halperin, "Peking and the Latin American Communists," 145.

CHAPTER 3

U.S. IMPERIALISM AND THE JARI PROJECT

The PCdoB targeted Araguaia in part because of the prominent U.S. business interests in the area and the manner in which the Brazilian military dictatorship allowed and encouraged their activities there.³⁵ For the military regime, U.S. corporations could fulfill the long-held desire of incorporating the interior into the orbit of the Brazilian state and simultaneously extract its resources. However, as a communist group, the PCdoB was largely concerned with the capitalist-facilitated exploitation of labor. Given this inclination to support marginalized workers and the influx of mostly foreign-funded multinational corporations into the region through the SUDAM (Superintendency of the Development of the Amazon) agricultural projects, the PCdoB targeted Araguaia as susceptible to subversive ideology. Some of the exploitative projects under foreign control included the Jari Project and mineral mining by the U.S. Steel Corporation. Such projects exemplifies the kind of U.S. extractive ventures the *guerrilheiros* sought to expose and potentially destroy. I use Ludwig's expansive projects in the area as a case study illustrating how the presence of such businesses fulfilled the military regime's vision of economic development and validated the presence of the PCdoB militants in Araguaia.

Though these projects were largely under the control of foreign, usually U.S., leadership they were facilitated by SUDAM. This government agency was spearheaded by the Castelo Branco regime whose aims involved turning "one of the world's largest areas of undeveloped land into a producing region that would supply the Western

³⁵ Dória, *A Guerrilha do Araguaia*, 8-9, 30.

industrial nations with food, metals, wood and other raw materials.”³⁶ SUDAM coordinated the programs, which provided tax incentives for corporations interested in establishing businesses in the region.³⁷ This process led to the expulsion of indigenous and peasant families who had certain rights to the land they occupied. In a 1967 edition of the PCdoB’s newsletter entitled *A Classe Operária*, the party voiced its dismay as millions of peasant families were expelled while the “imperialist North Americans” took possession of vast national territories.³⁸ The corporations interested in the economic development of the landscape relied on government support in order to remove the people from their land, leading to violent clashes between the military police and the *camponeses*.

Maria Helena Moreira Alves analyzes the conflicts over land in Araguaia in the context of the Doctrine of National Security and Development. This doctrine is a body of theory consisting of “ideological elements and guidelines for networking, information gathering, and political-economic planning of government policy.”³⁹ The author illustrates the doctrine’s emphasis on linking national security to economic development, noting that rapid increase in economic development was thought to discourage communist sympathizers.⁴⁰ This theory was directly applied to the Amazon region; General Golbery do Couto e Silva, a Brazilian theorist, was adamant about colonizing the Northwest of Brazil and flooding the Amazon region with “civilization.” He stressed the importance of development in the interior, and specifically in the Amazon, as a matter of

³⁶ Jerry Shields, *The Invisible Billionaire: Daniel Ludwig* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1986), 291.

³⁷ Alves, *State and Opposition*. 121.

³⁸ *A Classe Operária*, December 1967, 1.

³⁹ Alves, *State and Opposition*, 15.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 25.

national security — a means by which the government could plug up paths of penetration left vulnerable to subversive activities.⁴¹ The vast mineral deposits in the Araguaia region, found due to a joint commission sent to prepare topographic maps and air charts of Brazil among other tasks, provided an impetus for the implementation of the doctrine's economic development component.⁴²

Exhilarated by this recent discovery, the military dictatorship opened Brazil's natural resources to foreign capital while still retaining control over the country's economy. The regime's economic model for development hinged on an alliance among the state, multinational, and local capital.⁴³ The regime drew heavily on the Doctrine of National Security and Development, which claimed the primary objective of economic development was military defense rather than meeting the population's basic needs.⁴⁴ By firmly establishing the connection between economic development and national security, the military sought foreign capital as a means of transforming the mineral-rich region of the Amazon and Araguaia rivers into productive landscapes. Alves analyzes textbooks from the Superior War College, from which the doctrine was conceived, which “explicitly considers the contribution of multinational corporations to be by and large positive in the economic development of a nation, in spite of the fact that it may generate considerable internal opposition.”⁴⁵ This rhetoric created a complex symbiotic relationship among foreign capital, national security, and economic development.

⁴¹ Ibid., 25-26.

⁴² For more on the congressional recess that placed a legal framework for providing a system of fiscal incentives as a means of implementing the economic development of the interior see Alves, *State and Opposition*, 103. On the 1952 mutual assistance agreement signed by the U.S. and Brazil, and from which the commission mentioned formed, see Ibid., 120.

⁴³ Ibid., 27.

⁴⁴ Ibid., 26.

⁴⁵ Ibid., 26. Examining the Brazilian and U.S. views of the economic relationship between the two countries as presented by Roberto Campos and Lincoln Gordon, Andre Gunder Frank concludes that the

Opening the Amazon to multinationals as a means of “developing” the Brazilian interior, allowed wealthy entrepreneurs such as Daniel K. Ludwig to capitalize on this initiative for their multiple business interests. Ludwig began discussing the possibility of bringing his businesses to Brazil with Roberto Campos in 1964, two years before the implementation of the SUDAM agricultural projects.⁴⁶ Ludwig, anticipating a wood shortage, began conceptualizing his project in the early 1960s starting with the search for the perfect fast-growing hardwood and then moving on to scouting locations. The American billionaire had several business ventures across the globe during this time, so many in fact that the sun indeed never set on Ludwig’s empire. Drawing on previous experiences managing projects abroad, Ludwig had three specific criteria for the location of his next projects:

1. A large tract - several million acres - of cheap, undeveloped land on or near the Equator.
2. Access to a deep-water port (which he would dredge deeper if necessary).
3. A country dominated by a friendly authoritarian government that would give him favorable tax breaks and other financial incentives, suppress any social unrest, and keep its nose out of his business.⁴⁷

Daniel Ludwig was rarely denied, his power and wealth were recognized and welcomed by the Brazilian government. In 1966, Ludwig met with then president Castelo Branco in order to discuss the Jari Project. During this talk Ludwig acquired a ten-year tax exemption at Jari, the ability to import equipment without paying import duties, permission to write off half of the taxes on profits from any other enterprise that Ludwig

U.S. exploited Brazil “unmercifully” and ultimately stunted its economic development, see “On the Mechanisms of Imperialism: The Case of Brazil,” in *Imperialism and Underdevelopment: A Reader* ed. Robert I Rhodes (New York: Monthly Press Review, 1970).

⁴⁶ Shields, *The Invisible Billionaire*, 286. Campos was active in the Superior War College (ESG) prior to the coup, see Alves, *State and Opposition*, 7. He pushed for an agricultural policy as a means of attracting foreign capital for the productive of export crops, see Alves, *State and Opposition*, 50.

⁴⁷ Shields, *The Invisible Billionaire*, 290.

might undertake in Brazil, and the freedom to carry out his project without interference from the Brazilian government.⁴⁸ Upon securing these economic concessions Ludwig began turning close to four million acres of the Amazon rain forest into tree farms, rice paddies, cattle ranches, and mines in 1967.⁴⁹

These business ventures highlight the exploitative nature of resource extraction as it impacted both land and labor. Ludwig's vision consisted of leveling large tracts of land in the Amazon basin using tractors, bulldozers, explosives, airplanes and herbicides in order to create neat rows of *Gmelina arborea* trees.⁵⁰ Much like Henry Ford in Fordlândia, Ludwig did not take into account the complex ecosystem in the Amazon rain forest.⁵¹ His biographer describes the species at Jari as being a part of "a staggering complex ecosystem that had taken half a billion years to evolve, and the survival of each type was inextricably bound up with the whole."⁵² This complete disregard for nature's will proved to be a fatal mistake for the Jari Project. The various life forms in this environment heavily contributed to the lushness of the soil in the region. Ignorant of this, Ludwig's crew used heavy bulldozers, destroying the ecology of Jari, so as to make way for the tree plantation. However, after two years of clearing the jungle Ludwig's staff soon realized that the very machines used to make their jobs easier had, in fact, packed

⁴⁸ Ibid., 294-295. As evident in *Autos and Progress: The Brazilian Search for Modernity* by Joel Wolfe there is a distinction between productive foreign investments, such as auto factories, and extractive ones such as Ludwig's ventures. This distinction mattered to the broader Brazilian public in that productive foreign investments brought forward and backward linkages.

⁴⁹ Shields, *The Invisible Billionaire*, 12-13. Ludwig's project coincided with the infiltration of guerrilla members in Araguaia. Though sources vary, it is largely believed that Osvaldo Orlando da Costa arrived in 1966.

⁵⁰ Shields, *The Invisible Billionaire*, 13. See also Daniel Ludwig's obituary, Eric Pace, "Daniel Ludwig, Billionaire Businessman, Dies at 95," *The New York Times*, August 29, 1992.

⁵¹ See Warren Dean, *Brazil and the Struggle for Rubber: A Study in Environmental History* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2002) and Greg Grandin *Fordlândia: The Rise and Fall of Henry Ford's Forgotten Jungle City* (New York: Metropolitan Books, 2009) for an analysis on agribusiness' failures to "tame" the Amazon.

⁵² Shields, *The Invisible Billionaire*, 297.

the thin, soft soil too tightly for the Gmelina seedlings to take hold.⁵³ Thus while Ludwig intended to turn this supposedly “unproductive” land into a commercial space, his process inadvertently diminished the land’s productivity.

The exploitation of the landscape was intimately connected to the exploitation of laborers. Upon realizing that machines were only impeding his work, Ludwig hired men, called *gatos*, whose job involved recruiting peons from the slums of Belém and surrounding cities to clear the jungle using the “slash-and-burn” method.⁵⁴ Due to the high unemployment rate in the region, the *gatos* quickly rounded up the two thousand workers necessary for the job. The vast majority of them lived in poverty and thus were unsurprised to be paid the minimum wage, however, they were unaware that the *gatos*’ fees and the cost of food would be deducted from their salary. The total amount deducted from their paycheck equaled forty percent, twenty for both the fees and the food (purchased from stores owned by Ludwig).⁵⁵ In addition to being unfairly compensated, these laborers lived in deplorable conditions. They slept on unprotected hammocks, camped out in the jungle, with no way of escaping their work situation. Those that did manage to escape were either tracked down by Ludwig’s ex-military security staff or died in the vast and unforgiving forest.⁵⁶

Brazil’s Maoist communist party vehemently criticized the harsh conditions in such fields of work. In the May, 1972 publication of *A Classe Operária*, an unidentified author asserts that in the north and northeastern states monthly salaries did not surpass cr182.40, roughly cr6.80 a day. This short article regards such a payment as a “salary of

⁵³ Shields, *The Invisible Billionaire*, 299.

⁵⁴ Edison Martins, “Miséria em Jari mata ilusões de cinco mil peões,” *Jornal do Brasil*, April 29, 1974, 7. See also Shields, *The Invisible Billionaire*, 299.

⁵⁵ Shields, *The Invisible Billionaire*, 308.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 308.

hunger,” maintaining that with every passing day it became more disproportionate to the cost of living and the workers’ necessities.⁵⁷ In addition to identifying low salaries in relation to cost of living, this publication also linked inflation to *latifúndios*, meaning agricultural estates. Thus, in the section “*O Latifúndio é Inflacionário*,” the author reaffirms that the military regime:

Estimula a instalação de grandes propriedades no Mato Grosso, no Amazonas e no Pará, através de incentivos fiscais da SUDAM. O caráter ‘progressista,’ ‘capitalista,’ dessas ‘empresas rurais’ pode ser avaliado pelo emprego generalizado de trabalho semiescravo que nelas se verifica, conforme denúncias quase diárias na imprensa.⁵⁸

Pointing to the “semi-slavery” nature of labor in these rural enterprises, the author emphasizes the low wages and physical toll of such work. The author goes on to blame the *latifundiários*, the agricultural estate owners, for the increased cost of food in the country, condemning their export-oriented business strategy. Paradoxically, this article also accuses those *latifundiários* with expansive lands of lacking interest in exploring them “in an intense manner.”⁵⁹ It does so to make the point that the mass-exodus of landless *camponeses* to the cities decreased the number of peoples engaging in subsistence farming and increased the demand for food in urban centers. Though not specific to Araguaia, these grievances were relevant to work conditions in the region.

The PCdoB considered Brazil’s military dictatorship responsible for the overwhelming presence of imperialist foreigners in the Brazilian economy. In a document analyzing lessons learned from the 1964 coup, an unidentified author opines that the military leaders known as the Sorbonne group were primarily interested in securing the

⁵⁷ “Salário de Fome,” in *A Classe Operaria*, p.10, no. 64 May, 1972.

⁵⁸ “O Latifúndio é Inflacionário,” in *A Classe Operária*, p. 8, n. 64 May, 1972.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 1972.

interests of the bourgeoisie (who had links to “monopolist yankee capital”), the *latifundiários* and the North American imperialists.⁶⁰ The economic concessions and autonomy guaranteed to Daniel Ludwig epitomizes the PCdoB’s grievances against the military regime; that they prioritized the interests of imperialistic North American businessmen over the basic needs of the Brazilian people. Furthermore, the dictatorship’s economic development model, based on an influx of foreign investments for resource extraction, both depreciated landless workers’ quality of life and rendered Brazil incapable of self-sustained economic growth. Analyzing the U.S.-Brazil economic relationship, Andre Gunder Frank claims that the composition of American investment and its effect on the structure of Brazilian economy was crucial to maintaining Brazil’s underdevelopment.⁶¹ Given that combating the exploitative nature of U.S. imperialism was a major tenet of Maoist communism at the time, the choice of Araguaia as the setting for a prolonged popular uprising seemed well founded.

⁶⁰ “O Golpe de 1964 e seus Ensinamentos,” Comissão Executiva do PCdoB, August 1964, Centro de Documentação e Memória, Fundação Maurício Grabois. The Sorbonne group included Castelo Branco, Costa e Silva, Cordeiro de Farias, Bizarria Mamede, Décio Escobar, Golbery do Courto e Silva, Sizen Sarmento, Muniz de Aragão and Ernesto Geisel.

⁶¹ Frank, “On the Mechanisms of Imperialism,” 95-97.

CHAPTER 4

TERRAIN, GENDER, AND MYTH

The oppressive working conditions in Araguaia, often at the hands of elite Brazilians managing poor and disenfranchised workers, provided a (supposedly) susceptible base for the PCdoB's communist philosophy. Beyond this atmosphere of contention, members of the organization also considered the physical landscape as favorable to their cause. In a study of the region the group states, "In this situation of favorable terrain and a population potentially partisan of revolution, the guerrilla war will be able to accumulate forces, realize intense political work, thicken its combatant forces, maintaining local resources."⁶² In addition to support from the residents, the guerrillas counted on knowledge of natural resources and terrain in order to survive in the forest, protection from heavy artillery due to the thick canopies, and the predictability of military posts along major roadways as the means for a successful insurrection.

This section views the end of the guerilla war as one where landscape played a definitive role. Though the landscape provided an advantage at the onset of war, the military eventually overcame the jungle's many obstacles. In fact, the Araguaia region was the perfect location for an insurrection. After all, sixty-nine *guerrilheiros* and the relatively small number of *camponeses* who joined them resisted large numbers of troops for three years. The *Guerrilha do Araguaia* did not fail due to location; they failed as a result of human error. Never having a chance to materialize their political and ideological mission, the *guerrilheiros* were betrayed when some of their comrades started having second thoughts. Nonetheless, even as the guerillas believed the landscape would protect

⁶² "Copy of the Study," p. 4

them, the camponeses made certain among them part of that landscape. Locals mythologized compelling figures of the resistance into figures of supernatural essence that endure onto present.

The PCdoB's infiltration of Araguaia began with the arrival of Osvaldo Orlando da Costa, or Osvaldão, in 1967.⁶³ Also known as *Negrão* or *Minerão*, Osvaldo was a tall, Afro-Brazilian man from Passa Quatro, Minas Gerais; he became the most well known leader of the guerrilla movement. Though Osvaldo was not as eminent in the party as Ângelo Arroyo or Maurício Grabois, he was the first to establish a relationship with the local population. Joana Almeida, wife of a *camponês* who joined the guerrilla war with their two sons, called Osvaldo the flower of subversion.⁶⁴ Osvaldo was the most wanted man in the eyes of the military, his charm and friendliness with residents of Araguaia marked him as a major threat. He developed close ties with other residents near the Gameleira river, hunting with and working alongside them. In fact, Osvaldo has remained a powerful legend for the people of Araguaia. He is said to have had supernatural powers – the ability to turn invisible or turn into a rock. The myth regarding Osvaldão has been firmly entrenched into the local landscape.

Like Osvaldão, Dinalva Oliveira Teixeira (Dina) also became a part of Araguaian folklore. Dina, “myth of a woman who never missed a shot,” was the only female deputy commander of a guerrilla camp – camp C. While a fierce fighter, Dina was also an integral part of the community. Despite having an academic background in geology, Dina

⁶³ Sources vary regarding Osvaldão's arrival in Araguaia. While he is known to be the first to install himself in the region Bernardo Joffily dates this to 1969, while Dória et. al. claim that future *guerrilheiros* arrived towards the end of 1967.

⁶⁴ Bernardo Joffily, *Osvaldo e a Saga do Araguaia* (São Paulo: Editora Expressão Popular, 2008), 12. Osvaldão was introduced to the PCB (as it was known at the time) while studying abroad in Prague, with Eduardo Pomar, son of PCdoB founder Pedro Pomar, see Joffily, 29.

helped deliver babies in the Araguaia jungle. As part of such an intimate moment in families lives, Dina is held in high esteem among Araguaia residents. Dina arrived in the region with her husband Antônio in the early 1970s. In addition to delivering babies she and her husband owned a small business near Cigana in Pará. She, like Osvaldão, was is described as having supernatural abilities: superhuman strength, invincibility, and the ability to transform into a butterfly and escape enemy fire. This myth originated from an encounter with military forces during which Dina managed to escape with a bullet scrape on her neck after shooting captain Álvaro de Souza Pinheiro on the shoulder. However, the butterfly narrative became dominant in the popular imagination of the region.⁶⁵ If

⁶⁵ Hugo Studart, *A Lei da Selva: Estratégias, Imaginário e Discurso do militares Sobre a Guerrilha do Araguaia* (São Paulo: Geração Editorial, 2006), 55.

Osvaldão was the most wanted man, then Dina was the most wanted woman. Military forces hunted her from the moment they arrived in Xambioá. They traveled up a river going door by door in search of Dina and her husband Antônio with Pedro Albuquerque



Neto as their guide.

Figure 3: Osvaldão. Source: Patrimônio Histórico de Passa Quatro.

Pedro Albuquerque Neto arrived in the Cigana region (part of Araguaia) in the beginning of 1971 with his wife Tereza Cristina. Tereza, whose codename was Ana, objected to life in the jungle from the very beginning and though she refused to take part in their meetings, the young woman participated in military training and other activities that

involved walking through the woods.⁶⁶ A smart, forward-thinking woman, Tereza becomes highly proficient in the trails surrounding the camp – planning for her escape. In addition to being generally unhappy in her situation, the leaders of the party decided that Tereza, pregnant at the time, must have an abortion. She was not the only one. Lúcia Regina de Souza Martins (Regina), who joined the armed rebellion with husband Lúcio Petit da Silva, was also quick to plan her own escape. Regina succumbed to a series of ailments, which worsened after an improvised abortion by her friend Sônia. During an approved visit to a hospital in Anápolis, Goiás supervised by Elza Monnerat, Regina saw an opportunity to escape and caught a bus back to São Paulo with the money she had hidden away for this purpose. Regina arrived at her parents home safe although malnourished and suffering from a botched abortion.⁶⁷ Meanwhile, Tereza and Pedro they were able to escape before the forced abortion. The couple managed to sneak away one afternoon when they found themselves alone at the camp. Catching a bus to Piauí, the two live clandestinely until February 1972 when Pedro was arrested in Fortaleza, Ceará.

Pedro's arrest led military forces to Araguaia before the *guerrilha* were able to materialize their extensive plans. The PCdoB's insurgency fell apart because the supposedly egalitarian party tried (and succeeded in the case of Regina) to violate women's bodily autonomy. The protagonists of this narrative within a narrative were not the only ones affected by the commanders' decision. Sônia had desperately apologized to Regina for the violent act she had committed prior to the latter's escape.⁶⁸ The gravity of

⁶⁶ Moraes and Silva, *Operação Araguaia*, 44.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 46-47. Regina and Tereza were not the only women whose bodies became controlled by the PCdoB militants. Criméia Alice Schmidt de Almeida had a son, João Carlos de Almeida Grabois, with André Grabois (son of Maurício) in February of 1973. According to Studart the commanders of the guerrilla group sent Criméia back to São Paulo upon discovering that she was pregnant (in August of 1972), see Studart, pg. 26.

⁶⁸ Moraes and Silva, *Operação Araguaia*, 46.

the situation was also exacerbated by the arrival of military forces in April of 1972. Using Pedro, broken down by physical and psychological torture, as a guide, the Brazilian Armed Forces began their mission titled *Operação Cigana* (Operation Cigana).⁶⁹ The sources regarding this operation in the region, combined with the PCdoB's study of the area prior to installing guerrilla camps there demonstrate the extent to which the terrain proved favorable for a Brazilian peasant rebellion. Though the CIE (Centro de Informações do Exército – Army Information Center) had intelligence on subversive activity in the area, it was Pedro's testimony that brought soldiers directly to the meticulously planned *destacamentos* (with particular interest in capturing Dina). These documents demonstrate the PCdoB's planning and conversations regarding the physical conditions necessary for a successful insurrection. The military documents, on the other hand, serve to evaluate the PCdoB's claims regarding the region.

Hoping that the physical landscape would allow for a trajectory akin to communist movements abroad, the guerrillas lauded the abundant natural resources and natural coverage as the key to defeating the regime. They believed that Araguaia's terrain provided the optimal location for insurrection and that the fertile and mineral rich landscape presented an opportunity to sustain a relatively large number of combatants. Such a vast space would also provide accommodations for what they hoped would be an influx of revolutionaries from throughout the country.⁷⁰ In addition, they felt that familiarity with the terrain and its resources would be particularly useful at times of powerful offenses by the enemy. If the *guerrilheiros* were placed in a difficult situation they would have the immense jungle into which they could escape and find safe refuge

⁶⁹ "Relatorio Operação Cigana," p. 1

⁷⁰ "Copy of the Study," p. 4

from enemy forces.⁷¹ In fact the guerrilla engaged in training expeditions into the forest providing valuable knowledge of survival in the jungle for those accustomed to a more urban lifestyle. The mostly city-born college students would thus be able to deduce what is safe to eat, orient themselves in the vast wilderness and find emergency provisions hidden in the trees (usually guns and machetes). The region was also thought to be both

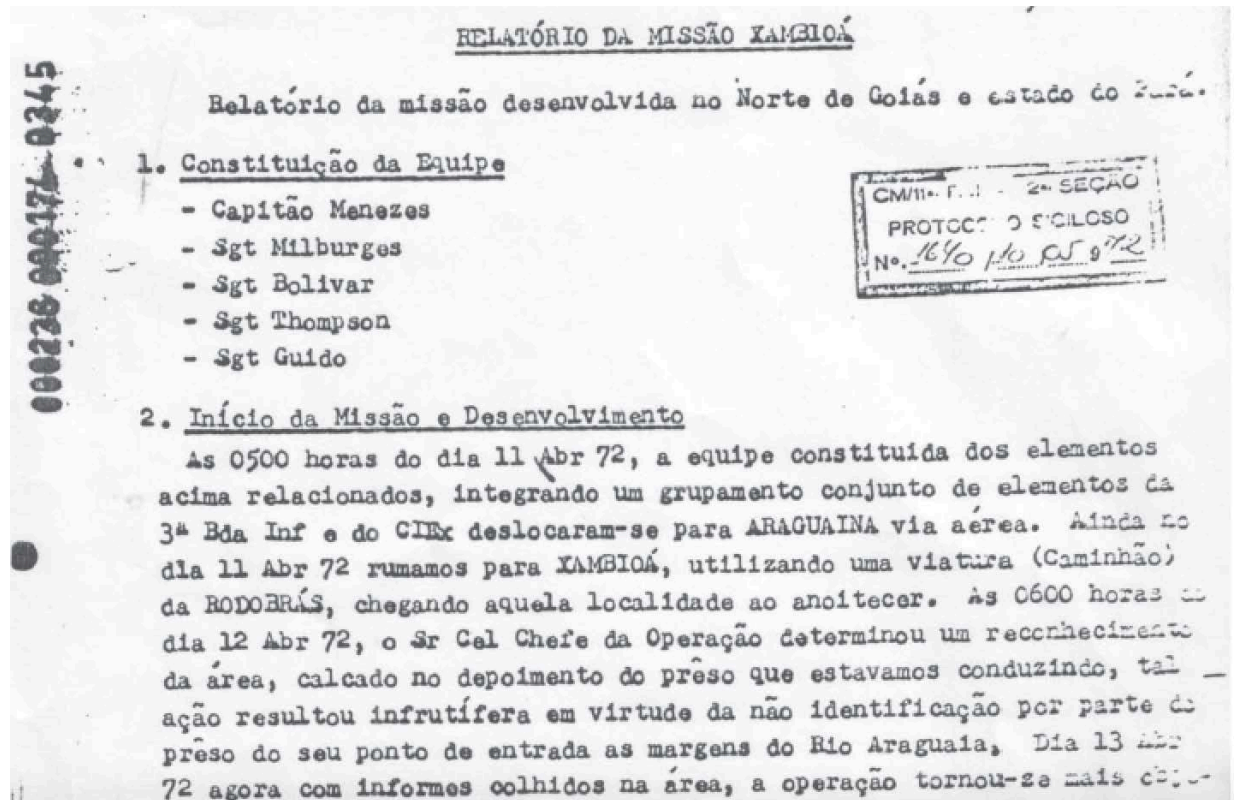


Figure 4: Xambioá Mission Report detailing the April 1972 mission. Source: Author.

hostile and foreign to the enemy given that most of the incoming troops would be unaccustomed to such an environment. Arrogantly, the *guerrilheiros* believed that in order to “confront the diseases, the mosquitos, the bad weather, it is necessary to have clavate awareness and a spirit of abnegation that only the guerrilla has.”⁷² The

⁷¹ “Copy of the Study,” p. 4

⁷² “Copy of the Study,” p. 5

revolutionaries counted on their superior knowledge of their environment to survive and succeed in their quest.

Military sources confirm this advantage. In a report of the Xambioá mission dated April 11, 1972, Captain Hamilton Ribeiro Saldanha de Menezes describes the insurgents as perfectly adapted to the area and having a profound familiarity with the terrain and its demarcated trails. The report goes on to explain that the equipment and footwear used by the guerrilla were in perfect consonance with the region and that the subversives have established a logistic support system aligned to their guerrilla principles.⁷³ In addition, Captain Saldanha de Menezes notes that the troops' own equipment was not adapted to the area; citing their backpacks as too big and their footwear and clothing inadequate for the environment and the obstacles they face in carrying out the mission.⁷⁴ The guerrillas had, of course, anticipated this. They knew that the heavy equipment and military training did not necessarily prepare soldiers for jungle warfare.

The military forces also recognized the adversary's social clout in the region. Captain Saldanha de Menezes, in addition to recommending better equipment and reconnaissance of the region prior to operations, also suggested providing elements of assistance to Araguaia residents so as to neutralize enemy support.⁷⁵ It did not take long for military personnel to see the value of social networks between guerrillas and residents; such a relationship was first harmful to innocent residents who experienced indiscriminate violence from the regime. The PCdoB preempted such violence and thus their depiction of government-sanctioned violence became a self-fulfilling prophecy. The extent to which residents of Araguaia sympathized with guerrilla forces cannot be

⁷³ "Relatório da Missão Xambioá," p. 2

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 3

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*

ascertained from the archival sources available. By providing classroom materials, teachers, doctors, and medical supplies, the *Paulistas*, as the suspicious newcomers were called despite varying origins, filled a gap left by incompetent and/or unwilling government. Though the government eventually accepted the importance of basic institutional funding in the region, the initial assistance by subversive communists appears to have resonated with the local population. This is evident in the Xambioá and Cigana mission reports. But to what extent do these sources represent those Gayatri Spivak would term “subaltern?” Is it possible that military personnel misconstrued fear for sympathy or unawareness for complicity? Or, in their raids of guerrilla camps and collection of written material, did government forces uncritically accept the PCdoB’s narrative of their own importance in the region? This aspect of the history leaves much to be desired; specifically in that it hinges on the perspective of those whose voice are obscured by propaganda and self-interest.

The guerrillas predicted that the dense forest would set limitations on the movement of armed forces and provide coverage from heavy artillery. They counted on the lush, humid and vast jungle to restrict the type and amount of weapons used and reduce the effectiveness of strafing. The study of the region, conducted by members of the PCdoB, believed that helicopters and paratroopers would be ineffective in this region.⁷⁶ While the PCdoB guerrillas accurately assessed the military’s lack of experience with the Amazon basin’s forestry, they sometimes underestimated their opposition’s technological might. A classified, undated, document summarizes the scouting mission in April 1972, *Operação Cigana*. This exercise allowed military troops, dressed in civilian garb, to both survey the land and test their equipment in the jungle. It

⁷⁶ “Copy of the Study,” p. 5

also validated some of the PCdoB's presumptions regarding the military's disadvantage: inexperience with climate and transportation limitations. The aforementioned document, a report from the Army Ministry, relates the operation's conclusions and recommendations for future missions. In addition to asking for more adequate clothing for the environment, the report also mentioned that helicopters were indispensable for a successful counterinsurgency. It cites, for example, it's element for surprise – unlike the twelve to eighteen hour-long reconnaissance missions, maneuvers covered by helicopters lasted ten minutes and kept the target in “perfect physical condition” for an attack.⁷⁷ Helicopters would facilitate the locating process given that one of initial hindrances to the operation was incorrect information regarding the location of communist camps in Xambioá.

In trying to locate the homes of guerrilla members, troops often alerted the guerrilla watchdogs, giving the insurgents plenty of time to escape into the forest as planned. During their reconnaissance mission in April 1972, the troops rented boats when traveling up the Araguaia River and traveled on foot in search of Dina and Antonio's home.⁷⁸ This mission must have utilized pack animals for the unknown author of this classified document also calls for instructions regarding the handling and use of pack animals, specifically as some of the soldiers suffered abrasions and rashes due to lack of experience riding horses.⁷⁹ While the helicopters would help locate their targets, the armed forces could not rely on cars or trucks in the dense forest, as predicted by the PCdoB. They were also right about some of the weapons, which were in fact futile in the humidity. The report calls for keeping automatic weapons encased in plastic during

⁷⁷ “Operação Cigana,” p. 7

⁷⁸ “Operação Cigana,” p. 2

⁷⁹ “Operação Cigana,” p. 7

reconnaissance missions, the use of smaller rifle for discretion, and notes that hand grenades stopped working after extended periods of time in the jungle.⁸⁰

The Araguaia militants were not necessarily wrong in their assumptions. Their knowledge of the landscape proved central to the war's longevity. The vast forest allowed for somewhat easy escapes and maneuvering around the military's predictable posts. Having friendship networks spread out over the region also proved advantageous, as *guerrilheiros* were able to stop by people's houses for food and water before retreating further into the woods.⁸¹ Though only twenty *camponeses* ultimately joined the fight, the aid provided by Araguaia residents sustained a small movement for three years. Despite the fact that most of the guerrillas only had one year or two years to adapt to their new and foreign environment, the landscape provided enough safety and sustenance for survival. Militants such as Ângelo Arroyo, Micheas Gomes de Almeida, and João Carlos Wisnesky were the only ones to survive the war without first being imprisoned. The vast jungle allowed for their survival and escape.

⁸⁰ "Operação Cigana," p. 8

⁸¹ *Camponeses do Araguaia: a Guerrilha vista por dentro*, documentary, directed by Vandr e Fernandes.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION

Although the *guerrilheiros* did not ultimately incite a mass popular uprising, their presence in the Araguaia region was nevertheless influential. The majority of the militants arrived in 1970 and 1971, meaning they had a short period of adaptation to the environment and of disseminating their subversive ideology before the war began. Thus, rather than evaluating the movement based on its long-term plans, an investigation of the PCdoB's choice of Araguaia provides a more reasonable measure of success. Though the guerrillas correctly assessed the landscape's physical impediments to the armed forces, the ideological characteristics presented a more complicated picture. The lack of sources from the *camponeses'* perspective hinders a thorough investigation as to how susceptible they were to subversive ideology. It would be convenient to deem this aspect of the party's decision as unfounded given that only twenty residents joined the armed resistance.

However, the lasting influence of the Araguaia Guerrilla War necessitates a more complex study of the guerrilla war's success. Though the members of the PCdoB were not able to carry out their prolonged plan of instilling communist sentiments among Araguaia residents, their acts of resistance were nevertheless influential in the area. Agrarian resistance continued in the aftermath of the *Guerrilha do Araguaia*. For instance, the Catholic Church became a major player in the defiance of arbitrary land claims that affected thousands of families.⁸² The struggle for those without land

⁸² A 1981 study by the National Conference of Brazilian bishops estimated that between 1977-1981 45 rural trade union leaders and pastoral agents providing aid to peasants who were being evicted from their land were murdered,

continues to this day, particularly with the Movimento dos Sem-Terra (Movement of the Landless). Whether the influence stems from the *guerrilheiros* themselves or as a response to military repression in the area is less certain.

The presence of U.S.-based multinational corporations also complicates an evaluation of the movement's success. The deplorable working conditions, such as at Jari, gathered national attention due to vociferous complaints from the rural laborers during President Geisel Médici's visit to the plantation in 1973. Accounts describing the miserable social conditions in the area serve as an important source outside the communist perspective although in this case they reaffirm what the PCdoB viewed as labor exploitation (see fig. 2).⁸³



Figure 5: "Misery at Jari Kills Illusions of Five Thousand Peons." Source: *Jornal do Brasil*.

Despite the egregious violation of workers' rights at the hands of a U.S. corporation, the guerrillas did not receive mass support in their insurrection. The continued resistance to land grabbing and evictions indicates that anti-imperialist fervor might have been

see Alves, 123. For more on the increased paranoia post-guerrilla and the repression directed at lay pastoral agents in addition to priests and bishop Pedro Casaldáliga see Campos Filho, *Guerrilha do Araguaia*, 167-174.

⁸³ Martins, "Miséria em Jari," 7.

prevalent but not as politically charged. If anything, the investigation of working conditions in Jari by the Médici government, whether genuine or not, implied national concern for the problem.

The existing historiography on the Araguaia Guerrilla War, though limited to Portuguese-speaking audiences, contains a wealth of information. Though documents produced by the PCdoB must be analyzed critically as they have clear political motivations, they are nevertheless valuable. While the documents available allow for considerable access to this history, many resources remain untapped. The interviews with military guides and *camponeses* who aided the guerrilla war and were subsequently tortured for their involvement often present a biased narrative. Through the course of this research I often found myself asking about the *camponeses* who did not agree with either the military or the guerrillas but who may have blamed the violence of that era on the communists. Ethnographic study of the area could lead to powerful oral histories regarding the *guerrilheiros'* radicalizing influence and a more complex narrative. In addition, military archives have yet to be made public and what is available can only depict part of a much larger story. These particular sources could reveal why the armed forces responded to the PCdoB militants in Araguaia with such a heavy hand. Did they consider it a threat to the military regime as a whole or to the mostly foreign-owned businesses (and thus economic development) in the region? In other words, to what extent did the dictatorship consider the guerrillas to be a destabilizing agent? Fortunately, there is a possibility that these sources will become accessible as the truth commission continues to untangle the complex history of Brazil's military dictatorship. Thorough

engagement with these ill-considered or inaccessible avenues could lead to new discoveries concerning the events in Araguaia.

The sixty-nine, mostly young, *guerrilheiros* who joined the cause had ambitious goals and an idealized solution to capitalist problems. Though these youths were overwhelmingly college-educated middle class students, and thus somewhat removed from those they sought to liberate, their advocacy for the landless and the rural poor had nationalistic intentions. Both sides of this oppressor/oppressed dichotomy were working towards a better Brazil, albeit by taking starkly different paths. And while the PCdoB was more apt to listen to *camponeses*, their voices are still relatively muted in the pages of this history. While the interviews of Araguaians in documentaries funded by the Maurício Grabois Foundation highlight some of these missing voices, it does not offer a comprehensive narrative of local response to the guerrillas. A less partisan historical approach to the Araguaia Guerrilla War could elucidate heretofore unheard narratives and indicate whether or not support for the guerrillas was as pervasive as both PCdoB and military sources indicate. Access to such information could provide a more thorough analysis of the PCdoB's success in Araguaia and validate the choice of the region as a starting point for a rural, anti-imperialist revolution.

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