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**Dammed and diversionary:  
The multi-dimensional framing of Brazil's Belo Monte dam**

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**Abstract**

Belo Monte is one of the most divisive dams in Brazilian history, becoming entangled in a thirty-year struggle between pro- and anti-dam interests over the role of the facility within a complex web of Brazilian development and the future of the Brazilian Amazon. This research explores how the proponents of Belo Monte have adopted a number of policy frames as a means of deflection, to divide the opposition and legitimize the project. It investigates this claim by analyzing speeches given within the Brazilian Câmara dos Deputados and the public speeches of high-level politicians. These sources, organized around a framework previously identified by Ahlers *et al.* (2014), show that the government and individual politicians have used a variety of framing devices to legitimize the hydroelectric facility. Principal methods of framing used also demonstrate how contemporary narratives (e.g. sustainability) have been employed to deflect opposition criticism and widen the scheme's perceived beneficiaries. In doing so, this paper demonstrates how the transformation represented by Belo Monte encompassed not only a process of engineering but also a re-articulation of the complex and its role in modern Brazil.

**Word:** 8,296

**Keywords:** Brazil, Belo Monte, political framing, Amazon, dams

## **Dammed and diversionary: The multi-dimensional framing of Brazil's Belo Monte dam**

### **Introduction**

On 24<sup>th</sup> November 2015, the Brazilian *Instituto Brasileiro do Meio Ambiente e dos Recursos Naturais Renováveis* (Institute of the Environment and Renewable Natural Resources, IBAMA) authorized the operation licence for, the 10 233 megawatt hydroelectric complex, Belo Monte. This project, nestled deep in the Amazon rainforest and sitting astride the Xingu River, has become one of the most divisive dams in Brazilian history. A thirty year contest over its construction, benefits and externalities has accompanied the dam from its initial conception in the 1970s to the eventual flooding of its reservoir.

Due to the longevity of this dispute, the debate surrounding Belo Monte can be understood as much a symbolic debate as a practical, political struggle. Following recent scholarship (Carvalho, 2006; McCormick, 2010; Bratman, 2015), this work will argue that the construction of Belo Monte has become entangled in a protracted ideological struggle between two trajectories, with a pro-dam bloc (of state plus private interests) in conflict with an anti-dam coalition (of domestic and international activists) over the dam's construction. Central within this struggle has been the role of political framing, used to define Belo Monte and its wider consequences. Whilst proponents of Belo Monte have argued for the dam's importance, with the construction deemed as a necessary and sustainable solution to a number of policy problems; opponents assert that the perceived negative effects of the dam, including environmental degradation and livelihood impacts, outweigh the potential benefits.

Whilst previous opposition movements against Belo Monte have proven successful, the most recent manifestation of this resistance has not been able to prevent the flooding, habitat destruction and population displacement that the project brings. Previous scholarship has stated that the reasons for this can be found in the private-public nature of the project and differential access to resources and decision makers (Bratman, 2015; Klein, 2015). This research will argue that an additional reason for the success of the pro-dam lobby can be found in the successful re-articulation of the Belo Monte complex by the complex's proponents. In presenting Belo Monte to the Brazilian public, the government and individual politicians have sought to legitimize a project that is due to flood 440 km<sup>2</sup> of the Amazon region in a number of ways: from the proclamations of the need to increase electricity generation capacity to assertions of an international conspiracy against Brazilian development. It is this fluidity of framing — and the harnessing of contemporary storylines (such as those of sustainability) that has allowed the pro-dam coalition to divide the opposition, decrease their political power and further legitimize the project. As a result, this study will assert that the reordering of Kararaô not only involved an architectural transformation and recasting of the dam as Belo Monte, but it also involved a re-articulation of the dam by its proponents.

As a means to understand the policy frames present within the construction of Belo Monte, this work will analyze a number of sources from speeches given within the Brazilian *Câmara dos Deputados* (House of Representatives, the lower house of the National Congress)

and a number of additional public speeches from high-level politicians — such as Presidents Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva (2003–11) and Dilma Rousseff (2011–16). It is important to note that this analysis has analysed sources taken from translated materials and that this impacts on the potential for analysis to make direct conclusions regarding the grammatical or lexical strategies within the sources presented. Translation between languages can never be precise — as the nuances in meaning that are present within the original text may be lost during the translation process and the resultant text may be inscribed with the translator’s own subjectivity.

In response to this, this paper will not focus on the use of language within these sources but will instead characterize the sources as collective evidence of the political framing of the Belo Monte project as linked to a number of policy problems and entrenched understandings. Within this process, political actors have attempted to shape public perception of the Belo Monte project, via the development of linkages between the dam and pre-existing cultural resources and politico-economic problems. This work will analyse the chosen sources in an effort to explore how the project has been articulated as a solution to a number of problems in modern Brazil, the socio-political and historical context of such claims, and the political and cultural resonance that such political framing may possess.

These sources will be organized within a framework provided by Ahlers *et al.* (2014), which defines a number of discursive structures evident in previous projects of hydraulic redesign (via dam construction, irrigation networks, inter-basin water transfers, or similar schemes). This analysis will be conducted in a number of stages. First, the scholarly base of this work will be outlined, detailing the role of discourse in hydraulic infrastructure projects. Subsequently, the history of Belo Monte will be explored, as well as its prominence in Brazilian national development agendas. The political frames adopted by the pro-dam coalition will then be analyzed, with their role and significance asserted, before concluding remarks provided.

### **The history of Belo Monte**

As Oliver-Smith (2014: 119) has written, ‘Dam projects, like vampires, are hard to kill permanently’. Belo Monte provides a significant example of this seemingly-eternal nature of hydroelectric projects, with the dam planned and abandoned on a number of occasions. Plans for Belo Monte, originally named Kararaô, were first developed by the Brazilian military regime in 1975 within a context of national-developmentalism and major infrastructure projects (such as the Trans-Amazon Highway and the Tucuruí, Samuel and Balbina dams) that sought to enrol the Amazon region into national efforts towards modernization. However, it was not until the 1980s, under the government of President José Sarney, that the plans for Kararaô were actively pursued.

An extensive network of popular opposition developed in response to these plans. This anti-dam movement saw indigenous communities (particularly the Kayapó) join forces with multi-scalar social movements formed by non-governmental organizations. Despite a lack of politico-legal routes of protest, the anti-dam movement articulated a critique related to indigenous rights, environmental health and social issues (Carvalho, 2006). An opposition meeting in the town of Altamira in 1989, named the ‘First Encounter of the Indigenous Nations of the Xingu’, attracted activists from across Brazil and the wider world, as well as, famously,

the British musician, Sting. It was here, at Altamira, that one of the few international protests against dams occurred. The indigenous leader, Tuíra, held her machete to the side of, the engineer, José Antonio Muniz Lopes' face and a popular image of indigenous dissent was formed, sparking repercussions across the globe and the removal of the dam from the planning process in 1990. Subsequent formulations of the plan continued to be dogged by a series of court decisions between 2000 and 2002.

However, upon the 2003 election of Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva (herein Lula), of the *Partido dos Trabalhadores* (Worker's Party, PT), as President of Brazil, the administrative atmosphere surrounding Kararaô (now renamed Belo Monte) transformed — with the new government reviving the plans. In July 2005, Legislative Decree Number 788 authorized the construction of Belo Monte. A popular movement developed to protest the project for the second time. In 2008, the *Segundo Encontro dos Povos do Xingu* (Second Encounter of the Peoples of the Xingu) was organized and the local population again protested. However, the project was not defeated. On 10th February 2010, IBAMA granted a provisional license for the development of the hydroelectric complex, approving the project's impact assessment and giving permission for the project auction to occur. A court judgement ordering the suspension of the preliminary license granted to Belo Monte and the cancellation of the tendering process was swiftly overturned and the Belo Monte scheme's resurrection was complete.

Belo Monte represents a flagship scheme of an extended government program of infrastructure-led development and modernization. Since 2007, the PT governments of both Lula and Dilma Rousseff (herein Dilma) has focused efforts on, a series of economic growth policies — such as the *Plano de Crescimento Acelerado* ('Growth Acceleration Program', PAC), its successor plan — PAC 2, and *Avança Brasil* ('Forward Brazil'). These plans embody a policy package that has included significant investment in infrastructural development across the Legal Amazon region and the country as a whole. Within the PAC, sit government plans to build over at least 25 large hydroelectric dams, as well as hundreds of additional, smaller hydroelectric plants over the next thirty years. With many of these new projects to be built in the Amazon region, it has been estimated that these projects will affect at least 30 per cent of indigenous lands in the region (MME/EPE 2011). This has continued a national paradigm of resource management that Loris (2007) has argued has a long history in 20<sup>th</sup> century Brazil, namely an emphasis on the expansion of infrastructure as a means to support irrigated agriculture, expanding industry and the growth of urban areas.

Belo Monte represents a particular element of this form of developmentalism: namely, the ties between hydropower and the presence of mining companies. This is not a new relationship between hydropower generation and the extractive industries, with the Tucuruí dam constructed to provide hydroelectric power a number of aluminium interests (such as the Albrás complex) within the Greater Carajás project. Previous research has argued that, with Chinese aluminium interests and multinational mining companies looking to expand operations within the nation, the Brazilian government has come under ever-increasing pressure to provide a power grid conducive to such industrial expansion (Fearnside 2006; Loris, 2009) — further fuelling the deemed necessity of hydropower. The contribution of the mining sector to Brazilian gross domestic product (GDP) has increased from 1.6 percent to 4.1 percent in the

years between 2000 and 2011, with production previously expected to increase at least threefold by 2030 (MME/EPE, 2011). This growth has been facilitated by political efforts and legislative frameworks to process domestic mineral resources (such as bauxite, copper, nickel, and gold). The efforts towards a new Mining Code (see: Bill 37/2011), and the development of new mining sites in both indigenous lands (Bill 1610/96) and protected areas (Bill 3682/2012) provide legislative examples of such endeavours. The completion of Belo Monte will allow for the development and extraction from the bed of the Xingu river's 'Big Bend', to be exposed by Belo Monte's diversion of 80 percent of the flow from this 100km stretch of river — with a 1,305 km<sup>2</sup> gold-mining concession already granted to, the Canadian mining company, Belo Sun (Poirier, 2012; Lees *et al.*, 2016).

### **The competition between pro- and anti-dam coalitions**

Carvalho (2006) has argued that the evolution of Brazilian energy development policy has often taken the form of long-term interactions between two opposing groupings. Whilst coalitions of pro-dam interests place large-scale energy projects on the government agenda, an opposing grouping continues to point to the project's environmental and social impacts as a reason against construction. A characterisation of the construction of hydropower projects as formed of a series of long-term interactions between competing advocacy coalitions allows for an understanding of how these two sides have politicized energy development projects and their environmental and social impacts (Carvalho, 2006; Bratman, 2015). Hochstetler (2011) characterizes such groups as the 'enabling coalition' or the 'blocking coalition', illustrating the diverse linkages between the state, civil society and commercial actors in the debate over Belo Monte. Such linkages constitute an ever-changing set of relations that demonstrate limited homogeneity and extensive flux. Instead, the policy goals of such coalitions become their defining quality. This echoes previous assertions made in Baviskar's (1995) analysis of the Narmada Valley dams in India, in which the anti-dam movement was not a homogenous grouping focused on a sole ideological positioning. Within this reading, anti-dam movements become characterized by diverse experiences that place them in a heterogeneous network of opposition against the scheme in question.

The pro-dam lobby is often comprised of commercial construction companies, the Ministry of Mines and Energy (MME), the federal and regional electricity authorities, and private interests, such as the international mining industry (Hall & Branford, 2012; Fearnside, 2016; Bratman, 2015). Recent court judgements of the Federal Audit Court, Judgment TCU 1569/2015 (2015) have shed light on the corporate structure of Norte Energia, the consortium building Belo Monte, which includes of: two state-run pension funds; energy producers (the national utility, Eletrobras; the regional providers, Companhia Hidrelétrica do São Francisco (CHESF) and Eletronorte; and, a holding company of a number of regional providers, Neoenergia S.A); national banks (Banco do Brazil and, its subsidiary, BB Banco de Investimento SA); private energy companies (Iberdrola Energia and Amazônia Energia), and a number of private companies, such as Vale S.A. Particularly dominant in the funding of the complex is public capital, through direct contributions from the federal or state government, the presence of pension fund contributions from the federal state, or the large amount of financial backing received from the Brazilian Development Bank (BNDES). As the "visible hand of the state"

(Casanova & Kassum, 2014: 35), BNDES has played a significant role in the provision of finance to the Brazilian economy, providing 2,115 loans, ranging in from under R\$1 million to over R\$1 billion in the period 2002–11 (Montero, 2014). 27 percent of these loans (or over R\$73 billion of investment) have been made to the energy sector (Montero, 2014).

It is this myriad of political and commercial interests that has resulted in accusations of an opaqueness within the licensing process of Belo Monte. Evidence of this can be found in the resignation of a number of IBAMA staff members in the licensing period of the Belo Monte complex, complaining of political pressure for the swift approval of the scheme. This potential of corruption is further exposed by data released by Brazil's Court of Electoral Accounts, which shows how, in the period of 2002 to 2012, the top four contributors to political campaigns were construction firms that built major infrastructure, such as dams (Fearnside, 2013). Within the context of an extensive anti-corruption investigation, known as *Lava Jato*, these linkages between private interests and political actors have come under increased legal attention at the time of writing.

Standing against Belo Monte is a diverse coalition, incorporating local actors (indigenous groups, local residents directly affected), Brazilian nongovernmental organizations (i.e. the Xingu Alive Forever Movement and the Movement of People Affected by Dams), international campaigning groups (i.e. International Rivers and Amazon Watch), the Catholic Church and other pastoral organizations (i.e. the Indigenous Missionary Council), political leaders, and researchers from Brazil and beyond. The current Belo Monte project has been sporadically held back by opposition action, via occupations, protests and lobbying. Legal proceedings have resulted in the reversal of licensing decisions (in 2011, 2012, and twice in 2013) — although these reversals were quickly overturned, resulting in only short delays.

However, within the competition over Belo Monte, the momentum has been primarily enjoyed by the pro-dam coalition, resulting in a sense of inevitability of the eventual completion of the dam and flooding of its reservoir (Zhour, 2010; Hochstetler, 2011). Carvalho (2006) has stated that this continued momentum for the pro-dam coalition can be found in two main reasons. First, the potential gains of energy development provide a long-term motivation for pro-dam actors to face down opposition networks; and, second, the power relations between the two sides affect proceedings, with the dominant coalition often possessing access to key power resources and decision makers (Carvalho, 2006). Strategy could be added to this, with the opposing coalitions' continued need to politicize the issues at hand and to create public disapproval and popular pressure against the scheme. Common tactics here may include media campaigns and legal efforts to block the projects. However, the continued use of these tactics is often problematic: due to the difficulties in prolonging public interest in the project, and the financial costs of continued legal action (Carvalho, 2006).

### **Framework of analysis**

Both Bratman (2014) and Klein (2015) have argued that the ineffectiveness of the opposition network against Belo Monte has been the result of characteristics outside of their control - such as the heterogeneity of the network and the institutional nature of Belo Monte. This work follows these assertions regarding the relative ineffectiveness of the opposition, by arguing that

the articulation of Belo Monte by its proponents is characterized by a degree of *deflection* of opposition critiques. In doing so, the pro-dam coalition has been able to frame the construction of Belo Monte in a way that directly addresses, deflects and discredits resistance discourse against the dam — whilst widening the number of perceived beneficiaries of its construction. In doing so, the pro-dam coalition has narrowed the terrain on which the ideological competition over the character and meaning of Belo Monte was conducted.

These can be likened to what Crow-Miller (2015) has described as *discourses of deflection* that are employed to interpret, discuss and address opposition network's criticism of dams, whilst mobilizing other interests around certain understandings of the infrastructure in question and solutions that fit a larger agenda. It is these political frames that rhetorically position dams alongside wider political issues that are used to justify construction. Islar and Boda (2014) have found a number of prevalent discourses within this discursive construction of large scale water projects, including the necessity of economic progress and development, the rule of economic growth, and the importance of securing continued water supply for urban centres. By exploring and analyzing this use of political frames, this research will provide important evidence of how pro-dam arguments often evolve and transform as a response to opposition network's alternative definitions of the infrastructure.

Much of recent scholarship has focused on the intricate ties between the construction of dams and notions of statehood and modernization — and how such claims often result in the exclusion of those affected by construction (Isaacman & Sneddon, 2000; Cunningham, 2007; Abbink, 2012; Lee, 2013; Mohamud & Verhoeven, 2016). It is through this process that discursive structures can become naturalized via social practice, allowing for their sedimentation to empower the institutions, elites and individuals that created them (Bakker, 2000). Furthermore, as Akhter (2015) has successfully illustrated in the case-study of Pakistan, the failure to demonstrate such affirming arguments effectively heightens potential opposition and alternative articulations of the infrastructure in question. Within this reading, dams cease to be the transformation of biophysical environments only, becoming agents that promise societal resilience and progress (Ahlers *et al.*, 2015), and the transformation of a waterscape can be analyzed as the outcome of historical contests surrounding the meaning of water resources, their role in development and the significance of the infrastructure used (Kaika, 2005; Alatout, 2008; Budds & Hinojosa, 2012; Ahlers *et al.*, 2015; Swyngedouw, 2015).

This work will analyze these interactions surrounding Belo Monte by adopting — and adapting — a framework provided by Ahlers *et al.* (2014: 50), in their analysis of dam construction in Afghanistan. These authors, following the work of Hall *et al.* on modernity (1995), identified five central discursive elements that are used to cast a hydroelectric dam as part of a modernist project. These principal forms of discourse are listed as:

1. The conquering of nature;
2. A technological fix for socio-political problems;
3. The 'civilizing' mission of western powers;
4. Nation-building and the unifying of a fragmented society;



## 5. Notions of economic progress.

The sources analyzed within this research have been taken from speeches given within the Brazilian *Câmara dos Deputados* (House of Representatives, the lower house of the National Congress). These have been accessed from the institution's transparency portal (see: <http://www2.camara.leg.br/>). A number of speeches provided in the House refer to additional materials, which have also been analyzed within this work. In addition, a number of speeches from high-level politicians have also been explored. These speeches were made in a formal setting, in the knowledge that they will be recorded and made publicly available — either via the media or governmental transparency programs. This public nature of the sources allows for them to be understood as interactions with a wide audience of the speaker's constituents, with the speech designed to influence popular opinions of the project. In doing so, the speakers present within the sources analyzed are making a particular effort to frame linkages between the Belo Monte project and a number of policy problems and wider political issues.

Within the case of contemporary Brazil, it is possible to state that the current manner of discourse surrounding hydroelectric dams does not correspond with a number of the elements of Ahlers *et al's* (2014) discussion, namely: *the conquering of nature through science* and *the 'civilizing' mission of the west*. Despite historical examples of the use of such discursive structures, particularly in the years of the military dictatorship — in which infrastructure projects were justified via storylines of the conquest of nature and *terra nullius*, the decades since the military dictatorship have witnessed a distancing from such storylines. This may be for a number of reasons — the success of the environmentalist movement in discrediting such claims, the increasing understanding and protection for indigenous groups, or the association of such a narrative with the violence of the dictatorship.

Furthermore, it is possible to detect a number of additional routes of framing that act as a means to deflect opposition criticism. These are listed below and will be outlined in more detail in the subsequent analysis.

1. Demonization of opposition networks
2. The sustainability of Belo Monte

## Analysis

### *Techno-fix for socio-political problems*

The energy sector is one of the most politicized areas of Brazil's political economy. Brazil has experienced a series of electricity crises — in 2001/2002, and again in 2013 — when periods of drought reduced hydropower production. In the 2001 crisis, energy rationing was introduced and lasted for the nine months between June 2001 and March 2002 — resulting in a reduction of an average of 16.3 per cent in national energy use (Carvalho, 2006). As Carvalho (2006) has argued, the memory of 2001/2 provided the government with an opportunity to pursue energy projects, regardless of their environmental and social costs. The energy shortage, labelled by Federal Deputy Asdrubal Bentes as 'the biggest energy crisis of ... [Brazil's] history' (Bentes,

2001), resulted in a renewed quest for new, large energy generation projects and a diversification of the national energy matrix – as evident in both the continuation of hydroelectric dam construction and the building of the controversial Urucu-Manaus pipeline, transporting natural gas.

Within the sources analyzed, the memory of rolling blackouts and energy rationing weigh heavy on the minds of the population and the policy-makers and an urgency of finding a solution to this issue of generation is developed. In 2005, Fernando Ferro, PT Congressman for Pernambuco, former electrical engineer and prominent proponent of Belo Monte, predicted that ‘If new large electricity generators do not come into operation by 2010, we may have an energy collapse’ (Ferro, 2005a). Four years later, in the aftermath of a 2009 power-blackout, Ferro (2009) stated that: ‘The concrete fact is that we have a political responsibility for the country's energy... The worst of all worlds is where there is a lack of energy’.

It is within this context that the Belo Monte complex has become represented within the sources as a techno-fix for these problems of energy development and use. Belo Monte became ‘an essential tool to avoid our country suffering from a total energy collapse in 2010’ (Ribeiro, 2005). Fernando Ferro later went on to develop the legislation that authorized the implementation of the Belo Monte project (PDL 343/2005). In this document, Belo Monte was described as the ‘only solution to ... ensure the energy necessary for domestic supply, which is a fundamental condition for the process of national economic and social development’.

Within this positioning of Belo Monte, it became — in the words of Federal Deputy Rodrigo de Castro, ‘impossible not to be impressed by ... the importance that this plant will have in generating energy for our country’ (Castro, 2015). Alternatives were neglected and Belo Monte became the only route forward. José Genoíno, a long-serving PT congressman from São Paulo, argued that the scale of Belo Monte resulted in the obvious limitation of any alternatives, quoting from an editorial in, the national newspaper, *O Globo*, titled *Belo Monte é indispensável* (‘Belo Monte is indispensable’): ‘Belo Monte's grandeur can be appreciated when the plant is compared to similar electricity generation projects. Belo Monte, when the Xingu is at a low flow, can generate as much energy as three nuclear power plants ... or of almost one hundred wind farms’ (Genoíno, 2010).

The popular fear of the *apagão* (blackout) was used throughout these arguments, with Belo Monte portrayed as the only route to fulfilling the increasing demand for electricity within Brazil. It is this provision of energy that led to wide cross-party support of the authorization of Belo Monte. In the debate regarding Belo Monte, José Carlos Aleluia, a trained electrical engineer and former director and president of CHESF (1987-1989), a regional energy company with an interest in Belo Monte, argued that the construction of Belo Monte was *above* politics (Aleluia, 2005). For Aleluia (2005), a Federal Deputy from Bahia and leader of the opposition *Partido da Frente Liberal* (Liberal Front Party, PFL), the project, ‘is not a Government project, [it] is a project of the Nation’. This rhetoric continued, with Paulo Bornhausen labelling Dilma Rousseff the ‘mãe da energia’ (‘mother of energy’) (Bornhausen (2010)). The fact that Bornhausen was then-affiliated with the centre-right *Democratas* party, often positioned against the ruling PT, demonstrates the important depoliticization of Belo Monte as a solution

to Brazilian energy shortages. It is this opportunity to provide a technical fix to the problems of energy supply that had previously dogged the Brazilian electrical sector that has provided an important discourse within the legitimizing of Belo Monte within the Brazilian Chamber of Deputies.

Although this framing of Belo Monte as a solution to problems of energy security reduce the dam to issues of hydro-electricity production, their articulation has allowed the dam's proponents to maximize the number of beneficiaries of the project within the popular understandings of the dam. With the occurrence of blackouts continuing to possess an important resonance in contemporary Brazil, these storylines of energy security appeal those people fearful of a future loss of power whilst asserting the national benefits of the scheme. Furthermore, with these blackouts often most obvious in large urban areas (such as Rio de Janeiro and São Paulo), the adoption of this frame points to an important geographic disconnect between the externalities of Belo Monte in the local sphere and the blessings that the energy provides at the national level.

#### *Notions of economic progress*

This extension of the benefits of Belo Monte can also be found in the framing of the facility as being for *the greater good* of the Amazon region and the nation as a whole. As Deputy Carlos Souza of Amazonas, affiliated to the centre-right *Partido Progressista* (Progressive Party, PP), has argued '...We need the Belo Monte hydroelectric project... so that this country can continue to grow' (Souza, 2011). Lula (2010) has also asserted this role of Belo Monte in wider patterns of development, with the region around Belo Monte becoming transformed: it will 'no longer be just an exporter of aluminium and iron ore [but will] become an industrialized region that can generate jobs and income so that the people can live with dignity' and that 'instead of exporting iron and buying chips, we're going to export a product with value-added so that these young kids can work in the steelwork plant and earn their daily bread'.

This creates an important contrast between the Pará of the past and the future that Belo Monte represents. This appeal to a brighter future can be found in words of, the Senator for Rio de Janeiro (2007-2014), Francisco Dornelles, who asserted that: 'the construction of Belo Monte dam is of [the] greatest importance for the development of the country... to sustain economic growth, [and] job creation' (*Senado Federal*, 2011). President Dilma Rousseff's framing of Belo Monte has often been referenced the role of the complex in Brazilian development, with the plant cast as a 'fundamental undertaking for the development of the region and the country' (Rousseff, 2011). This casting of infrastructure as a necessity for the development is particularly illustrative of the long-running support that Dilma has provided for such projects, particularly during her time as Minister of Mines and Energy (2003–2005).

Within this framing, economic benefits for all were promised and such allusions resonate across Brazilian society, still conscious of the years of economic turmoil in the 1980's. Reports of progress and poverty reduction reverberate across society, resulting in the deemed parallels between the two becoming entrenched (Bingham, 2010). These benefits were also extended to the indigenous communities to be affected by construction. Zé Geraldo, PT Federal Deputy for Para, argued that 'The life of the Xingu, in Altamira, will not worsen due to Belo

Monte. Quite the reverse. The indigenous peoples of Pará are seeing their lives improve' (Geraldo, 2011). The role of the speaker here is of significance. Zé Geraldo, originally a farmer from Pará, has often voted for measures in defence of the indigenous population, is a known environmentalist and anti-corruption activist. With such a personal history, Geraldo contrasts heavily with the accusations of corruption that have been recently directed at the Belo Monte project (see: Amazon Watch & International Rivers, 2015).

### *Demonization of opposition networks*

Such allusions to 'our common future' locate the opposition movements as both consciously existing outside of this project and standing in its way. As Zhouri (2010) has argued, the anxiety of an *international conspiracy* to restrict Brazilian use of the resources of the Amazon has a long history in the political rhetoric of the Brazilian state. This method of framing has continued, flourishing in the era of Belo Monte. Following the lead of Sting in 1989, celebrity activism has continued in the action against Belo Monte. James Cameron and Sigourney Weaver have publicly spoken against the dams, and, as California governor, Arnold Schwarzenegger visited the dams in 2011. Former President of the United States, Bill Clinton has also spoken out against the dam. Bratman (2014) has argued that the international flavour of this celebrity activism has often allowed for the pro-dam coalition to deploy nationalist sentiments and critiques of the foreign environmental interests *interfering* in Brazilian sovereignty over the Amazon region.

As early as 2001, Asdrubal Bentes (Brazilian Democratic Movement Party, PMDB) spoke of an 'intolerance from those who do not want to see this country develop, and [for] the Amazon [to] be rationally exploited, producing well-being for its people'. Within this speech, Bentes asserts the need to modernize the Amazon region but also affirms the perceived backwardness of those seeking to stop such a future. Bentes is a member of the *Frente Parlamentar Agropecuária* (Agricultural Parliamentary Front, FPA) – a cross-bench coalition that acts in the interests of landowners. This political commitment can be found in Bentes' voting record. The Congressman from Pará has previously voted in favour of modifications to the Forest Code, which allows for the expansion of agriculture into deforested areas, and against processes of indigenous demarcation.

Within the Chamber of Deputies, the internationalization of the opposition has been met by the articulation of Belo Monte as the site of a nationalist struggle. Nicias Ribeiro spoke of a recent British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) camera crew present in the area, asserting that 'it cannot be accepted that the BBC in London comes from another continent to create problems for us, in Brazil and in Pará, while we, it seems to me, do not create problems for these people' (Ribeiro, 2002). Similarly, Asdrubal Bentes (PMDB-PA) drew comparisons to the previous international interest in Kararaô, with this new brand of activism repeating the same story, with opposition that '...wish to derail our development, who want to stifle the Amazon, and not allow us to make the most of our hydroelectric potential, to use our riches in favour of Brazilians' (Bentes, 2002).

On 8<sup>th</sup> April 2010, the film director, James Cameron wrote to Lula personally, expressing his concerns regarding the Belo Monte complex. Cameron and Sigourney Weaver had been

publicly critical of the Belo Monte project. The thoughts of these Hollywood stars was not appreciated by some in Brazil's political community, with Congressman for Roraima, Marcio Junqueira directly targeting the pair, querying: 'I wonder, what do James Cameron and Sigourney Weaver know about our country's energy needs?... They live in a world totally different to ours; they live in a reality totally different to that facing Brazilians in the Amazon' (Junqueira, 2010). Within Junqueira's (2010, emphasis added) words, the nationalist sentiments of his critique become clear: 'This is Brazil, *our* country'. President Lula adopted a more conciliatory tone in a speech in Marabá, Pará in 2010 (Eletrobras, 2010): 'From time to time, along comes a gringo to take a shot at Brazil. We need to show the world that no one wants to care for our forest more than us; but it is ours, and no gringo should poke his nose in where it is not wanted, because we shall care for our forest and we shall take care of our development.'

Further articulations of Belo Monte as a nationalist project can be found in the response in the Chamber of Deputies to the 2011 actions of the International Labor Organization (ILO) and Organization of American States (OAS) Commission on Human Rights (IACHR). Both organizations issued cautions against Brazil's failure to consult with indigenous communities, a violation of ILO Convention 169. In response to the OAS decision, Dilma withdrew Brazil's ambassador to the organization, and suspended the paying of its annual dues. In the Chamber of Deputies, the rhetoric towards the IACHR decision was heightened. Carlos Souza criticized the 'grotesque attitude of the Organization of American States – OAS, which wants to interfere in Brazilian sovereignty by preventing the construction of the Belo Monte hydroelectric plant' before moving on to 'praise the courageous attitude and Brazilian spirit shown by the President of our Republic, who does not accept this intervention' (Souza, 2011).

The emotional heightening of this argument is apparent, and the nationalism present demonstrates a significant facet of the discourse surrounding Belo Monte — the linking of international action and opposition to a wider, historically-rooted fear of an international conspiracy against Brazilian sovereignty over the Amazon, and the use of its resources. Within the context of *Avança Brasil* and of the PAC's, environmentalist and indigenous opposition to such schemes have become cast as opponents to modernization and barriers to economic growth (Zhoury, 2010). Media coverage and judicial decisions have often cast opposition movements in Brazil, such as activists against dams, as criminal (Da Silva & Rothman, 2011). However, it is also the political community that is able to frame these activists as on the margins of espionage and distinct from wider society (Bratman, 2015). The result is the creation of a dichotomy of *Us vs. Them*, and the reduction of the Amazon to 'a treasure chest coveted by the generalized "global community" – that Brazil must protect for their own use' (Zhoury, 2010: 266).

Whilst these international forces were articulated as subversive, national and local environment and human rights defenders were met with a variety of other framing strategies. Romanticism and naivety were articulated as defining qualities of this opposition — particularly in a speech given by Lula at a 2010 rally for Belo Monte in Altamira, the site of its construction. In this address, Lula compared the opposition to Belo Monte with his own past experience protesting against the Itaipu dam. For Lula, 'The opposition — like these *kids* — for lack of information, used to say that an earthquake would happen, say that the Itaipu reservoir would

cause an earthquake in the Itaipu region... [and that] the weight of the water would change the Earth's axis' (Lula, 2010, emphasis added). The caricature of the opposition as reactionary, naïve and mistaken is made and, as Senator Dornelles asserted, Brazil cannot 'allow [these] partial views of reality to prevail in the face of general interest' (Senado Federal, 2011).

In adopting this language, the dam's proponents create an image of both personal and national progression — from a naïve past to a logical present, in which opposition networks are unable to keep up with the pace of change (Bingham, 2010). As Zhouri (2010) has argued, the use of this infantilistic logic evokes images of a middle-class youth — often urban and immature — lacking any real knowledge of the situation on the ground. This image is developed by Lula's (2010) use of his own experience — even his own immaturity in his past battles against Tucuruí — to show how the opposition will eventually understand the utility and importance of Belo Monte and will abandon these 'constructed fantasies' of the dam's externalities.

This creation of bipolarity has allowed for the simplification of the complex social issues that surround hydropower projects across the Brazilian nation and the discrediting of opposition networks and the indigenous peoples affected. The infantilizing of opposition is particularly symbolic here, with indigenous groups possessing the legal status of orphans and wards of the state far into the 20<sup>th</sup> century (Ramos, 1998). By labelling the opposition as both ignorant and innocent, an image of the opposition as antithetical to the important role of Belo Monte and the development that it promises is created — leading to a demonization of the affected communities and their legal rights to protection, livelihoods and land.

### *The sustainability of Belo Monte*

It is notable that Lula (2010) made the comparison between the opposition to Belo Monte and his own personal opposition to the Tucuruí dam in the 1980s. As Hall and Branford (2012) have argued, the memory of this dam is particularly prominent in the opposition networks to Belo Monte. This dam, on the River Tocantins, was inaugurated in 1984 and designed to provide electricity to the aluminium complexes within the Carajás project. The flooding of the reservoir resulted in the loss of 2,500 square miles of forest, and the displacement of 35,000 people (Hall & Branford, 2012). The flooding at Tucuruí provided an important historical memory, resonant in the potential social and environmental upheaval to be caused by Belo Monte.

A number of sources specifically focused on the changed, improved design of the dam as a means to distance Belo Monte from previous facilities. The altered design of the complex provides an important route for further assertions of the dam's sustainability. Pro-Belo Monte politicians have repeatedly stressed that Belo Monte will take a different route from the dams of the past. Ferro (2005b) argued that 'this hydroelectric project will be undertaken in compliance with our political, social and environmental responsibilities'. Zé Lima, State Representative for Para and from the Tucuruí area, emphasized this difference from previous facilities: 'the Belo Monte plant has the cheapest kilowatt output in the world and causes less environmental impact' (Lima, 2006). Within the new plans of Belo Monte, submitted to the Brazilian Electric Energy Regulatory Agency (ANEEL) in 2002, the plant has been redesigned — reducing the surface area of the reservoir from 1,225 km<sup>2</sup> (473 mi<sup>2</sup>) to 440 km<sup>2</sup> (170 mi<sup>2</sup>). Lula (2010) asserted in his speech at Altamira that 'Let us use clean energy and preserve the

environment. This is my commitment' pointing to a sense of personal investment in this claim. The history of previous dams was further evoked in this speech: 'We do not want ever again a hydroelectric plant that commits a crime of insanity such as Balbina... We don't want to repeat Tucuruí, we want something new'.

For Ferro (2010), the alternatives provided the more-dangerous routes of energy-generation: 'If we do not build hydroelectric plants, we shall have to follow other paths: using nuclear energy, using thermal energy, and generating energy from fossil fuels, thus increasing greenhouse gas emissions, which will cause significant losses to our differential of generating clean energy'. In a statement repudiating the IACHR criticism of Belo Monte, Chico Lopes, representing the Communist Party of Brazil, argued that:

The Brazilian government must also continue with the construction of the Belo Monte hydroelectric plant ... for it is a clean and renewable energy source that will prevent future non-green energy sources from being used to satisfy the needs of a country that requires growth to improve the conditions of life and dignity of its people (Lopes, 2011).

This use of 'sustainable energy' as a framing device allows for the reduction of the complex storylines of climate change and renewable energy into an articulatory element that provides Belo Monte with additional credibility. As Vieira and Dalgaard (2013) have argued, the Lula administration has often added an element of sustainability to the previous discourses of economic development propagated by the military regime. In adopting this frame, Ribeiro and others seek to depoliticize Belo Monte – it becomes environmentally benign, with the opponents who claim differently engaging in a politicization of the complex. As Ferro (2009) argued after a power-cut across Brazil, 'We cannot, therefore, accept this hysteria from those who wish to politicize this issue, but at the same time we must have the humility to recognize that the necessity of learning lessons from this episode, so that the Brazilian energy system remains secure and clean, so that it remains one of the mainly hydroelectric systems, which affords us the security of not emitting greenhouse gases'. This discourse was spread beyond the doors of Congress. In 2012 — at the time of Rio +20 conference, a number of government-sponsored advertisements, billboards and other materials portrayed Belo Monte as 'clean energy' (Bratman, 2015).

Within this argument, Belo Monte is characterised as *green* and sustainable, whilst those who stand against it are engaged in a political struggle. The Minister of Mines and Energy (2011–2014), Edison Lobão (PMDB-MA), argued at a press conference that hydropower construction in the Amazon was not only strategically important but represented government investment in clean energy (Eletrobras, 2012). Lobão's aim quickly levelled at the opposition to Belo Monte, extending this inference of politicization to an accusation of distortion: 'We see large media outlets criticizing projects like Belo Monte, but they often do so based on arguments that are not real, saying that we are going to harm the indigenous and riverine populations. That is misinformation. Plants like Belo Monte have been designed to minimize their impacts, and they will allow Brazil to go forward with a power network that boasts minimal emissions' (Eletrobras, 2012). The environmental credentials of Belo Monte are made clear. Yet, recent events do allow for a critique of the political agent affirming them. The

wide-ranging *escândalo do petrolão* in Brazil – and the related *Lava Jato* investigation have recently implicated Senator Edison Lobão– with, as of February 2017, Lobão standing accused of accepting a number of bribes, including one of up to R\$1 million (see: Ministério Público Federal, Petition 5.252; Petition 5.255; Petitions 5260, 5276, 5277, 5279, 5281, 5289 and 5293)

Brazil's political positioning as a global leader in renewable energy lend such claims credence. The International Energy Agency has labelled Brazil as 'a world-leader in renewable energy' (IEA, 2013: 28), observing that some 45 per cent of the national energy demands are provided for by renewable energy. This argument occurs despite Brazil's limited investment in wind and solar projects. Furthermore, this assertion of the sustainability of hydroelectricity is supported by decisions at the international level. Under the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change Kyoto Protocol's Clean Development Mechanism (CDM), hydroelectric dams are provided with carbon credits. The World Bank has significantly increased its funding for such projects in recent years, considering hydroelectric energy as a significant part of clean energy matrixes in the future.

This utilization of the language of sustainability provided the pro-dam coalition with the tool of a common language, used to communicate with the opposing environmental concerns as a means to both placate criticism and deflect opposition. This discourse of green economy presents a perception of the mutual amicability of economic development and environmental protection, allowing for an undermining of previous criticisms of Belo Monte as of an environmentally destructive character (Bratman, 2015). The pro-dam coalition has fixed the concept of sustainability to deep-rooted discursive structures that linked dams to the processes of modernization and development (Vieira & Dalgaard, 2013) and the international reputation of Brazil as a leader in clean energy. In doing so, this use of ecological rhetoric acts as a means to deflect environmentalist critiques, and appeal directly to the growing environmentalism within the Brazilian population, as well as seeking to detach more local concerns from the international campaigns of conservation and habitat protection (Zhourri, 2004; Vieira & Dalgaard, 2013).

### **Concluding remarks**

This work has found evidence of political framing that fits into the framework provided by Ahlers *et al.* (2014), with Belo Monte articulated as both a solution to Brazilian problems of energy supply and as a central element in the modernization of both the immediate region of Pará and wider Brazil. However, the analysis of speeches given by politicians in both the Brazilian Federal Chamber of Deputies and a number given in public forums has shown that the Brazilian context involves a number of frames, not represented within the Ahlers *et al.* (2014) framework. This can be understood as demonstrating an important fluidity. Whilst the retreat of Kararaô between 1989 and 2002 allowed for the redesign of the physical characteristics of the dam and its renaming as Belo Monte, it also allowed for a re-articulation of what the infrastructure and its opponents represents. It is the articulation of these elements of *Belo Monte as sustainable*, and *opposition as regressive*, that has provided an important example of the use of political framing to discredit and prevent the effectiveness of opposition networks against the construction of infrastructure.



In the sources explored, proponents of the Belo Monte complex employed a variety of political frames to stifle the opposition movement against the hydroelectric facility. In doing so, it has illustrated a significant flexibility in how the project is articulated, with a number of frames adopted representing an important rebuttal to tactics used by opposition networks. The arguments found within this analysis are by no means standalone; instead they often intersect, resulting in the bridging between articulations. Opposition networks are not only cast as regressive — these characteristics are articulated as directly providing a barrier to the economic and development and energy security that Belo Monte is deemed to embody. Furthermore, the hydroelectric complex is not only articulated as a techno-fix for problems of energy supply, but is also asserted as the *sustainable* route to such security. All frames detected possess an important resonance in a Brazilian nation that possesses central memories of both energy shortages and financial instability.

With the contest over Belo Monte characterized as a clash between two sets of discourses — of both the pro-dam coalition and the opponents to the dam — this harnessing of discourse has provided an important vehicle for the pro-dam coalition. By both asserting the qualities of Belo Monte and addressing opposition networks and their criticism, Belo Monte's proponents have sought to further legitimize Belo Monte and delegitimize the opposition that has stood against it.

In appealing to these notions, numerous policy-makers have sought to downplay the social and environmental implications of the project, instead casting the schemes as *apolitical*. A large number of the speeches analyzed within this work were given by politicians representing parties in government — such as the PT and their coalition partners, such as the Brazilian Democratic Movement Party (PMDB) — of which both Asdrubal Bentes and Edison Lobão were representatives. However, a number of sources analyzed have been taken from the words of politicians representing parties *outside* of government (such as the Brazilian Social Democracy Party; and the *Democratas* party) — representing an important bipartisan nature of this pro-dam argument. As a result, it is difficult to cast these sources as evidence of a centrally-orchestrated production of the Belo Monte scheme.

Nevertheless, such a diversity of speakers represents the multi-faceted nature of the informal coalition asserting the importance of the Belo Monte project, as well as a presentation of the dam as above politics. This provides an important route to deflecting the discourse of opposition movements. As Klein (2015) has found in his recent work on the opposition networks against Belo Monte, this heterogeneous coalition struggled to maintain a unity in the face of the strength of the pro-dam coalition and the government's claimed commitment to fair and democratic development projects. This difficulty in establishing unanimity was further enhanced by the political framing of Belo Monte by its proponents as representing a solution to a variety of problems — be it sustainability, development, or energy security — that appealed to many and extended the purported beneficiaries of the project (Klein, 2015).

This work has demonstrated the multifaceted and often fluid nature of the frames that surround the construction of infrastructure projects. Significantly, these arguments have directly addressed the primary reasons for the successful opposition campaign against the

original plans for Belo Monte (then named as Kararaô): namely, the creation of linkages between varying, multi-scalar interests and the creation of an international support in opposition against the dam's construction. This reframes the debate surrounding the dam as a binary between the quest for development and those wishing to hold Brazil back. As a result, this research demonstrates that the various framings of such projects do not operate individually but must be understood as part of a wider storyline, designed to divide opposition networks and deflect their criticism.

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