

ARTIGO

FROM THE HUT TO CIVILIZATION: THE INDIANS IN
THE COLONIZATION PROCESS OF RORAIMA IN THE XX
CENTURY

Abstract

This work analyzes the Indian participation in the process of construction of a non-indian place in Roraima, in the twentieth century. We use a diversified material – texts already published and thoughts of Michel de Certeau inasmuch as he defends that reports build places.

Keywords: Indians; non-Indians; civilize.

Resumo

Neste trabalho procuramos compreender a participação dos indígenas no processo de construção do lugar não-indígena em Roraima, no século XX. Na tarefa lançamos mão, de um lado, de uma fonte caracterizada por um material diversificado, em sua maioria textos já publicados e, de outro, do pensamento de Michel de Certeau, quando este afirma que os relatos constroem lugares

Palavras-Chave: *Indígenas; não-indígena; civilizar.*

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In “Índios de Roraima” (Indians from Roraima), a work published by the Roraima Diocese Centre of Information (CIDR) in 1989, we can observe that from the mid-nineteenth century, there was a change in the official documents on the Rio Branco region: references to Indians, even the most isolated groups, decrease, rather, abundant news about cattle breeding show up. According to the authors of the publication, this allows us to figure out the ideological scheme that hides behind this type of occupations that were developed in the region.

Índios e brancos já não se relacionam diretamente, mas através de mediações produzidas e impostas pela invasão pecuaristas. O gado passa a ser índice de propriedade da terra. Assim, uma terra sem gado é uma terra livre, não ocupada por ninguém. Uma terra com gado é uma terra que tem dono. Consequentemente, as terras ocupadas por indígenas, sem gado, são ocupáveis, porque livres. (*Idem*, 27).¹

This indicates that the indigenous people from Rio Branco have ceased to be the spotlight of the constructors of the process of colonization on the region, as it can be seen during the settlement in the colonial period. We can imagine that, according to the view mentioned by the authors above, they are understood just as the remaining groups with whom the colonists would need to live with. By the way, a presence that will become unwelcome and uncomfortable. An example of this can be seen in nowadays’ speeches, in which they are seen as obstacles to the development of the State of Roraima.

We understand that this “disenchantment” of the settlers toward the indigenous people that happens with livestock functioning as settlement mechanism, it is repeated in all other economic activities that later came to be developed in the region, either in its invasion by miners, whether in incentive policies to the settlement of agricultural colonies.

Santilli (1994, 36), mentioning the fields of Paranapanema, south of Mato Grosso, Maranhão and Piauí, reports that the expansion of livestock in these places has happened with the expulsion and/or extinction of indigenous peoples, differently of what happened in Rio Branco, where farmers tried to occupy indigenous areas, seeking to start the consent of these peoples.

¹ “Indians and whites no longer related directly, but through mediation produced and imposed by the farmer invasion. Cattle become index of land ownership. Thus, a cattle without land is a free land, not territorialized by anyone. A land with cattle is a land that has an owner. Consequently, the lands territorialized by indigenous people without cattle are able to be territorialized, because it was free. (*Ibid*, 27)”

Despite the violence that has been widely practiced, especially at the beginning of the occupation process of Rio Branco basin by non-indigenous, when there was the extermination of ethnic groups, the process of occupation of the area by farmers points out the preference for an investment in patronage, establishing the indigenous one cronyism and covenant relationship: marrying indigenous women and taking the children to be raised on farms (*idem*, 36).

From the way installation of cattle ranches in Rio Branco has taken place, we notice that the extermination or expulsion of indigenous to far places was not a central or explicit concern of this settlement mechanism. Therefore, a question arose: if they did not intend to kill them or remove them physically from their way, this implies that these people would be present in some form in this project, hence the question: what place should they occupy in this process? As we know, there was more than just putting them into villages.

Taking into account we are in the twentieth century, we understand that reports of people connected to the two indigenous agencies, the Indian Protection Service and the Benedictine Mission, which settled in the early decades of that century in Rio Branco, are instructive for understanding in field of representations, such as how indigenous practices should be inserted into the society the non-indigenous have put onto practice.

The Indian Protection Service (SPI) is settled in Rio Branco in 1915. Among the few activities carried out directly in favor of the indigenous peoples of the region were the schools, created with the function to provide literacy to indigenous children and teach harness, blacksmith, carpenter and joiner courses; It was the first school founded in 1919. This was considered by the agents as very important to adapt indigenous to civilized customs and, as the 1924 report says, were designed to:

Disseminar a instrução entre as inúmeras tribos semi-civilizadas que povoam o interior para torná-los úteis ao engrandecimento da Pátria e ao bem da família. (CIDR, op. Cit.,31).²

In other words, to frame them into this new model of society means teaching them new ways that enable maintaining their own survival. Thus, as individuals, they became useful to the development of the local society and the national state as the thought of the modern world. Therefore, they were compulsorily taken to accept an “alien” social organization design as if it were their own design.

² “Spread education among the many semi-civilized tribes that populate the country side to make them useful to the aggrandizement of the country and to the family as well. (CIDR, op. Cit., 31).”

As for the clients of the courses, the Protection Service to the Indian 's Report from 1923 says:

São frequentados com grande proveito pelos filhos de índios, que constituem a massa de trabalhadores e de campeiros de gado de toda a região de Alto Rio Branco. (*Idem*, 29)³

We believe that the place that the Indians should have taken up on this social model was there. For, in the configuration of a place that had livestock as major activity, the Indians were supposed to take care of the cattle and another subsidiary activities, but necessary to that enterprise. Luciano Pereira (1917) says on his report when he visited the Branco River in 1917:

Quando nas malocas, plantam o milho e a mandioca de que necessitam e o que sobra vendem aos civilizados, em troca de armas e panos para roupa. (*Idem*, 22).⁴

Therefore, the activities of providing flour, horticultural products and manual services were set as Indians activities. If the Indians were put into this process, they would be transformed into “citizens”, thus, they would be considered useful to the “civilized” family.

Turning to the second indigenous agency, the Benedictines, despite not having experience with the indigenous catechism, they criticized the previous methods used in this practice. For a developer of Benedictine mission, Bishop Van Caloen, the basic premise for success firstly lies in the gradual distancing of the individual from their culture of origin. Santilli (Op. Cit., 46-47) mentions an excerpt from his speech dated from 1919, at which the Bishop sought to raise funds from Rio de Janeiro to the project of the mission. In it we can see the methodology used:

Há um Segundo systema [sic] de aldeamento melhor ainda que o primeiro e mais eficaz [sic] porque está baseado em raízes mais profundas: é um systema de educação completa de meninos e de meninas índios, em internato agrícolas, educação de um lar civilizado (...) Isto basta para a primeira geração de meninos, apanhados nas matas, nus e vadios, e que tem ainda no sangue os instintos [sic] da natureza não refreada por tradição ou por autoridade alguma (...).⁵

³ “The courses were frequented with great benefit for the children of Indians, who made up the bulk of cattle workers of the whole Alto Rio Branco region. (*Ibid*, 29)”

⁴ “When the Indians were in their huts they plant corn and cassava that they needed and the rest they decided to sell in exchange for weapons and rags for clothes. (*Ibid*, 22).”

⁵ “There is a second settlement system even better than the first and most efficacious because it is based on deeper roots: it is a complete education system of boys and girls Indians in agricultural boarding school education of a civilized home (...) This is just for the first generation of children, caught up in the woods, naked and stray, and they have in their veins the instincts of the nature unrestrained by tradition or any authority (...).”

In theory, these quotations show the frame that sets the participation of indigenous peoples in the project that had as objective to occupy Roraima. Essentially, we can say that both indigenous agencies aimed at the same goal: to transform the Indians into “civilized” men, which meant distancing them from their culture of origin, so that in this way they could be useful to society that they ought to integrate.

Thinking about the integration among the social groups from the local area, it was observed that, when Koch-Grunger (1966) affirms that the national farms were being despoiled by the particular people that had taken over the cattle and marked them with their own marks, this means that these people were “given” the ownership of the land and, at the same time, with the reason of the occupation, in this case, cattle breeding. Therefore, there was the Roraima fields to be housed by them and the cattle. There was still an activity to be put into practice that needed someone to do it and it represented the third factor to build a place: work. This functionality would be useful to Indian peoples.

During the observed period, the authors, who refer to Indians from Roraima, are unanimous in affirming the participation of these people on farms and mines. “É raro encontrar um homem macuxi que não tenha passado pelo menos uma temporada como garimpeiro improvisado”⁶. (DINIZ, 1972, 73-74).

KochGrunberg gives some observations about São Marcos farm:

Los ‘vaqueiros’son en su mayoría indios puros de las cercanas tribus Makuschí, Wapishana y otras, y sorprende La rapidez con La que esta gente aprende a manejar caballos y lazos, cuando llega Del interior.⁷

In Luciano Pereira’s speech we can analyze a similar point of view when he mentions:

No Rio Branco os serviços dos Índios são aproveitados para todos os misteres, inclusive o de vaqueiro, no que às vezes se tornam exímios. Assim, os da fazenda nacional São Marcos são quase todos índios, a começar pelo capataz, e mais ou menos vão dando, conta do recado. (Op. Cit., 22)⁸

⁶ “It is difficult to find a macushi man that has never worked as a treasure hunter”.

⁷ “The ‘cow-minders’ are mostly pure Indians from nearby Macushi, Wapishana and others tribes, and surprised how quickly these people learn to ride horses and bows.”

⁸ “In Rio Branco the Indians services are availed to all the trades, including the cow-minders, who sometimes become Exímios. Thus, the people from national farm São Marcos are almost all Indians, beginning from the foreman, and will more or less be able to come up with the goods. (Op. Cit., 22)”

These reports confirm the active participation of indigenous peoples from Roraima in economic activities for the construction of a place that was exclusive of non-indigenous society, both in terms of administration as well as the society style that the activity had constituted. If we observe the settlement process of the colonial period, despite being a project created and run by non-indigenous, it was consisted exclusively by indigenous peoples. The case now was another one: the Indians should accept as theirs, a project they entered only with the provision of low-skilled service, giving up all the space that was their hitherto reserved, as well as its own social organization, and finally, their own culture.

In *Jornal Boa Vista*, owned by the government of the federal territory of Roraima, it was weekly distributed and almost exclusive in the decade of 1970s, we see an almost total silence about the presence of indigenous peoples in that period. This silence reinforces our belief that all Rio Branco occupation mechanisms, current state of Roraima, except the settlement of the colonial period and the project carried out by the very indigenous movement, are not different to this attitude. If this group of social actors were not reserved the references in the speeches, it means that their presence would not be meaningful for the development of plans that they wanted to run, which reinforces the idea of unskilled people in this process.

We can say that the socioeconomic setting that has begun to take shape in the effective occupation of Roraima was a society characterized by a large estate, focused almost exclusively by livestock, having the main social group formed by the northeastern and their descendants.

By the 1970s, this group remains as the central framework, but opening up to the prospect of attracting investors from various branches and locations in the country and, we believe that, for sure to have the support of indigenous peoples in the performance of tasks did not require a skilled labor more specialized.

During this period, the construction space in the non-indigenous society of the Roraima Territory was a place that, like any other, required of its inhabitants certain characteristics to inhabit it, so it was necessary to comply with its order as Certeau (1994) proposed. As indigenous were considered by the society as unable to develop tasks that require a more elaborate logical construction, for being labeled as lazy and primitive, it was certain that they would be considered unable or unsuitable people to inhabit a world that wanted to be modern.

In order to satisfactorily integrate to the social projects of the regional social groups, the indigenous peoples needed to begin to show capacity for doing their activities. One of the wishes of this kind of society was to make them settlers. Still

in 1973, there was a note about the *Fundação Nacional do Índio* - FUNAI that wanted to hand in rural villages to tribal groups that were already integrated into the national society. The project said that each family would receive a plot of 50 hectares, according to the president of FUNAI General Oscar Jerônimo Bandeira de Mello, who has also affirmed that if this project were successfully engaged, this experience would spread to others different parts of the country. (JORNAL BOA VISTA, 27/10/1973, 8).

An example of this kind of wish that came true happened in the June 16th of 1977, when the Indian Ricardo Aleixo, a Wapishana chieftain's son, received himself the title of land ownership from the hands of the Minister of Interior the request of the president of the National Institute for Colonization and Land Reform (INCRA), Lourenço Vieira da Silva. Ricardo Aleixo was the first Brazilian Indian to get a title of land ownership and it was disclosed on the news. (JORNAL BOA VISTA, 25/06/1977,3). This fact let the president of INCRA full of excitement:

O Instituto pretende intensificar o cumprimento efetivo da Lei 6001 do Estatuto do Índio que estabelece em seu artigo 33 a regularização de terras até 50 hectares que forem ocupadas por índios, durante um período de dez anos consecutivos. (*Idem*).⁹

If we take into account the indigenous culture, this model of distribution of lands was led to another order. It is private property settling in a region where land was collective. Until then, these people had not been concerned with land tenure, except perhaps to protect their territory from other groups, the new order required a written paper and signed by a out comer authority, that took their place and dictated orders about the construction of what he considers his own space.

We believe that the elite of the Roraima society has dreamed, implicitly, with an integration of the native people, perhaps as the last act of a play that began in the eighteenth century. For this society, among stages considered as “savage” and “civilized” in the integration process, the indigenous passed through an intermediate phase that was called *Caboclo*. Therefore, at first, those who lived isolated from the Brazilian national society were considered indigenous, those ones that were naked, used arrow and other objects and specific practices of this people. In a second plan, the *cablocos* wore clothes and they used other objects and non-indigenous practices, living or not directly with the “savage” and “civilized” ones. Lastly is the stage in

⁹ “The Institute intends to intensify the effective fulfillment of the Indian Statute that the law 6001 provides in its article 33 about land with 50 hectares occupied by Indians would be regularized, over a period of ten years consecutively. (*Idem*).”

which the Indian completely loses its bond with its people of origin and becomes indistinguishable from other individuals of the so-called civilized society.

When Ricardo Aleixo received the land ownership from INCRA it was realized that he was giving a big step to become “civilized”, since, by settling in his homeland and meeting the expectations that the title carried with it, he would be considered a settler. For sure, when Ricardo received the title he could not be in the primary indigenous condition and it would be a few time to say that he was not in the intermediate condition as well to totally be considered “civilized”. It is just an adaptation to the new way of living that he had to face.

From what was exposed, we believe we can make some observations. We understand that the colonization strategies highlighted here was the basic premise for success, eliminate the indigenous cultural values, in particular, the incompatible ones with the advancement of colonization. When we talk about progress, we are not just talking about material progress, but also about the development of all the values that require an organization of a place, among them the moral ones.

The formula to achieve this goal varied, at least in three different ways: one was holding the indigenous people in *aldeias*¹⁰ or huts; another, through a focused education in order to civilize them; and a third would be counting on the indulgence of indigenous, or even ignoring and occupying their lands with projects unrelated to their practices.

According to indigenous traditions, the world was built and given by their mythological heroes. In the Rio Branco area of occupation process, another world was imposed to them this time by contemporary humans. These people donated them not only a world, but the position he should occupy this time and more, they were there to enforce this proposal.

We can see that the use of “civilizing” (a word given by the colonizers) was nothing but fallacy, because if we take the term in the meanings: to leave the primitive state; instruct; make civil, no systematic effort occurred in this direction. It is understood that whoever colonizes, civilizes any person or group of people. When Santilli (1994) mentions the fields of Paranapanema, south of Mato-Grosso, Maranhão and Piauí, saying that the expansion of livestock in those places occurred according to the expulsion and extinction of the native, this means that there did not process the action of civilizing, as it also did not happen in the Rio Branco ethnic groups who were also expelled or exterminated. How could this kind of fact happen if whom to civilize no longer existed?

¹⁰ T/n: The name of the place where a community of Indians live. It is how we call their villages.

Even in the colonization strategies where this practice could have played an important space, it did not. This was the case of the people on indigenous lands, or livestock that their agents sought consent from these people. The use of the verb *civilize* also was nothing but rhetoric; in practice, it was only to break the indigenous socio-cultural values that prevented the premise of the new order places. We can see that in the most incompatible points, there was often resistance from indigenous people, one evidence of this is the failure of putting the indigenous people in *aldeias*.

We understand that such a failure can be attributed, in particular, to the incompatibility of the two ways of living in society, which implies two ways of organizing quite different places. The evidence can be translated in the speeches of colonial agents' eighteenth century, shortly after the rebellion of indigenous villagers in 1884, or even after the 1890 rebellion, when it spoke of the need to put them in *aldeias* far from their place of origin. This meant that the connection with their cultural practices prevented them becoming part of a new social organization. (FARAGE, 1991).

It is also observed In the Bispo Van Caloen's speech, to whom was able to educate the indigenous kids, "esta geração, passar d'um estado quase animal ao de um bom pae de familia". Santilli said (1992, 47), it seems he has not created higher expectations regarding the conversion of adults. The gradual distancing from its original culture began with the children, people who had not yet incorporated the cultural values of indigenous and were in a favorable phase to receive a new training.

Still, it could be in the justifications for the establishment of schools for Indians, which were often boarding schools. SPI report of 1924 mentions:

Muito necessária se torna a criação de escolas primeiras nas zonas habitadas pelos silvícolas que se vão adaptando nos costumes da civilização. (CIDR, 1989, 31).¹¹

The goal was to keep them away from his social organization to bring them closer to the customs of the "civilized" world. There has never been a concern to instruct them, to make them civil or civilized. This would give the native the status of equality, which would also imply a condition of claiming specific rights, which could be the output of the invaders from the indigenous territories.

Keep them away or make them forget their values and practices that prevented the development of a new way to occupy the space, this was the crucial point, which the colonizers faced, in the old days, and, we can say that part of the Roraima society faces this problem nowadays, taking into account that the process of occupation of

¹¹ "Much necessary becomes the creation of primary schools in areas inhabited by forestry that will adapt the customs of civilization. (CIDR, 1989, 31)."

the region by non-Indians are not yet fully defined. We understand that the natives of Rio Branco, the current state of Roraima, have never moved away completely from their traditional customs, their culture and their place organized following their values.

If in the past, non-indigenous society sought to disqualify the cultural traits of the native peoples and impose its own way of living and to organize, nowadays, the indigenous work on the appreciation of their culture and they require to be respected as such.

A late colonization may have contributed to this, as in the northeast region of the state, Macushi territory, the systematic colonization only arrived in the early decades of the twentieth century. The Schools that aimed at educating Indians are also from this period as well as the autonomous presence of the Catholic Church.

Taking as a reference, more specifically, the Macushi and Wapishana, the culture of these two people suffered very significant changes: there was a change in the format of their dwellings; the use of non-indigenous clothing; the mother tongue was forgotten on a large scale; They began to eat different kinds of products that were strange to them, leading them to attend the local market.

Nevertheless, many of its specific practices remained, and nowadays, in addition to the authentic features, including the organization itself that the indigenous movement gained. Some elderly indigenous never stopped speaking their native language, and today we can see young people also speaking. Certain types of foods, such as “*damorida*”¹², an indigenous common boiled food, or drink as “*caxiri*”¹³ show that they never moved away from their daily practices completely.

Most Indians live in villages, which are called malocas by the regional people, and those who live in the city, usually maintain relationships with relatives living there. If the passage of the mid-twentieth century, these people tended to disappear as ethnic consumed by advances of the regional society, with the organization of indigenous political development in the recent decades, tend to develop themselves by the construction of a new entity process.

In the period that a process of modernization of a non-indigenous place in Roraima begins, more specifically, from the 1970s, increase the efforts to transform, as fast as possible, the indigenous into a common person. We understand this fact as an act that goaled to avoid recognizing the Indian characteristics, any trait that

¹² T/n: *Damorida* is an indigenous food made with fish, pepper and some salt, everything mixed in a kind of sauce.

¹³ T/n: *Caxiri* is an indigenous drink made with the leaves and the roots of the cassava trees. When you have it, you usually feel drunk.

require differentiated law. Therefore, the concern to occupy and legalize the ownership of indigenous territories as soon as possible with non-indigenous projects was a form of guaranteeing to non-indigenous society the greatest amount of land as possible. To achieve this goal, it was valid even the presence of many miners in mineral exploration activity, a practice that the local society evaluated as a mistrust, because it involved the invasion of space by a large number of immigrants, which in its composition was constituted the vast majority of men considered as “rude” and to have low-purchasing power.

In the words of the governor Ramos Pereira, when he refers to Roraima, either the aldeia or a mining area visited, there is no differential treatment with regard to indigenous, except for the demands, because they asked for tissues, shoes, salt and etc, while the non-indigenous were requesting for roads, working conditions, schools and so on. For the rest, they were seen by the *Jornal Boa Vista* headlines as interchangeable.

We understand that it could not be anything different about the governor’s attitude, if we take into account the model of society that he wanted to fund, as a social model that had as main objective develop its manufacturing sector making use of the modern world production techniques, in itself was revolutionary in the sense of carrying with it the desire for innovation. It could have accurately been translated in denial to the “old”, to be considered “archaic”, and this was the condition that occupied the Indians within that vision.

Therefore, the characteristics of the indigenous do not find space in a society that wanted to be modern. As the dreams of those who stimulated the development of this model of society, there were two problems. Despite a headline of 13 November 1973, saying that “Perimental Norte marcará o encontro de civilizações: era do computador com a da pedra lascada”, (*JORNAL BOA VISTA*), it was a meeting that did not allow interaction between two opposite poles. One was the death of the other and in this case, they had as starting points the speeches in favor of the “new”, the “modern”, the very values of indigenous culture, used by producers and founders of this new world, to highlight the importance and value of their construction. It was the death of the indigenous place that these speeches have been fed and taken shape. (CERTRAU, 2000).

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