

## LIVING IN THE AMAZON STATES AND THE CONTROL AND DOMINATION STRATEGIES OF THE IMPERIAL STATE OF BRAZIL<sup>1</sup>

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*Francivaldo Alves Nunes*

Doctor in Social History from Universidade Federal Fluminense. Professor at the Federal University of Pará

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**Abstract:** This article analyzes the discourses on the way of life of the populations that occupied the Amazonian hinterlands of the 19th century, in this case, the provinces of Pará and Amazonas, residing on the banks of rivers and streams and who worked in extractive activities and planting in small swiddens. Using government and expedition reports as Sources, we demonstrate how these values, associated with agricultural activity, required the State to perform not only in maintaining order, but as an institution promoting policies that would elevate the habits of populations in the Amazon, in dissonance with life experience of the locals.

**Keywords:** Country side workers, Extractors, State, Amazon, 19th century.

## INTRODUCTION

In this article, I analyze the image constructed by public agents and intellectuals about the life experiences of the populations that occupied the Amazon hinterlands in the 19th century. Let me begin with a statement to the Legislative Assembly of Grão-Pará, on October 1, 1849, by Councilor Jerônimo Francisco Coelho (1806-1860), then president of the province.

In the fertile province of Pará, where nature gives everyone with a spontaneous superabundance everything they need to live, work is seen by these classes as an unnecessary and intolerable constraint. Our enemy, which raises its tent, or the haystack on the banks of any of these rivers and lakes varied with fish, surrounded by virgin forests and forests, full of fruits, drugs, and spices, abundant with an infinite variety of hunting in quadrupeds and volatile, lives resting and careless in the bosom of abundance.<sup>2</sup>

Note that the boastful tone for the forest riches that could be seen in the Amazonian lands, accompanied by joint steps, the criticisms of the way in which populations

dealt with these resources. This seems to be the first image that is being built in the region, that is, lands of great wealth, but as a population that knows little or nothing about the exploitation of these resources. As observed, there is a denial of the way of life of these populations.

It is precisely about this that I intend to discuss, that is, to analyze the authorities' view of the way of life of the populations that occupied the Amazon hinterland. For this we will use the records left in government reports and pronouncements, as well as traveler reports. Here we will seek to analyze the perception of public and naturalist agents, not only with a set of impressions, nor as simple reports. Our understanding is that this is a reading of a region, a forged image of the Amazon, which revealed it as the bearer of an invincible creative force, materialized in the perception of a dense forest, but occupied by a local population, which is perceived in a way to deny your life experiences.

## COUNTRYSIDE WORKERS, EXTRACTORS AND PUBLIC AGENTS

A first observation is associated with those pointed out by Domingos Soares Ferreira Penna (1818-1888) in 1864, for whom "freedom to work does not generate wealth and does not guarantee prosperity". This is an expression used in a report presented to the presidency of the province in which he observes the way of life of the populations that occupied the banks of the Tocantins River. When making comparisons with the planting experience, he did not fail to express his critical thinking about the forms of cultivation, still dependent on forest burning, as well as without any regularity in the days and hours of work, which would make this population achieve little generate wealth with their production (PENNA, 1864, p. 17). The

2. PARÁ - Speech made by the Honorable Mister Counselor: *Jerônimo Francisco Coelho*, 1849, p. 22.

complaint here is based on the absence of a discipline that organizes work and production.

According to the naturalist Henry Bates (1825-1892), who was in the region in 1848, the brutality of customs on the part of the populations that inhabited the regions of Pará and this lack of work discipline was related to contact with the indigenous populations. When observing the inhabitants of the region of Tocantins, the proximity of Cametá, he noted that there was a predominance of Mamluks, who although they were characterized by kindness in their habits, it was not possible to “buy from them much in terms of fresh food”. In the naturalist’s opinion, this was due to “the fact that they had never done anything more than what was strictly necessary for their own sustenance” (BATES, 1979, p. 58). The complaint is aimed at the absence of cumulative production that favors trade.

Another fact pointed out, now by the provincial authorities, about what was considered as wild practices of farmers, corresponded to the arms that were employed in agricultural work, perceived as “mobile, yielding to advantages, which appears to them as the harvesting of natural products”. This meant that they did not develop “regular work, not settling down, and rolling loose from forest to forest without leaving, in their passage through this laboratory of nature, other traces, other than the destruction of the trees, which offer them such great riches.”<sup>3</sup>

The Antônio Ferreira Gomes site, located in Vista Alegre, 22 kilometers from Cametá, is pointed out by Henry Bates as one of the cases in which there is a small farming area, without the use of instruments that promote increased production and indiscriminate felling practices. Forest. In the cultivated areas, a stretch of clear land could be seen, where there were several fruit trees, such as orange, lemon, genipap and guava trees. “Some poorly

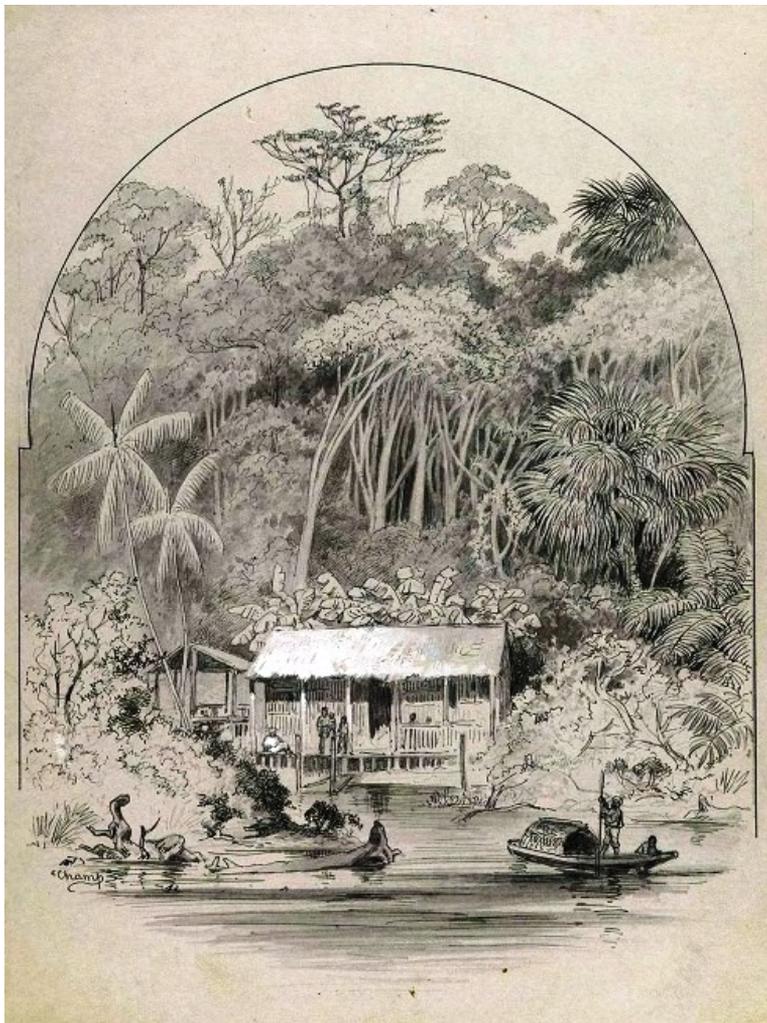
cared for” cocoa and coffee plantations were also recorded. Of the manioc cultivation lands, these were scattered throughout the forest, being also found on some islands in the middle of the river, however, what was observed was a forest force that sought to dominate and suffocate the Amazonian man (BATES, 1979, p 56).

In 1860, the North American James Wells Champney (1843-1903), registered this Amazonian landscape in which he sought to demonstrate this indomitable strength of the Amazon rainforest that limited human activity.

Robert Christian Avé-Lallemant (1812-1884), also a naturalist and who in the last year of the 1850s was in the Amazon, when examining the populations on the banks of the Rio Negro, revealed that they were perfectly satisfied with hunting, wild fruits, coconuts, palm trees and chestnuts “that nature throws at their feet” (AVÉ-LALLEMANT, 1980, p. 105). Here, the exuberant and giving nature appears again as responsible for the indolence, as it offered, free of charge, to the populations of the region what they needed.

In the assessment of the military and intellectual Antônio Baena (1782-1850) on agriculture and extraction in Pará in the first half of the 19th century, he highlighted that the farmers, in general, had not rejected what he called the “pernicious method of landslides” and “forest fires”. These actions, which were justified by being on tired lands and by the need to look for other spaces to develop new crops, meant that these workers did not lend themselves to the development of a fertile industry. The method developed by the settlers of Pará, according to Baena, copied “the crude custom that the foresters had in their timid agriculture”, which made it difficult, even to settle these settlers for a long and lasting time on the same land. (BAENA, 2004, p. 71).

3. PARÁ. *Report presented by Francisco Carlos de Araújo Brusque*, 1863, p. 43.



**Figura 1:** On the banks, de James Wells Champney, 1860.

Source: Digital collection of the National Library.

Available on the website: <http://bdlb.bn.gov.br/acervo/handle/20.500.12156.3/35611>

In areas where forest clearing and burning predominated, “the image of annihilation hovered”, “over the hills, some trunks were charred and others only half burned”, said Robert Avé-Lallemant when he observed the plantations that bordered the river Amazonas until the mouth of the Negro River, for whom he called “annihilating crop” (AVÉ-LALLEMANT, 1980, p. 140). To this lack of industry in farming was added what was considered as “the reduction of rural landowners in making a crop that encompassed the foodstuffs necessary for food, but also ensured commerce”. As highlighted by Antônio Baena (2004, p. 73).

In the case of wild plants such as sarsaparilla, piassava palm trees, gum and balsam trees, cloves, vanilla, oil, pitch, tow and other important products found in the Amazon forests, due to their usefulness in the trade, these were defended as necessary cultivation. However, what was observed is that these products were not yet constituted as an object of planting by the farmers of Pará. According to the president of Pará in 1863, Francisco Carlos de Araújo Brusque (1822-1886), several fruits, resins and balsams were not found so often in the markets of Belém, which was due to “the cramped routine to which agriculture was submitted”.<sup>4</sup>

And also about the issue, he pointed out that in the bay regions of the Lower Amazon, the improvidence and barbarity of their users would have caused the near disappearance of the chestnut, cloves, vanilla and copaiba trees, considered the four most esteemed vegetables in the region. This destruction was the result of the indiscriminate use of the force of the ax and the machete. In the case of the chestnut trees, their destruction was caused by the eagerness with which the extractors sought to exploit all the resources made available by this plant, pulling out even the bark in order

4. PARÁ. *Report presented by Francisco Carlos de Araújo Brusque*, 1863, p. 45.

5. PARÁ. *Report presented by Abel Graça Presidente*, 1871, p. 21.

to remove the tow used to caulk vessels. This practice would have caused a shortage of chestnut trees in the highlands of the Pacajá and Anapu rivers, making it necessary to reach the vicinity of the waterfalls of these rivers to extract this product. The clove, like the chestnut trees, was no longer easily found on the banks of rivers, as in the past. To obtain the product, it was essential to look for it inside the forests, which was explained by the predatory collection of this product, responsible for the destruction of the trees that produced them (PENNA, 1864, p. 81).

Heirs of the method of extraction of indigenous groups, the populations of Pará would be identified in some positions of local authorities, as incapable of making better use of the resources made available by nature. From the lands on the banks of the Tapajós River, southwest of the province, the Portuguese engineer Lieutenant Colonel Franco de Almeida, in his memory about the Tapajós, said that the lands that bordered this river had wild fruits, parsley, cocoa, cloves and gums. This region was also formed by general forests and pasture fields. However, despite the varied wealth of the region, little was taken advantage of, because the activities of exploration of these resources were being controlled by what he called “gross Indians”, that is, extraction and creation work were practiced, according to the lieutenant - colonel, by men “who were more like enemies than civilized”.<sup>5</sup>

Complaints about extraction practices appear in the reports of the presidents of Amazonas, especially in the case of João Pedro Dias Vieira (1820-1870). In 1856, he found that sarsaparilla had almost completely disappeared from the woods and banks of the nearest rivers, which was the result of inadequate practices by the populations of the interior, who, when removing the parsley,

stripped the potato that supported the plant from the soil. and would allow new harvests.<sup>6</sup>

The extraction of tow and copaiba oil also suffered similar damage, which, in the case of oil extraction, was being removed through ax blows that damaged the plant's stem, and not through superficial cuts that did not destroy the tree. In this case, Dias Vieira proposed as actions to tackle these problems the approval of laws and regulations that would curb predatory extractivism and support the cultivation of these trees, justifying these measures as necessary to also "ensure the best living conditions for the populations of the countryside, used to living in huts and feeding on fruits and tubers"<sup>7</sup>.

A last case is associated with the report based on the Madeira River exploration trip in 1861, in which the engineer João Martins da Silva Coutinho (1830-1889), at the time working for the government of Amazonas, made a diagnosis of the agricultural situation. and extractivism in this region. He highlighted that although there was legislation that expressly prohibited the devastation of vacant forests for shifting cultivation, in this case it referred to the Law of 1850, which left aside predatory extractivism, which killed trees little by little, as it understood that the destruction of a plant such as the rubber tree, for example, was not only associated with its immediate removal, but that by removing the bark, cutting the roots and perforating the trunk, it also promoted its destruction over time (COUTINHO, 1986, p. 64).

The problems identified with the extraction took on a more worrying economic dimension when referring to the destructive use of rubber trees. According to Silva Coutinho, in the islands and igapós of the Lower Amazon, in Pará, the absence of this plant was felt by its explorers. The damaged and weakened trees

could not give enough milk to satiate the greed of the manufacturers. With that, he said that if the authorities in Amazonas did not develop actions to combat these "destructive practices", the same would happen in this province. In Silva Coutinho's perception, these practices were consequences of "the disheartening way of life of the populations" that survived from extractivism, recorded in 1867 by the German photographer Albert Christoph Frish. This population formed by indigenous people and caboclos, for Coutinho, constituted themselves as "a nomadic horde that lands now and then there, extracting from the rubber trees as much milk as possible, killing the plants and leaving the devastation behind" (COUTINHO, 1986, p. 65).

## FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

Many other public agents, authorities and travelers could be highlighted here, however, we need to draw conclusions. In general, we can highlight that when describing the way of life of the populations of the interior involved in the extraction work, Silva Coutinho joins other intellectuals and public agents of the time, among other authorities, who pointed out the experiences of work and production of the populations of the country sides as a predatory practice, responsible for explaining the situation of misery in which the populations of the interior of Pará lived.

Another issue that can be observed in this relationship between public agents and the productive experiences developed by the populations of the Amazonian hinterlands is the prospect of transforming the region into a great center of production and trade. In this aspect, descriptions of the geography, flora and fauna of the Amazon, natural resources, customs of local populations, human effort to

6. AMAZONAS. *Report presented by João Pedro Dias Vieira*, 1856, p. 16.

7. AMAZONAS. *Report presented by João Pedro Dias Vieira*, 1856, p. 16.



Album géographique de G. Lortie, rue d'Assolvi 21 et 23  
au Rio de Janeiro.  
Photographie d'après nature par A. Frish.

Rio Negro (Brasil).

Montre Annuaire à l'Exposition de Paris de 1867  
Médaille d'Argent à l'Exposition de Rio de Janeiro.

MANÁOS.

Une famille de Tapuyas, à la porte de leur maison, dans une rue de la ville.

**Imagem 2:** Caboclos of the Negro River, by Albert Christoph Frish, 1867.

Source: Digital Collection of the National Library.

Available on the website: <https://br.pinterest.com/pin/333759022358658800/>

dominate the physical landscape and settlement are understood to reaffirm the region's productive capacity.

In the speech of these travelers and public agents, the habits of the Amazon populations were, therefore, in contradiction with what was understood as an industry, that is, a transforming action of man over nature, or even as a result of the effort of man's intelligence to satisfy an apparent need.

The inexistence of an agricultural industry, for example, would be related to the easiness of means to guarantee the necessary resources for survival, without there being a need to transform this natural space. This situation was responsible, therefore, for making the Amazonian man a constant dependent on the resources that the forests made available without great efforts.

The modernization of agricultural practices came to be perceived as necessary to overcome the way of life of populations in the interior of the Amazon, and described as a stronghold of wild customs. This perspective allowed for the defense of the introduction of new planting techniques that would overcome the old habits of dealing with the land, which were identified in these discourses as rudimentary and backward practices. Still on the issue, it was evident, from the development of agriculture, the expectation that the populations of the interior would overcome their nomadic condition, forming villages and helping in the progress and prosperity of these villages.

Extractive activity is also perceived as endowed with rudimentary practices, as it did not take advantage of all the natural resources available for exploration, which for public agents, instead of causing prosperity, was responsible for making these populations even poorer.

The descriptions and impressions pointed out represent, therefore, representations and readings about the region, involving scientific

and political interests, which oscillated in paying attention to commercial advantages, without losing sight of the control over habits and values regarding the way of life of the populations. It was at a time limited to the mid-nineteenth century, in defense of the circulation of knowledge about the forms of production and use of forest resources, as a strategy for economic development. Which meant disciplining Indians, blacks and mestizos, in their work experiences.

Finally, we would say that the observation of these public agents about the way of life of the populations of the Amazonian hinterlands revealed a lack of understanding about the experiences that involved dealing with rivers and forests. A necessary misunderstanding for the exercise of domination. We would say that, considering the interests of these agents, it was a timely misunderstanding, since the misunderstanding legitimized the condemnation of these practices and the search for other production experiences that would result in the extinction of old practices of planting and extraction.

What we can generally conclude is that it is, therefore, a clear strategy to justify domination and control, including suppressing, dominating or decimating local populations, a discourse that is quite current as a strategic use of domination and control of the Amazon.

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