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"The River is Our Street." Intersectional Rural Protest in Brazil's Amazon

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Abstract

In Northern Brazil, the Tocantins-Araguaia industrial waterway project seeks to expand the export corridor for soy directly through the Amazon Forest, threatening to destroy ecosystems and local traditional communities' socioeconomic base. However, dispersion, precarity, and isolation from political participation impede the collective organizing of those in rural "sacrifice zones" who are affected by this infrastructure project. This paper investigates how social movements address this difficulty, analyzing a boat caravan of labor leaders from diverse movements representing fisher, family farmer, Indigenous, Quilombola, women, youth, and church groups against the construction of the waterway. It argues that the campaign's intersectional practices — recognizing autonomous cultural identities, building solidarity around crosscutting threats to production and social reproduction, and formulating unifying inclusive demands and alternatives — address the collective action problem in these peripheries. Moreover, the campaign reflects labor organizations' environmentalization, i.e., the incorporation integration of regional, agrarian, and environmental justice concerns.

Keywords: Export logistics; rural development; sacrifice zones; Amazon forest; social movements; intersectionality.

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1 Introduction

In early February 2022, Brazilian labor leaders and international activists traveled several hundred kilometers in a boat caravan on the country's second-largest river called Tocantins — from the industrial port of Barcarena upstream to Itupiranga, in the Northern state of Pará in the Amazon rainforest. They visited eleven different communities seeking to prevent the construction of the Tocantins-Araguaia industrial waterway. The waterway would expand the export corridor for soy directly through the Amazon, threatening to destroy ecosystems and the region's economic base. During the far-right government of President Jair Bolsonaro, deforestation in the Amazon has been leading title pages across the globe. Yet, even progressive Brazilians know little about the waterway project in the peripheral North, let alone the grassroots mobilization against it. This article investigates how social movements mobilize protest in today's rural sacrifice zones by analyzing the strategies, alliances, and broader campaign vision in defense of the Tocantins river and against agribusiness expansion and export logistics (Acselrad, 2022; Lerner, 2012). I argue that intersectional organizing addresses the collective action problem in sacrifice zones by centering diverse cultural identities, building solidarity, unifying different allies in defense of a shared river territory, and formulating alternatives that bind their demands in shared patterns of production and social reproduction.

The concept of "sacrifice zones" denotes the distant and racialized places and peripheries where people with less access to decision-making processes suffer the costs of pollution and environmental deterioration from industry, extraction, energy generation, etc., for the wealth and comfort of others (Lerner, 2012). While the sacrifice zone concept emerged in the context of US toxic waste disposal, applied to global scales, it mirrors the colonial trope of the extractive frontier. The frontier — e.g., the Amazon forest — encapsulates dehumanizing ideas about territories of "untouched" natural wealth and non-modern forms of social organization that ought to be "developed," i.e., integrated into capitalist production (Becker, 1988; Brannstrom, 2009; Bunker, 1988; Hecht, 2005; Wanderley, 2018). The large distance and infrastructural isolation of these rural groups among themselves and from decision-making processes and progressive urban activists, together with the dominance of local, national, and international extractive industries, implies a collective action problem and the need for specific mobilization strategies.

Far from being simply arbitrary locations, sacrifice zones represent the racialized, gendered, and regionalized structural violence of extractivism, industrial production, and energy generation (Drotzer, 2014; Greiner et al., 2023; Valenzuela-Fuentes et al., 2021). In this sense, the concept is a spatial expression of Indigenous, communitarian, and materialist ecofeminist theorizations of intersectional marginalization at the crossroads of gender, sexuality, race, class, and religious identity aspects (Fakier et al., 2020; Odih, 2014; Venegas et al., 2021). Intersectionality emerged as a Black feminist concept to understand identity politics' political, structural, and representational dimensions (Crenshaw, 1990). Scholars have applied this lens to highlight how socioenvironmental risks and arising insecurities in social reproduction shape an invisible precariat's access to water or limit the capacity to migrate (Almeida, 2019; Chiro, 2020; Corson et al., 2013; Neimark et al., 2020).

Intersectional inequalities are a defining feature of sacrifice zones. They also serve as a framework to study protest movements and their demands for redistribution, recognition, and representation (Fraser, 2009). Feminist scholars show that intersectional organizing can reveal similar forms of oppression among women from different backgrounds and thus enable coalitions (Chun et al., 2013). Moreover, ecofeminist scholars argue that locating intersectionality

in real struggles holds lessons to integrate environmentalism, feminism, and class concerns in a broader movement for social justice (Cock, 2018; Mellor, 1992; Mies et al., 2014). What does locating intersectionality in real struggles look like in practice, especially in the context of subnational regional inequalities and sacrifice zones?

The colonial nature of inequality and oppression in Brazil implies a specific framing of race, gender, and class issues that has enabled an intersectional mobilization and alliance building of informal workers, Black women domestic workers, and women agroecology groups (Acciari, 2021; Naves & Fontoura, 2022; Perry, 2016). Socioenvironmentalism in Brazil and Latin America is rooted in the decolonial struggle against the exploitative development model and is historically linked with cultural identity (Indigenous, *campesino*, etc.) and demands for political participation, land rights, and public services (Rodriguez, 2020). Contributing to these debates, I argue that intersectional organizing is essential to mobilize diverse communities in socioenvironmental sacrifice zones and, at the same time, reflects the "environmentalization" of agrarian and labor struggles (Petras & Veltmeyer, 2017; Yaşın, 2022).

This article draws on five years of fieldwork in Brazil's Amazon region, including one year working at the city government of Belém, the capital of Pará. I participated in the boat caravan in 2022, in online and physical meetings, and protest events organized by the campaign to defend the Tocantins River against the industrial waterway project in Pará, as well as in community seminars aimed at public consultation in the Baixo Tocantins region. This research resulted in twenty-five formally recorded and several informal interviews and conversations with activists, local scholars, members of the state legislation, and the public prosecutor's office. In what follows, I first characterize the sacrifice zone in the Pará state of the Amazon. Then I consider the campaign's alliances, strategies, and demands against the waterway, examining how it mobilized and united to address the racialized, class-based, and gendered marginalization, dispossession, and displacement of communities triggered by the planned construction of the waterway. Finally, I discuss this protest, its intersectional nature, and its alternative vision for the socioenvironmental regional recognition, representation, and redistribution in the context of the environmentalization of traditional agrarian and labor struggles.

2 Sacrifice for Soy Export

Socioenvironmental activism — the connection between land issues, production, and environmental activism — has a long tradition in the Brazilian Amazon rainforest, as it goes back back to the rubber tapper movement led by Chico Mendes (Allegretti, 2008; Mendes, 1992). The Amazon is one of Brazil's poorest and most violent regions, highlighting the link between the primitive accumulation of natural wealth and the marginalization of rural families in Amazon sacrifice zones (Sauer, 2018). The region is an export corridor and energy producer for the national economy. With its Belo Monte and Tucuruí hydroelectric dams, Pará produces more electricity than any other state for the rest of the country (Fleury & Almeida, 2013). However, while hydroelectric dams appear as a "clean" energy source, their construction impacted the river flow and displaced entire communities, creating sacrifice zones visible on the physical maps (Bratman, 2014; Finley-Brook, 2021; Fleury & Almeida, 2013; Pinto, 2012).

According to the Social Progress Index (IPS), the conditions of Amazon municipalities are well below Brazil's average, especially regarding access to water, sanitation, information, and human rights (Santos et al., 2021). While hunger has increased in recent years across Brazil, it is worst in the North, where 71,6% of the population and over half of the family farmer

households (54.6%) live in moderate or severe food insecurity (Pajolla, 2022).[1] Political elites and corporations control local media, while energy and communication access is expensive, uneven, and scarce in rural areas, making collective action more difficult, time-consuming, and costly.

The federal government's industrial waterway plan reproduces this precarity dynamic, affecting already marginalized populations. The 2,000-kilometer-long Tocantins River begins in the state of Goiás and crosses the Amazon states of Tocantins and Maranhão until it flows into the sea near Belém in the state of Pará (Figures 1–2). The Tocantins-Araguaia basin is the largest river basin within the Brazilian territory, comprising 409 municipalities. Along the river live Indigenous, Quilombola, traditional communities, land reform settlements, artisanal fishers, peasants, and small farmer families. The waterway would make the Tocantins navigable all year round and — as part of the so-called Northern Arc Corridor — link Brazil's central soy-producing region to the industrial port of Vila de Conde in Barcarena, leading to the Atlantic Ocean.

Figure 1: Project Area
Source: Ibama; https://www.gov.br/economia/pt-br/orgaos/seppi/noticias-1/ibama-emite-licenca-previa-para-o-derrocamento-do-pedral-do-lourenco-na-hidrovia-do-tocantins

1. The Bolsonaro government paralyzed the demarcation of Indigenous territories, the implementation of environmental control and agrarian reform, and dismantled policies supporting small producers.

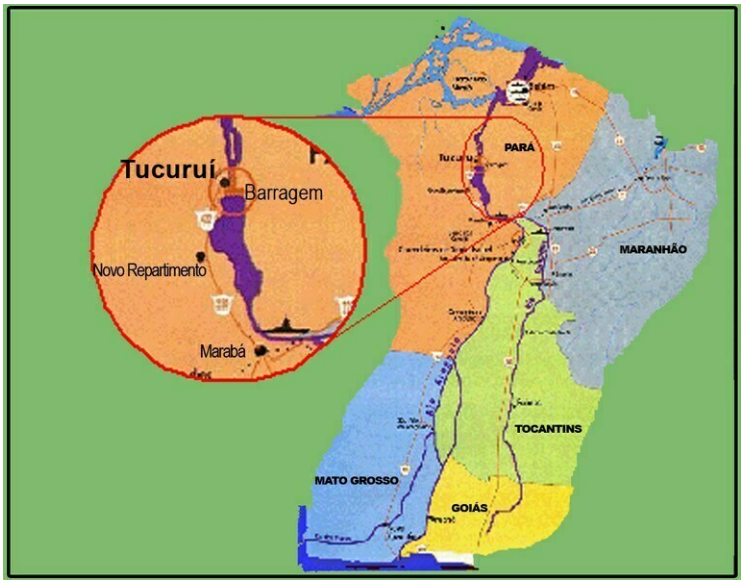

Figure 2: The Tocantins River
Source: DNIT; https://www.gov.br/dnit/pt-br/assuntos/noticias/dnit-lanca-edital-para-derrocamento-dos-pedrais-na-hidrovia-do-tocantins

The State Assembly's Human Rights Commission estimates that at least 30,000 families will be directly affected by the waterway (Bordalo, 2021).[2] The main works are planned in Itupiranga, where 35 kilometers of rock formations in the river, called the Pedral do Lourenço, would be destroyed by three detonations per day, each with a radius of one kilometer, for two years, resettling local communities. In addition, the project includes dredging and demolitions along 212 kilometers up and downstream from the Tucuruí hydroelectric plant to remove sandbanks, soil, natural sediments, and rocks. This stretch of river is home to 207 counted fish species, more than half of which are critical to the local economy (Santana, 2019).

On October 11, 2022, in the final months of Jair Bolsonaro's anti-environmental government, the Brazilian Institute of the Environment and Renewable Natural Resources (Ibama) granted a controversial preliminary license for the construction (Ibama, 2022). On March 9, 2023, the Federal Prosecutor's Office recommended the suspension of the license until the conditions and irregularities identified by Ibama itself would be resolved — amongst which a preliminary, free, and informed consultation of the affected riverside communities and an adequate socioenvironmental impact assessment. As analyzed in the following sections, social movements devised a creative strategy to prepare and mobilize diverse local communities.

3 Recognizing Local Realities

In defense of the Tocantins, the caravan emerged as an intersectional organizing practice aimed at mobilizing and promoting the rights of diverse and marginalized rural workers and communities in the most isolated regions of Brazil. It was led by Brazil's National Trade Union Center (CUT), which historically represents Brazil's diverse working class that emerged in the much wealthier industrial center of São Paulo. The caravan was a national initiative driven

2. Commissioned reports estimate that the waterway will only affect between 6,500 and 12,000 fishermen and those working in the fishing sector (DNIT, 2018). But these estimates are outdated.

by then CUT secretary Carmen Foro, now secretary of the Federal Ministry of Women. A Black woman from the riverine (*riberinho*) community of Igarapé-Miri on the Tocantins, Foro is widely known and respected for her regional engagement and for bringing the perspective of Amazonian women into the Southern-dominated traditional unionist CUT. The caravan took this commitment even further by bringing national union leadership to hear fellow members in their own territories and realities. In the Amazon region, unions are essentially agricultural workers' associations, and CUT is the backbone of various community organization structures like fisher and women's associations. According to Foro, the boat Caravan in Defense of the Tocantins River was "one of the strategies to form our voice as farmers, fishermen, and Quilombolas" (C. Foro, personal communication, March 28, 2022).

"The river is our street" is a popular saying among Amazon communities, and the caravan adapted to this reality: by boat, it navigated the Tocantins River from the industrial port of Barcarena upstream to the Tucuruí dam from where it continued by bus, passing the region that would be affected by the construction. During eight days in early February of 2022, its members — including high-level national leaders such as CUT secretaries for environmental and social issues, and human rights — visited eleven municipalities along the river, organizing seminars, distributing materials, hearing community members, and eating and sleeping in the communities. The mobilization was urgent as rural precarity was increasing and the Bolsonaro government had exploited the Covid-19 pandemic to dismantle socioenvironmental institutions and licensing. The caravan was the only way to account for the regional context of large distances, lack of roads, stable energy, internet, and communication, which required exceptional creativity, planning, resources, and a lot of time. For instance, on the second to last day of the journey, the bus got stuck in the mud road after a rain shower and all the caravan members worked for over three hours in the sun before freeing it. The bus ride back on the only highway from Marabá to Belém was delayed due to traffic and took around 14 hours.

The national and Pará state leadership of CUT, with financial support from the U.S.-based Solidarity Center/AFL-CIO, coordinated the organization of the caravan on the ground in partnership with diverse allies: the Movement of Dam Affected People (MAB), the Federation of Agricultural Workers (CONTAG and its regional section Fetagri Pará), the Diocese of Cametá, the Pastoral Council of Fishermen, the Federal University of Pará, the Popular Youth Movement, the Union of Public Education Workers of Pará (Sintepp), and regional fisher and Quilombola associations. For instance, MAB represents the local diversity of those affected by energy and infrastructure megaprojects in terms of gender, sexual orientation, religion, political party, and level of education. Its national coordinator Iury Paulinho reported that the movement's base is predominantly women who coordinate pushed by their concern for the life of their community and neighborhood (I. Paulinho, personal communication, January 30, 2022). Membership in these organizations is not exclusive. For instance, Luzia Mendes, from a Quilombola community near Baião, is communication director of the community association, vice secretary of the women's collective, and member of the regional women group in the Baixo Tocantins region. The caravan recognized the autonomy of specific interest groups and integrated them into a common resistance campaign.

While CUT organized the itinerary, boat, captain, and a tiny film crew, all members and organizations equally participated in the work during the caravan, cleaned the boat, prepared meals, and spoke at events. Moreover, the local associations coordinated the reception of the caravan in the communities, including the program of the meetings, musical presentations, and accommodation in different family homes. Especially women and youth associations led this preparation, setting up festive meals and, sometimes, the sale of artisan works and produce.

Each local association also mobilized its members from neighboring communities and arranged their transport to the meetings, thus enabling gatherings of hundreds of people of all ages. In this sense, the caravan built on existing structures of autonomous organizations.

4 Centering Realities and Identities

The caravan along the Tocantins presented a local snapshot of Amazonian (*Amazonida*) regional identities of fisher and peasant forest communities of Indigenous, African, and mixed descent, living off fishing and family farming. By visiting the diverse communities and listening to their concerns and denunciations, this conflict's intersectional dimensions became evident — especially the class, racial, gendered, religious, and cultural dimensions. Jonivaldo da Conceição Castro, from the traditional Igarapé-Miri fishing colony, explained the traditional small-scale production in the region.

> It is the story of the mermaid that is half fisher and half peasant. There is no fisherman who does not cultivate acai nor a farmer who does not fish. In Igarapé-Miri, 90% of the people depend on both.
>
> We wanted to change the life quality of our people who worked as slaves and lived serving the landowners. Today each one has his piece of land, his lot where he raises fish and chickens (J. da C. Castro, personal communication, March 2, 2022).

Instead of setting up one sole meeting in the Baixo Tocantins, the caravan visited diverse territories. It targeted local communities whose identities are complex mixes of race, culture, gender relations, generation, socioenvironmental conditions, and production mechanisms. In the first days, from Barcarena up to Cametá, a visit to the community would take several hours. It would commence with speeches from the local catholic pastor and the Pentecostal, evangelical pastor and a musical presentation of community youth. Students would present their interpretation of community life in the floodplains on the river and the threats by the industrial waterway in the form of dance. Communities would decorate the large wooden sheds with palm leaves and a collection of local fruit on the ground, such as cacao and mandioca. Social movement leaders would hold speeches and inform about the waterway and, most importantly, open space for community members to talk about their specific concerns.

On such occasions, fishermen expressed concern about the change in the tide and the disappearance of fish breeding grounds and species. Jonivaldo da Conceição Castro, from the Igarapé-Miri fishing colony, argued that "messing with a riverbed like this — we cannot even imagine how re-adaptation would take place to allow life in the river" (Castro, personal communication, 2022). These gatherings and discussions revealed the diverse perspectives within the communities and the specific racial and gendered impacts. Carmen Foro stated:

> The project impacts the rural area and the cities. When people don't have anything to eat or produce, they head to the city's peripheries with serious social problems, especially for women. Prostitution, rape, and similar problems happen where these projects occur (C. Foro, personal communication, March 28, 2022).

In a small group discussion about demands taking place in Tauirí, Prof. Christina Cunha from the Federal University in Marabá explained to the local fishermen how the waterway

would also affect Quilombola communities downstream and their lands, which are used collectively and in danger of appropriation by soy farmers and cattle rangers. Women also raised needs coming directly from their communities, translating them into demands for regional public policies, including building daycare centers and schools and distributing seedlings to plant trees. Moreover, a young activist from MAB reflected on her generation's role and possibilities in decolonial struggles for rights and recognition.

> For me, resistance is education. Go to Marabá, study, take the knowledge of the community to the institution, study law, and return to defend the community. Not to stop being a peasant or *riberinho*. These communities need public policies, not a program like this, to tell them they are developed (G. Souza, personal communication, May 2, 2022).

These ancestral identities and intergenerational relationships shaped every meeting, as culture, music, and food were recognized as central to community cohesion and equally affected by the waterway's disruptive development plans. One illustrative example in this respect was provided by Mestre Doriedson Lopes Viera, from the Quilombo Umarizal and leader of the musical group of *Samba de Cacete* — a traditional dance rooted in the Amazonian afro-descendant Quilombola culture with a specific rhythm — which is participated by over a hundred people of all generations. Reflecting on how Umarizal would be isolated through the drying out of the river, he argued:

> Automatically, our culture would be extinct. Why? Every family will look for another place to survive. But Samba de Cacete is a living culture. It is part of our blood. We practice it and pass it on from generation to generation (D.L. Viera, personal communication, January 2, 2022).

The recognition of the region also passed through the recalling of its history of isolated, unsuccessful struggles. Indeed, communities that would be affected by the waterway project have already suffered from land conflicts and the construction of one of the world's largest hydroelectric plants: the Tucuruí Dam (Santana et al., 2014; Urzedo & Chatterjee, 2021). The Dam's construction began in the 1970s as part of the military dictatorship's programs to integrate the region through colonization and infrastructure (Bunker, 1988). The local communities fought until the 1990s to receive electricity generated in their former backyards. The flooding of the reservoir alone displaced over two thousand Indigenous and traditional families, while the dam changed the river's tidal flow and sediment formation (Pinto, 2012; Mendes, 2017). Fishers and representatives from the community associations reported that the dam caused the complete disappearance of several fish species. In the same way, the waterway construction would destroy fish breeding grounds like the Pedral do Lourenço.

As the caravan moved further to the South of Pará, it reached the gigantic Tucuruí hydroelectric dam region. According to Iury Paulinho, 300 families lived below the dam and were threatened by possible breaks. Switching from boat to bus, the caravan members reached the agribusiness frontier, passing a completely changed vegetation compared to the lush forests. In this region, around 80% of primary forests were already lost, and, according to the Pastoral Land Commission, in 2021, 641 rural conflicts involving land, water, and labor rights occurred in the Legal Amazon — roughly half of the total registered in Brazil. Of the 35 registered murders, 28 happened in the Legal Amazon (CPT, 2022). In the municipality of Novo Ipixuna, local activists advised the caravan members not to stay overnight as initially planned, as violent

land conflicts caused insecurity in this region, especially for Black women activists (Araújo et al., 2019). Suena Nascimento, who presents herself as a peasant, *ribeirinha*, and rural educator from the agrarian reform settlement, was one of these young mothers and activists. She recounted the assassination of two socio-environmental activists, including her professor, and of having received threats for being an active member of the Quilombola community. She feared that people in her community would remain without fish, food, and income because of the waterway and increasing land speculation and conflict. In her situation, the caravan meant, "We are not alone. This struggle is not only mine. It is ours" (L. Mendes, personal communication, January 2, 2022). In sum, the campaign recognized the specific intersectional environmental, class, and identitarian dimensions and concerns regarding the waterway project and provided a means to counter official narratives.

5 Building Solidarity Along the River

The caravan informed people about the scope of the effect of the construction, making them aware of other groups' impacts they would not otherwise have been aware of. Antonio Dias, director of the Association of River Residents of Cametá and a member of MAB, argued:

> The Caravan comes to make us *riberinhos*, and forest people join hands and unite in defense because the project does not harm just one community or another; they damage the whole territory. I am from downstream, and arriving here at the source, I understand the dimension. We discover the river and other communities, increasing the concern that we might lose what we have and redoubling our care (A. Dias, personal communication, June 2, 2022).

Based on this recognition and exchange, the caravan aimed to build solidarity among distinct identities and autonomous groups. Padre Paulinho from the Diocese of the municipality Cametá on the Tocantins and representative of the Pastoral Land Commission (CPT) repeated in his addresses: "We are all interconnected" (*estamos todos interligados*), referring to the ecological interdependence of the river and the interdependence among autonomous groups. Similarly, Jandyra Uehara Alves, the National Secretary of Social Policies and Human Rights at CUT, spoke in Igarapé-Miri about the frontline role of workers in these sacrifice zones:

> It is not a problem of the fishers, of the region, of all of Brazil. The waterway will serve the national agribusiness. What happens here is the logic of predatory dehumanizing capitalist development in our country. What is happening here is a global problem (J.U. Alves, personal communication, February 2, 2022).

Therefore, recognizing unity and maintaining autonomous identities was central to this practice of resistance. As Luzia Mendes, the Quilombo activist, reflected:

> We need to resist to exist. As women, we have an internal battle and an external one; our battle is huge, every day" (L. Mendes, personal communication, January 2, 2022).

6 Demanding Recognition, Rights, and Compensation

The movement had short-, medium-, and long-term goals. Primarily, it sought to stop and stall the construction of the waterway. Iury Paulinho, who participated in numerous struggles across Brazil, reflected:

> This caravan is fundamental because it brings together diverse social sectors — unions, the Quilombola movement, and the church (I. Paulinho, personal communication, January 30, 2022).

With private actors infiltrating groups on social media and trying to trap them into approving the waterway by promising compensation, this endeavor became of the utmost importance. According to the activists, "the game is two to one," as three groups formed over time: one that stood against the construction, another group that considered possible compensation payments, and local mayors that hoped for political gains. Paulinho argued that, in his experience, companies never fulfill community conditions as in Brazil, no legal framework defines who counts as "affected" and what their rights are. Thus, compensation depends on the degree of organization of the affected people.

Second, communities have been fighting for procedural justice, namely the fulfillment of their right to consultation and free, prior, and informed consent. This right is enshrined in the Indigenous and Tribal Peoples Convention (No. 169) of the International Labor Organization but is often violated in sacrifice zones. Showing the effect of intersectional solidarity, the campaign in defense of the Tocantins catalyzed autonomous actions such as protests at the beginning of the fishing season in March 2022.[3] In late January 2023, over 200 people from 12 Quilombo communities met in the São José do Icatu community for a three-day workshop to formulate a protocol for free, prior, informed consent. In particular, a women-led protocol seminar aimed to create tools to help Indigenous and traditional communities to pressure the state to protect their constitutional and international rights to consultation about projects on their lands.

Third, activists developed demands that addressed various impacts brought by the waterway, sometimes related to its construction and others not. They consistently wanted all affected communities downstream of the dam until Barcarena to be recognized as collective guardians of their lands. They also demanded local development measures in light of the fact that the waterway would tremendously impact their socioeconomic base and promote agribusiness expansion. Amongst these measures was a guarantee to maintain the land rights of Indigenous, Quilombola, as well as of traditional communities. They also demanded local infrastructures, small ports, and roads to connect communities rather than export logistics and they asked for support for family agriculture to guarantee subsistence. In this respect, they also claimed an environmental recovery program that would enable the repopulation of the river with fish and help recover (yet without fully restoring) the riparian forests. Finally, they expressed demands about health, education, and professional training to give people alternative income options. As Foro said:

> If we end up losing this battle, we want real programs and actions, not crumbs, and not the misery they usually cause around these big developments (C. Foro, personal communication, March 28, 2022).

3. The movement has also demanded an audience with Pará's governor Helder Barbalho who has a close relationship with agribusiness interests and wants to speed up the detonation of the Pedral de Loureço (Dudu, 2023).

7 The Environmentalization of the Labor Movement

As mentioned above, through the boat caravan, national labor leaders from the industrial centers of Brazil's South-East did support rural activists from the North. At the same time, the diverse rural associations considered the union movement the primary mechanism to advance intersectional race, gender, and ecological interests. This is similar to what other studies have shown for domestic worker organizing (Acciari, 2021). Following a decade of coups in Latin America that weakened many rural and urban struggles for social justice, the resurgence of social movements was increasingly critical of a production-focused perspective, including the previous experiences of developmentist left governments.[4] CUT increasingly promoted energy democracy, regional equality, and socioenvironmental justice, as its analyses include intersectional, eco-socialist, and feminist concepts concerning redistribution, recognition, and representation. Daniel Gaio, CUT's environmental secretary, reflecting on this shift claimed:

> This world is increasingly hostile to human work, including this "green" capitalism that wants to commodify nature, so we must resume consciousness building. And it's not only class consciousness but the consciousness of the subject itself. Regional inequalities don't have to be measured by the Southeastern or productivist perspectives, constructing highways, mining projects, or waterways in the Amazon.
>
> Suppose we understand immaterial reproductive labor as being at the center of sustaining life, whether in family agriculture or the solidarity economy. In that case, we have a dimension of the real world of work. Maintenance of life must be seen as work and has to be paid for, and these people have to be given living and working conditions (D. Gaio, personal communication, April 20, 2022).

The boat caravan put into practice ongoing decolonial efforts, showing that recognizing intersectional oppression and affectedness enables coalition building (Chun et al., 2013). This movement practice is grounded in the emancipatory concepts of popular Brazilian thinkers such as Paulo Freire (Freire, 2014; Penna, 2014; Streck, 2009). Moreover, recognizing threats to the combination of production (fishing, subsistence farming) and social reproduction (community cohesion, traditional culture, music) implied the defense of life itself, beyond labor and the workplace. In this sense, the campaign reflected a broader environmentalization of the labor movement, which has already been highlighted in the agrarian movement (Yaşın, 2022). This integration of traditional labor struggles for redistribution, and also recognition and representation (Fraser, 2009) distinguish Brazilian unionism from others, especially in the Global North, and is grounded in the decolonial socioenvironmental tradition.

4. In previous PT governments, the Growth Acceleration Programs (PAC), including the Belo Monte Hydroelectric Plant construction on the Xingu River in Altamira, Pará, beginning in 2010, tore the PT government's relationship with rural movements (Buainain et al., 2014; Fleury & Almeida, 2013; Oliveira, 2016). The PAC also restarted the construction of the Tucuruí Dam's navigation locks, inaugurated in 2010, which are the foundation for the Tocantins-Araguaia waterway. The new Lula government has sought to break with this approach, promising social inclusion and public investment in the Amazon region, revising ongoing privatization processes, though also advancing neoliberal free trade agreements.

8 Conclusion

Brazil's new progressive government of Luis Ignacio Lula da Silva has strengthened the representation of Indigenous, Quilombola, and traditional people in the government. It has also re-emphasized the environmental agenda, including the proposal to hold the 2025 Climate Summit (COP30) in Pará's capital city Belém, which social movements have used as leverage in their protest. At the time of writing, it remains unsure how the government will address export infrastructure in the Amazon, i.e., the Tocantins-Araguaia Waterway, especially given agribusiness dominance in Brazil's Congress.

Beyond Brazil, many international progressive movements struggle with reconnecting national leadership with grassroots groups, especially in the face of rising far-right movements worldwide. The case presented here shows how these efforts build on intersectional organizing and the integration of Black, feminist, and socioenvironmental struggles in traditional class-based movements. These transformational practices and efforts will be equally essential to fight for socioenvironmental justice in the "sacrifice zones" and urban and rural peripheries elsewhere.

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