



DIE ERDE

Journal of the
Geographical Society
of Berlin

Vol. 156, No. xx · Research article

Rural Producers' Discourses on the Brazilian Agricultural Frontier: Between Local and External Narratives on Land and Forest

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Manuscript submitted: 4 March 2024 / Accepted for publication: 28 November 2024 / Published online: 14 August 2025

Abstract

The Brazilian Amazon is a region deeply influenced by historical development dynamics and resource extraction. In it, rural producers (RPs) are often held responsible for the increasing deforestation of the biome. This article explores the intricate relationship between national and global discourses and narratives of RPs in Novo Progresso (NP), an emblematic municipality located along the BR-163 highway on the agricultural frontier in the Brazilian Amazon. The study seeks to answer the question: How do RPs' historical and present positioning and narratives shape land use and management on the agricultural frontier in NP? To comprehensively understand these dynamics, the research incorporates the RPs' narratives within the historical context of local, national, and international discourses that contribute to land-related decision-making, migration, displacement, and socio-environmental issues, including widespread deforestation. The article situates the RPs in three historical trends: the construction of BR-163, the onset of external pressure, and the current advance of the agricultural frontier. Through biographical interviews, the study connects the RPs' narratives with national and international developmental discourses in and for the region, providing insights into how RPs perceive the socio-environmental dynamics in NP. The results present various discourses that have impacted biographies and local land dynamics, further developing socio-environmental issues. In addition, the position of the RPs in the region and their biographies contribute to the discussion on determining how to deal with the region's socio-environmental issues.

Keywords agricultural frontier, Brazilian Amazon, discourse analysis, land-use change, local narratives

Tello, C., Schröder, L. S., & Neuburger, M. (2025). Rural producers' discourses on the Brazilian agricultural frontier: Between local and external narratives on land and forest. *DIE ERDE*, 156(x), xx–xx.



<https://doi.org/10.12854/erde-2025-696>

1. Introduction

The significance of the Amazon rainforest's resource management and its far-reaching impact on climate change is widely recognized (Rede Amazônica de Informação Socioambiental Georreferenciada [RAISG; Amazon Network of Georeferenced Socio-Environmental Information], 2020). Significant responsibility for the destruction of the biome is commonly placed on the inhabitants of the region—in particular, the rural producers (RPs; Azevedo, 2023; Chaves, 2022; Levy et al., 2023). However, it is crucial to delve into the historical context of colonial and “developmental” policies and programs in the Brazilian Amazon to comprehend the present-day pressure on the forest and the local stakeholders' dynamics (Escobar, 2004). These policies and governmental dynamics, identified in this article as discourses, have exerted considerable pressure on the region and shaped local socio-environmental dynamics. This has led to land-related problems, such as unplanned migration, displacement, and land grabbing (Rodrigues & Nahum, 2023), and has contributed to environmental problems resulting from unsustainable resource exploitation, leading to widespread deforestation in the region. Settlements of pioneers in the forest expanded many extractive dynamics, such as mining and logging, and constituted the origin of the agricultural frontier. This agricultural frontier dynamic is characterized by the rapid advance and expansion of livestock and monocultures, mainly cattle, soybeans, and corn (Rebello & Homma, 2005). As an example of this dynamic, in the 1960s, the state of Rio Grande do Sul was the only soy producer in Brazil. However, to compete in the international market, soybean production was intensified in 1990 in the Amazon forest (Fernandez, 2006; Wesz Junior et al., 2021), starting a growing trend towards privatization and land concentration (Wesz Junior et al., 2021). Currently, soybeans are Brazil's second-largest export commodity (Observatory of Economic Complexity [OEC], 2023), which is due to the transformation of vast tracts of land into soybean plantations, distribution corridors, and ports, the indirect land-use change, and the placing of immense pressure on land belonging to farmers, settlements, indigenous peoples, and communities, leading in turn to deforestation.

Although there has been a significant increase in agricultural frontier monitoring and research focused on deforestation (Rebello & Homma, 2005), there is a call to expand the local understanding of narra-

tives and biographies as a key to promoting further policy improvement in assessing and targeting local stakeholders and promoting forest preservation (Escobar, 2016). Despite numerous top-down efforts to propose solutions, the tendency to generalize regional problems and the lack of integration of local dynamics and perspectives have obstructed the effectiveness of the socio-environmental solutions presented. It has been shown that involving a diverse range of local stakeholders with multi-epistemic differences in the proposal and implementation of policies, plans, and projects leads to better outcomes for stakeholders in the community. This results in, or at least shows the way to, positive outcomes and achievable objectives regarding many matters, including land and environmental issues (e.g., Cruz Rodrigues et al., 2023; Gomes, 2023).

Following the above trend, this article introduces and correlates external discourses with Novo Progresso (NP) RPs' narratives and their impacts on land and forest. NP is a municipality founded within a recent historical development dynamic. It is one of the ten most deforested municipalities in the Brazilian Amazon and is a central part of a commodity distribution corridor, the BR-163 national highway. The article aims to respond to the question: How do the RPs' historical and present positioning and narratives shape land use and management on the agricultural frontier in NP? Biographical historical interviews were conducted with RPs to achieve this. The article examines how regional development in the Amazon has been perceived and discussed from political, economic, and social perspectives at both national and global levels in recent decades (in this article, the word “external” will be used to refer to these discourses) in terms of three historical trends: 1) migration and the start of the construction of the BR-163 highway (1972–1988); 2) the onset of external pressure on the region (1992–2006); and 3) the advance of the agricultural frontier (2007–2021). It names and categorizes the RPs into the previously mentioned historical trends as 1) pioneers, 2) second-generation, and 3) soybean-generation.

The paper is divided into the following chapters: Chapter 2 explores the early national narratives on the occupational and developmental processes of the Amazon and the BR-163 highway. Chapters 3 and 4 focus on the research area and its socio-environmental dynamics. Chapter 5 focuses on the methodology of this research, particularly the data collection and

analysis. In Chapter 6, we present and discuss the positioning and narratives during the three historical trends and the narratives' correlation with past and present dynamics. We conclude with an overview of the regional RPs' dynamics and the future of land and forest.

2. The National Historical Discourses of Occupation, Resource Exploitation and Development

Throughout history, the Amazon rainforest has been renowned for its abundant resources by its inhabitants and colonizers. Therefore, there has been both national and international interest in the exploitation of resources. However, the forest's dense remote areas and challenging conditions kept it largely "untouched" (by white men) for a long time. Nevertheless, so-called "developmental waves" can be identified. Between 1879 and 1912, the rubber extraction boom, promoted by the government, was fundamental to expanding human occupation in the Amazon area (Passos, 2019; Rebello & Homma, 2005). However, it brought several issues, including violent land appropriation, displacements, and environmental impacts (Quin, 2022, p. 17). Then again, during the presidency of Getúlio Vargas (1935–1945) and World War II, the Amazon was thrust into the spotlight. The demand for rubber prompted internalization into the forest for extraction, contributing to a large transformational wave for the region (Oliveira, 2017, p. 47).

The following wave evolved during the Brazilian military government (1964–1985). Recognizing the potential use of the Amazon forest as a "strategic and central economic area," in 1966, the Amazon Superintendency of Development (SUDAM) was created. During the 60s and 70s, Brazil was going through social tensions in the northeastern region due to the neglect of an urgently needed land reform, which worsened after a devastating drought in 1970 (Passos, 2019). This led to a geopolitical strategy agreement combining Amazon's infrastructure development and economic exploitation programs with a colonization project to resettle the landless (Kohlhepp, 2002). Under the slogan *homens sem terra para terra sem homens* ("landless men to manless land"), the Amazon was presented as a solution for (avoiding) land reform (Kohlhepp, 2006; Passos, 2019). In 1972, the first National Development Plan (1972/74) was implemented, and the military used the media to strengthen

Brazil's and the Amazon's "development" discourses. For instance, the televised cartoon *Sujismundo* brought messages such as *Brasil gente pra frente* ("Brazilians moving forward"; Silva, 2021). It outlined a strategy emphasizing the National Integration Program (PIN), under the slogan *integrar para desenvolver* ("integrate to develop") as a crucial element in national development. This plan earmarked the development corridor of Central Amazonia (Pará and Mato Grosso state) to establish and connect agricultural and agro-mineral centers (Kohlhepp, 2002; Oliveira, 2017, p. 114). The primary aims were to grant large economic entities access to natural resources and redirect migration to the Northeast Amazon region.

To materialize the PIN discourse, the government decided to open up the rainforest by building the highway BR-163. The military, in BR-163's early construction stages (1971–1976), cleared a strip of ~1,700 km of forest to connect the cities of Cuiabá (Mato Grosso [MT]) and Santarém (Pará [PA]) and established several new settlements and communities in between (see Figure 1a). The second stage of the military plan was to inhabit the newly opened-up forest area. The government promised families land and resources as long as they fulfilled their mandate to defend the region through occupation and habilitation with a form of production (Torres et al., 2017, p. 16). The government aimed to populate the forest using a new slogan, *integrar para não entregar* ("integrate not to surrender"—referring to the Amazonian territory), secure the borders, and procure national and international investment to initiate resource extraction and production. This action alienated the region's previous inhabitants, such as *ribeirinhos* and indigenous communities (Brito & Castro, 2018; Coy et al., 2017; Coy & Klingler, 2014; Fearnside, 2008; Rodrigues & Nahum, 2023; Torres et al., 2017, p. 65). Thus, *camponeses* (small farmers) families that mainly came from the southern states of Rio Grande do Sul, Paraná, and Santa Catarina (Torres et al., 2017, p. 67) generated the so-called *invasão sulista* (southern invasion). Consequently, the BR-163 highway, which was developed to occupy and facilitate the extraction of resources, eased colonizers' irruption into the forest. In 1974, the Programa de Pólos Agropecuários e Agrominerais da Amazônia (Program of Agricultural and Mineral Poles for Amazônia [POLAMAZÔNIA], 1974–1980) sought to incentivize the integration and development of agro-industrial and mineral resources in strategically important areas of the Amazon for the national interest (Kohlhepp, 2006).

In addition, the prevailing national narrative, which promised that these new settlers would become the “heroes of the nation” through activities such as fostering development within the forest, resource production and extraction, and land protection, ultimately manifested itself in significant land and resource issues (BBC Brasil, 2008), as will be shown in Chapter 6. Following these developmental external narratives and policies, the region has experienced the infiltration of authoritarian, colonial, and capitalist dynamics (e.g., PIN and POLAMAZÔNIA), leading to land conflicts, deforestation, and rights abuses (Rodrigues & Nahum, 2023; Urzedo & Chatterjee, 2021); the Municipality of NP is an excellent example of these dynamics, as we will further explore in Chapters 3, 4, and 6.

3. The Research Area: Socio-Spatial Dynamics of NP

NP is a municipality located in southwest Pará, within the microregion of Itaituba. Its territory covers over 38,000 km², with an estimated 33,638 inhabitants (Instituto Brasileiro de Geografia e Estatística [IBGE], 2023b). Its geographical position and borders are of paramount importance to this municipality's historical and present dynamics (see Figures 1a and 1b). Historically, the continuous socio-environmental dynamics, mainly characterized by agricultural expansion, illegal mining and logging activities, land grabbing, and resource extraction, have led to 7,646.05 km² of accumulated deforestation since 2007, positioning NP among the ten municipalities

Figure 1a Novo Progresso's Location in the BR-163

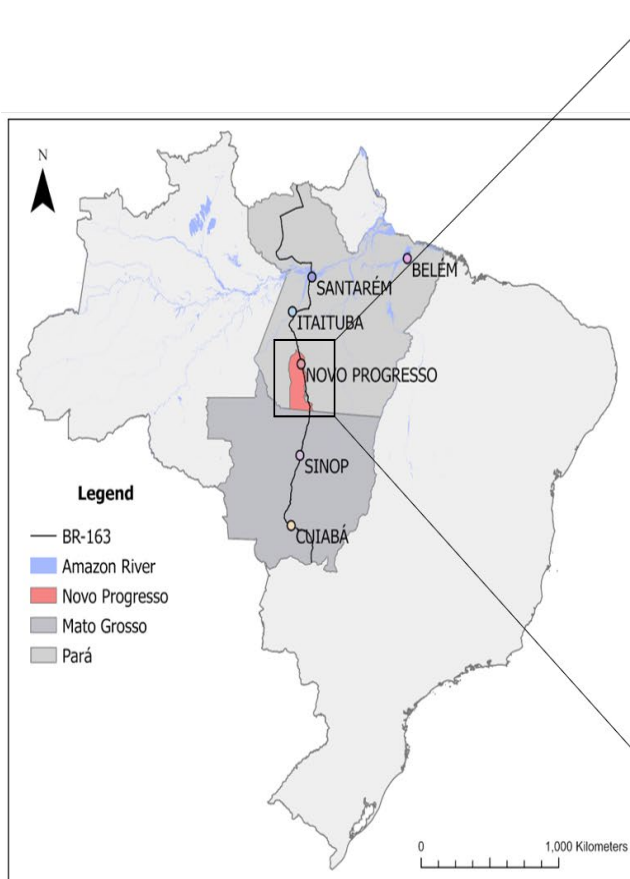
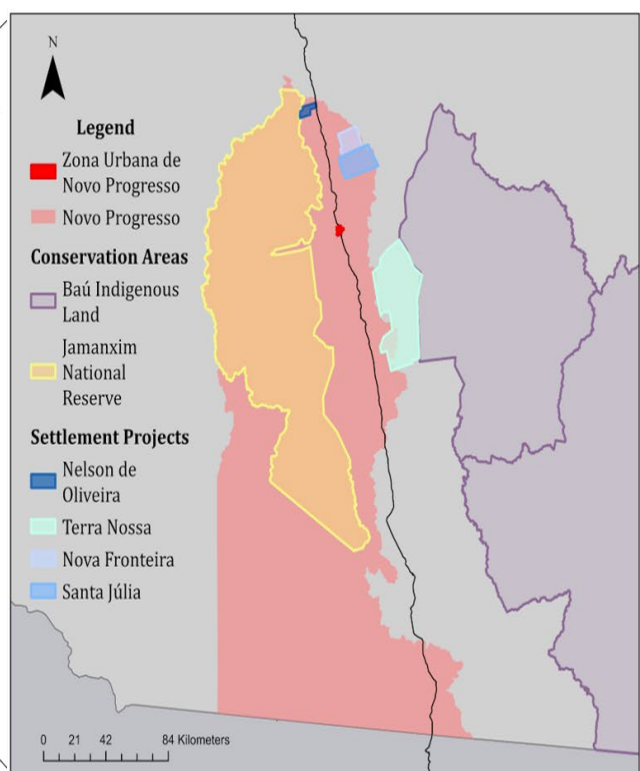


Figure 1b Novo Progresso's Land Configuration



Note. Source: Own elaboration

NP shares a border with the State of Mato Grosso to the south. NP is adjacent to the Baú Indigenous Reserve to the east and the Jamanxim National Reserve to the west. As it borders two federally protected areas, the urban and rural developments have been concentrated on the margins of the BR-163 highway, which crosses the entire municipality from north to south (IBGE, 2023c; Prefeitura Novo Progresso, 2023). The closest large cities are Itaituba, Pará (~400 km away), and Sinop, Mato Grosso (~600 km away). The first is a major river port, and the second is a central agricultural production area.

with the highest deforestation rates in the Brazilian Amazon (Programa de Monitoramento da Floresta Amazônica Brasileira por Satélite [Brazilian Amazon Forest Satellite Monitoring Programme; [PRODES], 2024). Nowadays, the region has become one of Brazil's largest livestock producers (Coy & Klingler, 2011) and is at the forefront of the agricultural frontier (Raimara do Reis et al., 2021; see Chapter 4.2).

4. NP: Historical Socio-Environmental Trends

To fulfil the promises of land development, the Federal Government expropriated the southwest land of Pará in the 1970s within the PIN (see Table 1). By 1979, with the opening of BR-163, the first wave of pioneer families concentrated in the nowadays NP urban area (IBGE, 2023c; Passos, 2019; Prefeitura Novo Progresso, 2023; see Figure 1b). In NP, the National Institute of Colonization and Agrarian Reform (INCRA) accompanied and endorsed the new settlers' right to clear the forest to declare them rightful landowners (Oliveira, 2017, p. 104; Torres et al., 2017, p. 54). INCRA encouraged forest clearing, informing pioneers that for every 50 hectares cleared, they would receive double (100 ha). In contrast to other regions along the BR-163, in NP, during the early years, the land was parceled into larger properties (Torres et al., 2017, p. 62), and the *camponeses* were instructed to clear the forest and obtain land rights (Oliveira, 2017, p. 162).

Moreover, the national and state authorities did not show a strong presence in the area during the first years. The lack of law enforcement generated violence and dispossession (Torres et al., 2017, p. 65). Additionally, the BR-163 highway was not paved, hindering internal mobility and the introduction of basic infrastructure, health clinics and hospitals, education, and electric power. Without solid governmental provision, the responsibility for the distribution of resources and law enforcement fell to other sectors, such as irregular mining, logging, and resource extraction, which for many years took the reins and strengthened economic and political dominance (Torres et al., 2017, p. 65).

With the democratization of Brazil in 1985, many political changes occurred. In 1992, the Rio Summit brought external attention to the BR-163 and its rising deforestation rate. Since then, scientific research in Brazilian and foreign universities and institutions

has grown exponentially (Tello & Neuburger, 2023). Amid increasing pressure from national and international public opinion, the government tried to control deforestation, but these attempts were unsuccessful (Imazon, 2015a).

In 1993, NP became a municipality with administrative rights in Pará (IBGE, 2023c; Prefeitura Novo Progresso, 2023). Creating and implementing law enforcement and bringing external financial resources to promote farming, schooling, and health clinics was a considerable victory for landowners. In 1997, INCRA implemented a program on land distribution to favor smallholder families. It established two settlements, "Nova Fronteira" and "Santa Júlia," to host 200 and 300 families respectively (see Figure 1b).

With the entry of Lula da Silva's (2003) Labour Party (PT) into government, policies changed considerably for the Amazon. PT governed as a progressive party; yet within the essence of "Ordem e Progresso" (order and progress), it left the extractivist projects to work around neo-extractivism (Andrade, 2022). New conservation, monitoring, developmental, and land-redistribution policies significantly impacted NP. By the early 2000s, the region harbored 186 non-governmental organizations (NGOs) that raised concerns about the effects of the paving of the BR-163 highway and the growth of soybean cultivation (Leão, 2017; Wesz Junior et al., 2021). This led to the 2004 BR-163 Sustainable Development Plan, which brought intensive monitoring into the region and the possibility of continuing the paving of the highway. In addition, the government sought to improve enforcement and created more than 500,000 km² of new Conservation Units, as deforestation was out of control. The National Forest Reserve of the Jamanxim was designed in 2006 to border the municipality and the cattle producers' farms (see yellow polygon in Figure 1b). Furthermore, in 2012, the new Forest Code was applied, which allowed amnesty for all those who had deforested until 2008 (WWF, 2012).

Regarding land distribution, the settlements of Nelson de Oliveira and Terra Nossa were formed in 2006 in NP (see Figure 1b). However, all of these changes brought challenges for NP, including numerous conflicts and acts of violence against indigenous and rural workers residing in the settlements (Rodrigues & Nahum, 2023). In 2009, a new initiative for land regularization was formalized, creating Law 11.952, *Terra Legal* (legal land). This law provided

Table 1 Excerpt from *Novo Progresso* Historical Plans, Projects, and Dynamics

Trend	Year	Plan, Project or Dynamic
Start of BR-163 Construction and Migration	1972–1974	National Integration Plan (National Development Plan)
	1972–1976	Construction of BR-163
	1974	POLAMAZÔNIA Program
	1974	First Pioneers in the region
	1985	Democratization of Brazil
	1985	Recognition of Indigenous land (Baú)
Increasing External Pressure	1992	Climate Change Rio Summit
	1993	NP became a Municipality
	1997	Creation of Settlement Nova Fronteira and Santa Júlia
	2000–2002	NGOs' arrival to the region
	2004	BR-163 Sustainable Development Plan
	2006	Creation of settlements of Nelson de Oliveira and Terra Nossa
	2006	Creation of National Forest Reserve of the Jamanxim
Intensive Developmental Process	2007	Pavement of the BR-163
	2008	Creation of Programs DETER and PRODES
	2009	"Terra Legal" Program
	2012	Creation of the Forest Code (CAR and LAR)
	2019	Bolsonaro "passar a boiada" policy
	2021	Finishing paving of the BR-163

"the land regularization of occupations within the Legal Amazonia" (LEI N° 11.952, 2009). The program announced it would regularize public land, serving more than 150,000 families. However, by 2014, less than 8,000 processes resulted in titles being issued (Tribunal de Contas da União [TCU], 2015).

Furthermore, significant efforts were made to regularize land, monitor deforestation and illegal activities, and audit extractives dynamics. Examples of these are the creation of the previously mentioned Forest Code, including the design of environmental protection areas, the Rural Environmental Cadastre (CAR), and Licensing (LAR; LEI N° 11.952, 2009; LEI N° 12.651, 2012). Likewise, external studies and forest monitoring by research institutions such as the National Institute for Space Research (INPE) created programs such as the Real-Time Deforestation Detection System (DETER); many more efforts from national and international institutes, universities, and NGOs have also taken place.

In 2019, a conservative party came into power in the national government. The right-wing president, Jair Bolsonaro, abruptly changed the discourse about the Amazon and NP, reducing the monitoring and conservation-program funds right from his early days

as president. This included the increase of financial support and laws to favor agribusiness—the so-called *passar a boiada* (running the cattle laws) during his presidential term (Pereira et al., 2021). An example of this was seen in the aftermath of the 2019 wildfires reported by INPE. During the *dia do fogo* (day of fire), there was a 300% increase in forest fires, with NP being at the center of the fires (Instituto Socioambiental, 2021); to date, this burned area corresponds to 300 ha of soybean production (Cruz Rodrigues et al., 2023).

4.1 The Regional Agricultural Frontier

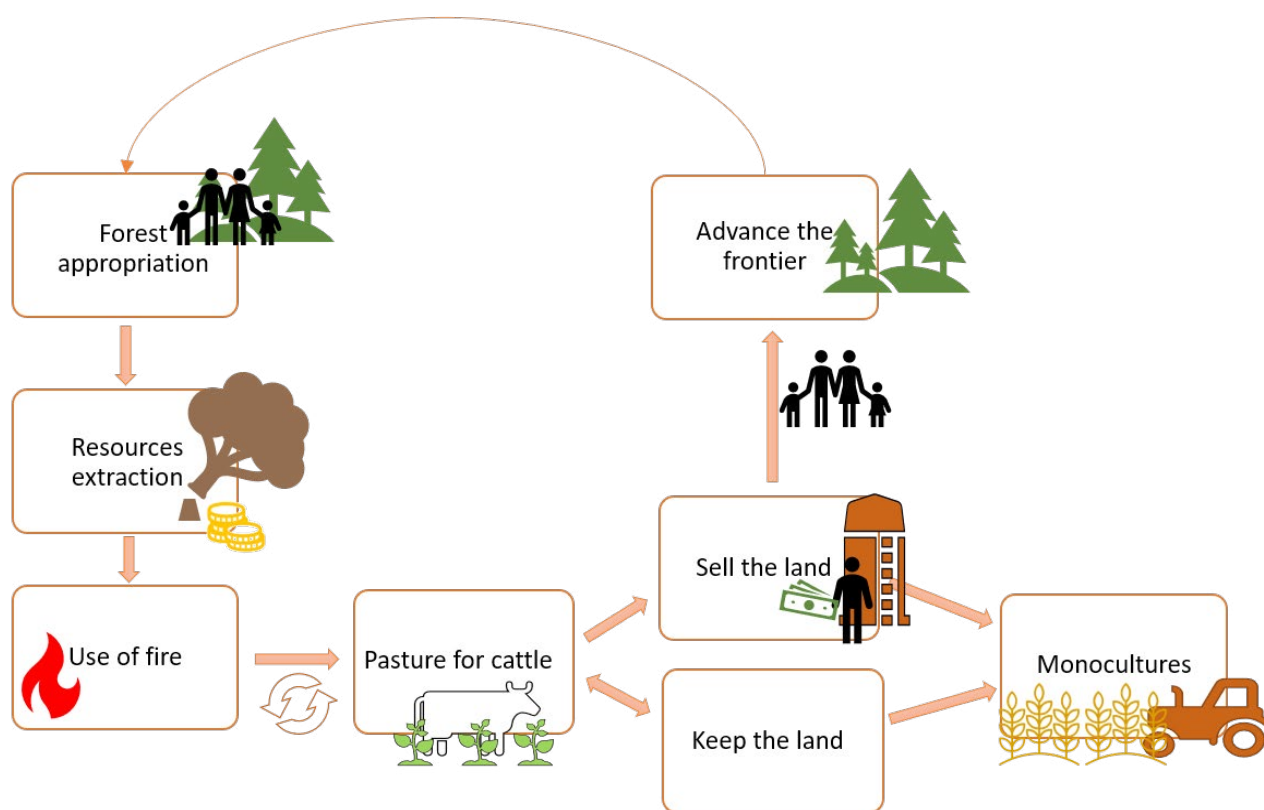
Predominantly, in the southwestern region of Pará, the advance of the Amazonian frontier was driven by incentives for occupation and integration of the Amazon into the domestic market. In the 1980s, the occupation of the frontier intensified with the rise of timber activities associated with the growth of cattle ranching (Imazon, 2015b). Lastly, the apparent consequences of soybean expansion taking over former areas of cattle ranching in the region have been evident since the late 1990s. This expansion triggered a process of expelling producers to new regions (pushing cattle ranching and setting the frontier in

motion; Wesz Junior et al., 2021). Correspondingly, it is marked by increasing privatization and concentration of land, conversion of grassland to soybean plantations, depletion of remaining forest areas, public land speculation, and pressure on local farmers' land (see Figure 2; Rodrigues & Nahum, 2023; Wesz Junior et al., 2021).

The BR-163 paving process (2007–2021) facilitated the distribution of commodities (Rodrigues & Nahum, 2023). This contributed to increased influxes of people, commodities distribution, deforestation, and higher land prices in NP. By 2020, cattle production already accounted for 632,411 heads and is expected to grow through the years (IBGE, 2024) or change to monoculture as the deforestation rate

increases (PRODES, 2024). The production of these goods accelerated the installation of logistical infrastructure that allowed these products to be exported, which expedited the region's conversion into a dynamic agricultural frontier led by the external market (Wesz Junior et al., 2021). Subsequently, the development and strengthening of monocultures like soybean and maize production in well-established regions, like Mato Grosso, started to drive producers outward to explore new territories—in this case, further north into the forest—propelling cattle-ranching expansion and pushing the frontier forward (Wesz Junior et al., 2021). This brought a new market for buying land and a shift in its use. In 2009, 1,000 soybean hectares were planted in NP; by 2022, more than 20,000 hectares had been planted (IBGE, 2023a).

Figure 2 Novo Progresso Agricultural Frontier Dynamic



Note. Source: Own elaboration

The illustration presents one common scenario of the NP frontier: It starts with forest appropriation (legal or illegal) and then involves deforestation, where valuable timber and resources are extracted. Furthermore, the remaining land is burned, grasslands are established, and cattle are introduced. This phase is characterized by the recurrent use of fire to facilitate land clearing, soil restoration, and pasture establishment. Over the next few years, land that shows declining fertility or undergoes an increase in value will transition to soybean cultivation. If other farmers, RPs, or companies buy the land, the previous landholders may seek new free and cheaper territories to start again, initiating an advance in the frontier.

5. Methodology

The chapter is organized into two steps. First, the biographical guiding questions and the data collection were developed. Second, a codification system was developed and applied to understand the RPs' narratives.

5.1 Biographical Semi-Structured Guiding Questions and RPs' Characterization

To identify and understand the local narratives of agricultural producers, a set of biographical semi-structured guiding questions was developed for *produtores rurais* (RPs who own or manage land) in NP. These guiding questions were used in interviews conducted in Portuguese and recorded with the permission of the participants, using an adaptation of biographical and narrative methods, assisted by coffee-table (Carranza et al., 2023; Smith, 1989) and walk-along (Bartlett et al., 2023) methods at the RPs' addresses (landholdings in private areas, communities, and settlements) along the BR-163 from March to June 2022. The information retrieved was combined with participatory observation.

The biographical semi-structured guiding questions allowed the interviewees to elaborate on biographical and historical topics and the municipality's past and present dynamics (Delory-Momberger, 2012). We used main and sub-questions, which let the interviewees explore and extend as much as they liked on the topics. Unlike the traditional method of biographical interviews, the interviews were conducted in a single meeting. The interview duration depended on the interviewees' willingness to express themselves and varied between 30 minutes and two hours. In each interview, qualitative data were obtained, including family migration history and previous labor activities, the relationship with other stakeholders, and their perceptions of land, production, and the forest.

We conducted 29 interviews with 36 RPs. In seven interviews, RP couples participated, while in the other 22, the RP was interviewed alone. The RPs are commonly categorized based on landholding size. Taravella and Arnauld De Sartre (2012) described *colonos* or *camponeses* as small farmers (~100 ha), *fazendeirinhos* as medium-sized farmers (up to 500 ha), and *fazendeiro* as large-sized farmers (>500 ha). Based on this categorization, we interviewed 13 small, 10 medium-sized, and 6 large-sized

farmers. Additionally, 11 of the 36 RPs have their land inside a federal settlement, which makes them engage in different dynamics than the others, as we will further explain. This article identified the RPs in categories based on three historical trends presented in Chapter 4.1: The first category, the "pioneers," consists of RPs who arrived between 1979 and 1981 ($n = 15$). Next is the "second-generation" category, consisting of second- or third-generation (sons or grandsons) regional owners who became RPs (i.e., they arrived with their pioneer families as teens or children and became RPs in adulthood) and those who came to the region between 1994 and 2001 to become RPs ($n = 9$). Lastly, the "soya producers" category includes all those from 2004 to 2017 ($n = 12$). These last three categories will help shape the storytelling structure of Chapter 6.

5.2 Characterization and Codification

The codification plan was developed in MaxQDA software (VERBI Program 2022) to categorize the RPs and understand similarities and differences in their narratives. For this step, the interviews were transcribed in Portuguese, and for this article, the narratives were translated into English by the authors.

In the first step, we explored the interlinkages within (1) their previous livelihoods and migration history and (2) facts that determined their arrival in the region and their first impressions:

- (1) We analyze the historical intentions and facts that determined their arrival in the region and first impressions of the area to understand personal migration histories and narratives, as well as national and regional discourses by asking:
 - a. Who told you/talked to you about the region? Why did you come to the region?
 - b. When did you arrive? How did you become a landowner?
 - c. How was the land/community when you arrived?
 - d. How did you intend to use the land when you arrived?
- (2) We analyzed the migration histories and stories in an attempt to perceive the way they understand the land:

- a. by codifying the family and personal migration patterns as indicators limited to the national discourses and actions and their interlinkages with personal narratives,
- b. by codifying the individual's and family's previous economic activity, land tenure and use as a means to understand the integration of narratives with current dynamics, and
- c. by codifying the intentions and facts that determined their arrival in the region to understand personal narratives and national and regional discourses.

In the second step (3), we characterize the current factors that determine the socio-environmental and economic dynamics in the region:

- (3) We analyze the contemporary aspects that shape the socio-environmental dynamics of RPs while:
- a. identifying the RPs' relationship to land and forest to understand the connection built since their arrival, and
 - b. identifying the current socio-environmental dynamics and how they influence the RPs' livelihoods and decision-making (projects and programs, bureaucracy, external challenges, etc.).

After identifying the correlations in the RPs' narratives using the coding system, some RPs per category were selected to present their histories, stories, and narratives on land and forest. The parameters used to determine the RPs were the correlation between narratives with the other interviewees and the amount of information the RP provided during the biographical semi-structured interview.

6. Developmental Storylines of NP: RPs' Histories, Stories, and Narratives

This chapter collects the narratives' correlations and tells the story from the biographical position of the RPs within the three historical trends mentioned above. Also, this chapter is written based on the RPs' collected opinions, narratives, and positions and is only accompanied by some of the author's comments, mainly in the first and last paragraph of each sub-chapter.

6.1 Biographic Storyline: Where did They Come From, and why?

Many of the RPs' biographical stories start before the opening of the BR-163. Like many Brazilians, the RPs are no exception to the historical migration waves. Within the families mentioned in the RPs' migration stories, it was found that the families (parents or grandparents) came from countries such as Germany, Italy, and Poland, among other European countries, and from Brazilian states in the northeast and south of Brazil, such as Bahia, Paraná, or Rio Grande do Sul.

The first RP interviewed arrived in NP in 1979, and the last was in 2017. Of the 36 RPs interviewed, 15 arrived between 1979 and 1981, 9 between 1994 and 2001, and 12 between 2004 and 2017.

Throughout their stories, it was found that no RP was born in NP. They maintained the previous migration trends and were born in southern or northeastern states, such as Mato Grosso do Sul, Paraná, and Rio Grande do Sul. Finally, it was identified whether they had a transitional place (where they lived and worked before arriving at NP). It was found that only 10 RPs came directly from the place they were born. Some came from Argentina and Paraguay, while others came from states such as Mato Grosso do Sul and Paraná. Some regions where they were born, or which they used as a migration route, are places where agriculture was a big part of the state's or national income.

Well, my parents are from Rio Grande do Sul. They also came from a family of German descent ... Then they came to Santa Catarina ... I was born in Guraciaba. I've always lived on the farm, even in the south. I planted corn, beans, and tobacco, all by hand, with an ox plough ... Then, in 1980, we moved to Mato Grosso. My father bought a small farm ... while working there; we already had this piece of land ... In 2001, I sold all my cattle and bought another 90 alqueires¹ of land in Novo Progresso. I was left with 436 alqueires of land. (Interviewee [I]-5)

... He was a "Bugre"² on my grandfather's side. My grandmother was Italian. So it was a mix. "Bugre"—Indian, with Italian. ([I]-16)

The RPs shared whether their families possessed land and/or worked as farmers before coming to the

region. Most RPs stated that their parents owned land; of those, a few ($n = 3$) worked in an unrelated farming activity. While 16 did not own land, most of those worked on someone's land as farmers or cattle ranchers. Most of those who had land stated that the land owned by their families was insufficient for economically sustainable production for the family. Similarly, if this land were to be divided among family members in the future (among siblings), the amount of land would not be sufficient to sustain their livelihoods. They also expressed that the countryside was a proper place to raise children with values. Therefore, most stated they went looking for land (to many different places), as they knew how to work it and/or liked farming activities. All of them said that before arriving, they found, through different means (reading, hearing, or people telling them), that the region would be a place of opportunity to get land and grow personally and economically.

In reality, my father was always passionate about land ... he wanted to have land and raise us here, as I told you. We were three boys, so he tried to bring us up on the farm, teaching us to work in the fields, on the land ... Raising children on the farm is much better than in the city. (I-16)

Since then, the RPs have understood farming as a means of living well. Land meant a place to live, have a family, raise children, and procure food for themselves, as well as a potential business to grow. This helps establish the RPs' position and narratives towards looking for land and continuing with farming. They tend to position themselves as descendants of Europeans and often feel ashamed of being related to indigenous people. From the RPs' position, the people of the south are people of European descent; therefore they are developed, while the people of northern Brazil and indigenous peoples are "lazy" and less developed. These racist expressions were strengthened by national developmental discourses, such as the "heroes of the nation" slogan (BBC Brasil, 2008). Thus, RPs repetitively expressed that they had brought development to the Amazon forest. They also identified themselves or their parents as brave people who left everything behind to enter the "untouched" forest, looking for a place to settle and develop.

6.2 The Pioneers' First Years: Forest Becoming Home and Productive Land

During the historical trend of the construction of the BR-163 and colonization, the Pioneer group (1979–1990), accompanied by their families, began the colonization and developmental process of the region. Some RPs identified themselves as part of the "southern invasion." They were encouraged to come to the region mainly due to what they had heard about it, or they were brought there.

Then he [his boss] told my father: "Let's go to Pará. Let's go on an adventure." Then he took a 30-kilometre strip from the BR road, 10 kilometres deep. Then my father came to look after it ... (I-18)

Of the 15 pioneer RPs, nine arrived as adults, while six arrived with their families as teens or children. The 15 pioneers shared their intentions to come to the region for reasons related to land appropriation and/or resource extraction (mining or logging). Some other reasons were associated with an agricultural production crisis in different regions. Furthermore, the majority expressed that their land was bought from another pioneer or the government. Most of them did not explicitly acknowledge clearing the forest; only three pioneers said they cleared the forest at the time of their arrival to obtain tenure. Also, the majority expressed that they were not the only inhabitants at that time, as many loggers and miners preceded them, as well as the previously mentioned traditional and indigenous communities already existing in the region.

For the pioneers, the first years were an encounter with the region's "wilderness" and the lack of resources. Many express that the region was "only forest," referring to the non-existence of infrastructure and poorly "developed" areas.

... we came to Pará. We were children. At the time, BR163 was a new road that had only been built. And it was very difficult because we looked at one side, and it was just forest, and the other side was just forests. (I-27)

They commented that as the BR-163 was not paved, access to primary resources was limited. *Atoleiros* (quagmires) formed due to heavy rain and silty forest soils, which prevented the ease of movement, and access was possible only by heavy trucks. Even though

the pioneers told us about ways to survive in the region, they shared stories of how they constructed *barracas* (camping tents) and then, with time and resources, started building wooden houses.

We chopped down a few trees by the side of the road; there were no big trees, just small ones. With an axe, my father and I started chopping them down to make a shelter, and when he arrived [referring to his son], we made a little house out of coconut trees. (I-19)

In addition, according to the RPs, there was no electricity, schooling, or health system. Pioneers talked to us about neighbors who had basic nursing training, which became the only health assistance in the region to help with one of the most common sicknesses, malaria. According to pioneers' stories, malaria was one of the deadliest sicknesses. In mild cases, the only remedy was attending the local nurse to ease the pain. They told us how nurses exchanged knowledge about treatments with the miners, who, in turn, had traded knowledge with the indigenous people of the region. In a serious malaria case, paying the miners (if possible) to take them to the hospital in the municipality of Sinop (~500 km away) in their light aircraft was the only survival option. Many pioneers had lost someone to malaria; all of them reported having the sickness at some point.

... and suddenly I caught malaria, and then it got bad ... when I couldn't take it anymore, we had to sell some cattle we had there to take a plane to get out because the road here was terrible (I-11)

Another problem they talked about was wild animals. Snake bites and encounters with wild animals, such as pigs and jaguars, were common. On many occasions, the pioneers mentioned the idea that the clearer the forest, the less dangerous it is.

... We say we weren't afraid, but if we weren't afraid, we wouldn't climb the logs or run away from the [wild] animals ... (I-19)

Furthermore, they shared with us how, in the same manner, food was lacking. The growth of food resources for self-consumption took time. Many pioneers spoke to us about the lack of seeds and commonly used animal proteins in agricultural production (chicken, pork, and beef). During this time, the closest

market was about ~450 km away, in Itaituba or Mato Grosso, and according to the pioneers, it took two to four weeks to travel there, depending on the climate and season.

... when we came here, it was all forest. There was no petrol station here or anything; we brought oil from Itaituba ... (I-18)

Therefore, the forest's resources, such as wild fruits, roots, and animals, were often harvested and hunted for consumption. Nevertheless, some producers shared the joy of these activities in the early times.

... Yes, we were afraid [referring to wild animals] and didn't make it easy, but I thought it was very beautiful. We found it very enjoyable. We'd go fishing and catch the fish to eat right there. It was delicious. (I-19)

They told us how timber extraction and mining became two of the main activities in the region. They explained that the need to produce food filled them with vigor to introduce cattle breeding. The first local trading markets were between RPs, loggers, and miners. All the pioneers interviewed became cattle breeders and designated an area of land for self-consumption agriculture.

So everyone who lived here and produced something was focused on selling it to miners ... so you'll see the flow of people and movement is high, and people have to eat. That's what people from here used to get by on ... It wasn't a form of subsistence; you made a good living out of it because sales in "garimpo"³ are high. (I-24)

Moreover, the pioneers expressed that the government had tricked them into coming and abandoned them. This action—they said—led to a lack of law enforcement and dynamics of violence and dispossession. It made survival and defending the land from new arrivals and opportunists almost impossible. Nonetheless, many stayed because they said they had nothing left or nowhere else to go.

The government opened up, and they were giving land to people from the south to come here, and then they abandoned all these people here with no medicine ... They just brought the people and abandoned them. (I-3)

He [interviewee's father] met someone who lived here, who tricked him into coming here, and that's how the story unfolded. Through knowledge to get past people, lies, and always with the promise of a promising future, but in reality, they were just political lies. (I-24)

Over time, pioneers spoke about how these challenges strengthened the community ties, which helped establish *comunidades* (communities). RPs explained how communities were communal areas (only for landowners and families) where a church, a school, and a main hall were built. During the week, this was the first place where children could go to school, and on Sundays, this place was destined for praying and social and sports events.

... but at the time, it was just forest, just forests... Yeah, we had to look for a school, a cemetery, creating a community was the way ... (I-1)

They shared with us that the communities strengthened the leadership in the region, which helped the inhabitants to have a sense of development. According to them, this became a vital space for socializing, dating, and partnership, not only to accompany and help each other but also to trade products and protect each other.

Nobody dared to enter the community, nobody had the courage to invade ... (I-27)

During these years, pioneers positioned themselves as brave people who decided to come to the region and confront the "unsettled lands." However, they shared their fears and struggles. The forest was presented as a rich but undesirable area due to its dangers, while the land was essential to obtain. They brought about development while clearing the forest and creating communities. They also positioned themselves as victims, expressing that the government had abandoned them all these years. Nevertheless, the pioneers who survived sickness and violence at the end of this first period also created communities, extracted resources, cleared the forest, and opened up the land for livestock production. It evolved like the early stages of the agricultural frontier.

6.3 The Second Generation: The Sense of Progress and Development

During the historical trend of increasing external pressure, the regional arrivals never stopped; according to the pioneers and second-generation RPs, new people came to NP every day to work. Even though the pioneers and second-generation RPs talked about abandonment by the government, the RPs told us about a sense of development and productivity in the region. The narrative of better access to the region and having cleared land to work on brought many more people to the area.

I came to Pará in '98 ... my father's sister told me that Pará was the end of the world ... When I realized this was the future, I sold my things there [MT] to come here. (I-29)

From 1991 to 2003, the second-generation group was taking over the region. Six of the 11 second-generation RPs arrived as adults, while five arrived with their pioneers' families as children or teens. More than half came from or were born in Mato Grosso; the others were born in Pará, São Paulo, and Paraná.

We took a piece that belonged to another farmer, where a clearing had already been made, and grass seed had been thrown, but it hadn't been burned. There was only this one edge of grass, but the bottom was still forest ... (I-26)

The second-generation RPs told us their intentions of coming to the region. The main answer was about obtaining land; one talked about extracting resources (mining). Furthermore, as cattle production grew, land prices went up. However, during this time, many people still had the option of arriving in the region to buy cleared land ready for production or clear their plots of land.

So land is the way you grow. You work it, you survive thanks to it, and it has always been increasing in value ... The owner of the plots said—No, 10,000 reais, that time has passed. We left because my mate couldn't afford it. So, we stopped the matter. Within 60 days, he sold it for 35,000 reais. (I-26; talking about a transaction in the year 2000).

Additionally, some stories were shared about the creation of the first settlement in the region. This allowed small farmers with fewer resources to obtain land. Five of the second-generation RPs interviewed inhabit these settlements. The settlements shared general problems in the region, such as the difficulty in linking with the main road, as the new inhabitants hardly had a means of personal transportation.

These plots were raffled off here by INCRA. A couple of years later, I became interested, and I bought this one and paid 3,000 reais for it ... When I arrived, it was just a forest. There was no road to get here; we'd go through the forest ... There were the little trails that INCRA made, and then we would put our supplies, like rice, beans, and oil on our backs and walk through the trails. (I-2)

6.3.1 External Pressure on Internal Interest

During this period, a crossroads of discourses began to converge upon the RPs. The national discourses of "development," "order and progress," "Brazil, moving forward," and "national heroes" came into conflict with national and international discourses on sustainability, nature protection, and climate change. At this juncture, NGOs appeared in the region to highlight environmental issues. However, the region's deforestation, climate-change issues, and lack of governmental support remained noticeable. The vast majority expressed their discontent against NGOs and environmentalists, as they interpreted that since their arrival, more obstacles had been put in the way of economic development in the region. Since then, they have read in the media that the RPs are the cause of deforestation and climate change. Some spoke about the nonexistence of climate change, as "it rains well and the climate helps [production]" (I-2). Apart from the NGOs, the spread of national and international news about regional dynamics brought discontent to the RPs. For pioneers and second-generation RPs, the impression of regional development had since been in the hands of foreigners rather than locals.

Then the guys from abroad talk badly about it because they're environmentalists. Why don't they reforest their countries? They don't want to reforest, but putting obstacles in the way of Brazil is fine ... that's a lot of politicking to me ... These NGOs themselves ... want money and keep putting obstacles in the way ... they're holding up the

country's development ... Think of a guy who's angry with these NGOs, that's me—these disgusting people. (I-2)

The problem of deforestation and climate change was introduced to the region during these years, and until today, the RPs continue to take a stand against policies and discourses that hinder the region's development (for RPs, development equals productive land).

However, the external pressure they felt did not impede the development of the agricultural frontier. The RPs share stories of how land prices and markets evolved regardless of external pressure. These new dynamics included land transactions and speculation. As cattle and soybean production expanded in the Mato Grosso frontier, discussions were underway regarding the Sustainable Development Plan for the BR-163 highway, which included provisions for financing the paving of the road.

Then they started doing daily work for each other, doing a little job here and a little job there, buying a head of cattle or two, and they began to get together, and they managed to buy a few fields and sell a few fields and buy a few more, and they started to increase slowly ... In 2002, the last area my late father sold and bought a bigger one, sold for 800 reais an alqueire and bought for 700 reais an alqueire ... it was 50 km away from the city, and the other one he bought was away; it was closer and better. (I-3)

During this time, and in their view, pioneers and second-generation RPs changed their positioning from being victims without government support to being a strong community that was bringing development to NP. The forest was presented as challenging and undesirable while land prices increased.

6.4 The Soy Generation: Land Management and Bureaucracy

In the mid-2000s, the debate over the paving of BR-163 attracted more people with experience and capital to the region to engage in soybean production. The enhanced possibility of facilitating the extraction and transport of products made this area increasingly desirable. However, national conservation and monitoring policies were simultaneously implemented (PRODES and DETER), intensifying the crossroads

between “development” and conservation discourses and further complicating the regional socio-environmental dynamics and RPs’ perspectives.

With paving underway (2007), a new discourse arrived in the region, bringing the idea of making NP the new Sinop: “This is how it will be. It’ll be like Sinop” (I-5). Located north of the Mato Grosso state, Sinop is a municipality that, from the late 1980s and beginning of the 1990s, became the so-called “capital of soy production” (The Economist, 2023). The high production of soy and corn led to the development of new infrastructure, including roads, schools, hospitals, and silos for storing grains. Therefore, the objective of the inhabitants of NP was to overcome Sinop. However, the process was not going to be simple.

I arrived here; this urban area was all wooden houses. There was only the Bank of Brazil and the Bank of Amazonia, which were actual buildings ... There was no asphalt, nothing; it was terrible. After a week, the drainage work began, and they asphalted the urban area. Within two years, I was already living in another town ... (I-22)

The 12 soy-generation RPs arrived from 2004 onwards. Furthermore, as explained above, between 2002 and 2004, there were many discussions on how to proceed with the BR-163 pavement. According to some RPs, the asphaltting only started in 2007 due to political conflicts as the regional discourse shifted from focusing on the need for better infrastructure to fearing its consequences. This shift in perspective has been and continues to be alarming to many RPs. Improved infrastructure, while beneficial in many ways, also opened the door for more capital-intensive producers to enter the region. This influx of well-resourced competitors creates a scenario in which many local RPs are overrun and/or displaced.

This BR-163 here, people fought not to have it paved. Why? For the big people to buy more cheap land, to buy more here/ because when a region is a mud road, the land is one price, when the asphalt comes, the price of the land doubles. (I-17)

Consequently, they said, bigger and more powerful farmers saw this as an opportunity. Hence, the soy-generation RPs interviewed came mainly for three reasons: to buy or rent land to produce soy, to work on cattle or soy farms, or to get a piece of land.

When I came here [2017] and saw a place that was completely out of date ... I saw that it’s all small farmers, and I think it’s a place that suddenly offers a good place for us to grow ... I planted my crops in the past on rented land ... Today I cultivate 1,400 alqueires. (I-23)

During these years, it was identified that some RPs entered the most productive phase since their arrival. It helped them to diversify their income. They said NP became a place to settle and a corridor for people and commodities. Hence, more services were needed as new people arrived and drove through it daily. The urban area of NP became a place that contained more than houses, including convenience stores and markets, petrol stations, shops, and hotels.

We bought a piece of land by the BR highway ... Here, to raise cattle, it’s better than Mato Grosso. It rains more ... We bought the hotel a year and a bit ago. We’re still working ... We’re getting on with life. We keep hoping to improve, to keep going, but I started from nothing in life, and today, we don’t depend on working as employees. It’s not much, but we’re surviving. (I-5)

Furthermore, according to some RPs, many political and legal dynamics impacted the region (e.g., projects such as PRODES, DETER, and Terra Legal), and everything became more complicated. Interviewees said the new demarcation of federally protected areas brought many problems to the region. The demarcation of indigenous land and the creation of the Jamanxim reserve impede the procurement and production of those lands. Nevertheless, the region’s programs that fund cattle production and land distribution arrived.

I arrived here in 2004. I took 150 hectares of land to look after for three years. When the three years were up, the Jamanxim reserve was created [the land he took care of was established inside the newly created reserve] ... INCRA demarcated the land and put us here [referring to the Terra Nossa settlement]. We joined in 2007. (I-26)

RPs also stated that land regularization programs, such as Terra Legal (2009), significantly impacted the region. They mentioned that the ineffectiveness of providing land titles also lowered the RPs’ morale, as land titles are one of the main elements used to request bank financing. In addition, forest monitoring

through the Brazilian Institute for the Environment and Renewable Natural Resources (IBAMA) has also affected land regularization and the production system. Many disagree with the monitoring programs, as they impose fines and embargoes on land but do not facilitate projects to conserve the forest or legalize productive activities. Most RPs, regardless of when they arrived, point out that bureaucracy (obtaining titles, obtaining CAR, LAR, releasing land from liens and fines, technical assistance, financing for production, among others) prevents the legalization of land and work. Nevertheless, many do not lose hope in doing things the “right way.”

It's been 40 years, 42 years here, and I'm the only one with the land title. Then, the others are left without. (I-15)

... due to the titles here, we don't get money from banks. Not even a bank finances us. Because of the environment, they don't finance. So, everything is our own resources; you have to buy from more expensive companies ... (I-17)

Currently, RPs living in urban areas have primary healthcare clinics, and some communities have small clinics. The municipal government has been actively funding water infrastructure projects and implementing healthcare, schooling, and food programs. However, residents in settlements discussed persistent challenges. Individuals and goods are situated farther from the BR-163 and have ongoing mobility issues. Additionally, services like electricity and internet are not consistently stable in these areas. For instance, not all settlements have schools, so private or public transport is necessary for education. The same applies to access to health clinics, posing logistical challenges for residents in these remote settlements.

We were happy because they brought me to the settlement ... Now all that's missing is a road and technical assistance for the people to work because there's no point in just planting without technical support ... (I-25)

Furthermore, in 2018, Jair Bolsonaro won Brazil's presidency. Many blamed the Labour Party for past neglect of NP and strongly supported Bolsonaro. RPs viewed Bolsonaro as a leader who finally recognized their needs and would promote regional development. This created a new attitude and discourse towards the federal government, as Bolsonaro was “the one

who has seen them again” and ensured the region's economic development.

There's no point in saying: “I'm going to do everything legally” because you won't be able to. The bureaucratic laws; that's why people work illegally ... But that's not a reason to lose hope ... everything is a crime ... And we understand that [Bolsonaro's] government wanted to encourage the people, but the laws hadn't been created yet. So, these bureaucratic things, from this past government [PT], which wants to come in again, which, if it does, will wipe out the rest. (I-16)

6.5 RPs' Current Overview

Regardless of all the challenges throughout history, almost all RPs talked about the changes and the new region's reality, as they observed the shift from being in “just the forest” towards agricultural land, soy monocultures, a paved BR-163, and many services. All mentioned the bureaucratic challenges that impede the development of economic and agricultural dynamics. They mainly position themselves against the previous government that “abandoned” them and in favor of the government that “supports” local structures.

Furthermore, very few RPs talked about the region being heavily deforested or about climate-change topics. Consequently, in their view, the Bolsonaro government made a remarkable change in Amazonian policies by focusing on the aim of “developing” the region without any concerns about environmental issues.⁴ Some RPs spoke about how the forest should be preserved by “leaving it alone.” However, many agreed that “whatever is cleared should be used for production without bureaucratic or legal problems” (I-8). It was also found that only a few RPs talked about or noticed changes in rainfall patterns, an increase in climate temperature, or a decrease in the number of wild animals in the region. It was interpreted (by the authors) that the silence or lack of in-depth responses to our mentions about the forest from RPs might be a way to protect themselves from external pressure and discourses (e.g., that the media, researchers, or NGOs might misrepresent their words or opinions) that address how the local socio-environmental dynamics impact the forest and global climate, mainly without knowing the local and personal contexts.

To summarize, many medium- and large-scale RPs, independent of the time of arrival to the region, position themselves as land- and forest owners. They built robust social and political structures, allowing them to navigate the regional challenges. The smaller landowners position themselves as victims, as the settlements they are part of still lack many financial and technical-assistance resources. Nevertheless, the majority consider themselves part of the RPs' "heroic" dynamic that continues to bring development to the Amazon forest. Thirty of the RPs said they liked the region and liked being RPs. Also, many said they would like to stay in the region. The vast majority spoke of how good they felt living close to the land and in the countryside. They said it gave them a lot of peace. Also, they commented that if it were not for the problems in the region (e.g., infrastructure and bureaucracy), living there would be even nicer, and they would never have the intention of leaving. Most look for their children to continue agricultural production or study something related. Therefore, they used a common expression to refer to how the dynamics in the region have changed—*hoje nós estamos no paraíso* (today, we are in paradise).

7. Conclusions

This article presented the connections between external discourses and the biographical narratives of RPs in NP, examining their influences on land dynamics while identifying and analyzing national and external discourses within three distinct historical trends. The correlation of external and RPs narratives during the historical trends allowed us to display the particular discourses that impacted the decision-making regarding forest and land. RPs spoke from their biographical position about how these programs, political changes, and discourses affected their biography and decisions about land use and forest. This helps to demonstrate the heterogeneity of the local impacts based on internal and external discourses. Also, it exemplifies particular demands at the local level. We found that the RPs want to generate dynamics favoring agriculture, development, land regularization, and productivity because that is how they perceive development should look. Therefore, the locals refuse the external discourses of forest conservation or climate change due to historically negative impacts on RPs' development, economy, and morale. This situation is because RPs have primarily aligned themselves with the development discourses of the region. Historically, they have often found them-

selves caught between local and external narratives of development and conservation. This means, on the individual level, that biography-driven life projects and future visions for the families of RPs converge with developmental programs of the Brazilian government over decades as RPs perceive land as a production factor, while nature-conservation and climate-mitigation discourses contradict their idea of forest as an extractive resource and obstacle for their production system. This applies to all RPs independently, whether smallholder families or medium/large-scale farmers.⁵ On a structural level, our case studies indicate that governmental programs tend to put landless and smallholder families in precarious settlement situations (second-generation RPs and/or poorly equipped settlement projects, etc.), while economically better-positioned RPs (third-generation RPs) not only have more economic resources but are also integrated into policy programs that privilege them even more. Consequently, regional inequalities may increase even further.

Knowing about the three generations' biographies helps us better understand their decision-making, which can promote a different way of creating policies aimed at RPs. For example, some pioneers and soy-generation RPs, who are large landowners, have a more robust physical infrastructure to grow their livestock or produce soybeans. On the other hand, second-generation RP and soybean farmers living in settlements (smallholders) lack specific structures; consequently, they are more vulnerable to regional economic and political changes and are, therefore, more inclined to sell their lands. The majority want to develop their agricultural production but fear that the rigid bureaucracy has confused legalization and regularization with criminalization. These repercussions impact all RPs but disproportionately affect those with limited market competitiveness, potentially prompting them to sell their land. This, in turn, contributes to the concentration of land ownership in the hands of a few and the potential expansion of the agricultural frontier. From the RPs' narratives and understanding of their history, we argue that by implementing sustainable socio-environmental policies and dynamics, programs should create perspectives for RPs' families that integrate their life projects and future visions, bringing together contradictory aims of agricultural production and nature conservation, also keeping in mind that the interests and needs of indigenous groups must be considered by acknowledging their needs, strengths, rights, and weaknesses.

Finally, it is crucial to recognize the need for more multidisciplinary research and local support structures to formulate policies that favor local socio-environmental dynamics. Physical structures, power relations between regional actors over socio-environmental dynamics, and decision-making patterns need to be considered for future research and development, providing information on the possible impacts of advancing agricultural frontiers or sustainable socio-environmental policies in NP and the Brazilian Amazon region.

In an era of urgent discourses that demand solutions for critical issues such as preserving the Amazon forest, we overlooked the essential practice of listening to the voices of those who engage in dialogue and share their daily lives with the forest. This article attempts to provide a different way of understanding local issues through the narratives of local people. It brings perspectives, heterogenizing both structural and social circumstances and avoiding romanticizing the narratives and discourses of stakeholders to allow for the understanding and critical observation of local dynamics. It recognizes the fights, struggles, and violent conflicts in this region. It shows a deeper comprehension of the RPs' standpoint and elucidates the sources of some conflicts and contradictions, highlighting why the imposition of external policies invariably encounters resistance. In the current scenario, this approach, despite its inherent weaknesses, presents itself as a viable way forward. It serves as a starting point for exploring options to address local socio-environmental challenges and strives to have a significant impact, resonating from the local sphere to the international stage.

Notes

¹ This is a measurement unit used in Brazil. It differs from region to region. For this article, it equals 2.42 hectares.

² Pejorative term for indigenous people (Guisard, 1999)

³ Informal small-scale mining

⁴ During and after the national election in October 2022 the large majority of the population of NP supported the Bolsonaro government, questioning the election result and protesting, partly violently, against the new government (Globo Noticias, 2022).

⁵ It is important to mention that our research focused on RPs and their vision of land and forest. The imagination of indigenous people regarding land and forest may be completely different and even opposite to the producers' perspective.

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