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## Environmental sovereignty discourse of the Brazilian Amazon: National politics and the globalization of indigenous resistance

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### I. Chronology

- 1822 Brazilian proclaims independence from Portugal, King Pedro I begins reign.
- 1831 Pedro I abdicates the throne as a result of violent protests leaving the crown to his five-year old son, Pedro II.
- 1888 Slavery abolished; influx of European immigrants over the next decade,
- 1889 Monarchy overthrown; federal republic established.
- 1902 Brazil produces 65% of world's coffee.
- 1930 Revolts bring Getulio Vargas to power.
- 1937 Vargas leads coup, rules as military dictator; state control of economy.
- 1945 Vargas ousted in military coup.
- 1951 Vargas reelected president, but faces stiff opposition.
- 1954 Vargas commits suicide after armed forces and cabinet demand his resignation.
- 1956 Juscelino Kubitschek elected president; development and openness to world economy create economic boom over next five years.
- 1961 Janio Quadros assumes presidency, resigns; replaced by vice-president Joao Goulart.
- 1964 Goulart ousted in bloodless coup; Castelo Branco elected president.
- 1967 General Costa e Silva inaugurated president.
- 1974 General Ernesto Geisel becomes president, introduces political reforms.
- 1977 Brazil renounces military alliance with United States.
- 1982 Brazil halts payment of its main foreign debt, which is among the world's biggest.
- 1985 Military steps down from political power; Tancredo Neves elected first civilian president in 21 years, with inflation at 300%.
- 1988 "Citizen constitution" reduces presidential powers; Chico Mendes, rubber tapper, union leader and environmental activist murdered.
- 1989 First direct presidential election since 1960. Fernando Collor de Mello elected president and introduces radical economic reform including importations, privatization. His efforts fail to improve the economy; by 1991 inflation reaches 1,500%. Foreign debt payments suspended.
- 1992 United Nations Conference on the Environment and Development (UNCED), known as Earth Summit, held in Rio de Janeiro.
- 1992 Collor resigns over corruption charges. He is later cleared.
- 1994 Fernando Henrique Cardoso elected; new currency, the *real*, introduced; Brazil signs Treaty of Tlateloco, declaring free of nuclear weapons
- 1995 Brazil joins Southern Cone Common Market (MERCOSUR); Cardoso redistributes 250,000 private acres to more than 3600 poor families.
- 1996 Cardoso decrees governments, companies, and individuals can challenge indigenous land claims in Amazon; National Defense Policy (PDN) announced; police kill 19 Amazon peasants in town of Eldorado dos Carajas.
- 1998 Cardoso re-elected. International Monetary Fund (IMF) provides rescue package for Brazilian economy.
- 1999 Foreign investment in Brazil reaches \$30 billion dollars.
- 2000 Indigenous Indians protest Brazil's 500th anniversary celebration.
- 2001 Government expects to spend \$40 billion on development in Amazon.
- 2002 Brazil wins World Cup; currency hits all-time low; Lula da Silva elected president promising political and economic reforms, first leftist government in over 40 years.

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2004 Brazil applies for a permanent seat on the UN Security Council; successfully launches its first space rocket.

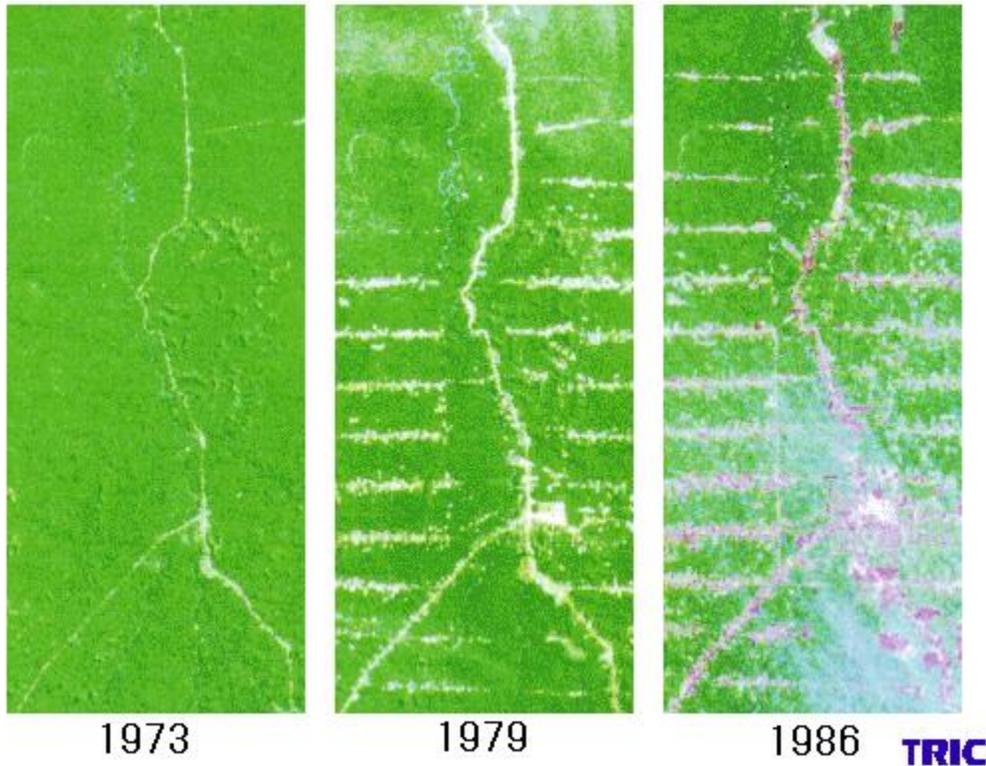
February 2005 Missionary campaigner for Amazon peasant farmers; Dorothy Stang murdered.

March 2005 Death squad kills at least 30 people on the outskirts of Rio de Janeiro.

### II. Map & Illustrations

Illustration 1: Amazon Deforestation rates

TRIC, Available: <http://www.itc.nl/research/policy/spearhead4/skidmore.asp>.



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**Illustration 2: Amazon deforestation**

Space Daily. June 10, 2004. NASA Data Shows Deforestation Affects Climate In The Amazon. Available: <http://www.spacedaily.com/news/climate-04zk.html>



### **III. Discursive Essay**

#### **1. Situating the nation**

The largest country and most populous country in South America, Brazil borders every country in South America except Chile and Ecuador. Brazil established independence from Portugal in 1822. In 1889, the monarchy was overthrown and a federal republic established. For nearly a century, Brazil was largely run by military dictators with varying degrees of political reforms. The military regime peacefully ceded power to civilian rulers in 1985. A mostly tropical region, deforestation in the Amazon Basin destroys the habitat and endangers a multitude of plant and animal species indigenous to the area. The Amazon jungle is a center of national politics, as the government attempts to compromise between environmental protection and the economic needs of the fifth largest population in the world.

Brazil's economy outweighs that of all other South American countries and is expanding its presence in world markets. Like many in the region, in the 1970s and 1980s, Brazil's economy suffered greatly from runaway inflation and the global collapse in oil prices. In the 1990s, Brazil's foreign debt was \$100 billion and grew to more than \$200 billion by 2003. While economic management has been good, there remain important economic vulnerabilities. The government is challenged to maintain economic growth over a period of time to generate employment and make the government debt burden more manageable. With a large labor pool and vast natural resources, Brazil pursues industrial and agricultural growth and development and is an emerging economic powerhouse. Considering the dues of a multi-year International Monetary Fund (IMF) loan, thirty billion dollars in foreign investment and a grossly unequal income distribution, Brazil's economic interests influence the country's politics and national identity.

#### **2. Instituting the nation**

The vast majority of Brazilians speak Portuguese, which differentiates them from their Spanish-speaking neighbors. Most Brazilians are Roman Catholic, which provides a general set of ideologies and beliefs held by Brazilian citizens. Brazil is a multicultural nation: a product of the very first wave of globalization, which was prompted by Europe's expanding trade. Brazilian national identity is even more "mixed" than is commonly understood. Notions of Brazilianness are continuously contested and negotiated. Brazil remains a country where hyphenated ethnicity is predominant yet unacknowledged. Since the colonial period, racial and ethnic groups have intermingled and intermarried creating a large mixed race population. All the racial and ethnic groups that arrived in Brazil intermingled and intermarried, with few exceptions. This led to increasing mixtures of all possible combinations and degrees. Since many individuals are therefore difficult to classify in racial terms, color, rather than ancestry, largely determines racial identity. Most of the population is considered ethnically "Brazilian." The country's population exhibits various racial backgrounds but resists ethnic subdivisions. In the 2000 census, 55% of Brazilians self-reported as white, 38% self-reported as mixed or brown, and 6% self-reported as black. Indigenous tribes comprise less than 1% of the population.

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Brazilian national identity remains highly problematic. While official Brazilian culture emphasizes Afro-Brazilian cultural forms like samba music and capoeira (martial arts), Brazilian mass media frequently portray Brazilian society as largely white. Furthermore, while Brazil has been touted as a racial democracy, there is a strong correlation between lighter skin color and higher socioeconomic status. Ideas of difference threaten universalist ideas of Brazilian nationalism, particularly in an international economy, where the government emphasizes development as the means to boost Brazil's global standing.

Today, Brazilian nationalism is centered on economic issues, which have political, environmental and cultural effects. Development efforts tend to privilege industrial and corporate interests at the expense of impoverished or indigenous communities. The expanding gap between rich and poor exacerbates problems such as homelessness, hunger and environmental destruction. Economic instability breeds insecurity as Brazil's territorial borders and natural resources are perceived as vulnerable. These discussions are not new. Debates about to what degree Brazil's markets should be open to the global economy have characterized presidential, state and municipal elections for decades.

### **3. Defining the nation**

Generally understood as a deep love for one's country, nationalism is "a group consciousness that attributes great value to the nation-state, to which unswerving devotion is tendered. The individual closely identifies with the state and feels that [his or her] well-being depends to a large extent, if not completely on its well-being" (Burns, 1968, 3). Contemporary nationalism is generally thought of as an agreement of a nation's citizens "to maintain their unity, independence, and sovereignty and to pursue certain broad and mutually acceptable goals" (Burns, 1968, 3). From 1935-1980, Brazilian nationalism took the form of military activity and expansion. With developing economic crises and domestic and international pressure for global trade, contemporary Brazilian nationalism stems from the widely held view that Brazil's size and potential mean that it should not rely on foreign money, but can compete on equal terms. Nationalism is the result of converging factors: security, economics, and resources. A leading producer of minerals, coffee, oranges, sugar, and beef, Brazil's nationalism is tied to its resources. Nationalism takes the form of reluctance to relinquish domestic control of the country's resources by opening up the country to foreign trade. This extends to protection of the country's greatest natural resource: the Amazon rainforest. International human rights and environmental groups have protested Brazil's development of the Amazon Basin and have led the call for international protection of the Amazon. Nationalist tendencies in Brazil have responded by pushing for Brazil's sovereignty rights over the Amazon. Fear of the internationalization of the Amazon has emerged as a security concern as the military is deployed to protect Brazil's borders of the Amazon.

Environmental nationalism has led to the establishment of national parks to protect the country's resources. Ethnic tensions emerge as indigenous peoples are implicated in the plight of the Amazon as they make sovereignty claims to land that is of interest to loggers, ranchers and urban developers. Economic nationalism responds to liberalization of trade barriers by pushing to protect national interests. Environmental nationalism is manifest in indigenous sovereignty claims over environmental resources to

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protect against ranching and logging. While there are similarities in these types of nationalism (for example the military wants to protect Amazonia as a key area of national interest), there are often competing claims of nationalism. Tensions emerge over how to best exploit natural resources: indigenous tribes such as the Yanomami and Seringueiros fight the development of land for logging and ranching purposes.

### **4. Narrating the nation**

1930-1980 was a period of Brazil's military and economic nationalism. From the mid-twentieth century, Brazilian and international environmental organizations have pressured the national government to curb damage to the Amazon rainforest. Brazil's economic policy in the 1970s and 1980s aimed to pay off foreign debt, which was the impetus for Brazil to increase exports. The military government, which held power until 1985, used foreign loans to build new industries and improve the country's infrastructure. Although Brazil made economic gains under the military, the country's economy stagnated during the "lost decade" of the 1980s with a burgeoning foreign debt and runaway inflation. Brazil turned to the IMF following Mexico's banking crisis to establish economic stability. This meant liberalization: opening up to foreign trade. Such IMF demands were seen as loss of sovereignty because privatization and foreign investment meant the government's control over the economy declined and fueled economic nationalism. President Fernando Henrique Cardoso's economic stabilization policies of the 1990s and the deepening integration of Brazil into the world economy poise the country to assume a greater role in the world economy and in international affairs. After the Rio Earth Summit in 1992, Brazil and other countries issued joint plan for protection of the rain forest. The recent presidential electoral victory of "Lula" da Silva, raises questions of how the election of a working-class leader to the presidency will affect the balance of power between Brazil's classes, the role of the military and the fate of the Amazon resources.

### **5. Mobilizing and building the nation**

The need to preserve Brazil's identity and viability is inextricably linked to control over its economy. Intellectuals, politicians and military commanders formulate nationalist doctrine. For this reason, Brazil's nationalist discourse is found in economic treatises, military policy and environmental advocacy. Nationalism has become an ideological response to globalization pressures, which are perceived to undermine state security. Economic globalization threatens the traditional core values of the Brazilian military and is thus popular among military officers. Globalization is central to the Brazilian military's desires for greater Brazilian autonomy in the international environment. Civilian government attempts to liberalize the economy are at odds with Brazilian military goals. The Brazilian military largely support developing the Amazon. Environmental pressures to protect the Amazon Basin are seen as strategies to internationalize the Amazon is seen as a threat to national resources.

Nationalism is framed as the politics of the national interest. It is an ideology that affirms Brazil's national interests may coincide with other countries, but are often contradictory. Socially liberal Brazilian economists argue that Brazil's economy is key to maintaining the national strength so that it may compete with richer, more developed countries. Economic nationalists perceive an asymmetry of economic power as

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responsible for regional disparities and insecurity. Brazilian military officers tend to express nationalistic views. Military commanders emphasize territorial sovereignty as essential to maintaining Brazil's integrity and power. Statements by military officials suggest environmental nongovernmental organizations are perceived as little more than lightly disguised instruments of richer countries that seek to undermine the sovereignty of developing countries without damaging international relations. Military officials argue that due to the region's rich natural resources other countries instinctively covet Brazil and Amazônia. In this way, Brazilian military nationalism is tied to environmental sovereignty, which is tied to economic growth and development. Nationalist discourse is found in economic and military texts, which are used to persuade citizens and policymakers to protect the country's natural resources and territorial sovereignty.

The concept of national security that prevailed during the Cold War has given way to growing preoccupation with sovereignty and the integrity of national territory. As environmental issues prompt the international community to seek protection of the Amazon as a source of global biodiversity, the threat of internationalizing the Amazon region will likely represent the central Brazilian military concern of the next century. In this way, the development of Brazil's foreign policy is based on national autonomy. Brazil's gradual transition to democracy has made the country's foreign policy vulnerable to pressure and negotiation. In 1985, the first civilian president saw democracy and economic reforms tied together. The non-authoritarian regime had to implement reforms to maintain economic vitality. In this way, as the national bureaucracy responds to economic challenges, political and economic nationalism inextricably linked. As economic decisions are made regarding Brazil's resources, environmental and economic sovereignty are the two emerging forms of contemporary Brazilian nationalism.

Brazilians, regardless of educational background, overwhelmingly list the natural environment as their greatest source of national pride. Natural conservation has been deemed the charge of the state and a matter of national defense. Natural parks and preserves symbolize the power and strength of the state to control its own lands and important biological treasures. Environmental and military concerns converge on the Amazon, an area of international importance. The perceived threat to the Amazon comes from industrialized countries and environmentalists. The sovereignty and integrity of territorial Amazonia have become strategic concerns in the view of the Brazilian military and national developing interests. In 2005, Brazilian president Lula da Silva highlighted his support for the Brazilian military. Lula's socialist roots dovetail with traditional Brazilian nationalism, which is particularly strong in the armed forces. Brazil's politicians and military officials perceive the country's borders with nine neighboring countries as potentially vulnerable in the face of continental competition for resources and international environmental pressures. Brazil's environmental protections reflect the ongoing recognition of the economic and nationalist importance of environmentalism.

As Brazilians emphasize their nation's territorial sovereignty, social issues such as poverty and hunger remain problems within the country's borders. While estimates vary, poverty affects at least one third of Brazil's population (almost 60 million people), while another 30 million are considered at risk. In the poorest parts of the country, nearly half of all families live on a dollar a day. In Brazil, wealth is concentrated in the hands of a few. The country's income distribution is one of the most unequal in the world and

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remains at the heart of Brazil's poverty problem. The expanding rich poor gap ensures that the majority of Brazilians continue to completely lack or have inadequate access to food, healthcare, and education. Hunger is the most extreme manifestation of Brazil's poverty problem. Widespread malnutrition and chronic food insecurity perpetuate a cycle of violence and crime, particularly in industrial eras such as São Paulo and in urban slums such as those in Rio de Janeiro. Brazil's nationalist pursuit of economic growth has not addressed the poverty problem. For example, Brazil's industrial agriculture economy has grown in the last two decades, but has not translated into a strong subsistence farming sector. Brazil's small farmers have suffered, remaining on small plots of land with which they cannot compete with large-scale industrial farms or migrating to cities in an effort to escape rural destitution, only to remain chronically food insecure. As the world's tenth largest economy, Brazil's inequality inhibits the country's domestic economy and its international standing.

Social democrats in Brazil evoke the disparity between Brazil and countries like the United States, which set high standards for developing countries, but, in the eyes of Brazilians, do not do enough to aid development. Such economists see Brazil pursuing global interests to the detriment of national economic interests. Economic nationalists see multinational, supranational or international governing bodies as responsible for the loss of Brazilian autonomy. In this view, the global economy is replaying Brazil's colonial history through the foreign investments. Such nationalists take care to note that Brazil cannot live in total isolation of the world markets. While globalization is a threat, it is also a chance and a challenge for developing countries.

How Brazil engages the global economy is at the center of contemporary nationalist trends. This is the new nationalism that economists and politicians support. Frustrated that the world thinks of Brazil as only a country of soccer and Carnival, new nationalism represents the chance to recoup Brazil's standing in the world through economic prosperity. This new nationalism responds to runaway globalization, and is a call for Brazil to defend its values and respect its national identity. New nationalism sees globalization as a threat to the national interest and the only way for Brazil to meet the superiority of the rich countries is to protect national interest and not open up to much to international pressures. To accomplish this in the coming decades, Brazil will need to perform a balancing act to stimulate investment while maintaining competitiveness.

Contemporary Brazilian nationalism is about a vision of the country whose interests are protected by territorial sovereignty and strengthened by economic growth. Brazilian nationalism has emerged as a military doctrine supported by economic interests based on environmental resources. The convergence of these often-conflicting interests in the nationalist doctrine reveals Brazil's rich history of pride in its territory and the hope in its future as an economic powerhouse. An economically and militarily strong Brazil is the cornerstone of contemporary Brazilian nationalism, which recognizes natural resources such as the Amazon Basin and is committed to protecting such interests with economic and military policy.

### **IV. Sidebars**

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### **Chico Mendes**

Born in Brazil on December 15, 1944, Chico Mendes grew up in a family of rubber tappers (seringueiros). Rubber tapping is a sustainable agricultural system, which impedes profits of cattle ranchers and miners. Mendes organized seringueiros to resist development of the forest through political nonviolent protests. He encountered a great deal of opposition and in 1988 was murdered at the order of a rancher, an act which increased the power of his grassroots movement.

### **Lula da Silva**

Born in 1945, Lula da Silva won Brazil's 2002 presidential election on his fourth attempt, leading a coalition of parties behind the Partidos Trabalhadores (PT, the Labor Party). A former shoeshine boy, Lula has had a long history with Brazilian labor unions, and was a co-founder of the PT. After he was elected president, Lula vowed to end hunger in Brazil.

### **Amazon Rainforest**

The size of the United States, the Amazon rainforest is the largest remaining tropical forest in the world. Most of the Amazon rainforest is in Brazil, but it also reaches into eight other countries. The Amazon rainforest supports 60,000 plant, 2,000 fish, 1,000 bird and 300 mammal species. In Brazil, the Amazon is home to 20 million people who rely on this ancient forest for food, shelter, tools and medicines in addition to playing a crucial role in people's spiritual and cultural lives. Scientists predict planned developments will lead to the damage or loss of between 33-42 percent of Brazil's remaining Amazon forest. The forest continues to attract ranchers, miners and loggers who want to profit from this natural resource.

### **International Monetary Fund (IMF)**

The IMF is an organization of 184 countries, working to foster global monetary cooperation, secure financial stability, facilitate international trade, promote high employment and sustainable economic growth, and reduce poverty.

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