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**Neoliberalism and Processes of Development in Mato Grosso, Brazil**

A Thesis in International Relations

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## ABSTRACT

This thesis intends to investigate and identify the main institutional, political, legal and economic features that led to the recent development process of the state of Mato Grosso, in Brazil. The importance of unveiling such aspects is based on the empirical necessity of understanding the different processes of integrating dependent economies into the international capitalist system as a consequence of globalization due to imperialist influences. Moreover, a deeper analysis of these actions will support future plans for Southern integration and help mitigating likely negative impacts that have reverberated from this experience.

The bibliographic research sought to raise the historical aspects of land occupation, the presence of international organizations and institutional processes that enabled the commodification of lands, and the consequences of private colonization processes to different communities. This thesis confirms the hypothesis that the implementation of neoliberal policies and the creation of colonization projects was undertaken by private initiatives that were configured as a continuation of the “colonial enterprise” and followed a capitalist logic of production. It also evidences different practices that were employed by organizations in coalition with the State for the acquisition and concentration of land. It is concluded that, as a result of agribusiness implementation, Mato Grosso has been transformed into an area of production of raw materials, food, and fiber for the contemporary industrialized core countries. At the same time, it consumes capital and technology from the same countries that implemented this development model in the region.

Lastly, this thesis demonstrates how natural, traditional and subsistence agroecological systems were supplanted by the capitalist model of profitability and generated harmful effects on the environment at the same time it intensified social and economic contradictions. In this sense, it stresses the importance of integrating autochthonous knowledge and practices when formulating public policies for regional development. The insertion of capital and technology for small farmers can help generate substantial elements of endogenous development in the Amazon. This will enable producers to optimize the use of local resources sustainably and turn the production surplus into benefits for the local community, preserving the culture and regional ecological base.

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## 1. Introduction

One of the greatest names of contemporary Brazilian literature, Manoel de Barros (1916 – 2014) defined his childhood in the Brazilian state of Mato Grosso (MT) as a time when distances seemed immense and time moved very slowly. In the poet's words, mentioned in a documentary, his family "lived in a place where there was nothing (...) and we had to invent the world"; "invention was required to enlarge the world and 'disturb' the existing", which is the normal state of things (Cezar 2010). This is perceivable in his writings that fascinated readers by its simplicity and wisdom as he was talking about the vast rest of Brazil – the wetlands and rivers, and the poverty and solitude of rural life that millions of migrants have been abandoning to bigger cities due to the lack of economic opportunities there.

I wanted to write with bird words.  
We lived in an immensely and nameless  
place  
where we played with word play  
like: Today I saw an ant kneeling on a rock!  
Mother overhearing us play said:  
There you go with your visions again!  
Ants don't have kneeling knees  
and there are no sacristy rocks around here.  
What a prank of the imagination.  
The boy had a stony silence in his gaze  
and in his voice a clarity of Springs.  
Father thought we wanted to unsee the  
world  
To go find new things to see in words  
like: I saw the morning perched over the  
river  
banks like an open crane on the loneliness of  
a rock.  
Such novelties the boys made with their  
words.  
Then Bernardo came with another one:  
Today I saw  
a frog with a tree gaze.  
So it was clear we needed to unsee the world

to leave  
that immensely and sideless place.  
We wanted to find images of birds blessed  
with innocence.  
In that place we learned nothing but  
ignorance  
so as to fully understand the voice of the  
waters  
and the snails.  
We liked words best when they disturbed  
the common stream of ideas.  
We already knew that only the absurd  
makes poetry.

Manoel de Barros was able to see beauty in the crudeness of his region and connect language with natural elements through poems that are constantly raising the stakes of surreal, sensory delight. He considered that the immensity of Mato Grosso was incomplete and, consequently, his world had still to be created – that is, the intense and sophisticated exchanges between nature and the small number of inhabitants needed to be complemented with broader social intercourses and connections with wider Brazilian and international society (Ioris 2017a). More than that, he dreamed of a new condition for his people and advocated for what he called a humanist transformation of places, with synchrony between the reconfiguration of those places and the realization of human capacities at the same time. The poet born and raised in the city of Cuiabá, capital of MT, was an individual that knew the potentialities and richness of his locality and observed deep changes in the state's landscape and population throughout his life.

If alive in current times, Manoel de Barros would find a very different Mato Grosso compared with the one he spent his childhood days. Accounting for 22 per cent of the Brazilian gross domestic product, the state with an estimated population of only 3.5 million people is a big driver and one of the protagonists of Brazil's recent economic development (Harris 2021). The same place which fifty years ago was dominated by a mix of forest and scrubland, characteristic of the convergence of the Amazon forest and Cerrado biomes, and was mostly devoid of people, is now stage for growing cities such as Lucas do Rio Verde, Sinop, Nova Mutum, and Sorriso. Surrounded by flat farmlands that go for hundreds of kilometers, many of these are ranked among Brazil's most developed municipalities (Araujo and Boaventura 2020) and are proof of how quick efforts to be inserted in a neoliberal global economic system can drastically affect a territory and its conditions.

This article explains how this process happened, from the first colonial inspirations aimed by the Portuguese Empire which did their first expeditions in the region in the 1700s looking for sources of slave labor in indigenous communities and raw materials such as gold, to the rounds of investment made by the World Bank and the IMF applied by the Brazilian state that led to this economy based on large scale agriculture. Such practices have been marked by the persecution of indigenous people and the complete disregard of autochthonous communities' spontaneous occupation in Mato Grosso that have migrated there due to different reasons. Moreover, the combination between colonial inheritance based on nepotistic practices for land access and the poor administration of public territories has facilitated the commodification of lands and the exclusion of certain populations from participating in the development process of MT. In order to justify the acts of displacing and supplanting autochthonous populations with a new class of settlers, the current dominant class of "pioneers" who detain both political and economic power defend the myth that Mato Grosso was a huge empty space, with population voids.

Moving forward, the integration of dependent economies and nations into the international market of commodities as a consequence of globalization due to imperialist influences (Cardoso 1972) is another factor that has impacted socioeconomic and production practices. Boosted by the Green Revolution and recent technological advancements, what was seen before as a universe apart, mostly occupied by autochthonous communities and indigenous tribes and with little connection with the rest of the country, is now moving over 15 billion dollars a year and is responsible for 20% of total exports from Brazil (Ministério da agricultura 2020). This process was made possible thanks to many rounds of investment, economic policy prescriptions and structural reforms employed by the World Bank and the IMF in order to occupy the "empty lands" and explore the natural resources within the Brazilian territory.



Aligned with USA foreign policy through the Washington Consensus, transnational companies and the federal government of Brazil have been the main players in implementing neoliberal policies looking for reactivating capital accumulation and generating economic growth.

The push towards the economic development of the region is a product of policies and actions established since the Brazilian military dictatorship (1964-1985) and reflect the policies of authoritarian development enforced during this time (Mantega 1997). Influenced by international pressure to be inserted in the international market of commodities (Cardoso 1972), Brazil adopted policies to occupy and transform interior parts of the country in order to use this land for economic purposes. Due to a sense of country's predestination for the large-scale production of raw commodities (Cruz 2014), inheritance of colonial patterns and its placement within the structure of world capitalism (Cardoso 1972), the government's choice to support the private acquisition of land plots for crops production was not a surprise.

Since then, efforts for Mato Grosso's occupation have ranged from migratory campaigns of southern communities to occupy strategic areas at the same time it excluded original populations (da Silva and Ferrer Silva 2011), to processes of land demarcation and the creation of legislative tools for the commodification of lands in order to adopt a agro-export market centered economy. In addition, various forms of fiscal incentives and subsidies were created for the settlement of new migrants willing to engage with agricultural activities and the state has heavily invested in the construction of highways and other infrastructure installations in order to facilitate accessibility to the region (Campbell 2015). One of the consequences of these actions were the generation of political and economic oligarchies that not only concentrate extensive pieces of land but also have huge influence over the cities' social and political dynamics (Marques 2013). In addition to the socioeconomic consequences, the extensive production of

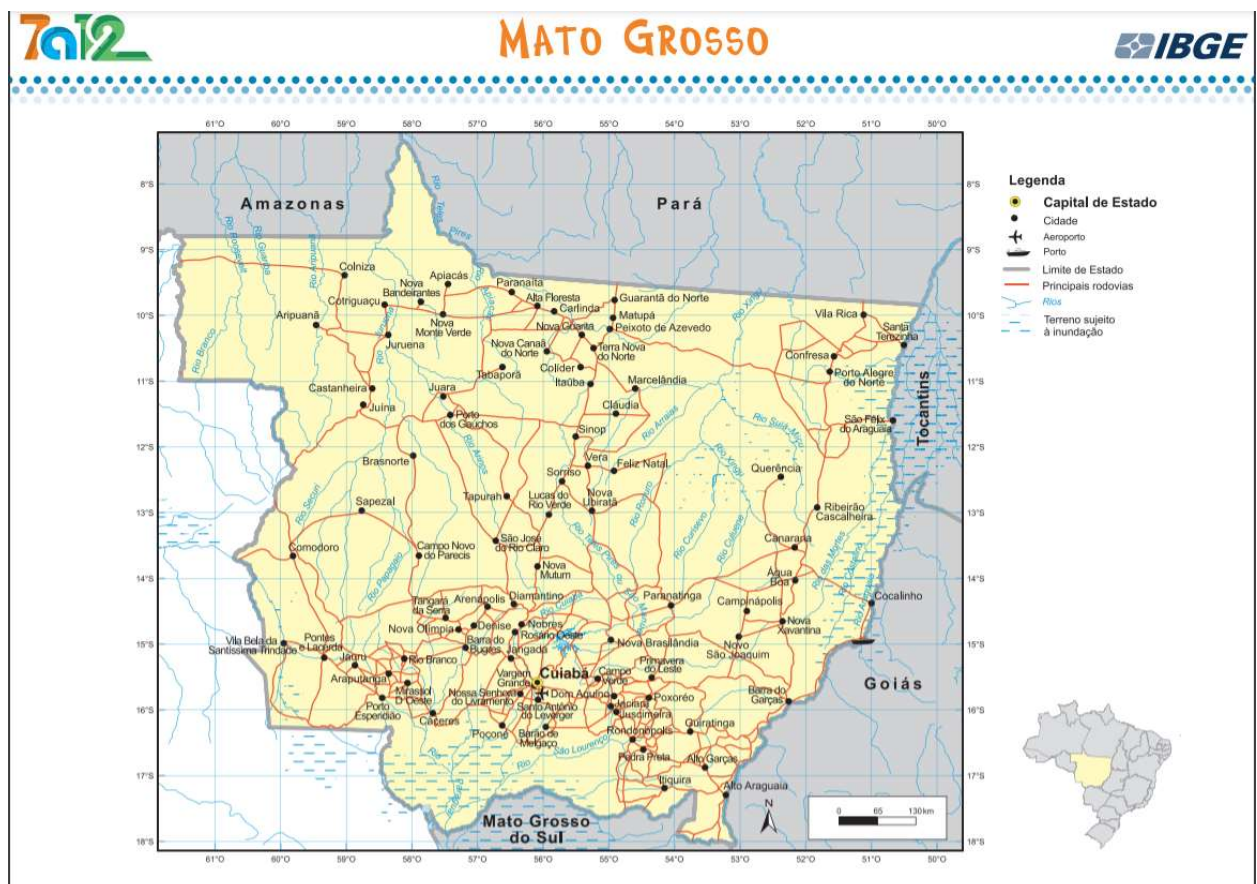
single products and the denial of autochthonous knowledge over MT's biomes have generated substantial environmental degradation (da Silva and Ferrer Silva 2011).

Therefore, in order to continue with the viability of its economic model and ensure environmental conservation, it is crucial that MT looks for alternatives that will enable the sustainable use of protected areas and foster a new, more sustainable and inclusive economy. Mato Grosso leads the country's deforestation rates among states and suffers yearly with unstable rainy patterns and wildfires seasons that are already affecting the population's health as well as the production and harvesting of commodities. This factor is accompanied by empirical documentation that relates the degradation of MT's biomes with practices for agricultural purposes (Yanai et al. 2020). Even though Brazil has had substantial governance reforms that have dropped Amazon deforestation rates by almost 80% between 2004 and 2012 (Schieleina and Börnera 2018), what is seen as governmental practice nowadays is a dismantling of the institutions supposed to guarantee effective environmental law enforcement (Harris 2021). In addition, historical episodes of class distinctions and exclusions in the municipalities of MT have generated social tensions that need to be addressed with urgency (Ioris 2017a).

The case of the particular evolution of agribusiness in Mato Grosso is a good subject of analysis of the environmental and social consequences of neoliberal efforts in Southern countries. It is a case of rapid changes in the region's landscape boosted by the selling of commodities in the international market that led to concentration on the main dimensions of power, especially economic activity, ideologies and various patterns of political domination. The perception of "shared progress" due to the intensification of capital circulation generates optimistic and positive feelings in the region's population, which increases support for neoliberal practices and environmental damage in favor of "progress". However, the insertion of capital and

technology for small farmers and autochthonous communities can help generate substantial elements in the contemplation of endogenous development in the Amazon. Their knowledge and practices are essential for the conservation of MT's fauna and flora, and they would be able to substantially increase production if receiving the correct investment policies. In this sense, this article argues that the interaction between neoliberal approaches and local cultures must be prioritized when formulating public policies for regional development. Only through this path Mato Grosso will be able to solve its growing inequality issues and environmental concerns.

## 2. The Myth of Population Void and Colonization Patterns



**Picture 1:** Map of Mato Grosso with its cities. (Reprinted from IBGE – Instituto Brasileiro de Geografia e Estatística (Governo do Brasil) (2018))

The state of Mato Grosso is located in the Center-West Region of Brazil, with a total area of 903.329,700 km<sup>2</sup>, and borders with Bolivia and the Brazilian states of Amazonas, Para, Tocantins, Goias, Mato Grosso do Sul and Rondonia. It is located within the Brazilian Legal Amazon, and hosts 3 out of the 6 biomes in the country (Cerrado, Pantanal and the Amazon Forest), which makes this place unique in terms of biodiversity (Chioveto 2014).

While the traditional narrative about its occupation for agricultural purposes treats this territory as a “huge empty space”, a complete comprehension regarding the state’s colonization requires the renunciation of the myth that colonizers who arrived by the 18<sup>th</sup> century found an empty region (da Silva and Ferrer Silva 2011). In fact, as shown by Pinto (2002), human communities have been occupying the region and establishing sustainable coexistence with the biomes for millennia. According to Cruz (2014), it was verified by several researchers that, since the first periods, there was a continuous and extensive occupation with numerous shelters and accommodations. This affirmation contradicts another myth that these groups would set their camps sporadically and would be nomadic for most of their existence. Leff (2000) affirms that each of the ethnic groups that occupied the region prior to the European colonization developed their own lifestyle in which social relations would be deeply integrated by both human and environmental elements. This means that communities would operate based on ecological cycles that would involve the harvesting of different crops, fishing, hunting and collecting food from different sources. Following the two well defined seasons within their territory (rain season and dry season), these tribes would follow natural cycles that would enable the sustainable and productive management of natural resources. Lastly, it estimated by Schmitz (2003) that over 25 indigenous populations have lived in the region known as MT nowadays. This estimative goes up to 180 communities if considering the whole Brazilian Amazon Forest biome (Paulino 2013).

## 2.1 From the Expansion of Frontiers to the Recognition of the State of Mato Grosso

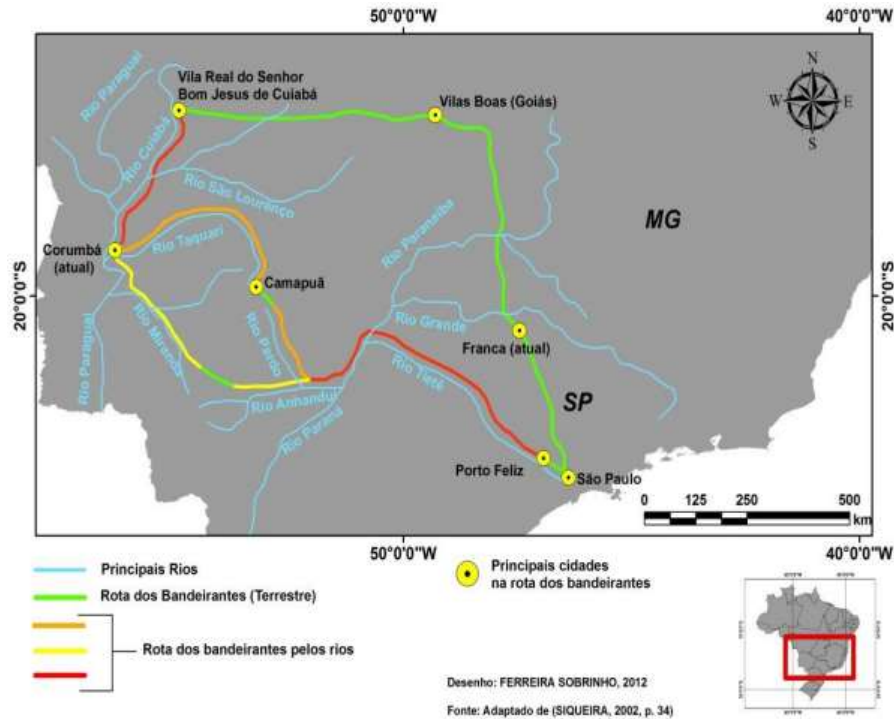
The colonization of MT has followed a model of land appropriation with the objective of exploring resources and raw materials that would attend external demands (Furtado 2001). In this sense, the expansion of frontiers can be considered as misleading accounts that tend to magnify the “pioneers” who have gone through the exploration saga and multiplied their wealth based on land conquests. Siqueira (2009) explains that the first expeditions made by the “bandeirantes paulistas<sup>1</sup>” were looking for a commodity that, according to them, was abundant in the Brazilian “sertões<sup>2</sup>”: indigenous people. It was in fact during attempts to track these communities that the expeditions led by Antonio Pires de Campos, followed by another one led by Pascoal Moreira Cabral, reached the land that would be known nowadays as Mato Grosso, in 1718. After one of their meals, some of the explorers casually found gold nuggets in the riverbanks while washing some dishes and utensils. It was the trigger for the creation of the first settlements in the region of Cuiabá, which was founded in April 8 of 1719. Ribeiro (2013) reminds that the paths taken to reach the mines of Cuiabá were, in the first moment, performed through the river waters using the same watercrafts that allowed European arrivals in the Brazilian territory.

Map 1 presents the two routes through the waters that would take from four to six months depending on the water levels of the rivers. The green line also shows the later option of migrating through land, which came up as an alternative path to avoid complications for access through the waters and creating a safer and faster way of reaching to Cuiabá (Siqueira 2002).

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<sup>1</sup> People who ventured into the backlands of the country in search of gold and other precious materials as well as the imprisonment of indigenous people and the capture of fugitive slaves.

<sup>2</sup> Historical nomenclature for Brazilian inlands not yet explored by the Portuguese Crown.



**Picture 2:** Routes taken through rivers and backlands. Reprinted from Ribeiro (2013).

- 1) First Route: Tietê River – Grande River (Paraná River) – Pardo River, Anhanduí River, overland crossing through Vacaria Fields, Mbotetue River (Miranda River), Paraguai River, São Lourenço River and Cuiabá River (Ribeiro 2013).
- 2) Second Route: Tietê River, Grande River, Pardo River, Sanguessuga River, overland crossing through Camapuã boathouse, Coxim River, Tiquari River, Paraguai River, São Lourenço River and Cuiabá River (Ribeiro 2013).

Finally, the news that gold was found in Mato Grosso brought new residents to the region, from miners to business people, from the hereditary captaincies<sup>3</sup> of São Paulo, Minas

<sup>3</sup> Hereditary Captaincies were inserted in Brazil by the Portuguese King around 1530. He established the creation of 14 districts that would be split in 12 lots to be shared by individuals linked to royalty. These lands could not be sold, only passed to heirs. The grantees allowed settlers to cultivate and explore these pieces of land.

Gerais and Rio de Janeiro. Mato Grosso was elevated to the condition of independent captaincy from São Paulo in 1748, with Antonio Rolim de Moura being nominated as its first governor. He occupied the position from 1751 to 1765, the same time in which Vila Bela da Santíssima Trindade was founded and considered the first capital of Mato Grosso. Located 500km to the west of Cuiabá, Vila Bela served for the enlargement of the territory and as a strategic defense for the territories explored by the Portuguese Empire (Ribeiro 2013). However, because of administrative difficulties and the lack of fluvial access from Cuiabá to Vila Bela, D. Pedro I ordered that Cuiabá would be declared as the definite capital of Mato Grosso in 1835.

## **2.2 Colonization Efforts and Displacement of Communities**

After the Federal Constitution of 1891, Article 64 regulated the empty lands of Mato Grosso and passed them from federal jurisdiction for state jurisdiction. Since this Land Law, the economic and political elite of MT started to appropriate the public lands of the state and transform them into private property (Barrozo 2010). According to Moreno (Moreno 2007), the same legislators who established limits for private land appropriation were also the first people to circumvent legal obligations. Because this law gave state governments the autonomy to measure its unclaimed areas and grant property titles, the trend of increasing incorporation of unclaimed land by private capital did not change (Reydon et al. 2014).

In the North of Mato Grosso, more specifically in the river valleys of Arinos, Juruena, Teles Pires and Paraguai, the native rubber plantations that were leased to companies owned by entrepreneurs from traditional families of Mato Grosso became their own private property in the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Moreover, the lowlands located around the Paraguai River, where the cities of Barra do Bugres, Tangara da Serra and Caceres are located nowadays, were

occupied by traditional communities based on the extraction of Ipecacuanha. These populations lost their land to nonnatives who demarcated this space as unclaimed areas and granted property titles through public registry, especially in the decades of 1960s and 1970s (Barrozo 2010).

Nevertheless, since the 1930s, the state started to adopt policies aiming to occupy its territory and fill “population voids” in certain parts of the country. Starting with efforts known as “west marches” (*Marcha para o Oeste*), implanted during Getulio Vargas’ administration, the federal government started to prioritize “national workers” instead of foreign immigrants to settle on new colonization areas. This policy redirected the migratory flows of the country to less populated regions, aiming to expand agricultural frontiers and give a solution to certain “social tensions” related to excessive poverty and pushes for an agrarian reform (Barrozo 2010).

Lenharo (1985) points out the fact that some parts of these “empty regions” were already occupied with the cultivation of mate herb in the south of the state, sugar plants in the margins of Cuiabá River, cattle raising activities in the Pantanal biome and other activities such as rubber and illegal drug plantations. More importantly, the author highlights two serious dilemmas that were surrounding the colonizing policies: how they would deal with the lands occupied by indigenous populations as well as how these peoples would be able to contribute or participate with the colonization enterprises (Lenharo 1985). Nevertheless, under these adverse conditions, Vargas still announced the expedition Roncador-Xingu in 1941, renamed as Fundação Brasil Central (FBC) in 1943, with the objective of attracting workers to Goiás and Mato Grosso. This approach was marked by the initiative of hiring third-party services to implement colonization projects and looked for attracting capital that could help in the extraction of the existing wealth in these regions (Ribeiro 2013). Therefore, the path for the colonization of the west of Brazil and



Mato Grosso's Amazon rainforest was institutionally represented in the eastern region of Mato Grosso, parallel to the Araguaia River valley.

### **2.3 Integration Policies for Private Colonization**

Meanwhile, the lack of infrastructure was still a barrier for the exploration of Mato Grosso's extension. With Getulio Vargas' deposition and the end of the Estado Novo in 1945, the enactment of the 1946 Constitution allowed for the democratic liberties that characterized the republican constitutions prior to 1937 (Moreno 2007). As a result, states increased autonomy over their agrarian policies, which were centralized by the federal government under Vargas command. Given more freedom for state governments, the groups that assumed Mato Grosso continued with the indiscriminate alienation of lands and the objective of increasing colonization projects (Ribeiro 2013). In 1945, governor Arnaldo Estevão created the Highway Fund (Fundo Rodoviário) which implemented, in 1947, the Department of Highways in Mato Grosso and accelerated the occupation process in the northern region of Mato Grosso (Mendonça 1981). His efforts to transform original woods into productive farms established the colonization projects of Vale do São Lourenço (localized in the southeast of Mato Grosso), Dourados and Bodoquena (localized in Mato Grosso do Sul nowadays), and Barra do Bugres (localized at the center-north of Mato Grosso) (Ribeiro 2013). However, the lack of support by the federal governments of Juscelino Kubistchek, Janio Quadros and Joao Goulart delayed the occupation of these lands since colonizers lacked the necessary orientation and assistance. This is because these communities did not have the necessary knowledge for cultivation in the region, since they were not used to the new types of soil or weather patterns in MT. In addition, the state did not fulfill some promises in terms of providing assistance such as financing tools purchases, technical assistance for soil correction and preparation for the commercialization of products. Still, during

the decade of 1950, the state governors of Mato Grosso Fernando Correa da Costa and Ponce de Arruda demarcated and designated a total of 4 million hectares for colonization, divided into 20 segments with areas of 200,000 hectares each.

Barrozo (2010) argues that, among the companies that acquired these land plots, many kept their properties as a store of value, increasing land speculation until the decade of 1970 when MT started to receive an intense migratory flow. The author goes even further and presents the information that the Kren-a-karore were one of the indigenous populations that most suffered direct impacts from the opening of the highway BR-163, in the north of MT, close to the border with the state of Pará. Moreover, in the Guapore Valley, the indigenous communities of Nambiquara and Paresi suffered with the impacts of the highway connecting Cuiaba to Porto Velho. This road was created going through the valleys of Jauru and Guapore, in a region where there was a huge forest reserve and exactly where the Nambiquara would live. Lastly, the creation of BR-158 in the region of Araguaia affected dramatically the Xavante, Karaja and Kaiapo communities since it enabled the permanent contact of these societies with a numerous contingent of non-indigenous.

Therefore, since the colonial aspirations aimed by the Portuguese Empire, the conquest of Amazon lands and persecution against autochthonous communities have been present in Mato Grosso's history. This colonial inheritance based on nepotism combined with the poor administration of public territories have facilitated the commodification of lands for their exploitation by capitalists. However, because of the lack of state infrastructure, this region would only become a target of intensive expropriation after the 1960s, when the dictatorship began to implement policies to consolidate its "integration" into the national political economy (Paulino 2013). This process was made possible thanks to many rounds of investments employed by the

World Bank as well as international and national US agencies in order to occupy the “empty lands” and explore the natural resources within the Amazon, as predicted under trade agreements signed in the preambles of WWII (Silva 1996). If there was a void in the region, it was an accumulation void, since self-sustaining settlements have dotted the region through a centuries-long process of occupation. Thus, after benefiting the financing and planning of private activities in MT, what is observed nowadays is an uneven economic development that benefits a small rural elite and presents high levels of land concentration and environmental impacts. The next sections of this paper aim to analyze the neoliberal processes that led Mato Grosso’s rapid development in the XX century until it reached its current position as the world’s largest producer of soybeans and big influence over the Brazilian GDP.

### **3. Agro-Neoliberalism as The Emerging Norm of Agribusiness Expansion**

In a globalized world with increasing needs to nourish and feed its growing population, structural failures are evidenced when issues such as food insecurity remain a constant subject of discussion in different sectors of society (Damaceno 2021). Analysis and critiques of the impacts of food governance can miss some complexities and be better addressed when it comes to the fact that we now have a globally integrated food system. However, the recent volatility in food prices and financial crisis that accentuated starvation levels have highlighted the ways development in contrasting parts of the world can have multiple and wide-ranging impacts (Clapp and Fuchs 2009). More specifically to the Latin American context, authors have paid decent attention to the consequences of the model of foreign investment that puts countries’ economies under dependent specialization patterns and places them within a more vulnerable position against global crises.

Wise and Vetlmeyer (2018) define the concept of dependency as a “subordinate relationship among formally independent nations whose scope of relations of production of the subordinated nations are modified or redesigned to secure the amplified reproduction of dependency patterns” (235). This framework helps understanding the paths of development and production practices that defined the structural dependency of commodities in Latin America as well as the reasons for their establishment. Moreover, Lewellen (1995) argues that the causes for underdevelopment are deeply connected to Western expansion and persist because of unequal power relationships between the richer and poorer nations. In this sense, countries are condemned to impoverishment not because they lack technology or capital but because of their placement within the structure of world capitalism. Due to colonial inheritance and unequal terms of trade (the widening gaps between prices for raw materials and manufactured goods), underdeveloped nations are prevented from developing local manufacturing capabilities by foreign competition at the same time they desperately need foreign capital. This element was seen as an opportunity by multinationals to profitably invest as state-protected monopolies in domestic production. Therefore, what was seen in Brazil after 1964 was the government assuming a strong guiding role in the economy, combining import substitution policies with an openness to foreign investors in order to receive foreign investments and access to industrial technology.

This approach followed a model of capitalist development that was theorized by mainstream development economists during the 1950s and 1960s as a matter of economic growth and modernization of the corresponding infrastructure and institutions framework. The modernization theory took form as the dynamics of economic growth and institutional reform, but it was grounded in the idea of the transformation into a modern industrial capitalist system of

an agrarian society and macroeconomic system, one based on pre-capitalist relations of production and a traditional communalist culture (Wise and Veltmeyer 2018). In this regard, dependency theory is seen as a key Latin American contribution that introduced a Southern perspective to development theory. In this sense, the main arguments defended by dependency theory were that the center-periphery structure of North-South relations are disadvantageous for countries on the periphery, and that the development of countries at the center of the system and the underdevelopment of economies on the periphery are interrelated.

Moreover, the Washington Consensus was a set of economic policy prescriptions that were boosted by the USA and its imperialist institutional arms (such as the World Bank, the IMF and the WTO) in order to set a neoliberal policy reform agenda in underdeveloped countries and to liberate the “forces of economic freedom” from the regulatory constraints of the development state (Wise and Veltmeyer 2018). In this sense, the main institutional mechanisms for reactivating the capital accumulation process and forcing economic growth was a program of market-oriented or friendly structural reforms designed to bring a ‘free market’ form of capitalism. These included the opening of countries’ economies for globalization, the privatization of means of production and enterprise, deregulation of product capital and labor markets, the liberalization of the flow of investment capital and trade as well as administrative decentralization.

However, authors have argued how these structural reforms and austerity measures designed the World Bank and the IMF in relation to inequality can give rise to both the emergence of socioeconomic powers rooted in widespread or deep social inequalities and to intersectional forces (above social domains as national borders or class) seeking to reinforce or overturn those inequalities. In the case of Brazil, Burity (2008) argues that the assimilation of

impersonal capitalist moral order has managed to constitute itself on the basis of a naturalization of inequality. This means that, by imposing the capitalist institutions of the modern world to its society without raising a moral understanding of the social relations that limit or restrain certain individuals and their social conditions, Brazil has reinforced the long term roots of unequal social relations that constitute its formation as a nation-state (Burity 2008). As argued by Jesse Souza (2003), a leading Brazilian social theorist:

The naturalization of social inequality in peripheral countries of recent modernization, such as Brazil, may be more adequately perceived as a consequence, not stemming from an alleged pre-modern and personalistic heritage, but precisely the opposite, that is, as resulting from an effective process of modernization of great proportions which increasingly takes over the country as from the early 19th century. (17)

When it comes to the integration of dependent economies into the neoliberal food regime, there are several evidences that demonstrate the World Bank (WB) role in the formulation, articulation, induction, and expansion of transnational and national agricultural development policies that contributed to the valuation of capital in agriculture and accelerated the commodification of rural lands in dependent countries (Pereira 2015). The need to feed hungry populations and Neo-Malthusian concerns with the imminence of food crises in the Third World have led to policies of economic incentives to ‘traditional’ farmers who were willing to increase their production and follow the capitalist criteria of profitability (Schultz 1964). In addition to that, the WB’s involvement with the so-called Green Revolution was decisive for the development of new agricultural technologies and products for extensive production as genetically modified seeds (GM), chemical fertilizers and more powerful machinery. The lobbying of international and US national agencies and their input of technical resources was

very important for the directions of this process and helped on not overloading US foreign policy. Sponsored by the Rockefeller Foundation, and afterwards by the Ford Foundation, the green revolution spread during the 1960s and reached its peak during the 70s, based on the creation of agricultural research centers, credit provision and infrastructure programs, and basic education and health in the countryside of various Third World countries (Perkins 1997).

The presence of private companies in defining the agendas of discussion and shaping the distribution of costs and benefits of the resulting rules and regulations shows that corporate power in global food governance has been present since its creation and establishment. Because of their concentrated capital, Clapp and Fuchs (2009) identify three ways in which corporations have been influencing the food system. First, instrumental power can be defined as attempts to wield in policy process through international industrial lobbying or political campaign financing. Second, a structural perspective of power is able to address how corporations are able to affect the input side of the political process. This happened through the ability given to these companies to punish and reward countries and individuals for their policy choices by relocating investments. Another way of observing the private sector structural control over the food market is by the fact that they have received the capacity to adopt, implement and enforce privately set rules seen as “forms of regulation” even though they were not developed in the public sphere. Lastly, the power of legitimacy comes within the normalization of the capitalist discourse that attempts to socialize politicians and the public sphere into accepting “truths” and creating political legitimacy over certain approaches of development.

This is evident in the development history of Mato Grosso and even nowadays with the presence of international financial stakeholders from countries as the USA, Germany, Canada, the UK and Japan controlling agricultural companies and productive land plots in the region

(Frederico and Almeida 2019). In addition, a confirmation of their economic power is the fact that only 5 companies accounted for more than half (51.7%) of the US\$ 15 billion accumulated in MT through exports from January and December 2013 (Araújo 2014). According to data collected from the Ministry of Development, Industry and Foreign Trade, Bunge (Dutch company based in NYC) exported from MT during 2013 the amount of US\$ 2.7 billion, which is equivalent to a share of 17% of total exports. ADM (USA company) got a slice of just over 10%, with US\$ 1.6 billion. Cargill (USA company), US\$ 1.4 billion and approximately 9%. Louis Dreyfus (French company) exported a total of US\$ 1.2 billion, which is over 8%. Amaggi, the only Brazilian company among the top-5, represented 7% of total exports, with US\$1.1 billion.

Finally, the concentrated power of these transnationals confirm a new relation of dependency that is associated with the latest advance in the process of capitalist development in the form of extractivism and globalization. In this sense, proponents of neo-dependency theory propose that the latest advance of capital on a global scale has created a neo-colonial system of global production in which countries on the (Latin American) periphery are forced into a new relationship of dependency around the export of primary commodities and the influx of ‘resource seeking’ capital (Wise and Veltmeyer 2018). Therefore, this new scenario is characterized by global networks of monopoly capital through which large corporations can expand their services, as well as productive and commercial activities, via mechanisms such as outsourcing or subcontracting to peripheral regions in search of cheap and flexible labor forces through labor arbitrage. In addition, another pillar of this new global architecture of monopoly capital is financialization, which involves a growing reliance on fictitious or speculative capital rather than on productive capital and leads to massive frauds and recurrent crises, as well as the concentration and centralization of capital (Wise and Veltmeyer 2018). Thus, an inescapable



feature of capitalism in this form is the deepening of unequal development, social inequalities and increased poverty.

### **3.1 The State as the Central Player in Neoregulation**

Even though large agribusiness transnational corporations play a crucial role in the definitions of the neoliberal food regime, it is also important to recognize the central role played by the state in providing political and policy context for the establishment of the principal economic agents. Otero (2012) makes use of the term *neoregulation* when he argues that states continue to be key actors to the deployment of neoliberalism and its practices. Since the 1980s, this ideology that vilified state intervention and glorified the private sector have benefited the predominance of private agribusiness corporations in food production and distribution.

Agriculture has been a prominent subject of discussion within the World Trade Organization, which is the most significant supranational regulatory body for commercial practices. Within WTO, proposals to reduce trade distortions and the discussion of agreements that oppose to protectionist practices of developed countries and push for advancements in developing nations have been hard to advance even after successive rounds of negotiations (Otero 2012). However, the most relevant point is that, whether in agreeing or not to participate in international agreements or developing national legislation, governments have been the main players in implementing neoregulation.

For Latin America, economic liberalization generally involved the unilateral end of protectionist policies; the opening of agricultural markets with the reduction or elimination of tariffs and import permits; privatization or dismantling of government agencies for rural credit, infrastructure, marketing or technical assistance; the end or

reversal of agrarian reforms; or the reorientation of food policies centered on domestic markets towards an agricultural economy geared on exports. (Otero 2012, 288)

Several examples can be pointed out in the case of the Brazilian state. (Otero 2012) notes that the country was an emblematic example of resistance in relation to the market of transgenic soybeans until 2006, when Lula's government succumbed to pressures from large landowners and Monsanto's lobbying efforts which had in fact been smuggling transgenic seeds from Argentina. Surprisingly enough, after 15 years of the legalization and adoption of transgenic crops, large landowners are now in an uproar against their resulting dependency on Monsanto since it has become economically disadvantageous due to the corporation's aspirations for profit. Moreover, another example that is a constant reason for debate is the existence of the Kandir Law, established in 1996. With the intent of making Brazilian commodities' prices more competitive in the international market and stimulate exports, this law exempts agro exports from taxations, following the global tendency (República 1996; Presidência da República 1996). The Kandir Law has also been an object of complaint from certain regional governments, including Mato Grosso's, since it reduces tax collection and increases fiscal deductions, making such impact in the region not so advantageous for local communities and public ministrations (Sanchez 2017). Lastly, Otero (2012) describes the dichotomy of the neoregulation approach between developed and dependent nations. The author argues that the neoliberal reform was implemented in advanced capitalist countries agriculture only partially, as they continue to subsidize and protect their agricultural sectors with billions of dollars per year, placing Latin American producers at great competitive disadvantage.

These are clear examples of a neoliberalism pathway that is translated in processes that range from adjustments of small-scale farming and local communities to the escalation of agro-

industrial production, the monopolization of trade, the widespread financialization of agriculture and the subjugation of public policies to strong market pressures. As a result, modern food systems under neoliberal pressures are increasingly focused on short-term economic gains, land concentration, environmental impacts and the legitimization of political hegemonies at the expense of issues of nourishment and health. Another effect that has been observed in the case of Mato Grosso is the phenomenon of a Dutch disease. Because of such a dependence on the export of raw commodities such as soybeans and cotton, the state's inefficiency in generating innovative and sustainable industrial practices that generate social impact and economic development for the regional community and society is certified (Ferrer Silva 2012).

Ioris (Ioris 2017b) defines the neoliberalization of agriculture as a contingent, place-specific convergence of various production and commercialization practices organized according to an ideological construct that privileges market-based policies and the intensification of capital circulation and accumulation without ever removing the state from the spheres of production, commercialization and legitimation. It largely follows the fetishism of free market relations while at the same time perpetuates calls for state interventions aimed, for instance, to mitigate price oscillations and avoid over-production. More importantly, agro-neoliberalism in Brazil seems to offer the prospect of a bright future based on the intensification of market exchange and rapid accumulation of capital. It is permeated by the promise of shared progress, while in effect it reinforces mechanisms of exclusion and exploitation.

The case of Mato Grosso is a clear example of how neoliberal efforts can drastically change the landscape of a region in order to fulfill market needs but does not generate the desired social impact or improvement. Even though the economic development of the region is clear through the advancement of municipalities created in the last 50 years, the improvement in

standard of living is not enjoyed by everyone and levels of inequality are increasing rapidly (Araujo and Boaventura 2020). Nonetheless, it is necessary to have a more specific understanding on how this process took place in order to understand the current scenario and consequences generated by the neoliberal approach.

#### **4 Military Dictatorship and the Inauguration of Mato Grosso's Amazon**

It was under the military dictatorship from 1964 to 1985 when agricultural modernization and rural development received important stimulus in Mato Grosso. Along with the new methods of production and improvement of agricultural techniques imposed by the Green Revolution, including the genetic modification of crops and new methods of soil fertilization (Stevenson 2018), a new type of colonization started to be implanted in the region (Cruz 2014). Aware of the new intentions for the land and with a capitalist development model in mind, the state elected a specific social class that would be ideal for the implementation of the commodities production project. With a bigger concentration of white communities due to immigration processes from Italy, Poland and Germany, Southern families were elected to manage the region's agricultural modernization processes. The intentions of whitening the population and bringing workforce post slavery abolition enabled the Brazilian state to receive many European immigrants looking to be settled in the states of Parana, Santa Catarina and Rio Grande do Sul. However, after over 2 centuries receiving European families, the federal government was starting to face uncertainties and pressures to deal with burning land conflicts in the South of Brazil. Therefore, there was a clear policy of favoring migrants from other states in detriment of the rural populations of Mato Grosso, which had identical or more serious problems. The autochthonous communities were marginalized during MT's development process while opportunities were given to Southern newcomers (Cruz 2014). Finally, these families which already had better education levels and

detained economic advantages over the MT population were attracted by the promise of social betterment and the possibility to own a larger rural property (Ribeiro 2013). The effect of these migratory policies is observed nowadays in MT with a population almost 5 times bigger than in 1970 (3.5 million in 2010), and 40 percent of these being migrants from other states or countries (Marinho et al. 2016).

Moreover, the state employed a series of activities related to land demarcation and changing legislative instruments in order to commodify lands as well as displace and supplant autochthonous communities with new settlers. This generated a process of land speculation that enabled many corruption practices in order to occupy and concentrate the “cheap and productive” lands in Mato Grosso as much as possible. There is evidence that private corporations played a key role in this process, from selecting and bringing workers to controlling all infrastructural efforts and place-framing the municipalities of the region. This section of the article is willing to explain how this process occurred.

#### **4.1 Changing Policies for the Privatization of Lands in Mato Grosso**

Ribeiro (2013) argues that the Land Law created during imperial times and the possibilities for an agrarian reform were seen as controversial topics in Brazilian society since their reservation of “vacant lands” for colonization. As the federal government looked for solutions to avoid controversies, President Castelo Branco announced the Land Statute (Estatuto da Terra) in 1964 which specified conditions and details that enabled migratory campaigns directed to Mato Grosso and the Amazon Forest. Laranjeira (1983) explains that the hereditary captaincy model adopted by the Portuguese Crown did not enable the centralization of territory and population control within the colonization process. Instead, this administration policy

focused on economic development and the creation of rural aristocracies, since it would only allow the exploitation of lands for production to those considered “friends with the king” or part of a wealthy elite of the time (Laranjeira 1983).

After that, the regional provinces created for land control given by the crown became federative states during the Republican regime. In this sense, the Land Statute, created through the Law n. 4.504 and announced in November 30 of 1964, increased the economic features on the process of acquisition of “vacant lands”, and diminished social and cultural norms attached to the colonization process (Ribeiro 2013). Following the definition of directed colonization, the state imposed two categories for colonization that would be driven by public policies: the official and the private. According to Laranjeira’s (1983) definition, both categories aimed at giving access to ownership of land and to promote its economic use, through the exercise of agricultural, livestock, and agro-industrial activities. However, the main difference between the approaches is the fact that official colonization projects would be guided by the State while private colonization projects would be led by corporations.

Cruz (2014) explains that, based on the new understanding of colonization projects, around 30 official colonization projects were established during the 1950s and 1960s, occupying approximately 400,000 hectares. Nonetheless, these attempts resulted in failures as these official projects were far from being able to follow the increasing migratory fluxes to the region. As explained by Castro (2002) the lack of road access to the colonizing projects and areas, the scarcity of schools and hospitals, the inexistence of technical assistance to the settlers and the absence of credit provision prove that the state did not provide the minimum requirements related to infrastructure. Moreover, the author argues that the federal government expectation looked for settling at least a million families in official colonization projects along the highways

that started to be constructed in the beginning of the 1970s. However, in 1973 the government had already evaluated that the expected results had not been achieved and thus the occupation of the region by large agricultural enterprises should be promoted.

Since the governmental policy that arranged the arrival of new farmers did not provide any type of infrastructure nor support, responsibilities such as education and healthcare access were relegated to the private colonizers. In this sense, there are many reports complaining about moving trucks that got stuck in mud extensions of unstable roads and having to live under plastic canvas shacks (Ribeiro 2013). As affirmed under the decree n. 59.428, from October 27 of 1966, according to the Land Statute:

[...] the administrator of the colonization district or center is responsible for the implementation, coordination and consolidation of services or technical, administrative and community activities of the colonization units until their total self-sufficiency. And still, the administrative manager will substitute the public authority in the region. (Brasil 1966), unpagged)

The failure of official colonization projects served as a justification for a new strategy of occupation in the region, in detriment of small scale producers. Castro (1988) points out to the fact that, by 1978, Mato Grosso did not have a single official project and transnational corporations of the agribusiness sector were already occupying large extensions of territory. On this matter, Hebette and Acevedo Marin (1979) explain that even though the colonization activities were accomplished by private projects, state efforts were not absent and can be directly associated with colonization efforts. Several types of credit and tax incentive programs were offered to increase the commodification of lands by companies in the Amazon. Other examples

are mentioned by the author such as the creation policies that provided support to private projects and investments on communication, transportation and general infrastructure. Even though the region had low levels of population density, the lands made available by the Government of Mato Grosso and the federal government were still inhabited and occupied by communities of indigenous peoples, extractive populations as well as traditional and small farmers.

Barrozo (2010) defines the agrarian policy employed by the state as an “agrarian counter-reform” because of two reasons. First, this is because the Land Statute resolution completely disregarded the spontaneous occupation of these lands (through the migration of rural workers from the Northeast, the South and other Brazilian regions to the Amazon), and employed a state-directed colonization which limited and controlled land distribution over certain regions of the Amazon. Second, the state induced, encouraged, favored and protected, both politically and economically, the appropriation of “vacant lands” occupied by tribal communities by large companies and investors.

Considering the colonization definitions as communities get settled, the economic factor defines and establishes the conditions for frontier expansion that have been debated because of its socioeconomic, cultural and environmental aspects. Castro (1988) argues that even though the articulation between private capital and the State generated two models for colonization, each with specific objectives, both were articulated and focused in the occupation of lands by capital. Moreover, according to Ribeiro (2013), the frontier expansion question generates academic and scientific discussions that go above the insertion of international capital in the financing of colonization activities. This is because it is impossible to detach the social and cultural influences emerged from the annihilation of the communities that used to occupy the region as well as the arrival of pioneers who did not have specific knowledge about the new reality that



they would face. Aligned with this discussion is the complete disregard for natural resources, considered unserviceable or useless at the time, which generate debates around the possible outcomes of passive policies that enabled the economic appropriation of these resources.

#### **4.2 The Separation of the State Mato Grosso and Special Programs for Land Occupation**

Another process that was key for the occupation of Mato Grosso's Amazon was the territorial separation that generated the state of Mato Grosso do Sul, located in the south of the current territory of MT. Even though there were movements pro-division that dated back to the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, it was only after the years of 1960s and 1970s when this movement started to be endorsed by the federal government (Silva 1996). However, before confirming the territorial separation, the Brazilian government made sure that the Amazon region of MT was already going through an institutional process that would guarantee its occupation by agro-industrial landowners.

Silva (1996) mentions that the strategy of exploring natural resources within the Amazon territory added to the agro-export dependent economic ties was already established under trade agreements with the USA that were signed in the preambles of WWII. According to the author, the tentative movements towards occupying "vacant lands" led by FBC that started in 1953 already consisted of economic agreements with the Americans. In this regard, the creation of official bodies to support the occupation process such as PIN, PROTERRA, POLAMAZONIA, POLONOROESTE, SUDAM, SUDECO, POLOCENTRO and INCRA evidence that the process of territorial division, which only took place in 1977, was looking for benefiting the financing and planning of private activities in the north of MT. The process of official and private colonization as well as the combination of activities developed by these governmental bodies

during the 1960s and 1970s, due to the division of the state, were able to allow companies to explore the Amazon region of Mato Grosso (Ribeiro 2013).

Thus, from 1966 to 1978, the Development Company of the State of Mato Grosso (Codemat) realized a series of direct land selling policies through biddings and state concessions, along with the land regularization of older agricultural colonies established during the 1940s and 1950s, and the legitimation and recognition of private land properties (Cavalcante and Fernandes 2006). In that process, numerous new urban and rural places were produced due to the operation of private and public colonization companies and the mobilization of social groups from different parts of the country. The Brazilian state appropriated most of MT's land without considering original populations and attracted national and international companies through various forms of fiscal incentives and subsidies for those willing to produce export commodities. Mato Grosso, in particular, was the “paradise of private colonization” projects (Ioris 2017a).

#### **4.3 Strategies for Land Accumulation**

Even though there was a huge extension of lands available, the Land Statute still defined a limit of 10 thousand hectares for each colonization project. However, one of the ways found for appropriating larger land plots was through the acquisition of property on behalf of a third party individual (Ribeiro 2013). This practice is known as “laranjas” (oranges) and is a means of circumventing policies that would limit land ownership of sale. Using laranjas, land grabbers would maintain an appearance of legality while appropriating extensive territories. Campbell (2015) adds up to the comprehension of this activity when he states that it is not required that the laranja be an actual living person, which enabled several properties to be assigned to phantom

names with legitimate social security numbers that private companies would purchase from southern associates in Mato Grosso.

Information regarding the lands of Mato Grosso would be propagated all around Brazil and the rest of the world through advertisings and people who would dedicate their professional lives on land selling and speculation. According to Moreno (2007) and Lenharo (1985), several means of communication such as radios and newspapers from the Southeast and the South of Brazil would announce “cheap and productive” lands in Mato Grosso, with ease of purchase. After accessing the colonization process that led to the current County of Canarana, Ribeiro (2013) was able to locate the lands acquired by COOPERCOL and identify documents that provide the names of the ownership title holders as well as the respective values of the time and updated to nowadays currency.

**Table 1** – Land prices per hectare in Canarana in Brazilian cruzeiros (Cr\$), deflated into Brazilian reais (R\$) and converted into US Dollars (\$). Prices from Dec. 2012.

Farm name(Representative name)	Date	Currency	Land Plot Prices	Hectares	Price per Hectare
Santa Lucia (Frederico Marquezan)	11/22/1960	Cruzeiros (Cr\$)	Cr\$ 113,157.60	8,967.00	Cr\$ 12.62
Santa Lucia (Frederico Marquezan)	12/31/2012	Deflated into Reais (R\$)	R\$ 17,432. 01	8,967.00	R\$ 1.94
Santa Lucia (Frederico Marquezan)	12/31/2012	Converted into Dollars (\$)	\$ 8,530.46	8,967.00	\$ 0.95
Santa Genovena (Boris Francisco)	12/27/1960	Cruzeiros (Cr\$)	Cr\$ 128,489.47	9,999.00	Cr\$ 12.98

Santa Genovena (Boris Francisco)	12/31/2012	Deflated into Reais (R\$)	R\$ 19,390.89	9,999.00	R\$ 1.94
Santa Genovena (Boris Francisco)	12/31/2012	Converted into Dollars (\$)	\$ 9,489.05	9,999.00	\$ 0.94
Santa Lucia B (Leoncio da Silva)	11/17/1957	Cruzeiros (Cr\$)	Cr\$ 129,762.00	9,999.00	Cr\$ 12.98
Santa Lucia B (Leoncio da Silva)	12/31/2012	Deflated into Reais (R\$)	R\$ 19,989.93	9,999.00	R\$ 2.00
Santa Lucia B (Leoncio da Silva)	12/31/2012	Converted into Dollars (\$)	\$ 9,782.20	9,999.00	\$ 0.97
Campina do Sonho (Nelson Soares)	10/12/1960	Cruzeiros (Cr\$)	Cr\$ 127,634.40	9,853.00	Cr\$ 12.95
Campina do Sonho (Nelson Soares)	12/31/2012	Deflated into Reais (R\$)	R\$ 20,256.52	9,853.00	R\$ 2.06
Campina do Sonho (Nelson Soares)	12/31/2012	Converted into Dollars (\$)	\$ 9,912.65	9,853.00	\$ 1.00
Sum of the Land Plots		Cruzeiros (Cr\$)	Cr\$ 499,043.47	38,818.00	Cr\$ 12.86
Sum of the Land Plots	12/31/2012	Deflated into Reais (R\$)	R\$ 75,312.75	38,818.00	R\$ 1.94
Sum of the Land Plots	12/31/2012	Converted into Dollars (\$)	\$ 36,854.78	38,818.00	\$ 0.94
Value Paid by COOPERCOOL in Canarana	5/24/1972	Cruzeiros (Cr\$)	Cr\$ 1,707,992.00	38,818.00	Cr\$ 44.00
Value Paid by COOPERCOOL in Canarana	12/31/2012	Deflated into Reais (R\$)	R\$ 6,223,045.01	38,818.00	R\$ 160.31
Value Paid by COOPERCOOL in Canarana	12/31/2012	Converted into Dollars (\$)	\$ 3,045,287.5	38,818.00	\$ 78.45

Source: Collection of original values and monetary change performed by Ribeiro (2013). Conversion into US

Dollars done by the author. Prices are from Dec/2012.

The consequences of such practices were confirmed in a report announced by the Agricultural Planning Commission of the State of Mato Grosso (CEPA) in 1979. It was observed that, between 1950 and 1975, there was an accentuation in the historical trend of land concentration in the region. The index that was 0.79 changed to 0.91, which was considered as land concentration trending to absolute. These numbers represented the state average and are based on the Gini Coefficient for land distribution (Cruz 2014).

#### **4.4 Private and Public Place Framing**

There is much evidence that private companies played a key role in the development of these regions as well as the processes of attracting migrants to work in these expansion projects. One of the most emblematic cases was the formation of the municipality of Sinop (145,000 inhabitants, estimated for 2020 by IBGE) after the acquisition by a company of the same name, *Colonizadora Sinop* (Sinop Colonizer), of a property with 645,000 hectares. Starting with the first streets of Sinop's urban area in 1972, these colonization projects were aggressively advertised to prospective farmers as an opportunity to restart their lives anew, with claims that they were "planting civilizations" and creating a livable Amazon by opening roads and clearing forests and jungles (Ioris 2017a).

Another example of workers' selection and recruitment operation was observed in the process of installation of Sadia's production unit in Lucas do Rio Verde. According to Cruz (2014), Sadia hosted talks and lectures aiming to convince future workers from different parts of the country of the advantages of migrating to Lucas do Rio Verde and work from there, a clear strategy to cheapen the costs of labor in the region. Finally, Volochko (2013) goes even further and claims that some of these companies still exert strict control over the urban landscape of

these municipalities. He mentions the example of the company JAR in Nova Mutum where, after colonizing the region in a process very similar to Sinop, the company still controls a good part of the land market and poor migrants and stigmatized populations are being settled in peripheral parts of the city. This is an example of not only how much control these companies hold in relation to the growing urban space but also is a clear process of socio-spatial segregation being executed. This means that these stigmatized people are suffering a process of exclusion and isolation among social groups. As stated by the author:

The company has built a housing complex formed with around 1.500 houses to host the new workers, known as Tessele Junior. This is a clear process of socio-spatial segregation of an impoverished and migrant population that is attending the needs and strategies of a company that holds enormous power over the creation of an urban space that is getting more controlled and segregated over time. The residents are deeply stigmatized and only go “to the city” (central region or “downtown”) when they receive their wages and need to make groceries or other purchases. (Volochko 2013)

Furthermore, it is important to acknowledge that these processes of development were not only led by private land ownings but also had huge participation of the Brazilian state. Because of the great availability of land, these colonization projects were established together with a smaller number of public colonization schemes, which facilitated their access to the region by heavy investments in public infrastructure. In 1970, the Center-West Development Superintendence (Sudeco), through national and regional development programs, articulated a highways complex project in order to clear the way for public and private colonization projects as rural schools, hospitals and others. These policies originated BR-158 (from Barra do Garças until the border with the state of Pará), BR-163 (Cuiabá – Santarém), and the reconstruction of

BR-364 (Cuiabá – Porto Velho). One of the most important highways for product transportation, BR-163 had several private colonization projects being created on its roadside, which resulted in the creation of the municipalities of Sorriso and Nova Mutum, for example (Cavalcante and Fernandes 2006).

In conclusion, these decades in which the state adopted several policies for the privatization of lands in MT were the result of neoliberal incentives provided by capitalist organizations, especially the World Bank. The migratory campaigns, processes of land demarcation and the creation of legislative apparatus were all tools for the commodification of lands in order to exclude autochthonous communities and adopt a market centered economy. The private sector had a key role in this process through the acquisition of much bigger land plots than what was legally permitted, as well as efforts to cheapen working force. Even though there was a rapid economic development in the region and increasing levels of capital concentration, the consequences of certain policies are only starting to appear a few decades after the beginning of the project. These vary from increasing poverty levels and peripheries in the municipalities of the region to the environmental risks brought by the agricultural practices.

## **5 Consequences and Path to The Present Day**

Since the rounds of investment employed by the World Bank in order to promote a massive commodification of lands in Mato Grosso, the agribusiness sector has never left its position as a crucial element of the Brazilian economy. A reason for this is the fact that, since the downfall of the military dictatorship in the 1980s, the state has been benefitting the implementation of a policy known as market-assisted land reform. This approach is basically defined as supporting the dynamics of land markets and favoring the replacement of rural

producers considered less efficient with others that were more efficient. Another reason is the fact that the governments of Fernando Collor (1990-1992), Itamar Franco (1992-1995), and Fernando Henrique Cardoso (1992-2003) made the agribusiness sector a macroeconomic priority in order to generate surpluses in trade balances. The effect of these policies was a process of “land reconcentration” and the establishment of transnational companies whose owners detain both political and economic power in the region. In addition, a process of consolidation of the agribusiness sector over the Brazilian political superstructure has enabled farmers and producers to maintain their agenda even during the leftist governments of the Workers Party (PT, in its Brazilian acronym) that led the country from 2003-2016. This section of the article is willing to evaluate how this processes took place.

### **5.1 A New Rural Model and Processes of Land Concentration**

After several efforts from the military dictatorship to occupy and establish a commodities production project in the region of Mato Grosso, it is clear that the state did not completely succeed in its initial project. With the downfall of the dictatorship in the 1980s that would eventually culminate in a return to democracy and a new federal constitution in 1988, the government failed in delivering certain promises to the people and companies that migrated to this region. More especially, the abandonment from the state and private companies due to the lack of fiscal investments and subsidies as well as a negligence to deliver infrastructural projects that would meet the needs of the population led to the failure of many colonization projects. The consequences of this was the fact that many farmers could not maintain themselves in the region because of the lack of basic conditions for production and self-sustenance.



Cavalcante and Fernandes (2006) argue that the precarious infrastructure and the inexistence of sufficient government rural credit for production generated a process of “land reconcentration” in the region. With the departure of many farmers in order to move to the newly urban areas looking for job opportunities or even to go back to their original states, prosperous landowners expanded their areas even more through the purchase of these land properties. The effect of that is the fact that, nowadays, Mato Grosso presents one of the highest land concentration index of the country. The degree of land concentration refers to the structural repartition of agricultural holdings within the territory, and reflects the extent of farmland controlled by small and large agricultural landowners (Nutrition 2022). This indicator is expressed by the authors based on the Gini Coefficient for land distribution, which increases our comprehension over the expansion of rural properties and their areas based on the analysis of change in land structures.

Moreover, the authors argue that this process is still happening in MT through a result of state policies that served to “reward or pay favors” and conditioned land possession in favor of those who produce in the territory on capitalist means. In other words, the government clearly created policies that benefited “a new rural model”, characterized by higher levels of agroindustrial integration, more direct intervention from large corporations, multipurpose technologies and, ultimately, high land concentration indexes. This argument is supported by the fact that, from 1992-2003, Mato Grosso was the second state with most areas registered in the “National System of Rural Register” (Cavalcante and Fernandes 2006). Given the World Bank’s financial and technical assistance, efforts to propel the reconfiguration of the state, prioritizing the municipalization of land policy, public-private partnerships to implement rural policies and private land titles have made present in MT and increased the mercantile offer of land (Pereira

2020). According to the WB, these actions could reduce transaction costs and make land markets more dynamic, favoring the replacement of rural producers considered less efficient with others who were more efficient. The effects are seen nowadays with problems such as the concentration of land ownership, production standards, and inequality of income and wealth in the rural economy linked to the functioning of land markets and institutions.

With these changes happening mostly in the areas where the soy production is being territorialized, more lands are incorporated by private properties through several forms of appropriation, which affects the land-tenure structure of the region. Cavalcante and Fernandes (2006) present the hypothesis that the soy complex establishment is the main driver of the commodification of lands due to the partnerships between the MT's government and multinational companies such as Bunge Alimentos S.A., Cargill Agricola S.A., Archer Daniels Midland Company (ADM), Sachetti and Grupo Andre Maggi (AMAGGI). In this regard, the deliberated public investments and legislative support for the success of soy enterprises enable the conditions for land appropriation. In addition, state highways and side roads as well as ports and railroads are strategically created to enable production flows, which facilitates the expansion of municipalities based on soy production. This claim is supported by the fact that the recent establishment of soy municipalities have taken place around the highways that connect Cuiaba-Comodoro (BR-070 and BR-174), Cuiaba-Alto Araguaia (BR-364, BR-183, BR-070), Cuiaba-Ouro Branco do Sul (BR-183) and Barra do Garcas-Agua Boa (BR-158).

## **5.2 The Implementation of a Market-Assisted Land Reform**

This moment of great turbulence due to the national changes in power structure forced the agricultural sector to become even more dependent on the federal government sectoral

policies in relation to external markets. The increasing levels in rural poverty, the fact that agrarian conflicts and violence against landless peasants had achieved international repercussion and that the Movimento dos Trabalhadores Rurais Sem Terra (Landless Rural Workers Movement –MST) was gaining notorious support with a growing number of occupations increased pressures over the government for an agrarian reform. However, the relationship between the Brazilian government with the World Bank condemned the instrument of expropriation for land reform and exalted the implementation of what is called market-assisted land reform (MALR). As Pereira (2020) states:

According to the WB, MALR was more efficient than the expropriation model because:

- a) it cost less, since land was acquired through mercantile bargaining between voluntary buyers and sellers; b) it had a voluntary nature, was decentralized, and "demand driven", which favored participation and the autonomy of beneficiaries; c) it was politically feasible, since voluntary transactions did not penalize landowners; d) cooperation was encouraged since the acquisition of land would occur through communitarian associations; e) the productive development of peasants was stimulated, since it was assumed that activities would be planned before the acquisition of land, with grants being provided for this purpose and to stimulate associationism; f) land markets would be dynamized, the basic requirement for the improvement of economic efficiency; g) it would contribute to the formalization of property rights, to the extent that only legally titled property were transacted; h) it was decentralized and not very bureaucratic. –

(Pereira 2020)

At the same time, the neoliberal adjustments followed by the governments of Fernando Collor (1990-1992), Itamar Franco (1992-1995), and Fernando Henrique Cardoso (1992-2003)

had as a central aspect the country's necessity to generate big surpluses in trade balances, which transformed the agro-export sector as a macroeconomic priority in order to fulfill this role (Cruz 2014). The plan of deepening hyperinflation and reaching monetary stabilization with the Real Plan in 1994 was imperative for the country's improvement on agriculture. The construction of a research network established by the federal government through EMBRAPA (Empresa Brasileira de Pesquisa Agropecuaria) and the financial incentives provided by the government enabled some companies to take advantage of this prosperous scenario. Therefore, by the end of the 90s, Brazil already had a dynamic agribusiness sector with an important class of professional and entrepreneurial farmers that held both economic and political power (Mueller and Mueller 2016). The contexts of commercial openness and globalization induced Brazil's return to its "agro-export vocation" project and defined from there the role agribusiness would play in the national economy and development processes until current days.

Helped by currency devaluation policies in 1999; booming commodity prices in the 2000s, foreign investments in productive, and speculative, ventures; and growing demands for soybeans from Asia and especially China, Mato Grosso went through a revitalization of place-framing at the agricultural frontier (Ioris 2017a). Another crucial factor were the adjustments in production, targeting primarily biofuel and export commodities, which helped the state to recover and expand at an unanticipated pace. As a result, both the established transnational (Monsanto, ADM, Bunge, Cargill, Dreyfus) and the new, rapidly growing Brazilian transnational corporations (Amaggi, BR Foods, JBS, Marfrig) played a decisive role in terms of business activities and influence behind policymaking (Ioris 2017a). In fact, Paulino (2013) argues that one of the most important features for the agribusiness sector success during this time was the

consolidation of their influence in the legislature, which strengthened their hegemony over the Brazilian superstructure.

### **5.3 The Political Hegemony of Agricultural “Pioneers”**

Authors argue that the reinvention and success of the agriculture frontier in Mato Grosso has not only to do with the state’s determination in the farming sector but also with the interests of transnational corporations in the region and their political influence. In order to achieve legitimized political domination over these regions, land and economic concentration have seen to be key factors. The main local political leadership originate from the families of the “pioneer migrants from the South” who own substantial shares of agricultural companies. These people are seen as the “natural leaders” since their ancestors have achieved economic success through crops production and were able to establish their businesses in a place where many have tried and failed.

One of the main examples of this is the case of Blairo Maggi, who is the owner of a family business established by his father a few decades earlier, called Amaggi. His company is currently one of the largest soybean companies in the world, responsible for around 5% of the total amount of soybean in the country, and increasingly involved in large public infrastructure, transnational trade and financial services. Blairo was the governor of Mato Grosso from 2003 to 2010, elected senator for the same state in 2010 and was eventually nominated as the new Secretary of State for Agriculture of the Michel Temer government, in 2016 (Ioris 2017b).

Many others could be cited as examples of crossover between political and economic elites. This process is also supported by a common misunderstanding in the population’s mentality that believes that good entrepreneurs will also be good politicians. Nevertheless, the

fact is that this political entry gives access to public resources that will be used to fulfill the interests of agribusiness elites. In addition, it enables the expansion of relations between companies and the State, which could favor the allocation of public funds in strategic areas for the “tradings”. This discussion was brought up to debates in MT during the last years of Blairo as a governor, after he was accused of offering fiscal incentives to Amaggi (Cruz 2014). However, it was not enough to hold back his political prospects since he was elected MT’s senator after renouncing the governor position in 2010.

Most of the politicians in the House of Representatives and Senate are openly affiliated with the agribusiness sector and defend the farmers’ and companies’ interests in Brazilian policy-making. Research conducted by Estadão/Broadcast, in 2018, has revealed that around 210 out of the 513 deputies and 26 out of the 81 senators are actively lobbying towards agribusiness interests. At least 42 of these elected politicians are farmers or owners of agricultural companies themselves and another 80 admit to have connections with the agribusiness sector (Pereira 2018). Known as “ruralistas”, their representation of the agricultural elites and constant involvement in politics is usually followed by the argument that these people were the “pioneers” to arrive and thus know better the necessities and struggles of their region.

Pessôa (2007) identifies a dichotomy related to the reality of each individual when considering the definition of pioneers in Mato Grosso. According to the author, MT’s society defines as “pioneer” the families which arrived in the region and reached economic and political success. This interpretation disregards the existence of the “pioneers” who did not achieve better economic and social conditions but were still crucial for the alienation of lands and knowledge construction of the region. Therefore, Pessôa (2007) defines the term “pioneers” as not only an invention, but also an apparatus that categorizes certain individuals of society as a “higher class”

based on monetary subjectivities of a given moment. Broadly speaking, the “ruralista” way has been marked by attacking vulnerable traditional communities, environmental destruction and land market directions that have worsened already precarious position of many small farmers.

#### **5.4 The Workers Party Complicity with Agro-Neoliberalism**

The process of agribusiness consolidation in the political sphere coincided with the unprecedented rise of an opposition party that led the country from 2003-2016. Since Lula’s election in 2002, there was an expectation from part of civil society that the state would intervene more in monopolistic agricultural practices and target agribusiness in order to reach a popular agrarian reform. However, it is meaningful to observe that even with the federal government’s transition from neoliberal parties occupying the presidency to the Workers Party in the 2000s, the agribusiness sector never left its position as a crucial element of the Brazilian economy. Even though there were some efforts addressed by PT’s government, the constant resistance and boycott by the “ruralistas” has kept the agribusiness sector in the centrality of the government’s agenda.

In fact, one of the first actions from the newly elected president was to announce the II National Plan of Agrarian Reform (PNRA II) which set financial targets to purchase land for 130,000 families in four years and to settle 400,000 in agrarian reform projects (Pereira 2020). This plan was followed by the failure of the first national agrarian reform plan, which was initiated in 1986 at the beginning of the re-democratization process, and anticipated the settling of a million families, but was only able to reach 6% of that goal. Even though Lula publicly announced his willingness to follow with the first target, his government still had to present a more viable plan in order to establish rural policies, since the expropriation of lands was

discarded. Hence, the process of building alliances to both gain election and govern led Lula and the first popular government in Brazilian history to abandon certain parameters and reposition itself in relation to the structural reform project that had seemingly brought PT to power (Paulino 2013).

As stated by Pereira (2020), the Lula administration operated an accommodation between the agrarian reform policy and MALR policies, funded by the World Bank. During this process, the MST was isolated and abandoned the struggle against MALR (against transgenic crops, deforestation, the indiscriminate use of agrotoxins, and the strong subsidies for the production of commodities for exports, as well as struggles for more credit and public technical assistance) in order to preserve dialogue and the construction of common agendas with trade union organizations. Still, even by the end of Lula's second four-year term of office, only 162,387 families had been settled (Paulino 2013). Official statements, however, claim higher numbers in order to support that PT administered the biggest land reform in Brazilian history (INCRA 2011).

On the other hand, it is important to acknowledge here that both houses of congress had massive participation of the "ruralistas", as previously stated. In this sense, most of these agrarian policies faced resistance, boycotts and had to be reformulated in order to become official. In this sense, one of the policies employed by the Workers Party's government was to call the regularization of lands through formal titling as the same as settling peasants into new rural lands. By considering land title normalization as agrarian reform, the government tripled the number of families settled, even though the vast majority of these families were on land that effectively belonged to them already.



Paulino (2013) adds to this discussion arguing that such policy only benefitted land grabbing and land concentration patterns. This is because the PNRA II legalized millions of hectares of state lands that were privatized through the falsification of documents and the collaboration of corrupt officials. Moreover, the “ruralistas” intransigence with the government has forced constant budget cuts over agrarian programs and even their suspension in certain cases, based on the suspicion of poor administration and corruption. Paulino (2013) presents the information that some 40.4 million hectares were bought for agrarian purposes and have not been distributed yet because the settlement creation process is practically paralyzed due to bureaucratic difficulties imposed by the “ruralistas”. While the federal government has justified land purchases as a way of streamlining the settlement creation process, arguing that it takes far too long to fight in the courts to take-back land illegally absconded from public areas, the fact is that the state lacks the political will needed to dismantle the land grabbing schemes that resulted in privatizing lands that should in fact be used for agrarian reform projects without any burden on public coffers.

What was observed in both Lula’s (2003-2011) and Dilma’s (2011-2016) governments was that the state remained the main player of agriculture production and regional development, as well as the main promoter of neoliberalizing policies, such as the integration with global markets, support to individual farmers and the privatization of roads and infrastructure (Ioris 2017b). This argument is supported by the fact that public credit increased from R\$ 15 billion per year in the 1990s to R\$ 133 billion in 2013 and R\$ 156 billion in 2014, with the overwhelmingly majority of this funding being directed to the agribusiness sector, despite the populist discourse that aims to please both agribusiness and family farming (Ioris 2017b). The result is a paradoxical combination of circumstantial profitability and positive results with

mounting socio-ecological risks and power concentrated in the hands of corporations and rural political leaders.

## **6. Contemporary challenges**

Making a general assessment of the impacts of neoliberalism and agribusiness in Mato Grosso, it is undeniable that the region went through a much quicker developing process in relation to other federal states. The country continues to depend on the financial performance of agribusiness and, according to the electronic page of the Ministry of Agriculture, in 2016, Brazilian trade produced a surplus of US\$ 47.683 billion only because of the contribution of agribusiness (the sector produced a surplus of US\$ 71.307 billion and the rest of the economy had a deficit of US\$ 23.624 billion) (Ioris 2017b). Mato Grosso is the protagonist of agribusiness efforts in the country and led the 2020 productive states ranking with a gross production value of R\$ 136.51 billion and estimates of 75 million tons of grains produced (Ministério da agricultura 2020). Furthermore, this intensification of market exchanges and rapid accumulation of capital in the region represented an increase in the population's quality of life. This is confirmed by the fact that most of the cities within the "soy complex" present higher levels of human development index in relation to the rest of the country (Araujo and Boaventura 2020).

However, this thesis shows how these neoliberal policies led by the state along with private projects were not specifically concerned about the socio-environmental consequences that would be generated by these processes. Even though development is quickly happening and the prospects for the future are showing to be very good, it is crucial that MT addresses some of the structural problems in order to continue in a competitive position in relation to global markets at the same time it continues developing itself. These range from addressing

infrastructural needs in the region while maintaining or strengthening existing environmental policies to dealing with burning social tensions related to class distinctions. In order to continue with the viability of its economic model and ensure environmental conservation, it is crucial that MT looks for alternatives that will enable the sustainable use of protected areas and foster a new, more sustainable and inclusive economy.

## **6.1 The Sense of Shared Progress and Environmental Concerns**

Ioris (2017b) talks about how the soybean-based economy was, and continues to be, constantly portrayed by sector representatives as a fine expression of technological efficiency and administrative know-how. They claim that technologic agribusiness replaced a tradition of chaos, incompetence, and turbulence typically associated with previous rounds of economic development in the Amazon with a new socio-spatial reality based on rationalism, knowledge, and competence. According to the author, this argument demonstrates what can be described as the “narcissism” of the agribusiness frontier, in which self-constructed declarations of heroism and of unquestionable achievements—mainly by large-scale farmers—serve to fulfil a prophecy of success and the triumph of the new configuration of places brought to the region. This argument is widely used in order to defend neoliberal actions in the region as well as avoid any types of criticisms that go against the State and private companies’ interests.

Because agro-neoliberalism seems to offer the prospect of a bright future due to the previous success on the accumulation of capital and the rapid urbanization of the area, there is a sense of “shared progress” that permeates the population’s mentality. The inspiring stories of success told by the founders of these regions are portrayed all around in cities such as Sinop, Sorriso and Lucas do Rio Verde (Harris 2021). In general, the narratives regarding the

foundation of these cities are intending to emphasize the boldness and voluntarism of the “pioneers”, while at the same time they relativize, when not completely ignoring, the intervention of other agents in the process, especially the state (Marques 2013). The streets dominated by large gated houses and modern big trucks, symbols of success for the region’s landowners, increase optimistic feelings towards progress and development. Therefore, it is common to hear from the community that Mato Grosso is a land for hope and opportunity, where another Brazil is being built through successful stories of exploitation of the Amazon riches.

However, authors have called attention for the fact that this feeling of local pride could increase the support for environmental damage in favor of progress (Marques 2013; Ioris 2017b; Harris 2021). An example of this happened in August 11<sup>th</sup> of 2019, when farmers organized what would be reported by the press as the “Day of Fire”. In order to show their commitment to the newly elected president Jair Bolsonaro, rural producers in the regions around BR-163 mobilized themselves through internet groups to set fires in the Amazon forest, with the main focus on targeting indigenous lands and conservation areas. The effect of this “protest” was an increase of 707 per cent on identified fire hotspots in the region from one day to the other (Greenpeace 2020b). Mato Grosso was also reported in 2020 as the second state with highest illegal deforestation rates by INPE, the federal institution that is in charge of monitoring the countries biomes and its wellbeing. The effects of the intensification of wildfires in the region was directly felt by the population in certain episodes, when cities such as Cuiaba had its “day turned into night” due to smoke accumulation in 2020.



**Picture 3:** Before and after a “smoke storm” in Cuiabá due to illegal wildfires in the region.

Picture is from 2020 (Unknown Source).

As a counterpoint, Brazil’s framework on environment crimes has been considered one of the most modern and comprehensive of its kind, building on several regulations and counting with many official bodies related to environment monitoring, control and law enforcement (Tacconi et al. 2019). In fact, the process of consolidation of the agribusiness sector during the 90s and 2000s was accompanied by a building of institutional capacity, with IBAMA (The Brazilian Institute for the Environment and Renewable Sources) being the main federal agency to improve and increase the number and skills of technically qualified employees. With an

approach that focused on the municipalities with the highest rates of deforestation, Brazil spent US\$ 1 billion/year on forest conservation policies at the federal level from 2000 to 2014, on average (Cunha et al. 2016). Moreover, Brazil has not relied on a single approach and established clear strategies that include timely remote sensing imaging to identify illegal deforestation and wildfires, confiscation of timber and machinery, embargoes, fines, public disclosure of non-compliant behavior and the blacklisting of municipalities that were not reducing deforestation. As an effect, these inspections were more successful in reducing large scale than small scale deforestation in the states of Mato Grosso and Pará (Tacconi et al. 2019).

Many empirical studies of forest conservation have shown that choices of governance measure are the main factor explaining variations in the outcomes of environmental policy (Wehkamp et al. 2017). In addition, periods of fiscal constraints and budget cuts in forest related policies are likely to have critical implications for law enforcement operations (Mueller 2009). The current Brazilian president, Jair Bolsonaro seems to have a well-defined agenda against forest law enforcement and has been applying several cuts in the budget of governmental organizations such as INPE and EMBRAPA for inspections and combating fires and deforestation (Harris 2021). The emptying process of IBAMA, with the persecution of employees and massive lay-offs in the past few years is another factor that has been compromising the conservation of natural biomes (Peduzzi 2021). It is also very symbolic that out of the 207 rural properties that registered wildfires during the “Day of Fire”, only 5 per cent were fined (Greenpeace 2020a). Finally, if Brazil continues with this path defended by Bolsonaro, climate volatility is promised to impact harvestings in the long run. Harris (2021) recalls what scientists have been saying for decades now, that if the deforestation of the Amazon

rainforest continues past a certain “tipping point”, the weather patterns that underpin agriculture – and industry – in South America will change dramatically and rapidly.

The increasing environmental damages in Brazil have not been ignored by the international community and several other influential representatives, as Joe Biden and Emmanuel Macron, have brought up the subject in international environmental forums. However, the biggest driver of Mato Grosso’s agribusiness continues to be the People’s Republic of China, responsible for 37.96 per cent of Brazil’s total agricultural exports in 2020 (Ministério da Agricultura Pecuaria e Abastecimento 2020). With the production of soybeans being accountable for almost half of the Brazilian exports (43.48 per cent in 2020 according to the Agricultural Ministry), there is a common agreement that China will continue with its purchases in the region simply because they have no other options with the same productive capacity as Mato Grosso. It is not rare to hear in the region that the Chinese would “go through starvation” if they stopped buying grains from Brazil. However, China has given signs that it is aware of this situation and is already looking for diversifying its suppliers in the short future. With investments in African States, with highlights for Tanzania, and other Southeast Asian countries, the Chinese government is expecting to decrease its demand and dependency on the Brazilian production (Nyabiage 2020). Another factor to be worried about is the recent decrease of soy exportation to China at the same time the US increased its exports to the Asian country. In March of 2021, Brazil registered a downfall of 85 per cent in its exports to China compared to the same month in the past year. Simultaneously, the US has registered an increase of 320 per cent in its exports to China compared to the numbers of 2020 (Singh and Patton 2021). Even though this retreat was accounted to a delay in the delivery of products due to transportation issues, it is a

clear example of how competition could directly affect Mato Grosso's agribusiness prospects if it continues with this "narcissist" train of thought.

An issue that needs to be addressed in Mato Grosso with urgency is the duality between achieving infrastructural policies that will meet the needs of the increasing grains production at the same time they respond to environmental concerns and customer expectations. The term "logistics" is usually brought up by producers as a demand for improved and more reliable means of transportation (Ioris 2017b). Because of MT's big territorial extension, the distance between big market centers and ports summed with poor quality highways aggravated by tropical rains and heavy traffic load affect directly freight costs, time for delivery and, ultimately, products final price (Marinho et al. 2016). Even though the federal state has been coming up with several infrastructural efforts in partnership with private companies as the creation of a rail lines that will connect Cuiaba to the Santos Port (FERRONORTE) and the privatization of 851 kilometers of BR-163 (Marinho et al. 2016), many producers are still not satisfied with governmental efforts in MT in the past years. Therefore, if the Brazilian state does not align its infrastructural efforts with initiatives to combat illegal deforestation as required by the Paris Agreement targets, the future viability of market prospects in the region could be affected.

## **6.2 Class Distinctions and Exclusions**

Another constant reason for discontentment has been the increase of class distinctions that started to appear since the 1990s, with a new wave of immigrants who settled in the peripheral regions of the agribusiness cities. Even though most of these cities present good indicators in terms of GDP per capita, low levels of extreme poverty, and great levels of Human Development Indexes compared to the rest of the country (Yanai et al. 2020), there is a big



concern related to how these municipalities will react to new migratory waves as their economic development continues. Ioris (2017a) calls attention to the striking contrasts between wealthy urban areas and agribusiness farms on the one hand, and the poverty of urban peripheries and small family farms on the other. According to the author, the fact that the regional economy is largely embedded in transspacial flows and international networks through which power is exercised extraterritorially has reinforced the pattern of socio-ecological exploitation, vulnerability, and political domination. A clear indication of that is the fact that most of the present-day agriculture practices and land markets of the region is now decisively associated with the activity of transnational corporations – controlled either by national or international capital - in charge of selling farms inputs, and controlling credit and foreign trade (Cruz 2014).

Therefore, the present day circumstances, marked by the hegemony of agribusiness at the expense of any other socioeconomic alternative, remain directly based on the original mechanisms of territorial conquest and political control put in practice since the middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The result of this is a growing periphery consisting of low-paid workers and unemployed, who typically migrated from the Northeast or other parts of the Amazon and who are normally nonwhite migrants. In addition, place-making in the region which has been characterized by special compression through the accumulation of land and accelerated financialization of production has sustained disturbing cases of racial and economic segregation and discrimination against the poor (Ioris 2017a).



**Picture 4:** Periphery of Sinop (São Domingos) in 2014. Retprinted from Ioris (2017a)

Despite all the positive images transmitted daily in the national media, the long-term viability of soybean production, the risks of a very narrow economic base, the isolation of the region in relation to input suppliers and soybean buyers, and the hidden agenda of politicians and agribusiness leaders that seems to exclude many people starts to face uncertainties. This is because of the ambiguous public performance that is conceived as a continuum in relation to the roles that used to be employed by the large landowners and “pioneers” of the region (Marques 2013). In this sense, many producers complain about the fact that there is a lot of technology available today which is in reality touched only by a tiny minority of the population (large landowners and agro-industrial enterprises) (Ioris 2017a). This argument raises a fundamental paradox between the presumption of progress and collective achievement, and the concealment of the fact that most social and economic opportunities are increasingly restricted to a small number of residents.

## **7. Autochthonous Knowledge for Social Innovations**

The comprehension of a world based on Western and capitalist logic mischaracterizes the cultural, ecological, social and gender diversity of a certain place since it imposes an idealistic society that overvalues European logic and ignores endogenous paradigms (Viola 2000). In this sense, there were innumerable mistakes and atrocities committed against indigenous populations. The myth of having “empty lands” in Mato Grosso is an evidence of these abuses, since the original population was disregarded, marginalized, enslaved and uncultured (da Silva and Ferrer Silva 2011). Moreover, according to Lévi-Strauss (1962), when the autochthonous population is not respected, all empirical knowledge or scientific experience developed by this population is lost. The heritage of an entire population is the systematically developed expertness which has a whole operating logic. This empirical knowledge was gained through centuries of active and methodical observation as well as the testing of different hypothesis that were rejected or proven through relentlessly repeated experience. Therefore, in the case of the autochthonous population of Mato Grosso, all the social experience, the familiarity with the ecosystems and knowledge about the fauna and flora acquired by the indigenous peoples was subjugated and potentially despised, due to ethnocentrism and Eurocentrism.

Nevertheless, there are regions that are managing to protect themselves in a globalized world at the same time they rediscover and restructure their production processes through the insertion of autochthonous knowledge, habits, customs and traditions. According to the policy advocated by Traditional Peoples and Communities (PCTs), these societies are defined as:

[...] culturally differentiated groups that recognize themselves as such; which have their own forms of social organization at the same time they occupy and use their territory and natural resources as a condition for cultural, social, religious, ancestral and economic reproduction;

using innovative knowledge and practices that were generated and transmitted by tradition  
(Secretaria Especial do Desenvolvimento Social 2021).

At a national level, fitting under this category are the indigenous peoples, quilombolas, communities of African origin, caboclos, riversides dwellers, and artisanal fishermen which perpetuate the traditions of their people through traditions (Ferrer Silva 2021). In addition, the State of Mato Grosso encompasses all such communities due to its huge territory and diversity. This is not surprising, given its original communities, the different migratory processes that happened throughout colonial times until more recent days and the constant displacement, misplacement and replacement of communities (Ioris 2017a).

According to Ribeiro (2013), the insertion of capital and technology for small farmers and autochthonous communities can help generate substantial elements of endogenous development in the Amazon. Although directing investments to the export agroindustry with a bias between the national state and foreign markets have been prioritized. This lack of inclusion policies is explained as *institutional voids* by Khanna and Palepu (2000, 2010) who define them as the absence of institutions that support the full operation of the market and generate massive social inequalities. Correcting these voids implies designing organizational structures whose core business deals with unmet demands. Ferrer Silva et al. (2020) explain that these failures can be seen as opportunities for companies to fill these gaps and obtain a competitive advantage by offering a new product or service.

Ferrer Silva (2021) describes collective responses in peripheral territories that are facing public problems in an innovative, ethical and responsible way that transforms the reality of the local population. As a social answer to collective problems that plagues communities, the author

identifies elements of *Transformative Social Innovation (TSI)* aiming to improve the well-being of a society at the same time it affects social relations and cultural orientations. These elements are defined as social innovations, which will change certain social relations of a determined community; innovation systems, which is defined as deep transformations in the patterns of cultivation and business practices for collective development; key change, which is the trigger that enabled institutional changes; and narrative of change, which identifies the new framework of ideas that subsidized a logic for collective action (Avelino et al. 2014).

This is the case of the quilombola community São Benedito, which manages to preserve its ethnic identity through sustainable production and employs a self-managed and cooperative character at the same time it has an economic dimension. Among the elements mentioned, this community shows paths of solidarity economy and seek to maintain their dignity, basic subsistence and land rights preserved (Ferrer Silva 2021). Moreover, community actors stopped valuing the status quo and perfected their existing techniques through their own traditions, leaving aside the employee-employer relationship and collectivizing activities. This means that their productive and economic activities follow an understanding of horizontal governance that replaces hierarchical leadership with collaboration, coordination, shared responsibility for decisions and outcomes, and a willingness to work through consensus (Ferguson 2009). The other two examples presented by Ferrer Silva et al. (2021) are the Projeto Reca and the Agroana Girau which serve as more evidence of the existence of phenomenon in which collectivity faces social problems while valuing its characteristics, knowledge and endogenous resources in order to insert itself in the conventional market scenario.

Nevertheless, in order to provide the means for such organizations to exist, it is necessary that these communities have financial access as an instrument for their own development (Sen

1999). Looking for filling social gaps defined as institutional voids previously in this article, social impact businesses are being created as hybrid organizations that generate positive socio-environmental impacts, such as third-sector organizations, and operating according to the market logic, such as second sector organizations. The document published by Aliança pelos Investimentos e Negócios de Impacto (Alliance for Impact Investments and Businesses) (2019) establishes four criteria for defining an impact business: [1] having the purpose of generating impact clearly stated, [2] having its core business aiming at solving a relevant social or environmental problem, [3] operating by the market logic searching for financial return through its production and [4] monitoring the generated impacts through indicators to prove them. The local organizations that make microcredit available to such communities open up possibilities for them to be inserted into local markets, enhancing their production and offering products and services for the region. This is the case of Banco da Gente, which provides microcredit and financial-administrative consulting to persons or groups that hold low income or suffer with social and cultural discrimination (Ferrer Silva et al. 2020). Besides offering capital access to small producers and cooperatives, the orientations provided for the use of microcredit also increase financial and technical conditions for them to leverage their income whether in creating a business or expanding their previously existing company.

Bessant and Tidd (2009) argue that social innovations happen through market methods when companies introduce new practices, services or products that aim to generate socio-environmental values in the community where they act. In agreement with this argument, Ferrer Silva et al. (2021) argue that organizations such as the São Benedito community and Agroana Girau are able to use economic principles as means to reach shared values within society that will provide opportunities for improvement in quality of life, inclusion, and access to cultural

production and environmental responsibility. Therefore, supporting grassroots organizations that make use of autochthonous knowledge will benefit not only these communities, economically speaking, but also society as a whole, since it enables social and environmental responsibility. Even though their practices have been deeply affected by modernization in the countryside and the spread of more urbanized values of life because of a growing dependence on market economy, their agricultural practices still maintain a high degree of agrobiodiversity (Ferrer Silva et al. 2021). Their knowledge and practices are key for the conservation of local biomes and biodiversity, and the insertion of capital and technology through investment policies would be able to increase their production if it wasn't for the absence of public policies and strong institutions.

## **8. Conclusion**

This thesis demonstrated that the private colonization projects gave rise to a capitalist logic that used institutional structures as a tool to shape a productive system in order to fulfill the interests of a local political elite. This colonization model was supported by a national proposal of encouraging the occupation and laying the foundations of a new economic model based on market capitalism and agricultural production in the Amazon region of MT. The process of land distribution and the migratory process known as “West Marches” emerge as elements that manipulated national public policies in order to meet the demands for occupying the region. As a result, official bodies and regional programs were created for the implementation of national plans and private colonization projects which acquired extensive pieces of land for derisory prices. It was possible to identify corrupt practices such as the use of third parties or “laranjas” and a speculative process that allowed a prodigious market, to the point of transforming land traders into colonization entrepreneurs.

The colonizing companies continued with their process of land commercialization, acquired new land plots and launched new projects that were more concerned with infrastructural aspects, since there was a clear lack of state support. These efforts culminated into the creation of municipalities that, after acquiring political representation, started to manage their responsibilities through public institutions. However, this separation clearly evidenced the correlation of economic support between private and public institutions since colonizers continued with their entrepreneurial aspirations at the same time they assumed political positions. A consequence of this is the fact that private companies actively took initiatives to overcome institutional absences. Therefore, the private and public representation followed a logic that was much more directed to the land market than the understanding of socioeconomic and environmental formation, and demonstrated that the occupation process was not aiming for improving collective life but subjugating nature and land in favor of a politically established minority. This duality has enabled the oppression of several local communities over time and raised signs of underdevelopment in a region where modern capitalist enterprises operate with archaic structures.

The neoliberal economic theory that values technological improvement and minimizes other variables such as the environment and cultural or social contentions ignores traditional and autochthonous contributions for the development of the region. This approach has been marked by its incapacity of understanding local specificities and encompassing peripheral communities. Nonetheless, the endogenous knowledge of certain producers has generated new insights regarding a unique ecology of the Amazon region. Therefore, the interaction between neoliberal approaches and local cultures must be prioritized when formulating public policies for regional development. Now is the time to set Mato Grosso on a path to economic growth and



environmental conservation, contributing not only to the region's GDP in the short term but also securing its socio-environmental well-being over the long term. This will enable producers to optimize the use of local resources sustainably and turn the production surplus into benefits for the local community, preserving the culture and the regional ecological base.

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