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Desiring the city – the urban imaginary in rural collective settlements in a Brazilian submontane Atlantic forest reserve*

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ABSTRACT

This article discusses data obtained in a study on populations who live near an important Brazilian submontane Atlantic forest, a geographical zone of north-eastern states located between the beach zone and the savanna-scrub zone. The populations in question live in a so-called Ecological Station from Murici (Esec-Murici), in the Murici Forest Complex (CFM), in the forest zone of Alagoas, distributed between two Incra rural collective settlements and on farms. Cultural forms used by such populations have been discussed by using social indexes taken from this survey and associating them with economical and environmental sustainability notions in their interfaces with these groups' social development and with regards to the actions of other agents in the CFM, suggesting that the maintenance of an urban imaginary which produces new subjectivities can be easily linked with environmental conservation policies.

Keywords: Anthropology, the environment, rural collective settlements, urban culture.

I

In contributing towards the debate involving rural peasants, State policy, agrarian collective settlements, and threatened ecosystems, the social sciences have found a differentiated empirical context from that which it "classically" confronted, thanks to Cultural Ecology, Rural Sociology, and even the Anthropology of Peasant Populations. Perceiving new problems and proposing solutions for them has been accomplished by recognizing the more all-encompassing character of the determinations that unite old contradictions between labor force and capital to new limits of ecosystem supportability and sustainability of propositions brought into effect through development policies. This is both the social and paradigmatic trauma that will be taken up by this article.

Using a perspective of creating social sensibilities for the impasses of environmental problems seems to be an increasingly long-reaching media-based radius, connecting the interests of world-wide citizens on problems directly felt by miniscule communities. Whenever possible, these groups learn to favorably manipulate their environmental interests together with already existing ones on their demand agendas. In dealing with communities of rural settlers, this kind of posture in creating pressure for making demands heard is actually a political practice that originally transformed these populations into land occupiers, with their marches and historical battles confronting the large landed estates, characteristic of land possession in Brazil, especially in the Northeast, yet also afterwards in small rural properties seeking to make their family-based production viable. On the other hand, the commitment of State policies was equally intensified, as in the example of the Agenda 21 in the Rio-92 meeting, establishing the necessity of seeking criteria for weighing this real “idea-value” which has become "sustainability".

In dealing with this situation, Anthropology must also recognize that certain marginalized populations, on a more ample scale within national society, may weave unusual and unexpected relationships provoked by the interests and presence of preservationists in their social environment. Environmental education, in order to preserve nature, must be a recurrent factor in everyday environmentalist practices, not only in terms of a population’s relationship with its natural surroundings, but also by redefining aspects of group cultures, favoring the production of new subjectivities and reinventing the group’s bonds to a given territory.

These new social bonds, for their turn, may collaborate in doing away with the often ingenuous praise that urban Brazilians bestow upon people from the Brazilian hinterlands and to the key political decision-making centers that directly affect rural groups. This is why regional and even cognitive boundaries definitely don’t seem trustworthy anymore, suggesting, even if only partially true, the idea that we are all “natives" (Geertz, 1997) or, what amounts to the same thing, "contemporaries" (Augé, 1998).

The title of this article, "Desiring the City" doesn’t necessarily possess the psychoanalytical appeal insinuated here, but, in an evident way, refers to behavior and discourse learned in individual speech in two kinds of rural farming communities: traditional rural populations and those created by induced social policies of land occupation. The empirical data to be commented on here stems from applying a survey as well as open-ended interviews and observation which took place in 33 different farms and two rural collective settlements neighboring the Murici Ecological Reserve (Esec-Murici, established in 2001, with 6.116 hectares), located in the homonymous city, 50 km from the capital city, Maceió. While the first model consists of the traditional farm-dweller, established over the slow rhythm of decades, the second model of land occupation extends to the impact of populations who have settled in rural areas cleared by de-occupying and reallocating land plots previously designated for other ends, such as extensive sugarcane cultivation, or, to a lesser degree, beef cattle.

We would like to believe that these "desires of the city", especially as revealed by groups and individuals recently settled in rural areas (settlements), many of whom come from the city, may conjecture uses and habits potentially favorable towards implementing sustainable programs for managing the CFM ecosystem, in agreement with the expectations of new actors on the land-issues scene, such as environmentalists.

This assertive is based on ascertaining that this mass of landless workers, often driven out of the country into small inland or coastal capital cities, owing to the regional agrarian model of a large landowning and mechanized economy, in its prior experiences has a quite attractive vocation for the

new land-reform directives, basically a productive multi-activity model in the countryside; which, among other factors, includes non-agricultural employment possibilities or a variety of opportunities that an ecosystem's peculiarities might offer for remaining in an agrarian setting in a non-predatory fashion, when the territory possesses these characteristics. Many of the men and women who settle there are former street salespeople, construction workers, and housecleaners (among other menial jobs). Functional and occupation polyvalence may thus operate as a channel for creating new opportunities to explore new occupational fronts, jobs, and rural income in a delicate context of implementing environmental preservation policies.

In early 2004, we were asked to collaborate with the Northeastern Ecological Society (SNE) in carrying out a demographical census of the Murici Forest Complex (CFM). This complex includes the Esec-Murici region as well as farms and the aforementioned collective settlements. These farms are old properties dedicated eventually to sugarcane or cattle, or, in some cases, both of these activities. Living on these properties are small human groups, dispersed in low geographic density. On the contrary, on the two collective settlements investigated, one may find a large population density restricted to family plots. The settlements are called *Dom Hélder Câmara* and *Ernesto Che Guevara*, locally recognized as "Duas Barras" and "Pacas", respectively, as they used to be called eight years earlier when these human contingencies were fixed there.

II

The ecological importance of the territory known as the Murici Forest Complex (CFM) started growing from 1980/90 on, and became quite intensified from the beginning of this century, gaining coverage in educational TV programs, local nightly news, national news broadcasting, not to mention the press, whether local, national or international.

In the CFM region one may find some of the most important forest reminiscences in Northeastern Brazil above the São Francisco River, housing 34 species and subspecies of threatened fowl. Since the 1980s, fieldwork in the region indicates the discovery of four new species of fowl: *Limpa-folha-do-Nordeste (Philydor novaes), Zidedê-do-Nordeste (Terenura sicki), Choquinha-de-Alagoas* (*Myrmotherula snowi*), and *Cara-pintada* (*Phylloscartes ceciliae*). Given its diversity, the reserve is also important for conserving reptiles, amphibians, and butterfly species. Because of the presumed importance of this area in terms of avifauna, a number of environmentalist organizations, especially international ones, have made territorial investments in the region, among other means by purchasing land in order to preserve native forest springs. With these same interests in mind, the region has also received visits from groups of foreigners, notably from the United States, who go there to observe rare birds. These interests have collaborated in giving the reserve greater public importance for the outside world, but also in native inhabitants´ self perceptions regarding the ecological importance of the land on which they live.

Rural workers´ demands for land has drawn favor since the area had been historically occupied by sugarcane cultivation, which recently entered into collapse with the closing of two sugar mills (São Simeão and Bititinga). The land where these mills had operated attracted interest for being well located, with good soil, and plenty of water and infrastructure thanks to the existing roads used to transport agrarian production from the area.

Consequently, current expectations are that new groups will be settled in the region near the CFM, causing concern among environmentalist organizations operating in the region. Besides struggling

to preserve the ecosystem, these organizations have strived, by fomenting practical projects for environmental education and making new ecologically-correct business ventures viable in the region, to instill populations already installed there with a mentality of “balance”, ecologically valuating the CFM area.

Besides the serious threat to species of tropical Brazilian fauna, the current situation causes concern because of the ongoing process of wood-cutting for domestic combustion, not to mention eventual illegal transactions involving wood and coal merchants. Devastating the woods and its fauna, however, is characteristic of the culture of extermination established since colonial days in what is now the state of Alagoas.

Historical references point to exuberance and greed in Alagoan forests, from the times of the colonizers´ first reports indicating that this province had the best land for providing raw materials for ship building and other ends. The velocity with which the Alagoan forests were destroyed was such that in 1799 a conservation commission was established, initially only in that province, but later on also being registered in Bahia.[1]

In 1830, the Province Counselor of Alagoas, José de Mello Correa, in a document sent to the provincial counsel, calls attention to this deforestation, suggesting that exploiting lumber for the naval industry be done elsewhere in order to avoid greater losses than had already occured.[2] The Alagoan historian, Craveiro Costa (1932, p.13), also mentions "meadows and hillsides once covered with forest vegetation, which man destroyed without taking precautions to replant to this day", located in the Mundaú River valley, also in the CFM. Further attention is called by the Geologist, Eusébio Paulo de Oliveira, to another virtue of the area in question, its soil: "its land is better suited for cotton and sugarcane, the two principal sources of wealth in the State [...] produces corn and beans very well, the basis of the population’s nourishment" (apud Costa, 1932, p.13-14).

The importance of the woods is notorious when considering life in societies "excluded from History". The forests were a strategic presence for *Quilombo* societies in the Seventeenth Century as well as for rebellious *cabanos*[3] in the Twentieth Century. In these episodes, the woods acted as a third person; they were the scenario for battles, refuge, and survival, detaining great representative power. This is why the forest is responsible for generating that which Manuel Diégues Júnior (1958) has denominated as the "*caboclo* cycle" in Alagoan folklore, leading to the creation of such typical folk characters as the *Caipora*, *Pai-da-mata*, *fulôzinhas*, and the *Curupira*, among others. Representations constructed from elements produced in the forest imaginary were capable of inspiring collective actions.[4] It’s also in the Mundaú valley where the most important manifestations of Afro-folklore took place, according to Abelardo Duarte (1975).

Within the forest zone region, the CFM encompasses old *plantation* lands on which monoculture sugarcane cultivation was practiced. This zone was preserved from the initial destruction of the coastal zone, located 50 km inland, owing to the abundance of other flatter areas having better established transport routes. It was only after the construction of train tracks, in the late Sixteenth Century, which would later connect the capital of Alagoas with Recife that land in the Murici region would gain value, being thus speculated on. Before this, the poor navigation capacities of the Mundaú River to the homonymous lake and the general lack of transport apparently made greater exploitation of the land unviable.

From its earliest configuration on, from sugarcane mills in Alagoas, up to the changes established in the productive system, especially in the mid-Twentieth Century (Andrade Neto, 1986; Carvalho, 2001) due to technical sophistication, the modalities of human occupation in the forest zone have

suffered important social changes. Among these are the transference of herds of laborers from farms and mills to nearby cities. In cultural terms, among other aspects, this has meant undoing older patterns of inhabiting and sociability in such a way that any sort of ideal image created of earlier dwellers/rural laborers seems unbefitting. This phenomenon is even more accentuated if one takes into consideration that the agrarian structure of practically the whole Northeastern forest zone is fundamentally based on large rural properties.

Brazilian Anthropology has deliberately dedicated a large part of its empirical field and theoretical reflections to understanding a presumably specific rural culture, taking into account known regional nuances of what has traditionally been known as folk cultures, meaning conflicts between capital and rural labor force. Thus, from "peasant traditionalism" (Lopes, 1981; Palmeira, 1977; Queiroz, 1973), to social engagement in the hinterlands (Palmeira, 1985), to the use of new technologies (Palmeira; Garcia Jr., 2001; Sigaud, 1991), discussing agrarian reform policies (Palmeira et al., 2004) or observing ritual forms of landless-poor people's political movements (Chaves, 2001; Comerford, 2001), populations and social dramas in rural areas have been frequently taken up as topics in Brazil and much of this material comes from the Northeastern forest zone.

III

During the first three months of 2004 we frequented the CFM region, visiting collective settlements and farms, counting houses and people, listening to histories and stories, new and old. An old unavoidable route for coastal slaves escaping to Palmares, the Muricia woods, or what was left of them, maintains little of its old exuberance these days. Located in dark clearings on the outskirts numerous campgrounds on state and federal highway roadsides that run parallel to the CFM, and to the collective settlements and farms we visited, the forests still provide, besides firewood used to heat stoves daily, enchantment for environmentalists and scholars, or, on the other hand, remains of game for the last of the hunters, but also a few meters of land for farmers or rural settlers who may be found skirting the borders between farm properties and the deep forest. The visitor's initial impression is something close to feeling the miracle of his or her very existence and an apparent splendor.

During the rainy January and February days we had to deal with roads in terrible conditions, even those close to the cities of Murici, Branquinha, União dos Palmares and Flecheiras, all served by state and federal highways. Conditions could even be worse as close as 50 km from the capital city of Maceió. However, these already grave conditions were made even worse by the rain, since people living in collective settlements and on farms frequently go about by foot and sometimes other forms of transport, lessening these distances from the cities. Those who attend classes, for example, unless there's a grade school in the area, must hike between five and six km daily, from Monday to Friday. There are generalized complaints for ambulatory doctors, schools, transport, electricity, roads, and other services. At each stop, and during every more in-depth conversation, we compiled lists of opinions, recurring themes, and motives for liking or not liking life in the CFM.

In general we found more apathy and resignation among farm dwellers and greater engagement and pride among the settlers. The latter constantly referred to the necessity they felt for "projects", another way of saying resources, financing and government-based assistance programs. Ideas on the natural environment also make themselves more felt in the collective settlements than among farm residents. We believe that this characteristic is due to the impact that the settlers have on the woods, more notorious because of the high-density concentration of individuals in a small space

and, what's more, in constant contact with representatives of the federal government, especially in dealing with agrarian concerns. The settlers also seem to pay more attention to the presence of institutional auditors (IMA, Ibama), especially since they've settled collectively on de-occupied land, leaving them open to this sort of visitation, differently from the farm dwellers.

In any case, it's with the settlers that these environmental activists from NGO´s actually have long-term plans in the CFM, placing their hopes on reverting mentalities regarding the environment; among other reasons, because the activists believe that they are dealing with groups who have been forced into finding adaptive solutions to the new environment in which they've been installed (as settlers). There's finally a last and crucial differentiation: genuine ownership of the land. While the farm dwellers exchange the right to live on the farm by doing sporadic tasks, many of which are remunerated by the proprietors who demand these services, the settlers are rural proprietors themselves, which boosts their self esteem, but, most of all, makes them genuinely interested in participating in any action that leads to creating resources, technology or opportunities for generating income or a market for their products. In other words, dialogue with the outside world is a permanent part of being a settler.

In carrying out the research, a single methodological orientation was used to collect data in the two universes studied, thus favoring a comparative treatment of this data.

A census of the total CFM population points to the existence of 1933 inhabitants. Of these, 35.4% (or 685 individuals) are concentrated in the "Pacas" and the "Duas Barras" settlements. The rest, 64.6% (1248 individuals) are distributed throughout the farms. While the collective settlements are densely populated, the farm population in the CFM seems to get lost in the immensity of land that covers properties making up the almost totality of the Esec-Murici region, currently subjected to legal environmental protection.

Environmentalists intend on making viable a kind of ecological corridor for birds, which would extend to the state of Paraíba, following the coastal submontane Atlantic forest range. In order to make this corridor possible, they deem it fundamental to garnish the nucleus of the CFM forest reserve, but, they also believe that for the reasons exposed in this article and because of expectations of population growth in existing settlements, not to mention new settlements in the CFM that might take root in the future, environmental education in this human scenario is absolutely indispensable so that projects designed to protect the ecosystem springs of the Northeastern submontane Atlantic forest may be successful.

For their turn, the farm populations don't seem to increase in the same proportion as that which has been projected for the collective settlements, and for obvious reasons: economic stagnation or slow development on the farms; a certain tendency within the adult population, especially the male population, to migrate in search of work during the periods between harvests in sugarcane plantations, and, especially, because they don't own the land on which they live. Offering environmental education is hindered by the sociological conditions of life in the CFM, although, once again, the settlers clearly demonstrate their willingness and capacity to formulate demands to public organs, being, as we have seen, the formative demand-base of the region. In practical terms, they are at a greater advantage than the farm groups in rallying support to push through determined labor conditions, institutional support for projects, infrastructure improvements, etc.

Yet it's equally true that the settlers are often patronized by the centralism characteristic of the movement to which they belong, even after having their plots registered. This is a common problem which makes environmental education and new productive opportunities considered more

“ecologically correct” more difficult. For example, concerning demands for wheat mills in the CFM, the environmentalists feel that locally produced flour could be limited to internal consumption, given the harm that processing causes to the environment, while the settlers and their political representation don’t feel this is possible since large-scale cassava flour milling is recurrent in the collective settlements, and many settlers resent having to pay for the use of private ovens. However, the environmentalists believe that since there have been success stories coming out of experiences in the CFM in production and transportation, the settlers will tend to adhere to environmental exigencies since it’s precisely these contingencies that wish to create productive solutions capable of bettering general conditions in settlement life.

Of all of these characteristics of social reproduction in the CFM none seems to cause more concern than the daily use of firewood, although its extraction from the woods is systematically denied in inhabitants´ depositions. When asking them if they go into the woods to gather firewood for their stoves, the standard response is that they only gather dried branches from dead trees. 95% of the farm dwellers respond that they do use firewood for cooking daily as do 97% of the settlers.[5]

The same principles hold true for hunting, a regional cultural trait. Once abundant, this kind of work was perfectly legitimate, but has currently fallen into decadence, including because of fiscal inspection. Although nowadays on a much smaller scale, game hunting is still a major reason given for going into the woods, right after gathering firewood for the hearth. Even so, hunting is made legitimate through the distinction between those who hunt and those who set traps in the woods, the latter of which are disdained as clandestine, completely illegal, and dangerous. The trap-setters are always assumed to be hunters who live “outside” of the contemporary CFM region. These days, hunting as well as wood-cutting for daily and domestic use are on an ambivalent crossroad, given their scarcity and/or the fragility of federal policies for fiscal and other forms of control over these natural resources.

A factor of great importance for comparing populations in CFM territory is the interviewed subjects´ labor trajectories, since their current occupations tend to be intertwined with previous forms of occupation as labor force. Most household heads in the settlements, almost 39% of them, worked in cutting sugarcane; yet another 37% of them carried out different tasks (temporary jobs in rural or urban environments); 23% of them had already worked as small-scale farmers, "farmhands", and only 1% as cattle herders.[6]

On the farms, sugarcane processing appears among 52% of the total population investigated, and farming activities on the small fields, 13%; cattle herding occupies 4%, and the category "others" makes up 28% of the responses, for reasons similar to the responses gathered among the population of rural settlers.

A relevant point in this comparative frame is electrical power, the availability of which, among other factors, directly affects those goods a population chooses to consume. The constant demand for this service can be measured by individual initiatives to use batteries, for example, as a means of fulfilling necessities in places where there is no electricity. Integrating part of the CFM population – especially settlers – into a media culture is thus highly dependent on the existence of this service. For those who don’t enjoy electrical power, daily ties to the outside world are established through battery-run portable radios, very costly for these inhabitants. The research revealed that almost 90% of settlement households have electricity, compared to only 61% of the farm households. In some cases, light posts runs close to a given property, without actually reaching it; this permits that neighboring populations have highly unequal access to a series of goods and services tied to the existence of electrical power services.

Another way of making a distinction between the universes of these two populations may be established by comparing data on their relationships with aspects of the surrounding natural environment. Fear of snakes is one of them. While the farm dwellers openly express greater naturalness in dealing with this environment, since they react better to intimacy with the actual forests, the settlers express shock and fear because of the proximity of the woods to their lives. For the settlers in general, the woods need to be better maintained, explaining why many of them express a certain aseptic attitude regarding them. This is why they really believe that it's reasonable for mosquitoes, snakes, and other animals deemed poisonous to be "cleaned" out of the woods. Even though settler and farm dweller groups are both afraid of snakes, the basic difference is in the resulting relationship, having implications for how settlers interpret and weigh the importance of this fauna in their lives. Cleared of large animals, the woods have been referred to as a snake hideout, in which an imaginary on a terrifying and dangerous animal is revealed. About the snakes, certain comments on this reptile are revealing, such as those in which inhabitants speak of a snake that "screams like a calf".

Evidently, this actual and practical behavior doesn't make it wrong to defend ideas regarding the importance of preserving natural resources, living in harmony with nature, etc. Basically rural settlers´ going into the woods seems to be an activity without much connection at all to these populations´ previous lifestyle, which explains why they feel ill at ease when having to go into the woods, making them feel confused and awkward, especially the women, who automatically respond that they are scared of going into the woods and especially of being bitten by snakes.

Gathering wood for domestic use (not only used for cooking, but also for making such artifacts as broom and spade handles, constructing fences, etc) is the main motivation given for settlers´ going into the woods. Providing the household with wood, in this context, has generally been a masculine prerogative except when the woman is the "household head".

On the other hand, on the farms, it's more common for women to go into the woods, being considered a normal activity while in the settlements they would be chastised, perhaps even to suggest for trying to arrange a "getaway", i.e., something illicit or illegitimate, or even, indecorous.

IV

Foladori and Taks (2004, p. 323) affirm that the current ecological "crisis" has forced a paradigmatic revision in Anthropology regarding this discipline's role in formulating environmental policies and in environmentalist struggles. This implies the necessity of confronting analytical and methodological polarities that would basically distinguish cultural relativism, on the one hand, and technocratic planning on the other.

According to these authors, "Anthropology is valuable for those who intend on constructing a more sustainable society" (Foladori; Taks, 2004, p. 323). What they call the "informative area" would be an anthropological contribution to the greater and more multidisciplinary debate within environmentalism, since the "cultural question", when thought of in its overlapping with the "environmental question", easily reveals how much "culture" can be harmful to pretensions of preserving the natural environment. One must pay attention to this point in terms of the uses and abuses of the concept of culture. If, on the one hand, it has been a recurrent practice to refer to the "discovery of culture" in development policies (Hermet, 2002), on the other, a return to the old

culturalism among those who profess the preeminent role of values towards what they consider "human progress" also becomes evident.[7]

Foladori and Taks (2004) further suggest that Anthropology may operate in another area of contribution which they refer to as "methodological agendas" in order to confront these problems between culture and the environment. Within this line of thought, the authors defend that sustainability is only acceptable if the more radical relativism with which anthropologists have often interpreted peoples and cultures be revised. Curiously, the authors, supported by Tim Ingold, wish to believe that Anthropology should epistemologically "shake" the foundations of what they call "technically-based arguments", in terms of their universal and imperative appeal (technique, planning) in favor of options based on Culture. What is actually at stake isn't so much a technocratic valorization of culture, with its projections of changing submitted peoples´ mentalities and their utilization of large developmental agencies, but, on the contrary, these target populations´ critical involvement as protagonists of their own destinies and as co-authors of collective actions having local and global repercussion in terms of the natural environment as well as any other acceptable developmental plan.

This way of reinventing local politics by way of more global concerns, to which the environmental theme seems to greatly contribute, may serve to focus the debate on induced social development policies, as long as we don't forget that the criteria for sustainability seems neither clear nor even consensual for those who profess it. Veiga (2005, p. 175) recalls that environmental sustainability possesses almost 20 indicators and 68 variables, and Ribeiro (2000, p. 131) affirms that sustainable development is the new "developmental ideology/utopia". Despite this, there is continual insistence on these highly idealized developmental aims, whether from an economic, social, or environmental standpoint, or, if one prefers, from an eco-developmentalist standpoint, or some other denomination in vogue.[8]

Non-traditionalist culture – i.e., that which is conceived in a different sense from notions of "peasant culture" or "rural culture" – of populations recently inserted in the CFM region, initially seem to indicate a disharmonic relationship with the threatened ecosystem in that submontane Atlantic forest reserve, yet, on the other hand, this culture also presents favorable characteristics for planning sustainable development projects, since the settler population has shown itself receptive to the innovations of multi-activity production, which is one of the public policy recommendations for small, rural production systems, idealized in economically and ecologically sustainable terms, including implications for generating non-agrarian occupations, employment, and income (honey, snakes, fish tanks, and granges among other kinds of production),[9] as long as these may proportion non-predatory relationships with the environment and more equalitarian kinds of social relationships between the different actors and interests coexisting around territory as specific and strategic as the CFM.

Studying different modulations of formative processes of Western cities, Freitag (2002) observed a polarity between what she calls historically formatted cities – she uses Berlin as an example – and those which she points out as being rationally planned cities, like Brasília. Now, if we could transport, conscious of the immense distinctions with the author's original applications, this interpretive sketch to the CFM, it wouldn't be difficult to imagine farms developing human agglomerations throughout history, while the collective settlements would instantly appear as examples of a rationally projected and executed model.

It's important to underline that what makes the collective settlements good examples of a planned society, as we see it, is the possibility of those most interested in this society being able to interact

and become protagonists of a future drawn out according to criteria as sustainable as the numerous projects and debates using these terms, justifying so many institutional presences in the settlers´ lives.

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1 Moreno Brandão (1981, p. 34-35), in his *History of Alagoas*, enlightens us on this subject: "It seems at that time (end of the Eighteenth Century) there existed a certain movement to preserve our forest resources, which had been brutally devastated, in as much as [...] José de Mendonça de Mattos Moreira passed on his position as responsible for forest conservation, a public position only to be found in the state of Alagoas, whose purpose was to insure that wood was cut and extracted in such a way as to preserve our natural vegetable riches from complete destruction ". As Thomaz Espíndola (2001) has informed, in *Alagoan Geography*, and Moreno Brandão (1981), the Forest Conservation team was a small group: besides the main post of conservationist, there was an administrator, a master, overseer, clerk, and stockroom. The group lasted until 1827, thus having inspected forests for almost 30 years.

2 The Counselor's speech, given in 1830, has been reproduced in the *Encyclopedia of Brazilian Cities* (1959, p. 242-243): "wood produced in the Nossa Senhora das Brotas de Atalaia parish[...]

was the first in this province used by contractors as plywood, continuing up to the present time; this would explain why so little wood has remained [...] and that new clearings have been opened in the woods south of the river Subaúma, all of which are intact in terms of plywood".

3 "Cabanos" is how rebels were called in the revolt that became historically known as the *Cabanada* movement, which broke out in the forests of the northern parts of the state of Alagoas and the southern parts of Pernambuco in 1832.

4 During the census, we went to the *Nova Vida* farm where we met *Dona* Madalena, an almost 70 year old hunter who told us that she chats with the *comadres fulôzinhas* in the woods, demonstrating how references to elements of the *caboclo* cycle are still part of the popular imaginary.

5 The use of gas stoves is also part of CFM reality, yet since this practice subsists thanks to funding from federal public programs, it's not actually effective in practice, which would explain why it's common to find households with two different types of stoves (these cover around 36% of households in the collective settlements and 42% on the farms); usually only the wood-fire stove is used in daily family domestic life. One may observe that effective policies for gas distribution, not in the form of vales, but the actual product itself, would cause a positive impact in the area, since almost all of the families, especially those from the two collective settlements, prefer gas and dislike having to go into the forest to seek firewood.

6 Considering that beef cattle has been one of the region's options for rural proprietors, having grown considerably since the collapse of two sugar mills in the region, it may be observed that ranching employs very little labor force. As one cattle herder has told us, one single man is generally used to take care of 800 cows.

7 A good example of this culturalist abuse may be found in the so-called "Harvard School", for example, in the work of Lawrence Harrison and Samuel P. Huntington (2002).

8 The actual notion of culture hasn't escaped the enchantments of sustainability. On this subject, see Leach (1999) and Viertler (1999). On the other hand, Ignacy Sachs (2002) has insisted on the idea of integrated and sustainable territorial development, which he also calls eco-developmentalism, covering, inclusively, a series of small-scale formal undertakings, used as a kind of strategy in order to "rediscover and reinvent rural Brazil". José de Souza Martins (2000), by questioning the future of rural sociology, has also interrogated the contributions of this discipline in terms of the quality of rural life. Incrementing productive actions in this ambit, as such, would include a vast scope of interventions in the territory being contemplated, besides considering optimizing production and aspects of territorial *marketing* and aggregating cultural value to goods and services produced (Nascimento; Sousa, 2004). All of this suggests that populations under pressure from such planning and strategies are under potential transformative impact of these paradigmatic changes, thus being able to take advantage of all of these factors, according not only to one's cultural, but also social capital, circulating these capitals in one's own benefit.

9 This reflection on agrarian reform with ecological concerns may be appreciated in Laury Cullen Jr. (2005). For a discussion on family farming, multi-activity production, and these activities´ implications on social theory, see Sérgio Schneider (2003). For an analysis of success stories in small innovative rural enterprise in Brazil, see Ignacy Sachs (2002).

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