The Secret of Speculative Accumulation: Capital, Land Fraud, and Environmental Governance in Amazonia

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Abstract: This paper argues that colonists along an unpaved highway corridor are anticipating future environmental governance regimes by reference to their own vernacular strategies of claiming properties and producing legible "natures" in development encounters. State efforts at reform begin with the premise that rural Amazonians lack reliable relations to territories, but an ethnography of their practices reveals that residents draw on the ambiguous history of property-making and their deep familiarity with surrounding landscapes to influence new environmental governance paradigms.

Explanatory note: This paper blends earlier work on an Amazonian highway with current fieldwork on emerging Brazilian policies to mitigate that country's production of greenhouse gases. Both of these projects merge at the point of thinking through land speculation--and more specifically the materialities of *property making*--in the Brazilian Amazon. The title given to this paper is meant to be a provocation, invoking Marx's work primitive accumulation (and others who have thought through, periodized, or otherwise named systems of accumulation), and I hope that we can have a lively discussion about the aptness of "speculative accumulation" to name what I am thinking through here. I do apologize for the last-minute title change, and I also apologize for the drafty nature of this paper. It represents my latest efforts to weave ethnography and analysis into an introduction for the book tentatively titled, *Conjuring Property: Speculation and Environmental Governance in the Brazilian Amazon*. I've appended many images that complement the text; please refer to them as needed.

Many thanks.

This paper is, at its most philosophical level, a meditation on infrastructure and human communities' varied experiences of time and space. But I must start with a coda: rather than investigating a bricks-and-mortar kind of infrastructure--a road, a dam, public buildings, etc.--I've become enchanted with an entity that can only be thought of as infrastructure after some conceptual foregrounding. This was not my original intention. But then fieldwork happened, and I spent two years in the Brazilian Amazon studying a road that was never built (image #1)[1]. This highway--the Br-163 highway through Western Pará--was carved out of lowland canopy and scrub forest in the early 1970s, initially attracting a modest stream of landless migrants from Brazil's northeast (*nordestinos*) and soon after a smattering of ranchers and loggers from the country's south (*gaúchos*).[2] The road remains unpaved--and thus impassable for six to nine months out of the year--along a thousand kilometer stretch. As far as infrastructure goes, the road fails to hold together the material or ideological projects it was slated to embody: it is neither a reliable conduit for agricultural goods, nor has it served as a backbone for a series of state-building projects from agrarian reform to environmental surveillance. Instead, over the past forty years, the Br-163 highway has remained largely as it has always been--muddy in the winter, dusty in the summer, bisected by rivers over which no bridges stay spanned for much longer than a season. This region is not part of the famous "Arc of Deforestation" associated with highway construction, spontaneous colonization, and the expansion of monocrop soy agriculture over the past thirty years. Here, there is no superhighway, and fairly little "time-space compression" results as one spends as much as two weeks to traverse the road south from Santarém to the Mato Grosso border. (image #2).

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[2] Admittedly, this is an oversimplification: northeasterners and southerners do predominate in the study region due to recent colonizations efforts, but more established populations (river-dwelling *ribeirinhos*, indigenous groups including the Kayapó and Panará, and remnants of 19th century rubber-tapping communities (*seringeiros, caboclos*) also form part of the social scene, though these communities are not centered on the highway.

What brought me to this part of the world was an interest in how the region's colonists--who number as many as 40,000 in an area five times the size of Massachusetts--related to the road and to their region more broadly. Since 2000, the federal government in Brazil has circulated plans for the paving and completion of the highway as one plank in a larger effort to introduce "environmental governance" into the region. Far from the muddy highway, plans to pave the road had been hotly debated: in 2002, the U.S.-based foods trader Cargill built a massive soy terminal at the northern terminus of the planned highway, sparking an international chorus of skepticism as to whether Brazil could balance the interests of agro-industrial capital and its own ambitious goals to reduce deforestation (image #3). I thought the return-to-roads would surely capture local interest and inspire all sorts of discussions about the future development of the region. To my surprise, people didn't much care about the road as such: support for it was unanimous, and didn't seem to pit different interests against one another. Although some of the older residents skeptically recalled how a half-dozen similar plans and promises had worked their way down the road over the past four decades, nearly everyone I spoke with believed that the paving of the Br-163 was imminent and that the road represented true "progress" for the region.

Throughout the 2000s, residents of Castelo de Sonhos--the small roadside hamlet where I based my research--waited for the road to come (image #4). They are still waiting. And even though this fated infrastructure has not yet unleashed its predicted effects--from economic development to deforestation and class warfare--Castelenses and other rural residents in Amazonia have spent a whole lot of time adjusting their daily practices in response to a far more pervasive and controversial element of local infrastructure. No one much cared to debate the road; a line of questioning about it revealed only bromides about it being "a matter of time" before the region carved by the highway could "join the rest of Brazil" via a reliable highway. What was far more contentious--and much more fundamental to understanding the sociopolitics of life in an overdetermined frontier zone--were settlers' debates about and practices concerning property.

The infrastructural parable here, therefore, is that of property: how it frames up, both conceptually and materially, a world of relations between people, their environments, and the very shape of history. I agree with recent work[3] that has urged an anthropological reappraisal of property. Rather than laying out a proper conceptual definition for what property is--and how you'd recognize it ethnographically--here I would rather draw attention to how, as an emic category among rural Amazonians awaiting development and governance, property became the idiom and the practice through which migrants flexibly adapted to a shifting terrain of governance possibilities. In the 1970s, Brazilian conventional wisdom saw the Amazon as a wild, empty frontier that demanded intense government presence lest Brazil lose the region; in the 1980s resource extraction and large scale agriculture shaped its figure; and currently national and international concerns about biodiversity and climate change predominate in visions of the region. In each of these eras, the Brazilian federal government devised different protocols for establishing legal and legitimate property claims, and settlers have carried these diverging property-making practices with them into the region. The result has been a clamor of confusion and invention in rural Amazonia, where property regimes are contested and individual property claims more often than not are provisional (image #5). In Pará state alone--where I've been conducting research since 2004--prospectors have registered an acreage in excess of four times the total land area of the state in title agencies: stark evidence of the unsettled, murky, and excessive nature of property claims in the region.[4]

So, If you'll allow me the conceit that property is infrastructural, the question turns to who--or what--*makes* this infrastructure. Roads and bridges have builders, from planners to craftspeople; they also have users. They hold certain economic relations together, and privilege certain points of view or cultural styles. But who makes property, and what holds property together? Is it title deeds,

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[3] See the edited volumes by Hann (1998), Verdery & Humphrey (2004), and Mauer & Schwab (2006).

[4] That four times the acreage of the state is claimed in title agencies is in part the result of Brazil's industry of private tile-houses, *cartórios*, who have an interest in registering as many claims as possible (under as many constitutional and legal provisions as possible, even if they conflict). See Brito & Baretto (2011) and Brazil (2001).

boundary trails, and fences; is it the expectation of inheritance or compound interest and rent; or is it the sheer discursive and material force of property ideology, be it liberal or socialist? These questions are too large to be taken up here, but they chart a fresh approach to property, one of the oldest objects of anthropological inquiry.[5] In rural Amazonia, it has been settlers and colonists (and increasingly native peoples) who have literally made property, both at the level of individual claims and at the level of coherent systems of publicly-recognized entitlement. This claim--that local people have created property, largely in the absence of the state but always with an eye toward state recognition--is what remains to be explored here. The arguments I develop below allow us to better understand the relationship between local vernacular practices and emerging forms of capitalism and governance on a resource frontier.

This research intervenes in larger debates on the relationship between culture and regimes of environmental governance that are appearing throughout the developing world. Following anthropologists Tania Li (2006) and Paige West (2005), I endeavor to show here how local peoples negotiate a range of subject positions as they come into contact with the state as "stakeholders" in development futures. This work builds on Arun Agrawal's insight that the project of environmental governance does not proceed evenly from state visions to local practice: indeed, it is perhaps more valuable to consider how local communities create the idioms and practices through which governance becomes possible, by anticipating and co-opting the strategies that government and NGO allies use to manage the region. As I suggest below, focusing on property-making in Amazonia is exactly where we should begin considering the policies currently being drawn up to reduce the emissions of greenhouse gases in the region. Brazil is the world's fourth largest contributor to climate change, and over 75% of its emissions are from deforestation and forest degradation in Amazonia. Ambitious global carbon trading schemes that overlook the centrality--

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[5] Indeed it was Lewis H. Morgan who wrote, way back in 1877: "A critical knowledge of property would embody, in some respects, the most remarkable portion of the mental history of humankind."

and the chimeric qualities--of property-making for rural communities risk repeating the lamentable history of development interventions along the Amazonian frontier.

Development, Infrastructure, Property

That frontier--the great green Amazon--has been variously imagined throughout history. Since 1970, development paradigms have piled upon one another along the unpaved Br-163, and each continues to claim a shifting set of adherents: first was the stalled effort at agrarian reform aimed at resettling landless nordestinos in Amazonia, then came incentives for commercial agriculturalists decamping from Brazil's south, and the latest vision outlines conservation protocols and sustainability initiatives. Careful observers and critics of Brazil's use of roads to "give land without people to people without land" have effectively argued that the military dictatorship's 1970s agrarian reform be best understood as a policy encouraging poor northeasterners to occupy Amazonia, fail as farmers, then devolve their territories to more highly capitalized ranchers, farmers, and industry (see Schmink & Wood, 1992; Little 2001). In this cycle, a cynical populism cuts roads and sends nordestinos out along them to ready the way for the next wave of state-backed clients, who in turn claim land and pursue modes of extraction and accumulation under different terms and policies (image #6).

In contrast with the paved roads of Amazonia, where initial contact with native peoples was followed by gold rushes, land rushes, violence, deforestation, ranching, and today's advancing soy plantations, the unpaved Br-163 is a quieter place, an odd sort of frontier-in-waiting. Along the road, migrants make their personal histories relevant in the present, which begs the question: How are roadside residents negotiating the varied, contradictory, yet ever-present models for the future of the region? The answer is that residents are using the development archive to prepare for possibilities. The pile of past development plans offers justifications for all sorts of frontier

activities in the present, and revitalizing development models provides a rhetorical and material link to governance in a region where the state is present largely through its absence.

Property-making is the principal technology that rural migrants use to signal their intentions to stay in the region, and the development archive offers a range of different practices and legal justifications for making property legible. Since 1970, when Brazil's military dictatorship sought to fill the "terra nullius" of the Amazon region by transplanting poor tenant farmers from the Northeast, nearly 70% of land in Amazonia has been declared public property, or "Terra da União." This includes a 200-km wide band along the new highways that the dictatorship plowed into the region throughout the 1970s. Land reform legislation at the time entitled any migrant to a plot of federal land that he could claim via usufruct homesteading rights: all he had to do was cut boundary trails (or *picadas*) and deforest at least half of his 100 hectare plot as evidence of a desire to "improve the land" through farming (image #7). After a year and a day, the Land Reform Agency would grant fee simple title to the homesteader: this piece of paper would entitle the holder to credit, the legal right to sell his property, or deed it over to heirs. Thousands of nordestinos homesteaded in this manner along the Transamazonian Highway, where they were eventually and violently run off by expropriating miners and ranchers.[6] Along the quieter Br-163, hundreds of nordestinos cut picadas in hopes of claiming clear title, but due to sheer distance and lack of reliable transportation, few ever received official papers from the state. Those who did often found the coordinates of their properties on paper to be in error, or found themselves being shaken down for a bribe from a low-level official. Longtime residents of Castelo de Sonhos tell me that by 1985 most early homesteaders had given up their failing farms. Many sought work on ranches or in wildcat logging operations in the Tapajós valley, though a few continued farming on their first or subsequent homestead claims.

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[6] See, among others, Almeida (1992); Fearnside (2008); Nugent (1997); and Schmink & Wood (1992).

Nordestinos continue to cut picada trails in and around Castelo, a method for claiming property that they have also shared with more recent migrants from the south. These so-called "gaúchos" began moving into southern Pará in the mid 1980s, as the advance front of a larger demographic shift from southern Brazil into Mato Grosso, which has become the agricultural heartland of Brazil over the past three decades. Enticed by government subsidies for cheap land, these whiter, wealthier migrants from the south deforested nearly all of Mato Grosso (which means "Thick Forest" in Portuguese) in the 1990s. Corporate colonization drove the property game for the gaúchos: lands were subdivided by a private real estate venture based in São Paulo or Porto Alegre, which would sell deeds to aspiring migrants. Most of these deeds corresponded to actual plots of earth, though many did not. Further, many of the initial buyers of land were wealthy urbanites seeking only a hedge against Brazil's rampant inflation in the 1980s and 1990s. Most of these absentee owners subdivided lands and sold them onto third parties without much care as to whether or not deeds corresponded to physical properties. The result was a tenure confusion in northern Mato Grosso, a confusion in which much turned on the possession of title papers, which in turn assumed a quasi-magical status (image #8). If an unlucky migrant found her lot already occupied, or simply didn't like the lay of the land, she could simply move further along and edit the terms written out on the deed papers. Forgery became a means to salvage or even expand on an investment: and thus the method of *grilagem,* or land speculation through forgery, was imported into Amazonia.

"Grilagem" derives from the Portuguese word for cricket, *grilo*. This is due to the fact that practitioners of grilagem devised an ingenious way to make their forged land titles look and feel authentically aged by using crickets. After composing deeds with the desired coordinates--often on paper mocked up to look like official government stock--a claimant places the deed in a shoe box with as many as two dozen crickets, buries the box, and after a few weeks digs it up. In the meantime, the crickets have defecated on the once-new deed and have chewed away at its edges, producing a crinkly sheet that is passably old and official (image #9). To support this prevalent

practice, a few migrants became quite expert in cricket husbandry, and charged a sizable fee for the services of browning papers that--nowadays--come straight out of inkjet printers before they head into the dark with the crickets.

In and around Castelo de Sonhos, a widely distributed population of 4,000 migrants--evenly split between Nordestinos and gaúchos--cuts picada trails and forges papers to make claims on property. One significant attribute of all this labor making property is that it is not done for the state to see, or at least not directly. The nearest land reform or environmental protection offices sit at a distance of over 1,000 km. Rather, picadas and crickets form part of a system of signaling and bluffing through which migrants aim to remain relevant in the region should governance ever arrive. This is a bit of a cat and mouse game in which the relatively poorer nordestino and the wealthier gaúcho trade methods and perspectives: a gaúcho might forge a paper that entitles him to 2,000 hectares, while a nordestino cuts picadas marking a homestead inside that gaúcho's claim. In an ironic reversal of roles, I have documented Southerners cutting picadas while citing their rights to do so under 1970s agrarian reform legislation (long before gaúchos began migrating north). Conversely, I've seen many Northeasterners forging title papers with the justification that, "everyone around here needs to defend their claims, and papers are powerful things."

This business is not only about making property appear, but also making it disappear: it was not uncommon for me to be walking along a boundary pathway with a homesteader only to step out into a blasted landscape, where a rival or a trouble-maker had burned out the path cut by the picada, thereby erasing the path that bounded a property claim (image #10). Similarly, industrious speculators attempt to short-circuit other claimants' boundary paths by spreading fast-growing seedlings into the pathway. Carpentaria palms and Lead-wood saplings[7] can achieve a height of four feet within three months of germination. During the rainy season, these upstarts provide the

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[7] *Carpentaria acuminata* and *Terminalia amazonia*, respectively.

perfect ledges for creepers and vines that can swallow up a narrow forest opening in relatively short order (image #11).

I found that cutting and managing picadas--along with the more subversive task of forging title deeds--are prevalent practices in Castelo de Sonhos. The principal economic activities include petty ranching and subsistence farming; a few illegal sawmills operate as well. Groceries stock up with non-perishables during the dry months when transport is good, but generally locals try to grow their own foods (manioc, beans, corn, livestock). In terms of social mobility, southerners are generally more prosperous than northeasterners, but neither ranching nor smallholding generates very much product that can be sold for profit in larger regional markets. Since the state agency for colonization and agrarian reform (INCRA) has no nearby offices, all real estate transactions are technically illegal, and proceed in a rather informal manner. Using picadas and forged papers allows a colonist to avoid the local real estate "market" altogether, and sets him up to either sell portions of the land on later, make claims in court at a future date, or generally slow down the process of land allocation in the event of future state efforts at reform. In light of these "free" means of turning land into property, in three years of field research, I found the price per hectare of land in the region actually fell.[8] In fact, very few land transactions took place at all, despite the growing expectation that the Br-163 Highway would be paved through Castelo at the time. By contrast, nearly all the Castelenses I met who concerned themselves with "inland" lands, towards the east and west of the bisecting highway, trafficked in fake papers and picada-cutting tactics. They seemed to have little interest in selling their lands, or in opening up their lands to ranches, logging, or the like. Crickets, trails, and fires were strategic resources in another kind of real estate game, one in which colonists were content to hold onto lands and project such holdings into the future.

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[8] This insight is based on only eight real estate transactions that I was able to confirm in interviews and participant observation between 2004 and 2007. None of these transactions are publicly recorded, opening this data up to all sorts of critiques from market fundamentalists. Still, a market in land existed (however small) in Castelo, and it was widely commented upon that, even with the strong Brazilian *real* and minimal inflation, land values were dropping in the region as expressed in sales prices.

Thus we can see how property-making in Castelo de Sonhos is an uneven, fully-emplaced, and thoroughly-embodied process for migrants. Making property requires specialized knowledge of the landscape, of the properties of crickets and plants, of the habits and motivations of one's neighbors. It requires patience and invention, and the ability to be flexible. But the question remains: why are these northeasterners and southerners so concerned with making property, especially since such claims are provisional at best? To answer this question, we need to delve deeper into the nature of property as a cultural project, and the relationship it has to the state, the market, and to locals' understandings of the shape of history.

Making, Shifting Claims

As we have seen, the unpaved Br-163 defines a region in which no single project of territory has achieved hegemony, but where colonists are in the midst of experimenting. Roadside residents are held in common thrall by the unsettled character of the region, by the possibilities they envision and create. These propositions lead me to offer <u>two related arguments</u> to theorize how roadside residents are actively participating in the elaboration of future governance plans in rural Amazonia.

The first argument can be stated as follows: <u>Along the Br-163, property speculation is not about accumulation as such, but is rather for colonists a means to anticipate future governance</u>. In rural Amazonia, there are multiple means to establish property and no final adjudicate to distinguish a legitimate from a fraudulent claim.[9] When a squatter cites usufruct rights and a rancher points to the representative fetish of the title deed, both claimants feel they have the backing of legal principles. And both are correct. However, rarely is either the aspiring smallholder or the titled farmer able to call upon the state to enforce one or another claim. In this context, it would be understandable if colonists did not bother at all with property, and rather concerned themselves

[9] The federal land agency, INCRA (Institute of Colonization and Agrarian Reform), is the bureaucracy responsible for the titling of lands along federal highways in Amazonia. The only functioning INCRA office in Western Pará is located in Santarém, and as a result INCRA offers few services to claimants alongside the unpaved portions of the Br-163 in southwestern Pará.

with less ambiguous prospects, like mining or logging. But conjuring property is the foremost activity of roadside residents, from poor colonists to large-scale ranchers. These roadside residents are making property in order to lodge themselves into the region's future, and are oriented towards what might happen next. Anticipating likely state actions, they position their claims to maximal perceived benefit.

This configuration is at odds with our standard models of colonial expansion along resource frontiers: work in Amazonia and throughout the world has consistently shown that capitalist relations proceed through a more-or-less orderly distribution of claims on property. Marx's famous analysis of primitive accumulation is apposite here, wherein he showed how the privatization of the commons effected both the initial historical impetus for the accumulation of surplus and the creation of a landless working class from whom the new owners could extract and accumulate additional surplus. The Turnerian frontier of North America is similar: pursuant to the federal government's expropriation of lands from Native Americans, U.S. citizens could take private possession of land and begin the process of extraction and accumulation. But along the Br-163, property claims do not sit still: they are a volatile and dynamic element of the landscape. Colonists from Brazil's northeast and south seem to be less concerned with securing and accumulating lands along the highway in the present. Rather, they are flexibly experimenting with the practices of making property claims appear legitimate to a future governance regime that might someday arrive.

Here, would-be ranchers are not felling large tracks of forest for their cattle herds; indeed, most "ranchland" is still forested, while the only things holding together the ranchers' claims are pieces of paper and picada trails. In this situation, where property claims exist only in the subjunctive, "owners" are less likely to insist on their inviolate rights to command the properties they aspire to. One gaúcho who had large claims on paper explained for me his method for dealing with a competing claim to his property:

> "If a fella is clearing trails on my land, I've got several options, but none of them involve getting the government to kick him off my land. Maybe I'll let him keep the area. Maybe I'll talk to him and see if he'll pay rent. Maybe I'll just expand my claim on the other side and cut trails deeper into the forest. There's so much land here, Jeremy, and at this point we're all just trying to carve out a piece and hold onto it."

This sentiment is surprising for at least two reasons. First, here is a rancher telling us that he can live with squatters on his land; this would be unthinkable throughout the rest of Brazil. However, I do not think this is a matter of generosity. Instead, I read this rancher's sentiments as expressing the flexible logics of property-making: rather than accumulating land, his priority is to maintain his future ability to claim legitimacy when the state & governance arrives. Second, this short quote betrays a reformed colonial vision, one where the forest is seen as a resource to be left standing since a standing forest offers more flexibility when it comes to repositioning property claims. The environment is valuable not because of the board feet of lumber that can be extracted from it, but because it is the terrain in which property claims are made and managed.

For the roughly 4,000 colonists who have decided to stay in the region of Castelo de Sonhos, the establishment of property that might someday be judged as legitimate is the *sine qua non* of the colonial reformulation of the Amazon. That is, roadside residents understand themselves as living in a time prior to history's arrival, a time defined by the struggle to establish oneself in space and time before the arrival of the state and the market. This is clearly a capitalist fantasy, but it is a fantasy that structures colonist behaviors. They understand that many of their present activities are destined to be erased when the singular political-economic system arrives and the history of the present is written. Until that time, residents experiment with multiple activities and property-making strategies to hedge their bets: after all, they are before history, and cannot be quite sure which configuration of property, law, or governance will prevail. Sooner or later, ambiguities over property claims will be sorted out, and some roadside residents will prove to be on the *right side of history*. In the meanwhile, they wait in anticipation, and seek to create the conditions for the state's arrival by

building concepts and practices that political economy might recognize and reward. Smallholder and large-scale proprietor alike are engaged in the dirty work making, forging, and relocating property, and rather than accumulating vast tracks of land, these nordestinos and gaúchos are more focused on staying relevant in the property game. As we have seen, these seeming adversaries actually learn property-making methods from one another, and swap stories about future governance possibilities.

So, even as migrants remake local landscapes according to their own anticipations about what might be deemed legitimate in the future, both plans and migrants alike are transformed by the exigencies of living in the region. My second argument emerges at this crucial point: Keeping up in the property game induces colonists into a process of localization: they come into intimate and surprising relations with other migrants and the environments that surround them. We have already seen the creative uses which to which colonists put crickets, trails, and plants as they learn to stay relevant in the property game. Settlers also need to negotiate the road—and the trails, streams, and paths that it crosses--and soon they become intimately familiar with Amazonian landscapes and even begin to identify as Amazonian. Far from supermarkets, settlers begin to plant the regional staple manioc in small house gardens. During the long rainy season when the road is intrafficable, fish caught in local streams and rivers provide the largest share of settlers' protein. This process of localization changes colonialist projects in important ways and draws our attention to both the non-human agencies and emergent subject-positions that comprise rural Amazonian livelihoods.

The point here is that neither land reform colonists' nor southern agriculturalists have their colonial expectations met when they arrive in the region, and soon each will begin to construct expansive but idiosyncratic networks in order to survive. To paraphrase the environmental anthropologist Tim Ingold, along the unpaved Br-163, life "goes on along" the trail, both in the literal sense that residents spend considerable amounts of time and energy moving, and in the figurative sense implied in Ingold's use of the term "wayfaring" to describe a practice of movement that is predicated on the traveler interacting with and reading the signs that the environment around

him features (2000). Rural Amazonians must find their way in the ersatz economy and society of the region, and to do so they become savvy collectors of locally-relevant knowledge. Walking, looking, listening, spreading rumors, hiding their tracks: these are some of the practices residents use to make their way along the road. Knowing how to recognize a freshly opened picada trail, how to fish or hunt game or collect crickets, how to maneuver around a competitor: these are the kinds of intimate environmental knowledges that colonists acquire as they stake and reposition property claims in the region. Dedicated to sticking around to see some portion of their claims ratified by the state, residents become savvy inhabitants of a diverse and dynamic environment, almost in spite of their colonial inclinations.

Long-term Br-163 residents have augmented the already existing meshwork of indigenous trails, lines of flight, and itinerant economic practices that have long typified the region. They came to colonize—and to be sure their actions and perspectives are still oriented around creating a new and "civilized" world in the forest—but these roadside residents are not your typical colonialists. The road, the rain, the presence of contradictory colonial visions, and the materialities of property-making are elements in an unpredictable landscape, in which migrants find themselves disenthralled as colonial masters and more concerned with learning how to survive and thrive in Amazonia. I argue that property-making emerges as the key method residents employ to come to know and speak for the region. In this strange colonial register, property is much less about accumulation for accumulation's sake, and is rather much more about articulating the emerging material realities of living in a remote region to regimes of possible future governance.

As property-making draws them into familiarity with local landscapes and opportunities, colonists also assemble and reassemble their subjectivities along-the-way. Though we might expect agrarian reformers and commercial agriculturalists to be natural enemies, their shared orientation towards future property regularization brings these actors into temporary alliances. Here, local

knowledge is built up through moving around and constructing personal relationships with other regional actors, a process that results in shared perspectives on the environment.

An example of this can be observed in the recent collaborations among rural residents to present themselves as "ecological stewards" during planning meetings with state and NGO officials. In four years of seminars and focus groups discussing sustainable development, loggers, ranchers, and smallholders presented a unified front as they learned the contours of environmentalist discourses. The state's plans to pave the Br-163 in a "sustainable and participatory manner" had brought officials and environmental NGOs to Castelo in an attempt to solicit community buy-in to a regional development plan (image #12). Responding to computer models that predicted dire deforestation rates in a "business as usual scenario," government technocrats were determined to use the paving of the Br-163 to introduce basic features of governance into the region and forestall the typical frontier dynamics of deforestation and social exploitation. Through the course of many participatory meetings in Castelo, visiting state planners tried to build a consensus around environmental governance themes, but eventually these visitors grew suspicious of colonists' performances. Officials were expecting gaúchos and nordestinos to be adversaries in their interactions with the state, an expectation informed perhaps by the history of violence and social strife along other Amazonian highways. In response to Castelenses' united front in which they presented themselves as "stewards of the forest," visiting planners concluded that roadside communities were merely "going through the motions" in sustainability planning.[10] However, it would be incorrect—or at least incomplete—to infer from settlers' stagings that they were only cynically conspiring to capture concessions from the state. Instead, we have to understand residents'

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[10] Here I have had to cut ethnographic data to illustrate this point. From 2005 through 2007, state officials and ecological NGOs partnered on creating a "sustainable development plan" for the Br-163 highway region, and sought the input of residents throughout the region. I accompanied meetings between state officials and local communities all along the highway, and found that by the conclusion of the plenary meetings, both sides had become disaffected with the other over possible zoning regulations, the pace and priority of the road paving project, and the ultimate status of residents' land claims. The "sustainable development plan" for the Br-163 Highway was completed, but shelved at the recommendation of the Minister of the environment. See Campbell, forthcoming.

willingness to embrace sustainability in a larger regional context: environmental planning represents a latter-day opportunity, a possible chance, for residents to establish legitimacy for their claims in the region. This is not a simple matter of greenwashing: seeking out novel partnerships and mastering environmentalist scripts are not so different from a rancher learning how to cut and monitor *picadas* or a squatter learning how to forge title-deeds with crickets. In participatory meetings, Br-163 colonists saw the emergence of new governance possibilities in terms of their long-standing experience in the region.

This experience, as we have seen, is thoroughly colored by the property-making game and the process of localization that arises from it. Take one example, of the gaúcho farmer and his nordestino neighbor who I visited in June 2011 during the burning season in southwestern Pará (image #13). Though these two claimants had squabbled for years over property lines and stretches of trees, Brazil's concerns over climate change mitigation had finally united them. As they watched the woods on their properties burn, they affirmed that their latest orientation towards the future was in keeping with emerging environmental governance regimes. These men and their families explained to me through the smoky haze that they had decided to conjoin their adjacent lots and embark on an ambitious reforestation program. Ironically, to qualify for this reforestation scheme, they had razed and set fire to 200 hectares of forest, an unfortunate scenario they planned to blame on a neighboring rancher known for letting pasture fires blaze out of control. With a story in place for why the forest was gone, the families hoped to participate in a REDD program, or Reducing Emissions through Deforestation and Forest Degradation, an initiative that has achieved some success lately with reforestation efforts in Indonesia and Tanzania. REDD programs compensate forest owners who can show that they have increased carbon sequestration on their lands. In late 2009, The Nature Conservancy (TNC) began two pilot programs to connect financial incentives generated in the global carbon market with Amazonian proprietors.

After learning of the TNC's REDD pilot program, the nordestino and gaúcho families devised an ingenious scheme, and one which took many meetings for me to suss out. First, they put aside any bad blood between them and began to work together to make property claims that would fit with what they understood to be the mechanics of TNC's REDD program. The families then set fire to their holdings to erase earlier picada trails and to reset the lot's carbon load to zero, thereby enabling multiple tons of future CO2 sequestration over the coming decades. Next, they drew up a contract in which the gaúcho agreed to be the minor partner in a corporation comprised of the holdings formerly in dispute, leaving the nordestino to be the sole client in a future patron/client relationship with the TNC and Brazilian state. To make the conjoined lot appear to have been legitimately purchased from a real estate firm, the families printed deeds and buried them with crickets. After I finally convinced him to show me his new "old" property papers, the nordestino quickly spirited them into a locked drawer, and began to show me instead the shiny new satellite-generated map that indicates the boundaries of the corporation's proposed reforestation project. (image #14). He proudly stated that a TNC fieldworker had given him this map just a week before.

To my nordestino friend, the map represented a future that is marked by technocratic procedures, periodic payments for forest improvements, and a rising sense of locals' participation in global environmental concerns. These things are real for rural migrants, but at the moment they are not strictly motivated by possible financial benefits associated with reforestation or carbon sequestration. Instead, these migrants' actions--destroying a forest in order to speak for a future forest--should be understood as a distinctly local appropriation of globally circulating idioms and practices of environmental governance. Climate change, like crickets and picadas, is another tool for making property along the Br-163; residents come to the rhetorics of climate change neither as a cast of newly converted environmentalists nor as investors looking for a financial windfall. The gaúcho put it succinctly: "Without clear land title, you cannot prove ownership and sell the forest's carbon." In this statement, a colonialist vision of extractivism frames the future forest's carbon as a

salable commodity, but the emphasis is clearly on the motive force of property. It is clear land title that these schemers are after, and in the latest push for environmental and economic planning along the highway, lining up for climate change mitigation is seen as a means to this end.

Satellite images baldly illustrate what these entrepreneurial families have done. Image #15 is a Landsat photo of Western Pará (July 2009), and it clearly shows the famous "fish skeleton" outline of trunk and secondary roads in the Transamazon region. A close-up of the same image centered on Castelo de Sonhos reveals forest cover surrounding the village and the unpaved Br-163; a blue circle can be seen indicating the site of nordestino and gaúcho's competing claims (image #16). Still green in 2009, a more recent satellite image--this one taken in July 2011 by the Brazilian Institute for Geography and Statistics (IBGE)--shows the claimants' lots lade bare. (image #17) What is crucial to know about this map is that The Nature Conservancy will be using later versions of it as their pilot program gets up and running. This is good news for the gauchos and nordestinos, whose vacant and cleared lot appears here. Since there are no trees there now, and since TNC is not going to compare current satellite data to earlier imagery, these families appear to be good candidates for reforestation: their lot is not inside a park or indigenous territory; the claims to their lot are no longer in dispute; and these families have managed to make connections with the right NGOs at that right time. While no one knows if or when REDD programs will result in direct payments to rural Amazonians, these colonists are actively anticipating a future governance possibility, and have literally staked their claim on it. From a distance, this looks like a tragically avoidable--and even absurd--deforestation scenario. From up close, however, roadside residents have burned this forest to solidify their property claim on it, while simultaneously inserting themselves as willing participants in environmental governance plans.

Speculative Accumulation: Prolepsis in Environmental Governance

My ethnography of development politics along an unpaved road in the Brazilian Amazon led me to closely examine the environmental, economic, and ideological aspects of property-making. In contrast to the typical picture of colonists using property logics to accumulate land and extract wealth, migrants along the Br-163 experiment with a range of property making practices as a means to anticipate and influence the future establishment of a governance regime. Colonists are fixated on property because they are still dedicated to a colonial transformation of Amazonia, but their improvised territorial claims also bring them into intimate and surprising relations with their surrounding environments, and this localization process changes their perspectives on relating to the state and regional outsiders. I offer these arguments not to glorify colonists nor to offer justifications for their worldviews. Rather, it has been my aim to sit with the empirical realities of this arrested frontier region, and to ask questions that further our understanding of the sociocultural aspects of establishing capitalist frontiers in the developing world. The environmental and cultural transformations currently taking place in Amazonia rely in part on both the idea and effective emplacement of property as an alienable and severable object; but this process of turning "nature" into a "commodity" is not an evenly unfolding one, nor is it an inevitable function of the structural evolution of capitalism.

By way of conclusion, I would like to return to a figure outlined in the title of this paper, but which for various reasons I have avoided defining: "speculative accumulation." So, what is the "secret" of speculative accumulation? The reference here is to Marx's grappling with the secret of primitive accumulation, which he revealed to be the initial violence at the heart of capitalism, the dirty secret that its liberal chroniclers tried to efface from history. Primitive accumulation is so-called because it is the first swipe of accumulation that kicks off the ever-expanding nature of capitalism. By the late 20th Century, regulation theorists and Marxist geographers were theorizing the current stage of capitalism as being defined by "flexible accumulation," in which communication

technology allows money and surplus to fly around the world rather effortlessly (see Harvey 1989). My intervention here is not to formulate a "new" period in this evolution of global capitalism, but rather to analyze the sociocultural specificity of capitalist formations. In this sense, I'm deploying "speculative accumulation" in a similar fashion as others have used "spectacular accumulation," i.e., to name and analyze how capitalism emerges as a processual cultural project, and how its practitioners become acutely aware of the *appearances* of wealth, accumulation, and success (Tsing 2005). With "speculative accumulation," then, I'm highlighting what happens when would-be capitalists anticipate and attempt to influence emerging state and market regimes (see image #18).[11]

Speculative accumulation is accumulation that will be realized if certain events take place. For rural Amazonians, this means *if* carbon markets develop, or *if* environmental regulation is forgiving, or *if* the state regularizes property claims. It is not instantly realizable accumulation, or even predictable: no one knows, though they can guess, as to yields, rents, and profits. In this sense, speculative accumulation is like any form of speculation: you place bets, you wait and see. But in another sense--and this is what distinguishes speculative accumulation--waiting around for things to develop (the "ifs" above) is not enough. Colonists engaging in speculative accumulation have begun to act *as if* certain future market and governance conditions are right around the corner.

In rural Amazonia, property-making is not deployed to mark and accumulate property, because the overwhelming consensus is that the infrastructure (laws, rentability, reliable markets) that

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[11] A possible touchstone for taking this concept deeper is Louis Althusser's notion of "aleatory materialism." Althusser points out that Marx (1867) understood the "non-teleological nature of capital accumulation" in the latter's account of primitive accumulation. From Marx's discussion of the sheep-walks, Althusser distills his own theory of political economy, which he calls "aleatory materialism," or the philosophy of the encounter (2006: 198-202). With this, Althusser contends that history emerges in contingent encounters (accidents, entanglements, brief incidents, etc.) that come to have a false sense of solidity in most historical analysis. Property, Althusser implies, is assumed to be the foundation of capitalist social formations; this assumption has so infiltrated our historical analyses that it has become difficult to think of social relations that might be determined by factors other than the conventional theory of property and dispossession that follows from classical primitive accumulation. Though left undeveloped before Althusser's death, "aleatory materialism" was intended as a correction to Marxists' assumptions that "primitive accumulation" had already happened, long ago on the sheep- walks. Instead, he argued that primitive accumulation is an ongoing process, defined by encounters and contingencies now as ever. Others, especially anthropologists, have taken this perspective in their analyses of intellectual property, genomics, patents, the privatization of public assets, and "neoliberalism" more generally; see Harvey (various), Rajan (2006), Shever (2009). See also the *Grundrisse* (Marx 1858: 490-48) for more on Marx's analysis of the emergence of private property as alienable, salable, and accumulable.

makes accumulation possible has not yet been built. There are many possibilities still for how capitalism will consolidate resources and modes of accumulation, so colonists set themselves up to participate in a variety of future scenarios. They are, in a very real sense, accumulating the abilities to move forward in multiple future scenarios; rather than speculating only on cows, or carbon, or land itself, these claimants are keeping their options open. In speculative accumulation, the terms of history can always be revised in order to fit with likely future regulations or scenarios for growth. Titles can be forged or revised, boundary paths can be shifted or erased, and alliances can be made or dashed: these are the resources that colonists are using to preserve their chances of fitting with future growth schemes. In pursuing these tools, rural Castelenses do not accumulate land and begin to extract profits and rent from it. But through speculative accumulation they do position themselves to speak for the region, and come to have influence over extractive regimes in the future. This final point is important because the relatively isolated colonists I have described in this talk are not the only actors anticipating growing wealthy along the Br-163 highway: agribusiness, mining, and other large sectors await future plans as well. "Flexible accumulation" may be fitting to describe how these large, multinational players are sizing up Amazonia as a resource frontier, but for long-term colonists in Castelo de Sonhos, "speculative accumulation" names the tools and the disposition through which relatively marginal actors look to remain relevant in the region.

Colonists pursuing speculative accumulation are self-consciously aware of the hinge that has yet to be put in place linking properties (in land, etc.) to history: colonists live in (and through their speculations produce) wild, unsettled country that will only in the future be regulated and incorporated into the state and market (see Rose 2004). By tending to trails and forging papers, colonists in Castelo de Sonhos are preparing for possibilities, trying their best to fit a range of possibilities for governance. This prolepsis--a foreshadowing, an enactment of something in the future as if it were accomplished fact--is crucial to the replicating of capitalism in expansive

frontiers.[12] With their concern for property's future legibility and durability, these colonists are creating the conditions for familiar state and market forms to "settle" the frontier. To the Brazilian government, property is both the problem (in that their is tenure confusion) and the solution to the challenges of environmental governance in Amazonia. Severable, alienable, and salable property--a goal of nordestino and gaúcho speculators alike--is now thoroughly embedded in state plans, and teams are currently drawing and redrawing cadastral maps throughout Amazonia. The days of fake papers and furtive trails are probably numbered, but their proleptic effects played and continue to play a role in shaping the terms for state and market reforms in the region.

Speculation and anticipatory gestures are an important way that people act and through which landscapes get transformed. As ethnographers, we need to pay close attention to anticipatory gestures, both as a matter of theorizing the emergence of capital and statecraft in a frontier zone, but also as a means for understanding how environmentalism itself is being woven into capitalist designs and local responses to possibilities for governance.[13] Ethnography of the development encounter bring local communities more squarely into the picture as historical subjects and reveal their roles in the construction of globally-circulating ideas and practices. I've tried to show here how property emerges for colonists via a restless localization of intense physicalities and longing anticipations. Colonists are rooting themselves in histories and materialities along the road, and this

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[12] I hope we can talk more about prolepsis in the discussion; Eric Worby has used the concept to great effect in his analysis of interactions between the state and agrarian reform clients in Zimbabwe (2000). An analytical term used in rhetoric and derived from the Greek for "preconception," prolepsis can indicate a foreshadowing, a preemptive rebuttal (as in an argument), or an insisting on the present (and impossible) state of something bound to happen in the future (e.g., the exclamation "I'm a dead man!"). Deeds and property lines perform a kind of prolepsis, as do strategic interactions with state planners. See Campbell, forthcoming.

[13] Indeed, my point is not that proposals for environmental governance or infrastructure reform are inspiring speculation and deforestation as people anticipate them. Rather the point here is to understand a culture of speculation, of making things in advance, which is actually at the heart of environmental governance. Colonists' speculations influence the shape that governance takes. It is not the case that the prospect of environmental governance is inspiring rampant land speculation "before it's too late," but rather that speculation is at the heart of environmental governance, an unavoidable fact of this region (and self-conscious frontiers everywhere), a structuring presence that will shape and direct, be part and parcel of, governance & the market.

is not a simple process of either environmental destruction or the emergence of a new army of ecological stewards. To understand it better, we need to take a look.

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Images referred to in the text:

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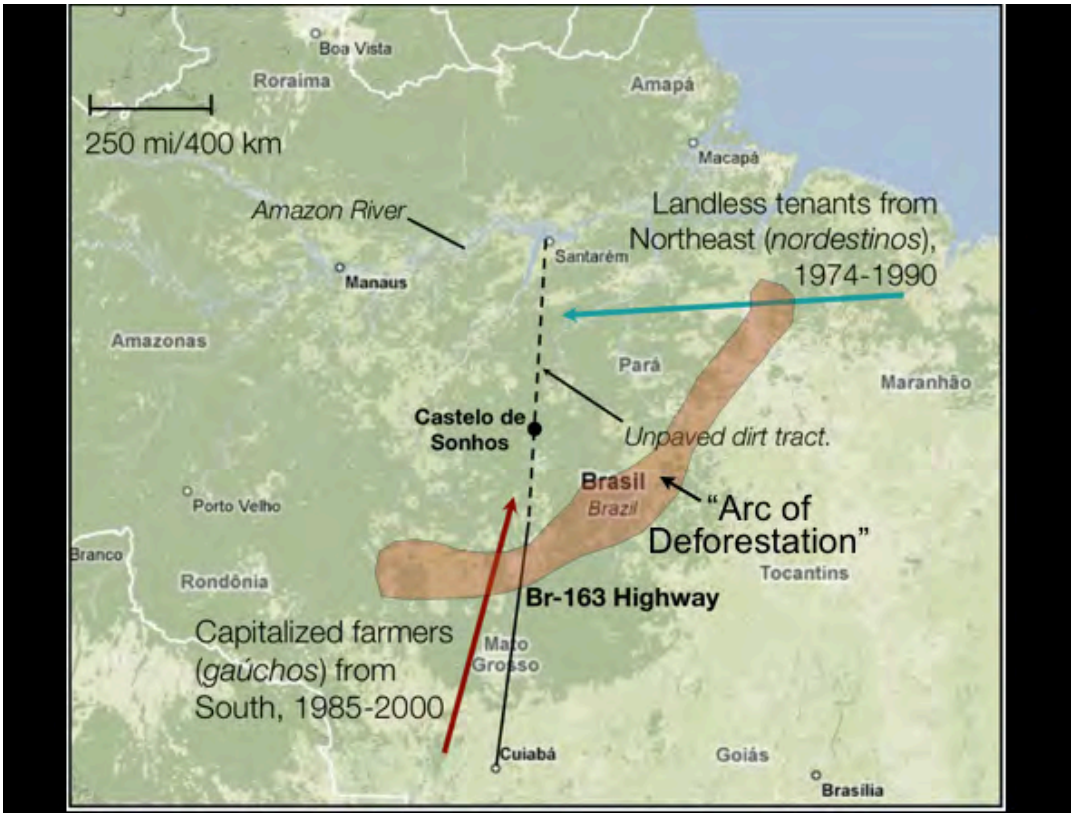
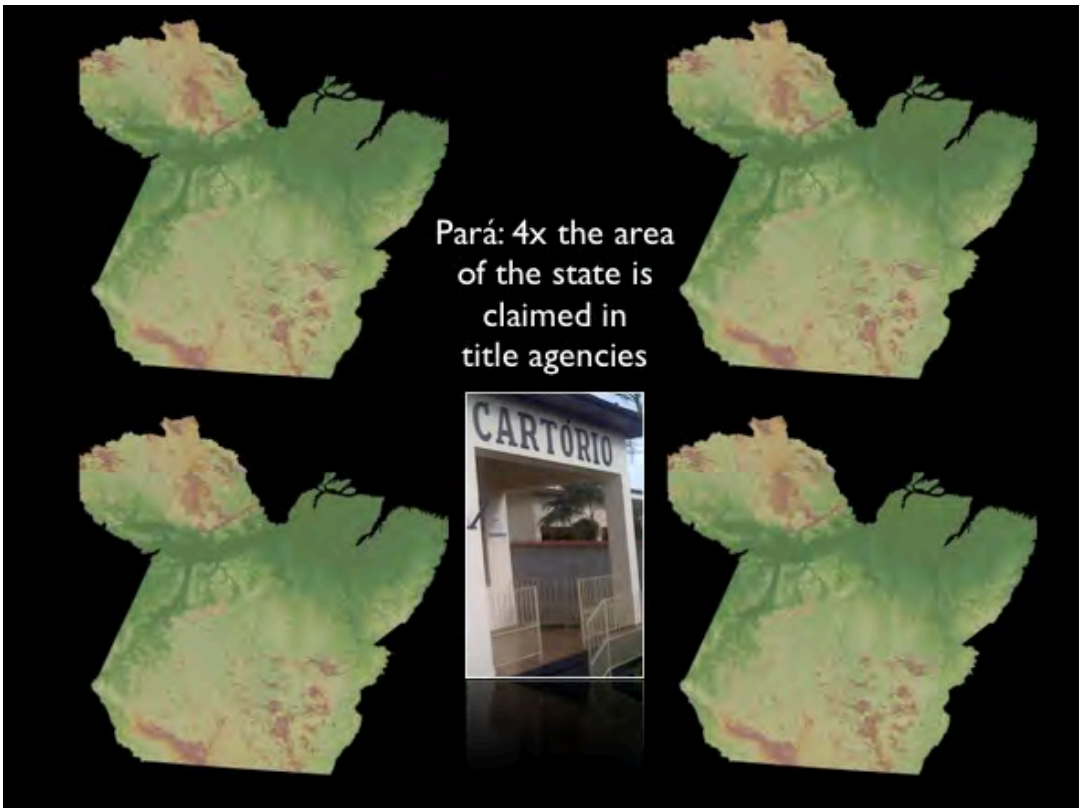


3


Cargill's Soy & Grain Trans-Shipment Terminal
Santarém, Pará - Tapajós & Amazon Rivers

4


Castelo de Sonhos:
"Castle of Dreams"


Pará: 4x the area of the state is claimed in title agencies
CARTÓRIO

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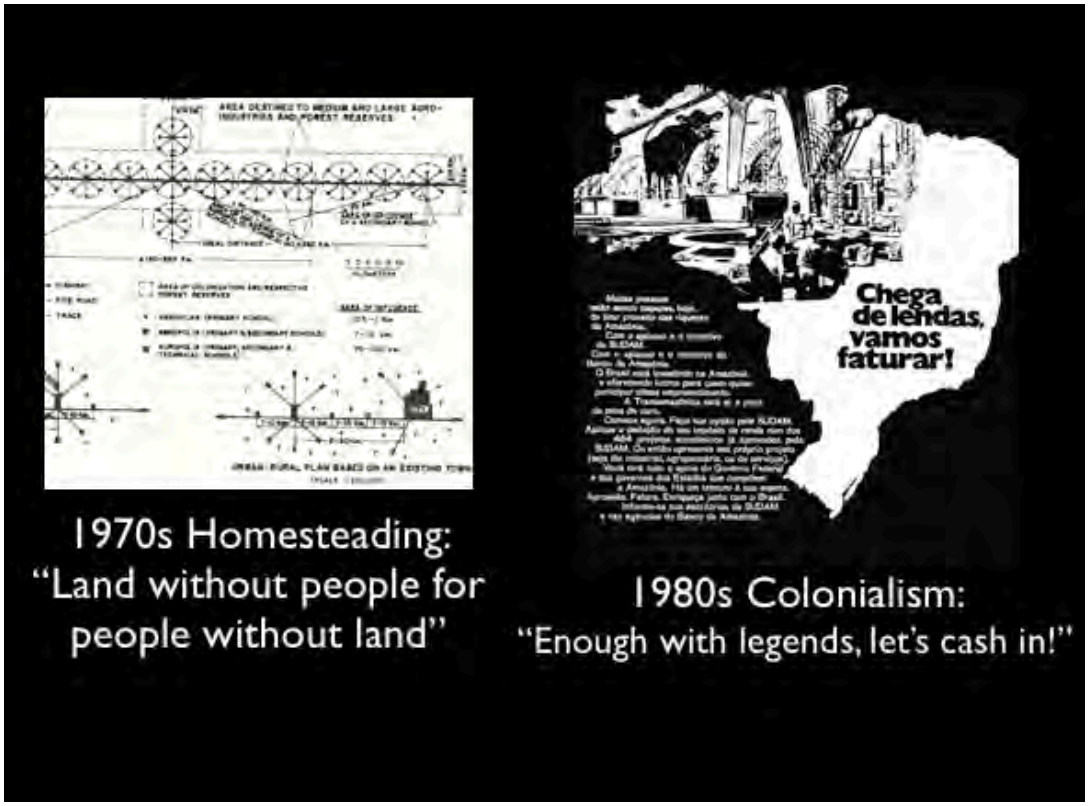
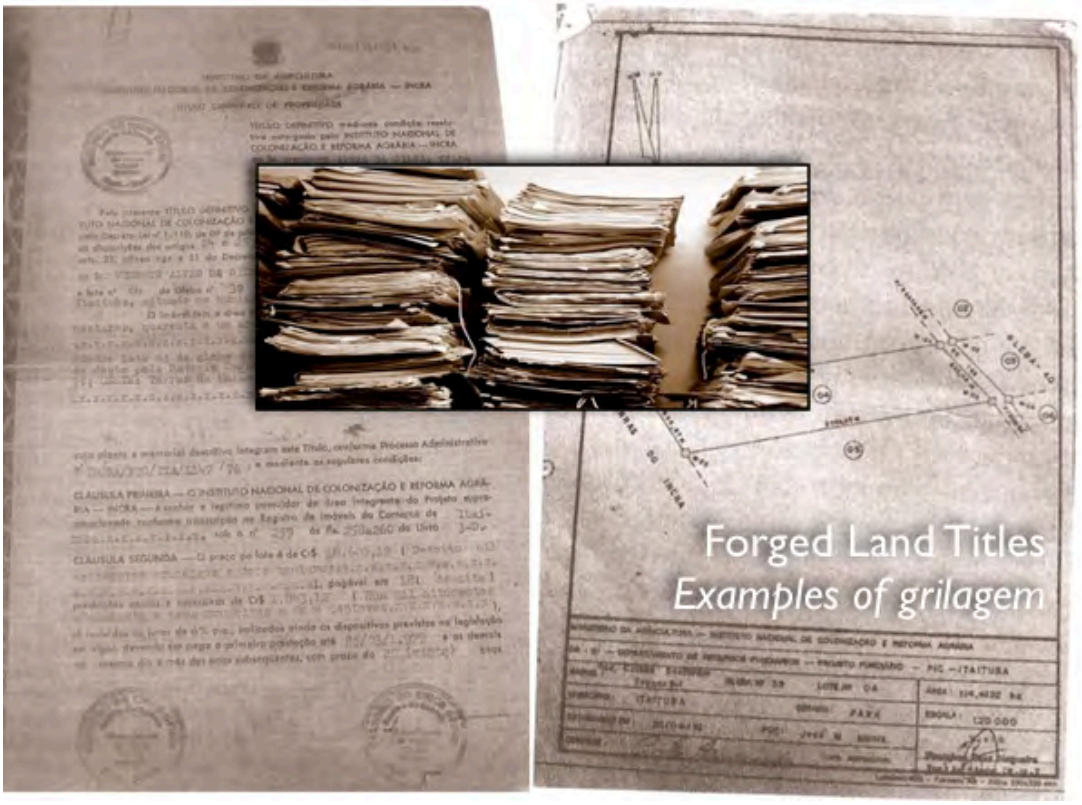

1970s Homesteading:
"Land without people for people without land"
Chega de lendas, vamos faturar!
1980s Colonialism:
"Enough with legends, let's cash in!"

7


Picada boundary trail

8


Forged Land Titles
Examples of grilagem

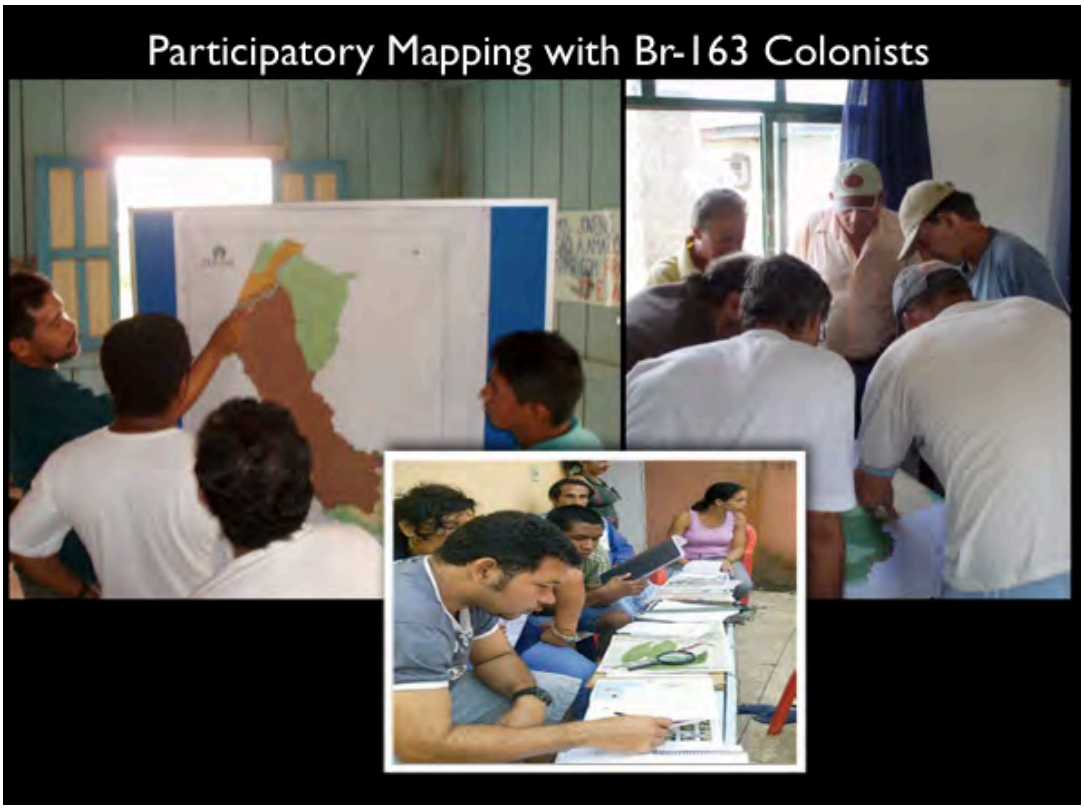
9

10

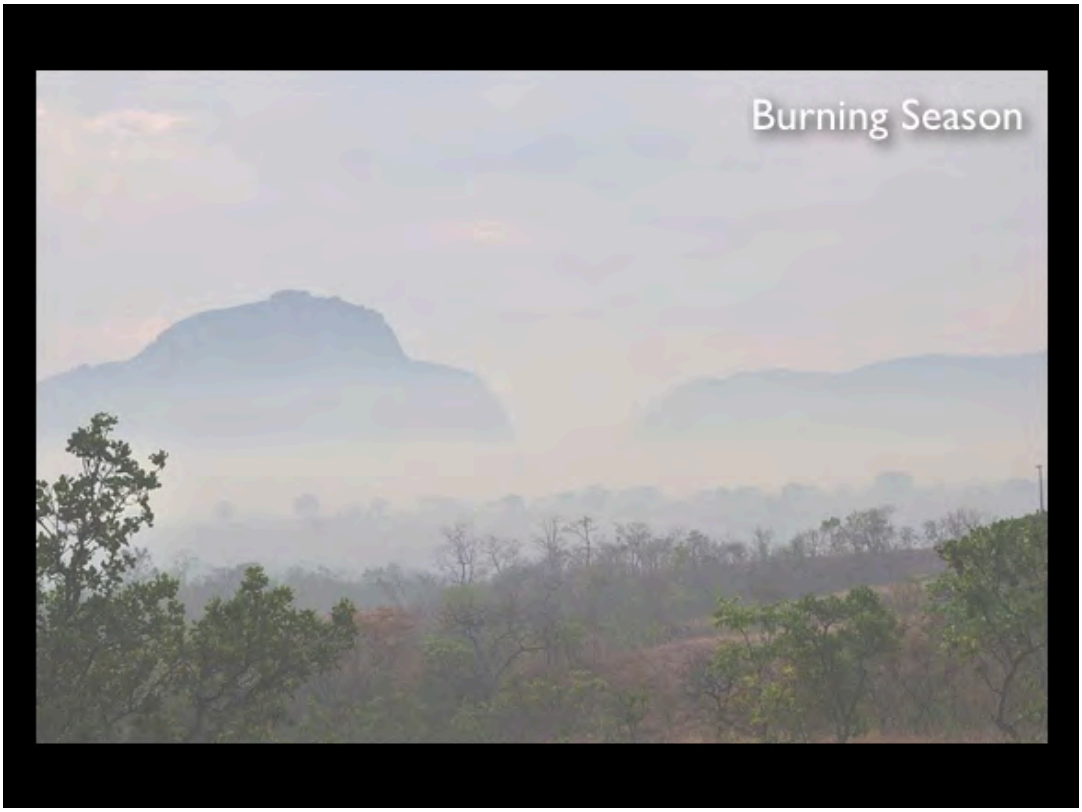
11


Fast-Growing Seedlings:
Carpentaria Palm, Nargusta Leadwood

12


Participatory Mapping with Br-163 Colonists

13



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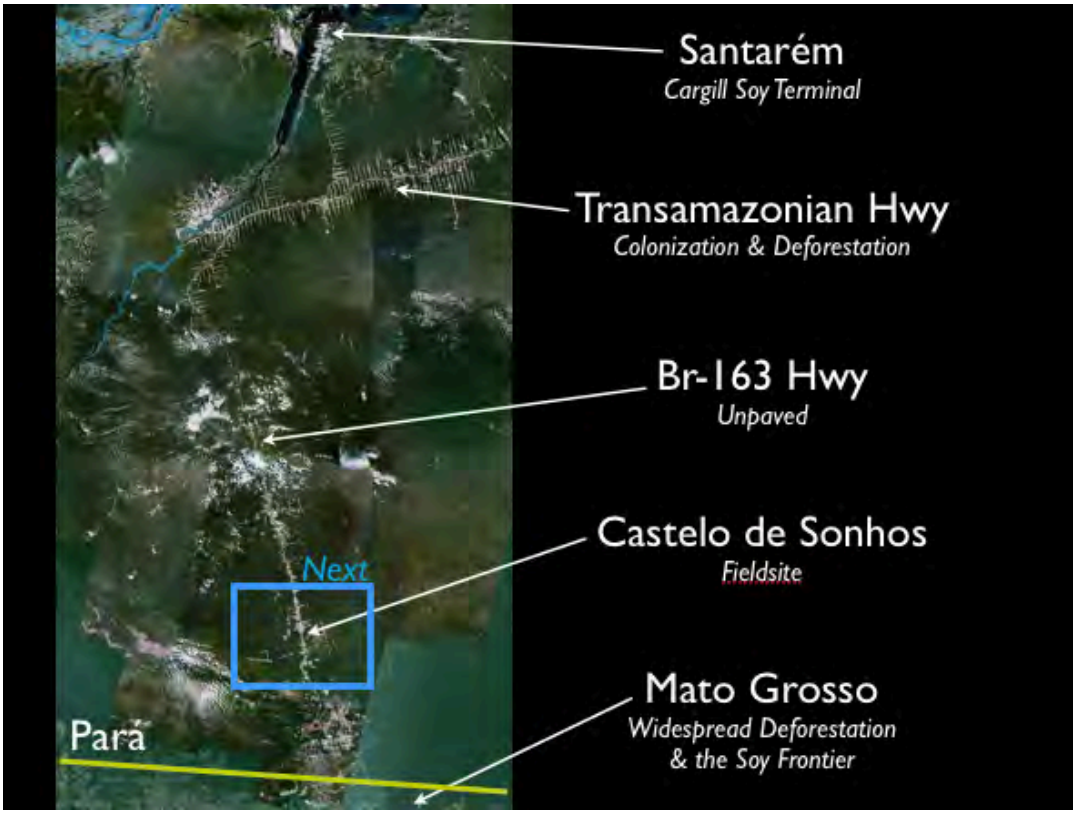
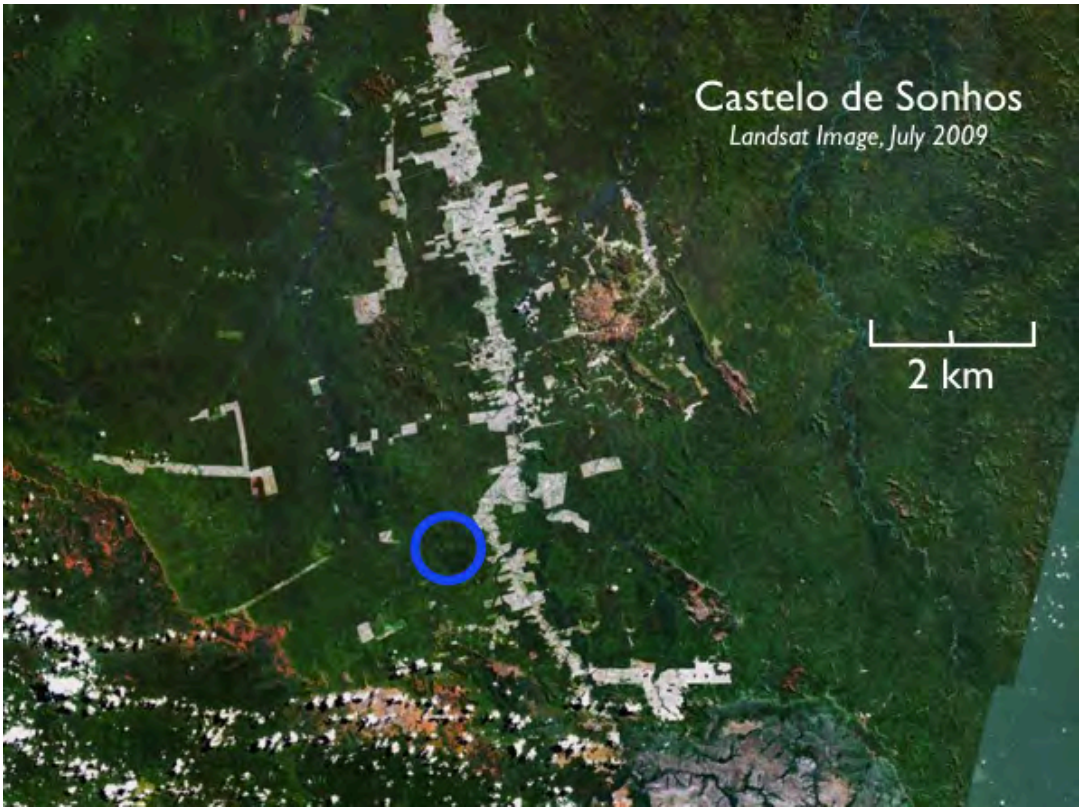
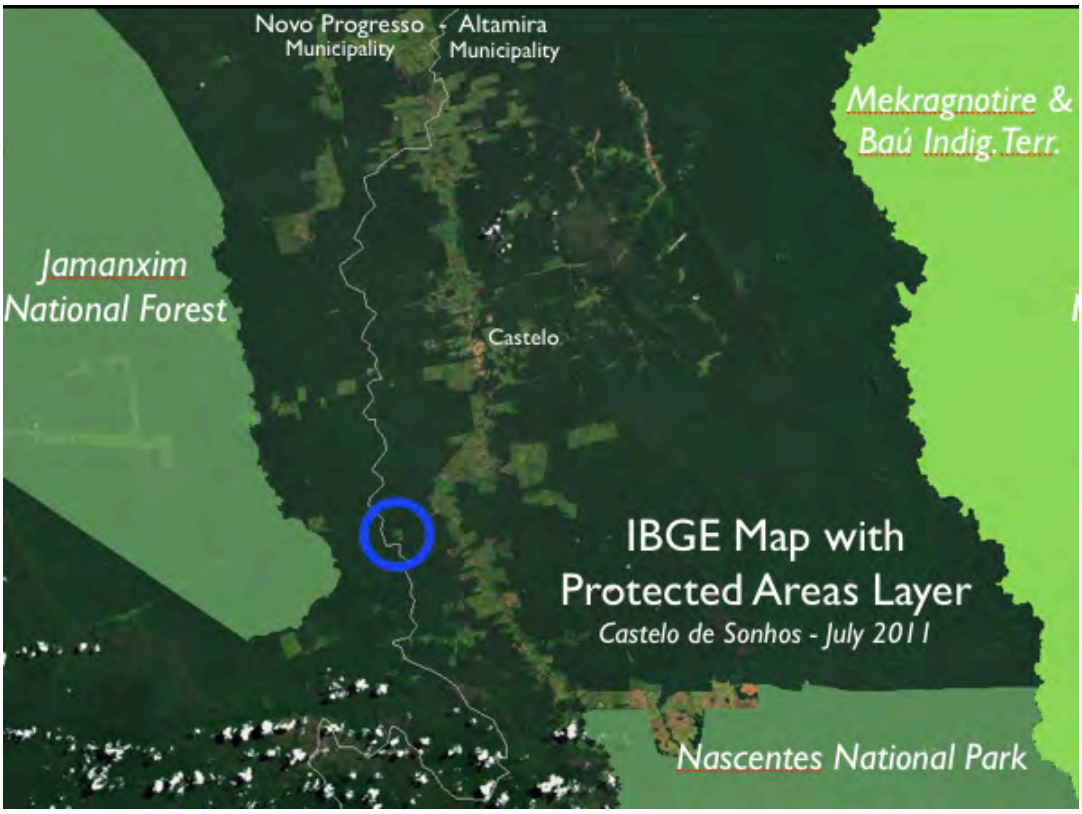

Santarém
Cargill Soy Terminal
Transamazonian Hwy
Colonization & Deforestation
Br-163 Hwy
Unpaved
Castelo de Sonhos
Fieldsite
Next
Mato Grosso
Widespread Deforestation
& the Soy Frontier
Para

16


Castelo de Sonhos
Landsat Image, July 2009
2 km

17



18

primitive accumulation

enclosure of the commons, expropriation, rent

flexible accumulation

post-Fordism, financialization, privatization

spectacular accumulation

economy of appearances; leaps of faith

speculative accumulation

attempts to anticipate or influence the state & market regimes that will make future accumulation possible