

## LIFE, EARTH AND ORE: the life stories of the residents of Piquiá de Baixo in Açailândia-MA network


VIDA, TERRA E MINÉRIO: as histórias de vida dos moradores de Piquiá de Baixo em Açailândia-MA em rede

VIDA, TIERRA Y ORE: las historias de vida de los residentes de Piquiá de Baixo en la red de Açailândia-MA

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### ABSTRACT:

The community of Piquiá de Baixo, located in the city of Açailândia / MA, keeps fighting for its space, in order to maintain its legacy and the right to housing. This journey came from a long process that formed an intense panel of confrontations, which started with the struggle for settlement in the land, with the arrival of landowners and extended to the environmental impact caused by mining companies. In this conflictive scenario, we aim to examine the ways of denouncing and resisting residents, with the privileged locus of analysis being the residents' life stories. It will be a qualitative research, with a double approach: social cartography, which values collective memories, and discourse in a social network that reflects life stories. We note that there is an empowerment and political denunciation through digital activism, contrary to the hegemonic discourse.

**KEYWORDS:** Eastern Amazon; Rural Communities; Memories; Digital Activism.

## Introduction

When working with local communities we must highlight their formative genesis, their fight path and, mostly, the social agents that helped to structure those communities. Such perspectives, with a view to seeking a mosaic of the locus, become still more complex when working with urban/rural hybrid communities<sup>1</sup>, which have severe conflictive conditions in their history, being marked by shock and resistance with view to strengthen, not only their legacy, but also in the maintenance of a *habitus*<sup>2</sup> and of an *ethos* of life. As research universe we work in this article with the community of Piquiá de Baixo, on the city of Açailândia, in Maranhão (Brazil)<sup>3</sup>.

This community has some quite particular characteristics, as it had been built by the continuous process of struggle, first by the path of fixation in an area of considerable natural richness, from the advent of the Belém-Brasília highway, in the 1970s, subsequently, by the conflict process arisen by the installation of steel mill of pig iron. In this resistance path, the community of Piquiá de Baixo undertook a process of empowerment in order to face the capital who intended to make impact on their lives and excise the local *habitus* conditions, as well as undertaking, subsequently, a continuous process aiming at denouncing the harmful consequences caused by the installation of these industries in its surroundings. Based on what was exposed, this article has as main objective to examine the forms of denounce, of struggle, of resistance and life of the residents of Piquiá de Baixo, having as privileged locus analysis the representations of the residents on pages of digital media, materialized in life stories.

In order to work with this universe, it is necessary to refine the article in the following moments, precisely apropos of better fit the intended scope, which are: 1) the community scenario and its significance within the locus of the Eastern

<sup>1</sup> For the characterization of the transformations of the rural universe underway in the Brazilian scenario, mostly, the convergence and rupture caused by the urban universe on rural, as well as the proletarianization of peasant workers into salaried workers, we report in this article as a theoretical contribution to the text of José Graziano Silva, in "O novo rural brasileiro", 1997.

<sup>2</sup> We reflect the *habitus* issue from the Bourdieu's theoretical contribution, when the author elaborate about the relationship between individual and society based on that category, stating that the individual, the personal and the subjective are concurrently social and collectively orchestrated. The *habitus* is a socialized subjectivity. (BOURDIEU, 1992, P. 101).

<sup>3</sup> Research made from the project *Cartografia Social de Piquiá de Baixo em Açailândia: memórias, trajetórias, política e ativismos midiáticos*, approved by FAPEMA according to the notice 002/2019/UNIVERSAL.

Amazon, aiming, thus, the framing of the region, the city and the community of Piquiá in face of the first conflicts arisen by the expansion of agribusiness and of the mining companies; 2) the voices of the community of Piquiá, highlighting in these moments the harmful consequences caused by these big industries, as well as the impact in the urban/rural hybrid scenario in Eastern Amazon and the attempt to stop these invisibilities; 3) the transformations of the claims in political acts, highlighting specially the work developed on digital media, for example, the *Justiça nos Trilhos*<sup>4</sup> [Justice on the Rails] Facebook page.

For methodological purposes this research will be a qualitative research, in which we will work with the analysis methodology through social cartography, as a form of articulating and dynamic study of the references gathered in the field work, namely: representations and relations of force; movements and confrontations. As research techniques which better subsidized our field work, we operate a bibliographic review, historical reconstruction, life stories and, above all, discourse analysis of the digital materials, in order to compose the research theme to, in that way, we can converge to the proposed objective.

### Lives in conflict in the Eastern Amazon

In order to frame and analyze the city of Açailândia inside the scope of this article, first of all, we must situate it spatially within the geographical locus in which it is part, seeking to highlight both the historical the political aspects, so striking in their present moment. Açailândia is included in the metropolitan region of the city of Imperatriz, considering this city as a regional pole and part of the West Mesoregion of Maranhão, with a borderline location between the Southwest of the state of Maranhão and North of Tocantins. It is important to understand Imperatriz as a pole city, in reference to Milton Santos (SANTOS, 2008; SANTOS & SILVEIRA, 2001), where the author masterfully emphasizes that a city acquires prominence as a pole when it has a functionality that encompasses beyond its own space, also, the cities surrounding its surroundings; consequently, it has become a major city through services and work, as well as building

<sup>4</sup> The social media have currently 2 billion active users and about 127 millions of active users in Brazil, being the biggest platform in absolute terms. In: <https://www.uol.com.br/tilt/noticias/redacao/2020/01/28/facebook-anuncia-medidas-para-protoger-privacidade-dos-usuarios.htm>. Access on May 2, 2020.

actions, networks and power relations, shaping the geographic space in which it located and interconnecting geographically across the region.

Such characteristics to define regional specificities become of fundamental importance, since the city of Açailândia came to be emancipated from Imperatriz in 1981, having, up to this date, historical and political references that can only be explained considering its formative genesis. In that perspective this process of the city genesis must be explained by the universe of expansion of national road networks, starting in the 1950s, with the construction of the Belém-Brasília highway (FRANKLIN, 2008), which led to a process of rapid emergence of the region in the regional scenario, making the city of Imperatriz the main expansionist highlight and, consequently, the future Açailândia emerging together in this scenario.

In that way, Açailândia was born as result of this expansion, mainly due to the various migrants who came to live by the side of the Belém-Brasília road, having a great absorption of this migrant workforce by the work on the highway. Thus, the intense migratory flow, both Maranhão residents and other national states residents, transformed the city of Imperatriz and its surroundings into a great "human anthill", above all, receiving the flagellates of the drought of the Northeast in this region, which was considered the last "green El Dorado", given that it is named as "*Portal da Amazônia Oriental*", precisely because its geographical characteristics (IDEM, 2008).

We must also consider the characteristics of the local biome, which led to a rapid process of local settlements of this migrant population, creating, consequently, prosperous rural communities. As for the biome, it becomes relevant to highlight its characteristics, as it is presented itself as a favorable natural resource for the fixing process of rural workers, since a region was in a rich convergence zone between the Amazon Forest, the Cerrado and the Mata dos Cocais, the latter having great prominence in the scenario for the management of the traditional communities of babassu coconut breakers since that period. We highlight that this natural scenario and its first formative centers came to be very threatened in the following years precisely by the economic cycles that followed in the region, namely: 1) the wood cycle; 2) the gold cycle<sup>5</sup>; 3) cycle of agribusiness, 4) with the cycle of pig iron companies, which came to settle exclusively in the Açailândia region.

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<sup>5</sup> We consider for study, the gold cycle as the period the late 1970s and the early 1980s. Although there were no extractive mines in Açailândia and region (MA), the city of Imperatriz becomes one of the main commercial centers for materials extracted from mining, thus making the entire region in its surroundings have reflections (positive or negative) from commercial economic fame, coming from the mines of Northern Brazil (FRANKLIN, 2008, TEIXEIRA, 2016).

In this process of installing capital, we emphasize that there were severe processes of local disruptions in Açailândia, in the following gradient: 1) first, of the traditional extractive communities being expelled by the various economic cycles; 2) later, rural workers and small occupiers were expelled, who settled in the region since the advent of the Belém-Brasília highway, which were pushed out of their work areas with the arrival of large estates and large industries in the early 1980s. This extremely dialectical process was mainly aimed at combining capital construction with economic development in the city of Açailândia, in other words, the sedimentation of corporate centers to the detriment of residents of rural areas, a social fact that has resulted to date in countless sequels for the population residing in the city, since, obviously, the great capital was not able to absorb the whole community for their jobs, causing, consequently, a great process of social exclusion.

We also emphasize that due to these economic cycles, there was a continuous process of proletarianization in the countryside. Such dynamics of proletarianization, in the years following the installation of agribusiness, and mainly of pig iron companies, came to turn rural workers into industry employees - being that, in addition to disrupting the dynamics of rural work, it also reflected in the changes in traditional peasant material and immaterial culture, given that due to daily work industries, therefore, there would be no conservation of rural practices. Along this path, there was also a break in the maintenance of small rural properties, resulting, therefore, in the non-commercialization of agricultural products and exchanges between countryside and city.

Furthermore, in addition to the attempt to annihilate family agricultural production, we emphasize that the fact of fostering these large industries in the local chain has brought as a last consequence the almost extinction of part of the region biome, therefore, of nature as way of survival of these rural communities in their natural habitat. We highlight in this scenario, for example, the weaknesses arising from traditional communities of Babassu Coconut, since the exploitation of babassu is considered as cultural heritage of coconut breakers (ALMEIDA, 1995), suffering as result of these large corporations, a constant attempt of annihilate this traditional workforce. Similarly, we verify, because it is an area of constant *grilagem* [land fraud] by large landowners, the occurrence of severe land conflicts mainly registered from the 1970s and

80s, facing the advent of large pastures for commercial use of cattle, gaining, as expected in the period, the strength of the bullet and capital (TEIXEIRA,2016).

Açailândia was emancipated of Imperatriz in 1981, hence, was marked by all those conflicts, however, even so, contradictorily, became to be an extremely attractive city for the great capital by several reasons. As explained, the geographic demarcation of the city and region as an attractive national pole in the face of successive economic cycles, caused the city become in the 1980s extremely showy for the international great capital and, above all, for the economic megaprojects associated with the national government, aiming to transforming the space in an industrial complex for mining companies. We emphasize that at this moment we were experiencing the twilight of civil-military dictatorship (1964 – 1985), which even being in its final stages still had authoritarian force. Therefore, any attempt to confront local residents, mostly small farmers, could do little to face the large corporations that were emerging; hence, it was an extremely unequal struggle, given the fragility that already existed in face of the confrontation with the large landowners and *grileiros* [land fraudsters], which physically eliminated opponents aiming to expand territories and pastures (TEIXEIRA, 2016).

This beginning of the 80s is marked by the expansion of the cycle of mineral extraction in the North of Brazil, and precisely by the regional specificities of Imperatriz and its surroundings, especially Açailândia, these geographic locations suffered with all the reflex of the economic “boom” of the period, making Imperatriz the commercial center especially for gold, and Açailândia as a future outlet for the production of steel mills, due to the Carajás railroad passing through the city from the North of Brazil, bringing material from the extraction mines. In the 1980’s, five steel companies were installed in Açailândia, which are: Ferro Gusa do Maranhão S/A (FERGUMAR), Viena Siderúrgica e Cia, Companhia Siderúrgica Vale do Pindaré (COVAP), Gusa Nordeste e Siderúrgica do Maranhão S/A (SIMARA), companies responsible for improving the ore extracted from the Amazon region, connecting to the international export of large industries. Obviously, this process of expansion of large corporations has brought great advances to cities that have benefited from this economic feast, both for Imperatriz, as a commercial pole, and for Açailândia, which has become a major industrial center for mineral processing (REIS, 2013).

However, once again we emphasize that this feast was not widespread for all segments, since, as a rule, these large manufacturing industries that use cutting-edge technologies have absorbed non-qualitatively the local labor for their production

process, delegating this function to the specialized labor from the great national centers, very well paid. Thus, as serious consequence, there was an extremely unhealthy forced adjustment process from the rural to the urban universe, in other words, there was a process of asphyxiation from the rural to the urban for subaltern jobs, thus presenting all the deleterious characteristics that this situation had brought to the residents of rural areas (SILVA, 1997).

That is, this economic advance far from bringing solutions and improvements in the quality of life has become the object of new conflicts, as already mentioned, resulting in the following characterizations: 1) a process of proletarianization of the countryside, when the peasants often gave up their work in agriculture to become linked as wage earners in these industries; 2) the dismantling of the traditional dynamics of these communities, which even living close to the urban core until the installation of large industries, still managed to maintain the preservation of habitus of life linked to the countryside; and, 3) regarding the biome, it considerably devastated what was left of natural reserves in the region's environment (IDEM, 1997). In summary, such deleterious scenarios were by no means overlooked by the dictatorial state apparatus during the installation period, because it had as its most important object in its commodity portfolio, mineral exploration on a large scale for the international market.

Among the communities that most severely felt these impacts of big capital in Açailândia were the residents of the Piquiá neighborhood, specifically from the community of Piquiá de Baixo, once there was a strong process of installation of these companies in the surroundings of the locality, not only asphyxiating their rural/urban hybrid *habitus*, but also transforming the lives of all residents of the community in an extremely complex situation, mainly with impacts and sequels on health. As it is known, any large transformation company that will be installed must have a minimum sustainability protocol, in order to be able to operate with an infrastructure compatible for the health of residents, however, this was not the case in the region, because the residents of Piquiá were the ones who suffered most from the impact of their daily lives due to the advent of these large installed iron industries.

From this unhealthy condition, there was great criticism because of the dangerous conditions of life, due to soot and pollution, as well as serious accidents and the lack of environmental planning of these large companies. Still, in relation to all the modernity promised by the great capital, in consortium with the civil-military dictatorship, such progress did not come at all for this small community, given that there

was a severe path of extinction of rights and erosion of its environment of natural life. In response to the lack of government attention, there was a slow but continuous process of empowerment of the local community, fighting for justice, health and their rights, that is, precisely with the main objective of facing this highly impactful process, which has so harmed their rural realities and brought several conflicts into their lives, as well as forcing a new countryside/city *habitus* (SILVA, 1997).

### **The voices of Piquiá want to echo: following the tracks of residents of Piquiá de Baixo in Açailândia – MA**

As for this journey of struggle, like so many other communities, neighborhoods and towns in the interior of Brazil, people of Piquiá de Baixo reveal in their memories the paths taken in search of better living conditions, breaking up from their families of origin to build other bonds. In these new relationships, new belongings and commitments became present before the government that insists on keeping them hidden; however, the residents did not remain silent, they did better, they organized themselves. This union that took place since the origin of the neighborhood keeps them together and guaranteed the to remain alert in the face of daily life and its chances.

The arrival of Vale company railroad, of steel industries and cement factories, left the community very vulnerable in all aspects, as already explained, in face of the impacts of environmental and noise pollution, even culminating in the expropriation of the community from its place. Therefore, the clash could only come through the collective force of the residents of Piquiá de Baixo, who broke through the invisibility block making their voices echo far away. According to Pereira (2019), the author describes that the residents organized themselves around an entity, the *Associação Comunitária de Moradores de Piquiá* [Piquiá Residents Community Association] and they all decided to fight together to reduce pollution in the neighborhood, to repair the impacts generated as a result of industrial operations and the entire mining chain: the alternative was to denounce companies in local, national and global networks.

Faced with these struggles, pursuing the memories of the residents of Piquiá de Baixo through their reports, we will follow the traces of their trajectories, disappointments, resistance and conquests. Thus, through this outline, we consider that the function of researching the memory and history of communities is, above all, to deconstruct the studies of linear history. In that perspective, in "History and Memory" Le Goff claims that the history of testimony has never ceased to be present in the



development of academic studies of the social sciences. Paradoxically, there is a criticism of this type of story due to the desire to put explanation instead of narration, but also, at the same time, we witness the revival of testimony through the “return of the event”, linked to the new media, to work of journalists among historians and the development of “immediate history” (LE GOFF, 1990).

Pierre Nora (1993), for his part, brings us a relevant discussion about the relationship between memory and history stating that these two are far from synonymous, because there is an opposition between these two fields. According to the author, memory is life always carried by living groups and, in this regard, it is in constant evolution, open to the dialectic of remembrance and forgetfulness; unaware of its successive deformations, vulnerable to all uses and changes. History, on the other hand, is the always problematic and incomplete reconstruction of what no longer exists, while memory is an always current phenomenon, and consequently, a link lived in the eternal present.

In this respect, we will approach mainly through the memory of the researched community, the formation of settlements in the region as reflections of transformation of rural areas into towns, neighborhoods and cities, many of them becoming a hybrid urban/rural community. Analyzing the case of Piquiá de Baixo in Açailândia, it is a roadside community that was formed from the arrival of many migrants and that their living spaces became slums, and, consequently, were treated with social rejection, that is, becoming invisible groups in the eyes of the State.

In order to better characterize the research universe, it is worth mentioning that the rural-urban exodus, according to Queiroz (1969, p. 94), caused a process of acceleration and formation of rural neighborhoods and slums, firstly in small cities. The rural workers flocked to the outskirts of small towns and villages, being, thus, expelled from their arable land, they migrated in search of fertile land. “There they formed a miserable group of ranches in vacant lands or in abandoned lands of bad soil.” (IDEM, 1969). In this context, the discussion that Martins (2008, p. 50) brings about the difference between periphery and suburb is valid, noting that there is a misinterpretation in these two concepts, namely: 1) Martins explains that in the suburbs the plots were large, the houses had space for the large backyard, a remnant of the rural that remained in the urban: fruit trees, vegetable gardens, chicken coops, gardens; in the suburban world, rural memory resists. 2) The periphery is already the product of real estate speculation, narrow streets and narrow sidewalks, lack of squares, tiny terrains, dirt and stench. Therefore, the

periphery is the designation of spaces characterized by pathological urbanization, by the negation of the urban itself. Thus, definition of periphery was incorporated for everything that is not a city. In this way the suburb, a traditional remnant between the countryside and the city, was erased as a place with a community and welcoming way of life that generates new belongings.

The community of Piquiá de Baixo has in its genesis, thus, traces of the categories described above; firstly, it has suburban characteristics: houses with large backyards full of fruit and vegetable gardens, collective use of forest and river spaces. Further, with the entrance to the Carajás – Companhia Vale do Rio Doce Railway complex and the other steel companies that settled, the place came to be transformed into a neighborhood with peripheral characteristics, because the installed companies usurped their backyards, polluted the environment, and degraded everything around the community.

According to Mr. Joaquim's, 78-year-old memory, he remembers how Piquiá de Baixo was born. Coming from Bahia in 1964 with his family, he says that at the beginning of the occupation in Açailândia, could have 20 houses, down on the edge of the manhole, down there,

[...] the river, at that time, was so good, had so many fishes, plenty of *açaí*, pure water, but when the companies came, the *açaí* was dying, they threw rubbish in the river and the fishes ended up dying, when the companies were arriving (...) no one bathed in the river anymore, because they left there scratching.<sup>6</sup>

Also, the account of Dona Francisca Silva<sup>7</sup>, known in Piquiá as Dona Tida, expresses her journey from place to place:

I was born in Ceará. When I came here, I came with my parents and siblings. We were eleven siblings. I was only six-year-old when I came to Maranhão. When we came to Maranhão, we came first to a city called São Domingos, there we grow up. When I was ten, my father passed away, we were fatherless. I left there and came to Barra do Corda. We lived in a place called Alto Alegre dos Padres. When I left from Barra do Corda, I was already married and mother of two kids. We came here, to Piquiá, in 1918. It has 38 years that I live here in Piquiá.

We can notice that Dona Tida's life trajectory is similar to that of many Brazilian migrants, always with their bags on their backs. Martins (2008) emphasize that in these moments of struggle for survival the common man is divided and powerless, creates and

<sup>6</sup> The account appears in the book *Liberdade caça jeito: histórias de todos na história de cada um*, precisely in the chapter *O grito e a beleza em Piquiá de Cima a Baixo*, by authors Pereira et. al.

<sup>7</sup> Interview held on 2019, November 9<sup>th</sup>.

recreates daily rites and procedures. It recycles social relationships, reappropriates traditions to face the deprivation of history and full understanding that modernity imposes on it, which minimizes and re-emphasizes it. Thus, he adheres, resisting living and overcoming in his own way the malaise of the society of uncertainty.

From the crossing of both documentary sources, as well as the survey of the oral history of these roadside communities, we seek to organize our analysis<sup>8</sup>. The narratives of many residents who founded neighborhoods and even cities and towns around the region's roads are of struggle, work, adventures and much suffering. In this characterization, Eclea Bosi (1994) shows that the constant displacements, result of modern life, force the non-rooting in a given space, or community of origin, also adds that this uprooting is a disintegrating condition of memory conditioned by the search for land and work to survive, with social ties and relationships being neglected. The author reinforces that

Having a past: here is another right of the person who derives from his rooting. Among the poorest families, extreme mobility prevents the sedimentation of the past, the chronicle of the family and the individual in their wandering journey is lost. Here is one of the cruelest exercises of economic oppression on the subject: the plunder of memories (IDEM, 1994, p. 443).

The migration, therefore, is a phenomenon that leads these peoples to the banishment of their past, forcing them to rebuild bonds with new people. There is a spatial instability, that confidence that the beings of their coexistence would not be lost, disappearing. Thus, hearing about the arrival of these groups in Piquiá and how they redo their experiences touches these social fractures of reconstructions and adaptations. Mr. Joaquim remembers his arrival here to the side of the road in Açailândia:

We came from Bahia, me, my father and my siblings; we arrived in 1962, staying for two years in Açailândia. My father took possession here (Piquiá), we arrived in 64 making a little pathway from Açailândia to here. When we came, dad made a hut on the riverside, and then started to work in plantation. We worked in plantation. When it was 1969 Mendes Junior came to make the road (BR 222). Here already had the goods, everything here was pasture. All we had here was good, pasture, manioc, corn, rice, beans. The *tropeiros* [man who carried cargo on donkeys and mules] came to pick up the crop and took it to Imperatriz.

<sup>8</sup> For the analysis, we rely on the theoretical perspective of Thompson (1992, p. 176) who makes it clear that "all of them [the sources] are fallible and subject to bias, and each of them has variable strength in different situations. In some contexts, oral evidence is the best; in others, it is supplementary, or complementary, to other sources."

Still on the tracks of the residents of Piquiá de Baixo, we talked to Dona Doca<sup>9</sup> and she told us that she arrived here in 72, came from Barra do Corda – Ma, lived in the house of her sister who was already in Piquiá, she married and had five daughters. In the community, she helped found the *Clube de Mães* [Mother's Club] together with other women, a club that mobilizes the whole community in all events, whether political, religious or cultural, comments Dona Doca that many important decisions were made in this place:

We founded *Clube de Mães* here. We worked together, many mothers. We did tolls, worked and made basic food baskets to help people in need. We did many events, many tours. We had a really good life here.

Dona Doca's account, which also belongs to other women in the community, shows how this collective of women enlisted other groups that led them to conquer some of the struggles. Dona Doca also recalls that she and the other women engaged in the project carried bricks, sand, cement and together raised the *Clube de Mães*. These memories of the struggle of Dona Doca and the other women of Piquiá reinforce the reconstruction of their homes. Dona Doca expresses herself again talking about her daily life in Piquiá in her youth, she reinforces: "all my memory is from here".

Dona Doca's memory goes far away and brings the sociocultural aspects of the life of rural communities in Maranhão, her relationship with religious trades and festivities. About *reizado*, a party that was very common in the interior of Brazil and Maranhão, she still reports: "we sing, we have the drums to beat, we sing and dance with the bottle on our heads, it was like that". The joy and enthusiasm in remembering these moments represents the life that pulsates in her memories, expressing the importance that the act of remembering has for the meaning of life of these people who have already experienced the sudden changes in their place. The transformations that the Piquiá de Baixo neighborhood had undergone, becoming an industrial neighborhood, left sociocultural and environmental fractures, the residents in the act of remembering find solace in their memories.

Another resident of Piquiá de Baixo, Mr. Edvard, remembers good times in the community:

Here we lived a peaceful life; the neighbors sit at the door every afternoon to tell stories under the trees and everybody was happy, because we bathed in the river there, fished there and lived on

<sup>9</sup> Conversation held on August 2019 at a meeting with the community of Piquiá de Baixo, as the result of research conducted in partnership with UFMA-UFT-UEMASUL

agriculture. Anywhere we could plant we lived well because the food provided. But not today, everyone is harmed [...] <sup>10</sup>.

In the conversations, the residents always referred to the practice of agriculture and fishing in the river for self-consumption as well as good community relations, without forgetting the baths and parties that made life lighter and happier. For Halbwachs (1990), memories are constructions of social groups, and these groups determine what can be remembered and the places where that memory is preserved. So it is certain that the collective memory is based on the memories that each person brings as a member of a group. The memory is explained by Delgado (2006) as a construction on the past, updated and renewed in the present time. At this point, the concept of time appears to be relevant, since representations about time are concrete constructions of material reality, so, in different contexts of history, men construct specific analyzes and representations about what has happened and what has been lived.

But, it is not just good memories that the residents of roadside communities in the West Mesoregion of Maranhão live, as well highlighted, we know well the conflicts and clashes that many of these residents faced and still face. In the case of Piquiá de Baixo community, the negative impact generated by the steel mills that installed themselves close to the community is explicit. These impacts that manifest themselves in various aspects daily, even generating diseases that affect children, adults and the elderly, are facts narrated in a painful way, many reach tears and silence, as telling their stories of suffering hurts.

Pollak (1989) emphasizes that, when the analysis of excluded and marginalized groups is privileged, the methodology of oral history emphasizes the importance of underground memories. They show themselves in moments of crisis, in sudden and exacerbated jerks, they are traumatic memories, memories that wait for the right moment to be expressed. According to the author, they exist in the memories of everyone, in the shadow areas, silences and unsaid. This typology of silences is shaped by the anguish of not finding someone to listen. Since underground memories invade public space, multiple claims invade the memory scene.

In the context of Piquiá de Baixo, this is expressed in the form of overcoming that came through a collective struggle for rights and guarantees that would minimize the suffering and neglect of the companies involved, as well as the State itself. The process

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<sup>10</sup> *Projeto Usina. Aconteceu deu sonhá*. Available in: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=y35MTS2wWio>. Access on September 04, 2019.

of regional, national and even international articulation means that this group is able to maintain itself overcoming all the consequences of its underground memories. Silences, as well as their voices, therefore, became a cry for help in favor of no less right. Therefore, the group's visibility gains wings internationally through a process of empowerment in digital media.

### The discourse and life stories: Who are they? What do they say in networks?

The object of this part of the analysis will be the life stories of the residents on Facebook page of Rede Justiça nos Trilhos (JnT) [Justice on the Rails Network] as a symbolic construction, which can be located by the address: <https://www.facebook.com/justicanostrilhos/>. The network is a movement of which the *Associação de Moradores de Piquiá* [Piquiá Residents Association] is part. The network platforms bring the activities of the communities of the *Corredor Carajás* [Carajás Corridor] that fight for their social and environmental rights. They are urban, rural, *quilombola* and indigenous communities.

In this sense, explains Charaudeau (2010, p.36), "information ins pure enunciation", which generates another knowledge linked to the conditions of production, reception and social interest elaborated in the act of communicating. The Facebook page of *Rede Justiça nos Trilhos* was created | January 10, 2012. We opted for Facebook, as it was the social network of JnT with the highest volume of subscribers, in May 2020 totaled 4494 followers, the largest audience in adherence to the organization's media<sup>11</sup>. Besides Facebook, there are Twitter and Instagram accounts, all created between 2012 to 2013 period, materialized as other fronts of engagement.

By betting on life stories, *Rede Justiça nos Trilhos* [Justice on the Rails Network] aims to counterpoint the silence of traditional media, where residents rarely appears, and on a few occasions, in situations of conflict, reporting on the problems faced, decontextualized from daily life, chores and values. By presenting names, homes, families, memories, the social network generated references to other senses, with a legitimacy and power to the "speak". The act of communicating involves the choices (how to attest to the validity of the information? What is the best way to reach the target

<sup>11</sup> Data obtained through the account <https://www.facebook.com/justicanostrilhos/> on May 22, 2020. The page presents the profile of JnT that: "has been consolidated in the defense of the rights of communities and against the impacts of mining on territories of the Amazon, especially in the states of Maranhão and Pará. About the content, it brings video, news notes, links and campaigns. There are related pages such as *Seminário Carajás 30 Anos* and *Pastoral da Terra* [Pastoral Land Commission]. It was liked by movement such as Iglesias y Minería, Artigo 19, Greenpeace Brazil, and Global Justice, as well as journalists and news institutions such as Leonardo Sakamoto, Mídia Ninja and Agência Pública.

audience? How to transpose the facts in a language?), and especially the “meaning effects” that is, how to influence the other, make him visualize the situation from another frame (CHARAUDEAU, 2010: p.39). Therefore, the organized community was building, throughout the process of symbolic confrontation, their discursive strategies, which results of the relationship between the intradiscursive and extra discursive to produce meanings: the conditions of discourse production, the identities of the interlocutors, the intentions and the devices applied in the relationship.

In addition to road closures, integration actions and legal processes, the *Rede Justiça nos Trilhos* invested in digital media, through the technical staff and strategies of visibility and empowerment of the community of Piquiá de Baixo. In the case of Piquiá, one of the main fronts is to carry out the resettlement of the 312 families and of more than one thousand people, who gathered in the residents’ assembly, decided to leave collectively. Due to legal pressure, the funds were gradually released, with the Federal Government, Caixa and companies of mining and steel industries, starting in 2018, a situation that was subjected to the conservative and unstable political scenario of Bolsonaro’s government<sup>12</sup>.

Denise Cogo (2004, p.42) reflects on this issue and explains that in the post-industrial world, the media are structured as “matrixes that configure cultural identities” and, more than technologies or spaces for interaction they give public visibility to organizations and institutions, signal social practices and reinforce perspectives of their own realities. The media protagonism of social movements is materialized under the demands of public visibility, based on the logic of known media (radio, TV, print and internet) or, by appropriating these mechanisms, in the organization of their own channels on social networks, thus establish spaces for conflicts, clashes and accommodation.

Manuel Castells (2013), when analyzing the new social moments after the crisis of 2008 and the mobilizations specifically of 2011 in Europe and Asia, points out that the internet has become the ground for the contestation of the political order. The author calls this new form of mobilization “connectivity”, with local clusters interconnected in a transnational way, capable of quickly spreading content and images across the globe.

<sup>12</sup> The contract with Caixa was formalized in September 2018. In: <http://justicanostrilhos.org/2018/09/19/piquia-de-baixo-assina-contrato-para-liberacao-de-financiamento-do-projeto-de-reassentamento-da-comunidade/>. Access on May, 5, 2020.

In this sociological perspective, in cyberspace, social movements crave a “participatory democracy”, as opposed to the traps of representative democracy, stripped by political scandals and economic crises, according to Castells (2013). Another characteristic of the organizations is horizontality, that is, there are no leaders presented in a traditional way, actions are being shared in an intersubjective process that unites political and critical positions to current institutions. In this perspective, Raquel Recuero (2014, p. 115), explains that sites such as Facebook, impacted the internet by generating multiple forms of connection, called by the author “associative connections”, which are the configurations of social relationships maintained or restructured in the digital environment. These connections interconnect the actors or “friends”, in a permanent cycle of information, in a network and everyone has access to what the others publish, they can be shared among several groups, replicated and found through search tools. This dynamic makes conversations more and more public, supports opinions, reinforces ideas and confrontations.

To understand which discourses were generated about the life stories of the community and its residents to counter the idea of economic progress, defended by the mining chain installed in the Amazon and with ramifications in Açailândia – MA, we researched the period from October to December 2019 and January and March 2020 the content published on the Facebook of *Rede Justiça nos Trilhos*. We selected this time frame according to some events, namely: 1) the participation of residents in the *Sínodo da Amazônia* [Amazon Synod]<sup>13</sup>, the largest event held by the Vatican in 2019 on environmental issues attended by representatives from Piquiá de Baixo; 2) on year has passed since the start of construction work on the new neighborhood, Piquiá da Conquista; 3) the death of the former president of the Residents’ Association, Edvard Dantas; 4) abroad, on year of the tragedy in Brumadinho – MG, and four years of environmental crime in Mariana – MG, both involving Vale.

When analyzing the discourse of the posted content, the purpose was to analyze what is said – what is informed. For Charaudeau (2010, p. 94) it is the movement of language, a process that “while it is related to an act of exchange, turns to the world to cut it in a more or less rational way, through of linguistic representations and reconstruct

<sup>13</sup> The Amazon Synod was an event of the Catholic Church, held in the Vatican City, from October 6 to 27, 2019, to discuss the paths of evangelization in the Amazon and to face the socio-environmental, economic and cultural challenges of that region. Bishops, missionaries, lay people and representatives of indigenous peoples participated. (CNBB, 2020). In: <https://www.cnbb.org.br/destaque-2019-para-a-amazonia-colaborou-com-o-processo-do-sinodo/>. Access on May 2, 2020.



it into categories of meaning". It is the "objective world" transmuted into meanings that is, interconnected to the universe of discourse, the meeting point of the shared objective and the conditions of production, the contexts of the world.

We selected life stories, which are highlighted in the materials shared on the Facebook page of the *Rede Justiça nos Trilhos*. We start from the understanding that the life story (DELGADO, 2017; BOSI, 2003) represents testimonies about the lived history, through constructed narratives and the interaction with the subjects, being able to bring the multiple instances of reality. Bosi (2003, p.16) emphasizes that "from the link with the past, the strength for the formation of identity is extracted", the sensibilities and behaviors of a given historical moment are forged. To approach oral memories is to bring together, in the actor's remembrance, according to the author, forgetfulness, omissions, and inauthenticities. On the other hand, it converges in another direction, bringing to light the ideological representations and the complexity of the narrated events.

For analysis and research, we have compiled the materials in which the actions of residents are represented directly, in specific materials produced for the page and when they detail aspects of their life: the trajectories, the problems, their claims, support to other locations, and participation in public acts. Links from other sources, such as magazines, newspapers or national or foreign news sites were excluded. The material posted in question is organized by journalists from the Press Office of *Rede Justiça nos Trilhos*, who regularly screen and post and adopt multiple languages: texts, photos and videos. We separated in the table below the materials with the characteristics indicated:

**Table 1: Materials published between October 2019 and March 2020**

Date	Subject	Numbering
October 15, 2019	Flávia Nascimento, from Piquiá, and Carolina Moura, from Brumadinho, were at the 5th session of the UN Intergovernmental Working Group in Geneva, Switzerland.	1
November 14, 2019	Photo made by resident of two children playing and cheerful, in the Piquiá da Conquista neighborhood.	2
November 23, 2019	Completed a year of the beginning of the construction	3

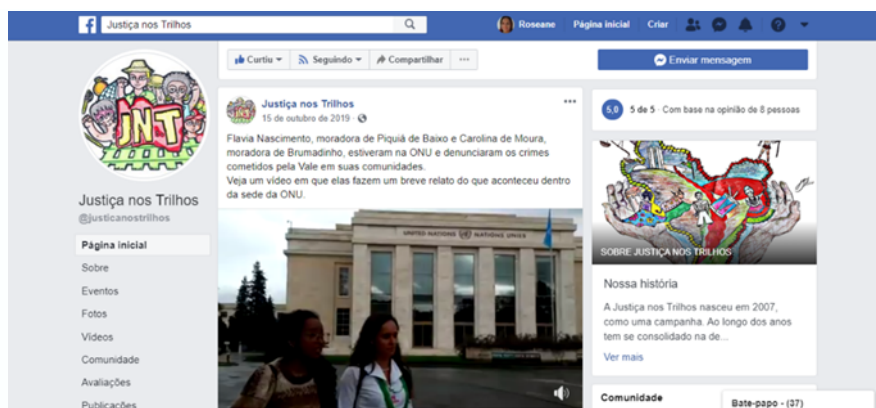
	of the new Piquiá da Conquista neighborhood.	
January 24, 2020	Act in memory of the first and historic president of the Residents Association	4
January 24, 2020	Tree planting in honor of Mr. Edvard Dantas.	5
January 24, 2020	Mr. Edvard is present!	6
January 25, 2020	The first houses built in the new neighborhood.	7
January 30, 2020	Mr. Edvard was always present in the struggle: his legacy, endurance and courage remained.	8
February 12, 2020	Resettlement project and female participation.	9
March 11, 2020	Women from Piquiá de Baixo participate in an autobiography workshop with journalist Bianca Santana.	10
March 17, 2020	The community of Piquiá de Baixo was hit by the flood of the Piquiá River and asks for donations.	11
March 17, 2020	The solidarity and unity of residents and partners to face the damage generated by the flood.	12
March 17, 2020	Members of the association and residents wash houses and put furniture to dry.	13
March 20, 2020	The community, through the association, thanks all those who have expressed solidarity.	14
March 20, 2020	Members of the residents' association and partners work in four posts to help 65 homeless families.	15
March 23, 2020	Residents complain that the water level of the river that passes through the community has risen again.	16
March 27, 2020	Residents Association suspends works of Piquiá da Conquista for the prevention of Covid-19.	17

Source: the authors.

To carry out the analysis, we bring the collaboration of Bourdieu (2012), with the theory of the fields, and Franciscato (2005), on the journalistic field to apprehend the struggles for power and social relations. According to the French researcher, social conflicts involve all fields (economic, political, cultural) that are crossed by symbolic systems, which organize a social order and a framework for thinking and acting in the world, and are transformed into a form of control of one class over the others. It is in counterpoint to the companies' discourse in building another symbolic logic, which the community of Piquiá de Baixo and supporters acted.

In the analyzed materials, we can find three discursive formations: 1) protagonism of the residents in the occurrences; 2) enhancement of memories and trajectories; and 3) union of members of the residents' association to face difficult moments. As Bourdieu (2012, p. 11) points out, "communication relations are, inseparably, always power relations, which depend in form and content, on the material or symbolic power accumulated by the agents". By pointing out the residents as subjects of their own history (1, 9, 10), capable of breaking with the neighborhood's borders, being in spaces such as the United Nations (UN) and fighting for their rights, it breaks with the idea that the issue is restricted to the State and that the group would not be able to face economic interests. It is also noteworthy that the notes highlight the presence of a young leadership, Flávia Nascimento, 25, who participated in the Amazon Synod, in Italy, in October 2020. The prominent figure of Flávia brings another vision for the youth of the community that action on the world is possible through mobilization.

**Figure 1:** Participation of resident Flávia Nascimento in event at the UN



Source: Facebook.

In another material, by showing the majority of the members of the community, women in actions such as a monthly assembly and an autobiography workshops, reinforce their empowerment in the texts and images of them gathered and happy: women who strive for the future of their families and lean to tell their own life stories. When presenting the actions of today and accumulating symbolic power through journalistic production, the time for action and chance in urbanized societies is sought. The news, as a reference to the immediate reality, feed on the culture of the present time (FRANCISCATO, 2005, p. 63). As a form of knowledge about the world, journalistic material can generate other positions, debates and questions from subjects and other social classes. Political capital is aimed at promoting chance and proposing polices that benefit the population.

The posts about the death of a leader like Edvard Dantas in January 2020 were a moment to reaffirm the neighborhood's historical trajectory and achievements (4, 5, 6 and 8). The then president of the Residents' Association, Edvard Dantas, visited houses, made trips to São Luís and contacted the Catholic Church in search of support for requests from the neighborhood, along with other members of the association. Recalling that his death was also caused by pollution in the place where he lived for many years, was part of the published note, as well as the decisive performance expressed in the images posted, with a serious look or speaking at the microphone in a protest, and in the verses to thank the collective work.

Figure 2: Note about the passing of Edvard Dantas



Source: Facebook.

The words legacy, hope, dignified life and joy, placed and reaffirmed in other posts (2, 3 e 7), as the photo of children playing and smiling at the new neighborhood, baptized as Piquiá da Conquista reaffirm the need to value the collective articulation, to wait for the results during a long wait, which can wear down the spirits of the population, however, it can result in success for those who want a better life, away from the infrastructure problems of the neighborhood. They reiterate that the new houses are already made (of masonry, large for large families, with models demanded and won by judicial means with Caixa); in other news, they show the actions that resulted in the victories over the economic power segments. They reiterate the same idea in different episodes through the notes that involve the creation of new cultural and social habits, as Franciscato (2005, p.63) explains when addressing how journalism reshaped time in Western societies. The news provokes the interaction between people; the interest in sharing that knowledge, the debate then can result in an action in society, in the changes that involve the play of forces.

Finally, the posts of March 2020 (11 to 17) signal a discourse o union and solidarity, because two problems are faced: the flood of the stream that passed through Piquiá de Baixo, with the destruction of part of BR 222, which gives access to the site, and the Covid-19 pandemic, which arrived in Brazil in late February. There is an emphasis on the protagonism of the Residents' Association, which creates a solidarity network to alleviate the suffering caused by the flood and to welcome the homeless.

The posts include bulletins illustrated with photographs of the collection points, report the mobilization of residents and the recovery of furniture and houses; in this situation, mining companies also sought to offer donations and support to the neighborhood. The organization intended to break the construction of a discourse of hegemony by mining companies, which offered support after the flood. Bourdieu (2012, p. 10) explains that it is a strategy of domination, when the distinctions are given to differentiate the classes and, in a "fictitious integration", the demobilization of the dominated is favored, differentiating those who have money and can act on those who need help and are weakened.

The interruption of activities for 15 days in the new neighborhood due to the sanitary measures adopted in the state against the pandemic is the event that ends the period of analysis: the cautious measure in face of external danger is related to the role of the Residents' Association regarding the organization and monitoring of the entire work, which was approved by Caixa and suffered reverses with the election of Jair

Bolsonaro and the containment policies and cuts in resources for housing. The biggest challenge for the mobilization of residents is to face the country's political reorganization and continue with its demands through a discourse that defends respect for the life and dignity for the Amazonian peoples.

### Final Considerations

The objective of the research involved the investigation of forms of resistance and complaints based on the study of the life stories of Piquiá de Baixo, the same was achieved by raising the meanings generated in the memories shared by the residents of the Piquiá community, pointing out the conflicts with successive economic projects that harmed the population. From these references, we apprehend the discourse of the Facebook page that breaks the approach of the daily life of the population of urban-rural areas, such as Piquiá de Baixo.

By listening to residents connected with their ways of living, valuing life trajectories and bringing protagonism into political activities, the page builds representations different from the usual ones, linked to decontextualized clashes, silences about the existence and ways of life of slum dwellers, peasants and excluded.

Based on the understanding of the historical conflictual process, the struggle for land and the right to housing and life, investigating the life stories of the residents of Piquiá leads us to an example of articulation that intends to break with meanings that oppress socially excluded classes. The voices of dona Tida, dona Doca or Mr. Joaquim, among others, allow us to apprehend the strength of the discourse present on the Facebook page of the *Rede Justiça nos Trilhos* [Justice on the Rails Network], which brings other subjects, actions and mobilizations of the members of the neighborhood.

We understand that JnT, through its social network, proposed to "humanize" the discourse about men and women living in the oldest neighborhood of Açailândia – MA. Disinherited from public polices when they complained about the pollution caused by steel companies, they faced the exclusion of the news until the beginning of the articulations for the collective exit of the neighborhood. The process of "humanizing" means respecting the other in its uniqueness, avoiding, therefore, the lack of understanding of reality, the uncritical tone and the superficial narrative, that is, capturing the universe of the other in its entirety (PEREIRA JÚNIOR, 2006, p. 94).

It is a posture that begins in social interaction, in the cultivation of otherness in social practices, as Cremilda Medina (2008) analyzes, it is to be open to transformation

when accessing other realities and meanings. It means dialoguing to apprehend in the life of a relationship, to be sure that you can leave one state and be inserted in another, the “not knowing” to know human life more deeply. Along the same lath, Stela Caputo (2006) tells us that the journalist is involved from two perspectives in the act of communicating: attaching himself to what is foreseen, planning on objective reality, or understanding organized work, but which can be restructured in the face of narratives that bring meaningful life stories, that can be shared in more critical horizons, deepened, and that reject frameworks that disguise the will of economic groups in collective desires.

By connecting the economic and political clashes waged by the Piquiá community and its supporters today to the protagonism of the residents, to the mobilizations against economic forces and to the life stories riddled with determination, courage and community spirit, the journalistic discourse of the *Rede Justiça nos Trilhos* page shows ways of fight and denounces the negligence of the authorities and the greed of the mining chain in the Eastern Amazon. They show journalism that values excluded voices and points out the group’s ability to articulate and community participation, as axes of the fight against oppression.

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**RESUMO:**

A comunidade de Piquiá de Baixo, localizada na Cidade de Açailândia/MA, se mantém em luta pelo seu espaço, a fim de manter seu legado e o direito à moradia. Este percurso veio de um longo processo que configurou intenso painel de enfrentamentos, iniciado com a luta pela fixação na terra, com a chegada dos latifundiários e se estendendo até o impacto ambiental causado pelas empresas mineradoras. Nesse cenário conflitivo, trazemos como objetivo examinar as formas de denúncia e resistências dos moradores, tendo como lócus privilegiado de análise as histórias de vida dos moradores. Tratar-se-á de uma pesquisa qualitativa, com dupla abordagem: a cartografia social, que valoriza as memórias coletivas e o discurso em uma rede social que repercute as histórias de vida. Constatamos que há um empoderamento e denúncia política através do ativismo digital, contrário ao discurso hegemônico.

**PALAVRAS-CHAVE:** Amazônia Oriental; Comunidades Rurais; Memórias, Ativismo digital.

**RESUMEN:**

La comunidad de Piquiá de Baixo, ubicada en la ciudad de Açailândia / MA, sigue luchando por su espacio, para mantener su legado y el derecho a la vivienda. Este viaje provino de un largo proceso que formó un intenso panel de confrontaciones, que comenzó con la lucha por el asentamiento en la tierra, con la llegada de los propietarios y se extendió al impacto ambiental causado por las compañías mineras. En este escenario conflictivo, nuestro objetivo es examinar las formas de denunciar y resistir a los residentes, siendo el lugar privilegiado de análisis las historias de vida de los residentes. Será una investigación cualitativa, con un doble enfoque: la cartografía social, que valora los recuerdos colectivos, y el discurso en una red social que refleja historias de vida. Observamos

que existe una potenciación y denuncia política a través del activismo digital, contrario al discurso hegemónico.

**PALABRAS CLAVE:** Amazonía Oriental; Comunidades Rurales; Recuerdos; Activismo Digital.