

Paulo Milhomens

# Oiapoque Riverside

French-Brazilian Amazon  
in question



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DO AMAPÁ

autografia



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*I dedicate this book to the  
native people of the  
Brazilian Amazon  
our ancestral matrix.*





# PRESENTATION

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This book was designed, let's say, from a research urgency originated in doctoral research at the Federal University of Paraíba. After its publication, I had the opportunity to participate in some events focused on Social Sciences. I realized that the possibility of releasing it in English would be an opportunity to establish a more fruitful dialogue at the university.

Regarding the Brazilian Amazon countless studies are already carried out in Brazil and Latin America. The texts presented here aim at this theoretical and methodological complementation. For readers unfamiliar with Brazil and the Brazilian Amazon it is important to note that the region entered the international spotlight with the return of Luís Inácio Lula da Silva to a third term. As I write this text, the "Lula Government 3" has just approved 16 more indigenous lands throughout the country, directly opposing Brazil's agrarian elites. Other global governance programs, such as the 'Amazon Fund', have also returned to the institutional scene.

The recent crisis of the accusations of a true necropolitics propagated by the previous government of Bolsonaro has put in the international spotlight not only the survival of the Yanomami people in the state of Roraima but the very political condition of maintaining their ethnic sovereignty and cultural in the face of the economic interests that were imposed in the region. Likewise, part of the territory of the state of Amazonas also forms a significant part of the territories of the Yanomami and other indigenous peoples. On the other hand, they compromised their sovereignty by forcing displacements imposed by the advance of illegal mining (*garimpagem* in Brazilian Portuguese language).

I should clarify that the so-called Pan-Amazon subcontinent (Venezuela, Ecuador, Colombia, Peru, Brazil, Suriname, Guyana, and French Guiana) is internationally inserted in the frontier expansion stage in the context of significant agro-mining exploration projects. Its territorial reconfiguration is related to forest devastation (especially in the states of Rondônia, Acre, Amazonas, and Roraima), which has been regional reconfiguration over the decades.

Therefore, by bringing this regional context into the social and historical scope of the Franco-Brazilian Amazon, it is an essential part of understanding the Pan-Amazon and its Caribbean portion (Guiana Plateau), and its strategic position concerning the European Union. In this sense, the first text entitled 'Ethos of mining: from the Oiapoque until the "other side" is the result of an ethnographic research carried out on the Oiapoque (state of Amapá, Brazil) border and its direct links with the *cultura garimpeira* (mining culture) and its various social groups transiting through the so-called "other side", that is, direct connection with the transit in mining areas in French Guiana and Suriname. I am very grateful to researcher Camila Rique for the valuable translation of this article into English. I highlight the collaboration and essential revision of Ana Patrícia Moura, proofreader of the original manuscripts in Portuguese.

The second text, '*El contexto de las migraciones en la frontera franco-brasilena*', is the only one in the Spanish language, but this is because it seemed to me that it had not been translated, primarily due to its presentation at the University of Salamanca and the Spanish-speaking public who comes to read it. So there is a political motivation. In it, I deal with the impact of the Pandemic caused by COVID-19 on the migratory context of the border. In fact, all over the world. Even for reasons related to the Pandemic, the object of study proposed by the article has become somewhat limited. But I acknowledge that the topic in question is subject to further research.

The discussion proposed by the third text, ‘State, Identity and Borders’ raises sociological questions about these three concepts. I referenced the theoretical bases known in the scientific literature made in Portuguese. The role of the State and its relationship with the political and, above all, economic configuration reveals many facets of the French-Brazilian border.

In *‘La Crique: literature and resistance on the French-Amazon’*, I brought a discussion about the homonymous novel by French-Guyanese writer Sylviane Vayaboury which was the subject of a class in the course State, Politic, and Borders in Brazilian Amazon along with the Graduate Program Degree in Regional Development from the Federal University of Amapá. In advance, my sincere gratitude to the coordination of the program for granting me the opportunity to create the discipline. In this way, we insert a debate that reminds me of the practical experience of Charles W. Mills on the “Sociological Imagination”: thanks to the author’s literary-ethnographic descriptions.

Although they are interdependent texts, the main focus is the Franco-Brazilian Amazon, bringing common aspects, especially concerning a study on borders. It is important to inform you that in the scientific literature, the works of Michelle Lamont, Carla Ladeira Águas, and Sandro Mezzadra, for example, constitute more contemporary approaches to the concept. Thinking about the frontier in a singular and plural scope is an attempt to understand how multiple the Amazon region is and its border limits, population displacements, and environmental impact.

In its countless borders, the small town of Oiapoque (state of Amapá, Brazil) know as one of the cities that are inserted by longitude into the Northern Hemisphere (above the Equator Line). However, Oiapoque geographical position had already surpassed as the point further to the extreme north of Brazil by Monte Caburaí (State of Roraima), on the border with Venezuela. The Oiapoque River is the border between Brazil and French Guiana. Its city counterpart is Saint-Georges de L’Oyapock, the region’s first bastion of the French government. In contrast, we have a scientific production within the scope of the Federal University of Amapá.

Another point I would like to highlight is the bibliography. I chose to keep it in Portuguese, and this is because it structures theoretical references that, unfortunately, were not translated into the English-speaking universe. Well, here's my suggestion: readers can take bibliographic notes and temporize with any research interests. I am grateful to my sister, Lúcia Ribeiro, for reading the original manuscript in the Portuguese language. Living in the USA for almost two decades, her perception of writing was fascinating. Finally, I understand that the French-Brazilian Amazon presents a wealth of research possibilities in this region of South America, a motivating condition.

# ETHOS OF GOLD-DIGGING: FROM OIAPOQUE UNTIL THE “OTHER SIDE”

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*I packed my bags*

*And I left on a trip*

*To get to know Brazil*

*From Iapoque to Chui*

*And to tell you the truth*

*I miss a lot*

*Everything I got to know*

*(Teodoro and Sampaio, From Oiapoque to Chui)*

**T**he month is March. Year, 2014. The forecast of the bus leaving the Macapá bus station following the trip to Oiapoque is somewhat uncertain. I am informed by the Santanense company agent that the vehicle will be delayed. It's already past 1:30 pm on that cloudy, hot, and humid afternoon. As in the entire Amazon region, this is the typical climate throughout the year. For those who come from other states in the country, the temperature tends to surprise, especially in the second half of the year, when rainfall is scarcer.

The way to Oiapoque is long. I am informed about the road conditions when I put my luggage in the trunk: “It's really ugly, it's after Cassiporé”, says the employee responsible for ticket sales at the bus company counter. People place their belongings in a disorderly way between the spaces of the vehicle.

This first look, which has no ethnographic pretensions on my part, is the first attempt to understand this Amazonian context: my first trip among many on the BR-156.

In the TV news and the press in general, the problems of transport on the highway are commonplace. The impression that many people have in the region when talking about the rainy seasons (between December and June) varies between skepticism and optimism. When I get settled on the bus, a lady who is beside me tells me that “they are going to finish the asphalt this year”. When the rainy season arrives in Amapá (between the months of December and June), the asphalt paving companies do not work. From then until now, it’s been seven years.<sup>1</sup>

On this first trip, I am informed by another passenger, who lives in the city of Calçoene, that “the mud is ugly in the 90’s”.<sup>2</sup> The same reports that a relative had arrived from Oiapoque a few days ago and described the quagmire as one of the worst in recent years. “Bus doesn’t even pass a small car, everything gets stuck. Only pirate passes”.<sup>3</sup> I asked him how so many people nurtured such determination to work or live in Oiapoque since it was such a distant and “isolated” city (considering this isolation as something relative a posteriori). “It’s the people looking for gold on the other side.” In search of gold – articulating all the networks that lead to the mining economy – these people set out towards the unknown.

I needed to establish a memorialistic pattern to arrive at certain questions that I would later pose as an ethnographic work. I ended up arriving at a common path: to reach the “other side”, this would only be possible through

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1 In March 2014, I traveled to Oiapoque to start working as a professor at the Federal University of Amapá.

2 Considered by many travelers in the region as one of the worst stretches of road in the rainy season. It is located 90 kilometers from Oiapoque, being one of the most difficult stretches in this land transit.

3 Pirates are alternative transport drivers (Hilux brand trucks with four-wheel drive) that transport passengers on the Oiapoque/Macapá route on the BR-156 highway. According to testimony from different pirates, this work has been carried out for over twenty-five years in the region. There is no record of female drivers working in piracy, which seemed to me to be a decisive demarcator in these relations of sociability on the border.

deponents. That is, through the speeches of women and men connected directly and indirectly with the world of mining for different reasons, fears, or survival needs. This first trip helped me to understand a little bit about all this. And it was exactly there, interspersing conversations between the most difficult-to-access stretches of the road, that complex issues arose involving the possession of indigenous lands for at least four decades. Among them, of course, Terra Uaçá.

The former Contested region still nurtures in the regional imagination the eternal search for gold, now specifically turned to the “other side”: the illegal mines existing in French Guiana. The first informal reports I got about Oiapoque did not initially come from this place, but from observing what people living in Macapá had as an impression of its distant border.

## “Are you going to Oiapoque? God forbid!”

Provisional judgments (and prejudices) are merely particular examples of overgeneralization. It is characteristic of everyday life, in general, the rough handling of the “singular”. We always react to unique situations. So we can react and solve the problem. But we do not have to examine all the aspects of the singular case, not even the decisive ones: we have to place it as quickly as possible from the point of view of the task posed. And this is only possible from the point of view of the assigned task. And this is only possible thanks to the help of the various types of ultra-generalization [...] Certainly, the provisional judgment of analogy can crystallize into prejudice [...] (HELLER, 1992, p. 34-35).<sup>4</sup>

Generalizations commonly take shape and color in the different layers experienced by established groups that, from their dynamics of sociability, produce a certain dynamism of these relationships as an element of external survival. Now, this phenomenon may arise as a need for political affirmation

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<sup>4</sup> All citations in the body of the text were translated directly from publications in Portuguese (Brazil).

or it may meet the hierarchy of hegemonic groups in these spaces, aiming to interfere with others.

It would not be an exaggeration to assume that such singularizations (and not singularities) are mechanisms that can interfere with rules, codes, or hierarchical forms. Thus – between different units and groupings between insiders and outsiders (ELIAS; SCOTSON, 2000), there appears what denotes a given region, community, or village: *Ethos*. Although the issue has been partially explored in the previous chapters, it is necessary to understand how these groups are established in a given urban or rural perimeter and, if their practices are consistent or not, with the space adopted to act in different ways.<sup>5</sup>

The ethnographic work developed by Elias and Scotson (2000) has a very clear demarcation of the idea of boundaries between social groups. A district of a small English town serves as a background to understand how the other is configured in their variations of sociability. Thus, the authors establish a sociological analysis that, although different from the border context of Oiapoque, brings the same problematizations of what is understood between insiders and outsiders, permeated by dispositions of cultural variability, tending to connect to regional traits. So,

The factual basis of the dispute over values is quite simple. Individuals always appear in configurations and individual configurations are irreducible. Basing the reflection on a single individual, as if, at first, he were independent of everyone else, or on isolated individuals, here and there, without taking into account their mutual relations, is a fictitious starting point, no less persistent, let's say than the assumption that social life is based on a contract signed by individuals who, before him, lived alone in nature, or together in absolute disorder. To say that individuals exist in configurations means that the starting point of all sociological inquiry is a plurality of individuals who, in one way or another, are interdependent. Saying that configurations are irreducible means that they cannot be explained in terms that imply that they have some kind of existence. (ELIAS; SCOTSON, 2000, p. 184)

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5 GOFFMAN, Erving. **The representation of the Self in everyday life**. Petrópolis: Vozes, 2002. Direct translation of the title in Portuguese.



As soon as I started fieldwork, aiming to “understand” and “explain” it, the initial mistake was the possibility of imagining it according to a previously constructed sociological description. A saleswoman in a drugstore in the center of the city, more precisely on Coaracy Nunes Avenue, one of the busiest in the city, brings her first impression of this memory of the mine. The girl, when passing the change, asks me, already recognizing a different accent: “Where are you going?”. I said that in a few days I would go to Oiapoque, where I would start a new job. “Are you going to Oiapoque?”. I asked her if she already knew the place and why she was astonished. The answer struck me as convincingly singular:

I never went there and I don't want to. There is a lot of malaria and prostitution there. It's very dangerous. I know people who went to that side, but it's too far away, I don't have the courage. It is a land of mining, a lawless place.<sup>6</sup> (Pharmacy clerk in downtown Macapá)

In this context in Macapá, I observed over time that there was no real connection between the daily life of the city (in the context of the capital) and a direct relationship with the reality of the border that I still didn't know. His speech already revealed three apparent groups according to his local memory of that place: smugglers, sex workers, and outlaws. Days before, walking through the streets of the center of Macapá, I notice that the main hotel network in the city was located in the vicinity of tourist centers, such as Fortaleza São José de Macapá and Teatro das Bacabeiras, a region that houses the city's hotels.

The establishment that I later stayed at in Macapá on different occasions, the Lana Hotel<sup>7</sup>, it is next to the main public market in the city and had a very diversified public for its profile of guests arriving in Amapá. It was possible to identify at this time how these warehouses worked for the circulation of people

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6 I chose to keep the statements of the deponents in their most colloquial form as possible, both in audio recordings and in the use of memory. This experience will be reported later during the fieldwork.

7 The names of commercial establishments, inns, and leisure areas were replaced by fictitious names. In the case of Lana Hotel, whenever I needed to go to Macapá, I stayed there (between 2016 and 2018).

and material goods with the purpose of Oiapoque. In 2016, when I was at the Lana Hotel for the first time, I was surprised by the amount of Guyanese and people of other nationalities among the majority of guests.<sup>8</sup> At first, this range of foreigners in Macapá was not noticeable. On the other hand, the air bridge between Macapá and Belém had always been a strategic route between the states of Amapá and Pará due to its geographic and cultural proximity.

One afternoon, chatting with the receptionist at the hotel lobby, I asked him about many people from French Guiana staying there. He told me that some of them came from Cayenne (capital of the Department of Overseas) towards Belém (state of Pará) and in some cases, stopped in Macapá for business and tourism. Macapá, for example, is the only capital in the Brazilian Amazon bathed by the Amazon River, an attraction in itself. On the other hand, there were many people linked to French mining companies, who used the overland route to Oiapoque at times, sometimes by the Macapá/Belém/Cayenne air route.

Although there was already a formal market for people linked to mining, the stereotyped imagery about Oiapoque in the capital of Amapá still translates into “death, prostitution and malaria”. A very similar representation to the imaginary of a filmic scenario, such as Serra Pelada (southern Pará), one of the most famous mining areas in Brazil between the 1970s and 1980s.<sup>9</sup>

As time went by, I noticed that this imaginary representation was not merely a remnant of an era, but rather an image about this distant place on the border, unaffected by the collective memory present in Macapá. On the other hand, I think that it is not possible to build a “positive image” about the gold miner culture – as this depends on the narrative point of view of those who economically benefit from this activity.

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8 Gentiles from French Guiana are called French, although generic terms such as Guyanese (or French Guiana) and French Guiana are used. At the border and in the Department of Overseas, they are also called Creoles in allusion to their local language of the same name, although French is the official language.

9 MOURA, Salvador Tavares. **Serra Pelada: experiência, memórias e disputas**. Thesis (Master's degree). Graduate Program in History. Pontifical Catholic University of São Paulo, 2008.

And if such images are crystallized in this way, even disregarding contemporary cultural dynamics of the gold rush, such permanence obstructs a reality that subsists in the current forms of mining exploration in the rest of Amapá, including the district of Lourenço in the 21st century. This dimension can only be perceived in daily life on the border.

In this sense, the photographic records made in the field make the local image and its nuances perceptible to the researcher. If there is a memorialistic permanence of mining present not only among people from Macapá, but in the historical imaginary of Amapá itself, the urban configuration of its spaces tends to reproduce a logic of abandonment. This relationship is not confused only with the lack of structure in many Amazonian cities, but with its landscape that dates back to the overexploitation of local populations and their wealth for decades.

Here, I would like to emphasize that the use of photographs aims to connect with a vision centered on the perception of local experience. In other words, characteristics, dispositions, and general structures tend to preserve the cultural and historical elements of Amapá. Thus, what are the possibilities of existing readings in a given photograph, but starting from this context? Something that only urban space is capable of revealing:

Following the circumstances and accelerated times of globalized capital, large consumer equipment has also arrived there, redefining the circuits in which these territories and their references are made. They are poles of gravity of everyday practices (TELLES, 2010, p. 89).

The use of images about the urban space and, consequently, its social sphere through the spaces of transit between different social groups, can be captured by the particular ethnographic experience of the researcher,

The practical place of photography in fieldwork can be demonstrated by relating its functions to the development of field research. The introductory step in many projects

consists of a global ethnographic view or a descriptive study phase. This period is a phase of accumulation of facts about the general environment under study, often essential to obtaining a broad view, within which cultural particularity can find an organic place. An understanding of ecology and cultural geography opens an orderly path for future research plans [...] Furthermore, we take advantage of these occasions to quickly explain our work, and find an unexpected tide of goodwill and interest in our study. [...] (COLLIER JR, 1973, p.12-21).

Considering the relationships that are created from the fieldwork, the photographs bring, on my part, this need for an ambient reading of the space, according to the related ethnographic indications. This perception of the border space through the use of photographs inserted in the work was a useful tool in terms of overcoming the difficulties encountered in fieldwork. And at this point, I consider the use of images fundamental in this sociological and anthropological foray.

**Figure 1:** Street in the center of Macapá



**Source:** Personal archive (2019)

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**Figure 2:** Fortress of São José in Macapá



**Source:** Personal archive (2019)

**Figure 3:** Street in the center of Macapá near Beira Rio



**Source:** Personal archive (2019)

# Field log reconstitution

The configuration of the Brazilian border strip has a very heterogeneous historical evolution, marked by issues related to conflicts in the demarcation of boundaries and occupation processes. From a state perspective, the boundary is intended to define what is under its domain and what is outside it. Therefore, it is a term that is linked to the concept of control; the border enables the state to discern: its territory, who inhabits it, and how these two elements will be governed in favor of its continuity [...] (MARTINS, 2014, p. 13-14).

I consider the ethnographic experience established for this work as the first of my part according to academic precepts. From the point of view of everyday empiricism, I had been running it since 2014. The theme of the Franco-Brazilian border effectively became an object of research in 2017, when I chose to join a Postgraduate Program in Sociology. Initially, there was interest in the diplomatic relations established between Brazil and France through the project of the Binational Bridge with the so-called “twin cities”, Oiapoque (Amapá) and Saint-Georges de l’Oyapock (French Guiana) are the last terrestrial entrepôts dividing the European Union and Mercosur.<sup>10</sup>

I had already realized the existence of the flow of people willing to travel (from different parts of the country) almost 600 kilometers along the BR-156 and reach the infamous “other side”. My ethnographic curiosity about mining started in 2016 when I returned to Oiapoque after a trip and got an interesting report from a pirate whom I consider to be an important witness at this first moment, especially when it comes to understanding the references they bring from so far away. Oiapoque. My first conversation with Mr. Maneco,

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10 CONTE, Maria Irene de. **The bridge over the Oiapoque River: a “transoceanic” bridge between Brazil and France – Mercosur and the European Union?**. Thesis (Master’s degree). Postgraduate Program in Human Geography. University of São Paulo, 2007. Direct translation of the title.

approximately 60 years old, a pirate for over twenty-five years traveling between Macapá and Oiapoque, emerged as the key to an ethnographic work.<sup>11</sup>

Over the course of six years of traveling between Oiapoque and Macapá, he obtained similar reports (from passengers and pirates) about stories about the road and other issues related to their lives on this itinerary. On one occasion, a female passenger of approximately 25 years ended up revealing that she had a “thing” in her purse. According to her, she was afraid that the Federal Highway Police would carry out inspections when we arrived at the fiscal post when we were already leaving the urban perimeter of Oiapoque. To my astonishment and that of the other passengers, the girl was carrying almost thirty thousand reais in jewelry in a small bag that she carried with her. The fact occurred when news circulated along the road that two piracy vans had been stolen by robbers that day. As we traveled at night, the risks were greater. Such situations are not uncommon on this border. After all, there are many economic networks involved in this world of mining.

## Oiapoque for those who see

According to Romani (2010), the word *l’Oyapock* (from French Guiana) and Oiapoque (in Portuguese word of indigenous origin), can hypothetically be translated from the Tupi-Guarani language as “Waiãpi’s House” (indigenous people who inhabit the region). The first signs of residents settling in the region where the municipality is located date back to 1900-1907, but in terms of effective occupation, it only occurred through Decree-Law no. 7578 of May 23, 1945 (which makes the creation of the city official). Oiapoque currently has approximately 27 thousand inhabitants<sup>12</sup>. The military district of Clevelândia do Norte (about 16 kilometers from Oiapoque) was founded

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11 The pseudonyms adopted by pirates are very varied. Here, I chose to quote them with altered names, however, close to the original as fictitious names. In general, almost all pirates have a direct relationship with the mining culture. Traveling from Macapá/Oiapoque costs an average of R\$250.00 reais, however, during rainy periods, tickets can cost R\$600.00. The most common explanation given by pirates for the high price of tickets is the terrible conditions of land traffic.

12 Available at: <https://cidades.ibge.gov.br/brasil/ap/oiapoque/panorama>. Accessed on: 08 mar. 2020.

at the beginning of the 20th century, still in the First Republic (1889-1930), for strategic control of the border.

Oiapoque can be described to some extent – and here I refer specifically to its composition as a range and threshold – in the perspective proposed by Águas (2017) of the territory of sociability groups operating as “a point outside the curve” in the daily life of their networks. This means to say that the State exists as a legal and administrative structure, however, it is limited in its bureaucratic institutional condition on the border between the different groups as a mere agent of activities (political and economic) for their permanence.

When I returned to Amapá to carry out fieldwork in October 2019, I was heading to the Macapá bus terminal and was able to talk along the way with a young Uber application driver, apparently little informed about my border destination. The image of prostitution, mining, and diseases such as malaria also appears as reference images. The methodology of interviews with the deponents, at first, was based on obtaining the reports and transcribing them from the use of memory, which I did not adopt due to the inefficiency generated by the circumstances of unpredictability that emerged during the immersion in the field. In most cases, I spent a long time talking to the interviewee and then asked for authorization to record on audio. In the course of the work, I noticed that recording audio and capturing images via the cell phone was less inhibiting than using other technological resources, such as a professional voice recorder.

I told him about the research and he was very receptive to “remembering” a little of his family relationship with Oiapoque since his father had worked as a state civil servant in the region in the late 1990s. gold relatively often when he returned to the capital. I asked him if he had another source of income at the time:

No, it was just for him, for us, to make a string, these things. It was easy to buy at that time. Today there is no more. How does it work today? I don't even see so many people talking like they used to. But in the old days, people took gold that easily from there. It wasn't a crime. He brought it to make a gold cord for him, for us, you know? It was for his use. (Maiane, 22, driver of an urban transport application)



Maiane also brings other information about other activities that emerge linked to the illegal exploitation of minerals on a border:

He brought a lot of things to me. He brought animals. I got a parrot, turtle. I was little, but I remember.

Here we can observe the naturalization of the deponent without any moral judgment in her speech. At no time was it possible to notice that her father, in the eyes of the State, practiced environmental infractions. Wild animals being trafficked point out that in addition to gold, other parallel activities emerged in this local extractive process.

On the other hand, when I chose the deponent category in the fieldwork, I took into account the irregularity in the time of the speeches and difficulty in “capturing” them, something related to temporary stays, a central feature in Oiapoque. His father, as a civil servant, also fits a common profile on the Franco-Brazilian border: the passerby. He or she who under various circumstances makes temporary use of the existing space. In this case, it is used to generalizations of all kinds and does not follow the rules of its original space, since once distanced from it, it connects to existing local codes.

Being a deponent implies having *sui generis* lines and impressions about the place in which they are inserted, although there is no cognitive clarity in the use of these lines. In this regard, we can observe:

[...] The models and results of configuration research are part of a process, of a growing field of investigation, in the light of whose development they are themselves subject to revisions, criticisms, and improvements, the result of new investigations. [...] (ELIAS; SCOTSON, 2000, p. 57).

As the field becomes involuntarily unpredictable, rethinking the initially proposed research model can lead the researcher to a new panorama in the field.<sup>13</sup> This reorganization of the research occurred in the face of *insights* revealed from dialogues that were not intended to readily become interviews – and, contrary to pre-arranged methods – emerged as revealing keys.

Before that first conversation with Maiane, I got an interesting statement from a woman I met onboard the flight that took me back to the state of Amapá, leaving through Recife airport. From the accent, I noticed that she was a native of Macapa. Sitting beside my seat, she said she was returning from the state of Goiás on a family visit. She told me that she lived in Oiapoque, more precisely from 1986 to 1990, when she worked as an elementary school teacher in a school in the city:

Oiapoque at that time had a lot of people. Those miners came to town, but there was no violence. There when it was just them it was quiet. Now recruits, there could not appear one that came confusion. Even children went to parties. I was dumbfounded, I had never seen it [...] But among the miners, there was no violence. There were a lot of people in Oiapoque. People took a lot of gold on the other side. A lot of French came from Guyana.

(Ms. Neuri, 65 years old, retired)

This testimony on board the flight between Recife/Macapá, in a way, sounds complementary to Maiane's speech. The period in which Dona Neuri lived in Oiapoque is considered one of the most profitable concerning the gold rush on the Franco-Brazilian border<sup>14</sup>. Another piece of information present in this talk about the “other side” (French Guiana) is the presence of French people spending their money in the city. This memory is still very present in

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13 I thank professors Simone Brito, Rogério Medeiros and Fábio França for the theoretical suggestions during doctoral studies.

14 FURTADO, Huana da Silva. **Work, migration and social relations:** the presence of Brazilian immigrants in mining in French Guiana. Thesis (Master's degree). Postgraduate Program in Regional Development. Federal University of Amapá, Macapá, 2015. Direct translation of the title.

the opinion of local merchants, especially establishments that sell alcoholic beverages<sup>15</sup>. In general, this local trade in the city is still very dependent on the arrival of foreigners.

The period described by Dona Neuri in Oiapoque is considered the apogee of the gold rush on the Franco-Brazilian border. Another memorialistic description of the “other side” (French Guiana) is the presence of French people in the city. At that time, the movement of foreigners – not just French residents in Guyana – was more intense. This is likely related to the peak of gold mining in the 1990s. Recruits vying for space at parties with miners present, in the interviewee’s speech, an important question about the sociabilities that are present on a border. It specifically refers to recruits, low-ranking soldiers who served in the Clevelândia do Norte battalion, as we have already seen, the first military base in the region to control borders.

About the presence of children at night parties in the city, when I arrived in the city for the first time in 2014, I was able to observe this description in situ. It was possible to see minors interacting with adults at times that were not convenient for their age in certain spaces (especially in the city’s central square). Thus, these initial speeches appear as clues to understanding the spatial functioning of a place I had already known for six years and, because it was so close, I resorted to the necessary and temporary distance. The field diary, chronologically, begins to be written in mid-October 2019, running through January 2020 with two breaks and a final return in early February.

The reconstruction of the field diary was made to script and map the workplace as if it were the first time. Although the interviewees bring similar lines, as well as memories that are particular to me, it would not be possible to readily naturalize them as an already defined object. Upon arriving in

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15 Alcoholic beverage is a central element in the sociability relations on the border. Both in Saint-Georges de l’Oyapock (French Guiana) or Oiapoque (Amapá), commercial establishments make the product available on a large scale. Many Brazilians travel to the border city along the Oiapoque River to buy imported beers, wines, and liquors. The best-known establishment on the Guyanese border is the China Market, located on the edge of the city.

Oiapoque after a period away, it was possible to re-elaborate my place as an insider and outsider.<sup>16</sup>

In an ethnographic classic entitled *The Argonauts of the Western Pacific* (1922), Bronislaw Malinowski (1884-1942) uses participant observation from a series of expeditions traveling to the Trobriand Islands, in Oceania, between 1914-1918. His work consisted of an ethnography using photographs, observing the habits and customs of native peoples in that territory. On the idea of distancing and approximation, he reveals:

It is obvious that, concerning the actual method of observation and recording in fieldwork of those that are imposing their place in real life and genuine behavior, the observer's equation becomes more prominent than in the collection of crystallized ethnographic data. But here, too, the main effort should go towards letting the facts speak for themselves [...] It is also important that this work of collecting and annotating impressions starts right at the beginning of the work in a given region. The subtle quirks, which impress while they are new, will go unnoticed as they become familiar. Others, on the contrary, will only become evident in the course of a deeper knowledge of local conditions. An ethnographic diary, carried out systematically over the period of work in a region, would be the ideal instrument for this type of study. And if alongside what is normal, the Ethnographer carefully notes the small and large deviations from the norm, he will be marking the two extremes between which normality moves (MALINOWSKI, 1988, p. 33).

Observation as a central and total element in field research sounds like a construction/reconstruction of something continuous. The fact is that the field already exists, we just “discovered” it. In general, “noting deviations from the norm” is perhaps the cognitive fixation that works aims for: deviations or deviations from the established rules are almost always the limits of understanding between legal and legal forms and the threshold - the boundary

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16 I consider it important to emphasize how the spaces of a border are dynamic and “mobile”, especially when a place is established among the insiders (from within). The sociability configurations had already changed significantly during the period I was away, putting me in the position of outsider when I returned.

between groups in the same space – reveals all those who are not inserted, but who establish a different meaning/structuring about their local *habitus*. I would dare to infer that pure and simple exoticism, as well as participant observation, are factors that take a long time to be “decoded”.

In this way, the field diary inserted in the urban perimeter of Oiapoque (in addition to three trips to Saint-Georges de l’Oyapock) following not only the speeches but “trails on the border” - presenting difficulties/facilities during the journey and as groups that I was able to identify elaborate a mining world.

Methodologically, more contemporary authors were included as references in this work, although the Eliasian way of thinking became predominant as the interpretive basis of fieldwork. At times, the field trips seemed endless.

**Figure 4:** Pirate's parking lot near Macapá's bus station



**Source:** Personal archive (2019)ource: Personal archive (2019)

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**Figure 5:** Passenger meeting area next to the pirate parking lot



**Source:** Personal archive (2019)

**Figure 6:** Pirate's parking lot near Macapá's bus station



**Source:** Personal archive (2019)

**Figure 7:** Unpaved stretch of BR-156 (towards Oiapoque/Macapá in January 2020)



**Source:** Personal archive (2020)

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## Invisible borders (body language, ways to see the other)

[...] As human beings, we are presumably creatures with variable impulses, moods, and energies that change from moment to moment. When, however, we revert to a character's character in the face of an audience, we should not be subject to ups and downs. As Durkheim said, we do not allow our higher social activity to follow the path of our physical states, as do our sensations and our bodily awareness. [...] (GOFFMAN, 2002, p. 58).

Warm night for an early morning in late October. Upon arriving in Oiapoque, I came across the first sign “there are no vacancies” on the margins of BR-156. It's already past 2:30 am and the pirate has to drop off a Peruvian

passenger at a hotel on the edge of town. He had told me he was going to visit an aunt in Cayenne. A few meters away, I look for information on two well-known hotels in the city (where I had stayed on other occasions), known by merchants involved in mining, tourists, and public servants on temporary service in the region. Finally, the only one available is Pousada Beira Rio, also known for accommodation well below what could be recommended in terms of comfort.

I note that the establishment has changed administration or possibly ownership. “Isn’t Mr. Anastácio no longer the owner around here?”. The young receptionist who was looking fatigued and watching messages on the telephone answered indifferently: “Yeah, it’s been a while.” I get the key to the only available room. I am informed that there are no towels or bed linen.

From a practical point of view, it’s not a problem, as I carry such utensils in my backpack, in addition to personal hygiene products. When I open the bedroom door (located almost at the back of the hotel), I smell a strong odor of damp and mildew. There are no windows in the bedroom and the bathroom is filled with accumulated water. It wasn’t the first time that I faced such a situation in Oiapoque. I ended up giving up on spending the night there, as I also noticed cockroaches circling the floor.

The receptionist then reveals to me that there is another room available, only at a higher price. A general rule in these hostels is to have a spare room always used by an employee for their rest breaks. When I pass through the corridor, already quite exhausted from the almost 12 hours of travel, I see a sign on the wall: “Carla, masseuse, phone number”.

In the morning, I go up to the second floor for breakfast (with some fruit and toast at the table). I observe from the hotel balcony an unusual activity for that time. The employee who is serving the table informs that it is a holiday on the “other side”, which is the reason for the movement in the stores in the center. “What do you do?” he asks. I inform you that I am a professor at the “Campus Binacional” and he seems to show some relief with the answer, although he continued to watch me carefully, but not directly. “Yes, the staff from UNIFAP are always here” (Federal University of Amapá).



At around 11:00 am, with a temperature of around 40 degrees, I go out to search for another accommodation, but in this case, as a monthly tenant in a nearby place. Initially, the pretext of finding another dwelling for the period corresponding to the research circumstantially gives rise to the exploratory work itself. In the urban perimeter of Oiapoque, along the BR-156, practically all the city's public agencies are located: FForum, Fire Department, Notary Public Office (only one in the city), three bank agencies, Federal Court and Regional Federal Police Office.

The nice part of the city is restricted to this urban space. Here, my first exploratory field trip takes place. Everything around me seemed to have a new meaning, although I was careful not to naturally create a mere report of experience about a familiar space, which was now configured as new. The public inspection bodies were there, but new agents configured another sociability throughout the space. At the small bars on a busy street, Tupinambá Avenue, it is possible to see many glasses and bottles of drinks interspersed with music played at high volume and noise from customers at pool tables, as well as a lot of garbage on the few sidewalks and courtyards in this part of town. Some stray dogs can be seen rummaging through garbage bags in the street, something common on the city streets.

In this nice space, the Pousada Beira Rio itself already presented a new agent of sociability: the masseuse. In general, women who frequent hotels throughout the day do not have a specific designation, although it is common to see them accompanied by tourists (mostly French males). In the city, they are known for using a common expression, but with a pejorative connotation: *ploc* (a girl who practices prostitution).<sup>17</sup> In the boundary space of this institutional legality, the re-signification of these invisible practices is created. Clothes and body language are also fundamental to understanding how it works. It is common to see women in bars (of different ages), at different times throughout the

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<sup>17</sup> The first time I heard the expression was through a transgender deponent named Dina, in 2016. According to her, its use is common in clandestine mines in French Guiana. In Oiapoque and Saint-Georges de l'Oyapock, *ploc* practice is seen as an informal source of income for women and men (the latter in smaller numbers). Dina worked at a bar called Sambauê, near BR-156. When I sought her out for an interview in 2019, I was informed that she had traveled to one of the mines in French Guiana. In this regard, see also Araújo. (2017).

day<sup>18</sup>. In most cases, they wear colorful lycra clothes and always with heavy make-up. Some spend hours playing pool with customers (mostly males). Men, in turn, consume a lot of alcohol (individually or in groups) attracted by music and interaction with women. This space of sociability is common on the Franco-Brazilian border.

A remarkable fact is that the other passersby around, seem not to care, completely ignoring what happens in parallel between the bars and everyday life. Eventually, a police vehicle slowly travels through these busier parts of the city, although there are no interventions of any kind. It is possible to see between the spaces of one establishment and another (such as bars and small markets), wooden enclosures known as *estâncias*<sup>19</sup> – usually on the sides or back of the establishments. On Tupinambá Avenue, I tried different attempts to take photographs, but as an outsider, the environment was somewhat inhibiting. The mere fact of handling the phone in public was enough to be noticed by someone. The fact is that in the bar area, I noticed that few people handled their telephones, which I found somewhat unusual.

The issue, to some extent, was problematized when I stopped at a small shop near the Public Market of Oiapoque to buy a bottle of mineral water. A man in his 50s greets me: “Bonjour” (good morning, in French). I reply in a relaxed tone that I am Brazilian (although I think my look in the field was similar to border police or some foreign law enforcement officer). On the issue of looking, sociabilities produce many different meanings – and beyond the physical borders presented – and insert other fronts in the set of this constitution. The slanted glances towards me in the vicinity of the bars

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18 To Barral (2012, p. 49), the bar appears at the center of debates on the problem of use and occupation of spaces [...] forcing actors and politicians to take a stand [...].

19 *Estâncias* are also usually called kitchenettes in Oiapoque. The difference that I consider fundamental is that the kitchenette is an accommodation with one bedroom and a private or shared bathroom, with open areas and a garage for vehicles. An *estancia*, on the other hand, acts as a temporary shelter for people heading to the “other side” (specifically, the mines of French Guiana). In these cases, it is common to see signs in the city with the identification “Rooms for rent”. Prices range from R\$ 150.00 to R\$ 200.00 for periods of 10 to 15 days. In both cases, they are hot and humid rooms, some without windows and little ventilation in the environment. On the subject, see Pereira. (2012, p. 170).

reinforced exactly that invisible line. In other words, there are other borders in the general border space that are only perceptible as an outsider.

On the way, I decide to take a break for lunch. On the corner of Tupinambá Avenue, small clothing stores and snack stalls are anointed between tiny corridors that give access to other *estâncias*. A little farther from the noise of the bars, this area has an ordinary flow of people entering the premises, having quick meals, and passing through the corridors that lead to them, possibly carrying out other commercial negotiations. On the same street, you will find the Colar de Prata steakhouse. It is one of the most frequented restaurants in the city and is configured as a more specific sociability space frequented by foreign audiences.

I notice many French and Guyanese tourists, although whites are outnumbered on this first day. In French Guiana, citizens of mainland France are called *metropolitans*.<sup>20</sup> There are many children and elderly people among family groups who chat and drink in the enclosure. In this space, it is possible to establish an ethnic thermometer at the border. With few exceptions, you see white and black Guyanese seated at common tables. Among Guyanese, for example, the look is peculiarly composed of different haircuts, ornaments (necklace and golden rings), and colorful clothes. The interaction, on the other hand, is remarkably asymmetric: Guyanese and *Metropolitans*, at first sight, do not interact as part of a common culture.

On the other hand, the few Brazilians in the environment – at some specific tables – are interacting with the French. This observation is more apparent, I believe, by the overcrowding of the restaurant, added to the intensity of the heat in the city and the internal cooling of the environment, making it an attraction for physical comfort. As I get up to get some cutlery, I ask a Guyanese, in English, if he's in line to do the same. He directs his gaze with

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20 *Metropolitans*, in the French language. This Gentile designation reflects the political and economic situation of French Guiana concerning its administrative headquarters in Paris. Guyanese territory within the European Union is legally registered as the Overseas Department. See GRANGER, Stéphane. **French Guiana, a French and Caribbean territory on the way to “South Americanization”?** Revista Confins. Belo Horizonte, n. 6, p. 11-16, 2008. Available at: <http://confins.revues.org/document5003.html>. Accessed on: 17 fev. 2020. Direct translation of the title in Portuguese.

an air of indifference but doesn't answer. A small eating area near the edge of the city, configuring one of the best options for these tourists, plus the fact that they have to share it regardless of their varied cultural relationships. A priori, it seems to be a plausible, albeit limited, explanation for thinking about how Guyanese, French, and Brazilians can interact through these cultural markers.<sup>21</sup>

Another fact observed in the Franco-Brazilian border is its most prominent cultural connection across the Oiapoque River. A considerable part of this French-Guyanese population, as well as Brazilians, uses the services of the popular *catraias*.<sup>22</sup> For six years, being on the frontier before the research was carried out, I would dare to infer that the economic integration of both cities, as well as the daily life in its interaction variability, refers almost exclusively to this river part. Throughout the week, Frenchmen, Guyanese, and Brazilians, as well as Gentiles from other parts of the world arrive in Brazil and return to the "other side".

An important issue raised in border relations is that the so-called Binational Bridge – an architectural project between Brazil and France – aiming to economically and politically integrate both countries was partially inaugurated in April 2017.<sup>23</sup> From the point of view of everyday life in the city, there are interaction problems on the border itself, which are scaled by the terrestrial threshold. *Catraias* generally allow people of different nationalities to create other forms of sociability. In the same way that we have institutions representing spaces of legality in the city center (such as public bodies), we also have a process of informalization of new interactions between different ethnic and linguistic groups. Likewise, the language, gestures, and looks in the city's bars reproduce this logic of "invisible" insertion in the eyes of the law.

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21 It is common to hear in the city that Guyanese people "don't like Brazilians", with reports of xenophobic acts and speeches about Brazilians being common in Saint-Georges de l'Oyapock.

22 Small boats that can hold 10 to 15 people and travel between Oiapoque and Saint-Georges de l'Oyapock. Pilots who carry out this work are called *catraieiros*. The work is performed only by men. These vessels also transport people and goods to other locations across the Oiapoque River (such as Vila Brasil and Clevelândia do Norte).

23 CONTE, Maria Irene de. **The bridge over the Oiapoque River: a "transoceanic" bridge between Brazil and France – Mercosur and the European Union?**. Thesis (Master's degree). Postgraduate Program in Human Geography. University of São Paulo, 2007. Direct translation of the title in Portuguese.

**Figure 8:** Sign with reproduction and location of the map of Oiapoque in French at the entrance to the city via BR-156



**Source:** Personal archive (2019)

**Figure 9:** Street in the central region of Oiapoque



**Source:** Personal archive (2019)

**Figure 10:** Set of *estâncias* along the BR-156



**Source:** Personal archive (2019)

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**Figure 11:** Shore of the Oiapoque River: the smaller boats anchored on the riverbank are known as *catraias*



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**Source:** Personal archive (2019)

**Figure 12:** *Catraias* at the bottom anchored on the banks of the Oiapoque River



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**Source:** Personal archive (2019)



**Figure 13:** View of the Binational Bridge, traveling by boat across the Oiapoque River to Saint-Georges de l'Oyapock, in French Guiana



**Source:** Personal archive (2019)

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**Figure 14:** Panoramic street view in the center of Oiapoque near Beira Rio



**Source:** Personal archive (2019)

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**Figure 15:** Vessels anchored in front of the hotel on the edge of Oiapoque



Source: Personal archive (2019)

## Touch of talking and gesture

I finish lunch and leave looking for a stay. The Colar de Péloras steakhouse, although always full between 12:00 and 14:00, ended up becoming a tumultuous place for daily meals, although more suited to the perception of the countryside regarding the progress of ethnographic work. Again, I leave the Beira Rio hotel at nightfall, which gives me a dimension of “another” city. I chose not to take photographic records on the days I went out at night, as the lack of light throughout the city makes the work more complex. However, I must infer that the relationship itself with the agents in the field was quite different. At night, Oiapoque becomes closer to its namesake on the “other side”: the gold-digging.

Hotels all over the center have small signs allotted with “no vacancy” reports, which made my search very difficult. Oiapoque nightlife, let’s say, has a singularity of actions that are distinct from the movement of daytime businesses. The daily life on the border and its transit appear as a “place of passage”. In the central square, there are very heterogeneous groups: evangelical singing groups, young people playing sports, people walking around with beer cans, and children playing in different corners of the square. A group of young people rehearses choreography for a specific dance. Dona Neuri’s report reappears punctually: Oiapoque’s visual picture of the circulation of people in the border strip gained well-established contours with her description.

A hot and quite tiring night. I pass in front of the Federal Police Station and ask a night guard for information about accommodation. The guard recommends that I look for a woman named Rose in a specific hotel. “Say it was Junior who sent you” However, I arrive at Hotel Fogo, also on the banks of BR-156. I am again faced with a “No Vacancy” sign. In addition to not having a good structure, at first sight, I am greeted by another woman, who does not identify herself and informs me that “Rose is not here”. Demonstrates concern for my presence. After a quick introduction, I identify myself as a teacher. “Professor of what?” When answering that my subjects are History and Sociology, she seems to find it curious, although the air of suspicion remains.

Unsuccessful at the Hotel Fogo, I am told by a man in his 60s about another well-known accommodation establishment, something like “kitchenette for monthly pay”. I head towards the place and after a walk of almost 20 minutes, crossing the BR-156 (which crosses the entire city), I arrive at the city’s neighborhood known as Perto do Céu.<sup>24</sup> In possession of a flashlight – a very useful instrument in Oiapoque, due to the lack of public lighting in the city’s streets – I follow the information given by passersby in the area – which didn’t stop the search from taking a while – until I find the Oceano Hotel.

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<sup>24</sup> This place is considered by residents of the city as the most remote and undervalued part of the city. Most of its inhabitants come from the state of Maranhão.

The location is well isolated and does not have, at least externally, security. In this part of the city, there are no paved streets. I find myself outside the establishment with a man of approximately 65 years old. He had his cell phone to his ears and seemed to be trying to listen to audio messages with some difficulty. I greeted him, but he didn't seem to hear. I assumed he was deaf and only after he saw me did he say something in a language I didn't identify. Externally, the hotel was similar to other *estâncias*, although also to the kitchenettes spread around the city. As it was very hot during this period, even at night, I assumed that spending a period in a place with little ventilation and humidity would be compromising health.

The middle-aged man tries to communicate in an unintelligible language and shows his cell phone display indicating that he is the “hotel manager”. After a few minutes, I manage to establish contact through the phone message application with the woman who identifies herself as responsible for the establishment. She said that a “room would be vacant in a few days”, however, I decided not to move forward in the lease negotiations, as the environment was unsafe.

A notorious fact in these hostels, kitchenettes, or *estâncias* – very close in terms of structure – is their improvised form in terms of construction. I think it is necessary to understand that in a border context, the dynamics of passage and in between, as well as aiming for the “other side”, becomes something more important. Residency is not a priority.

I thanked the contact of “Mr. Gringo” and continued my search. Arriving through the vicinity of the only existing bodybuilding gym in the city, I am taken by a merchant on his motorcycle to the other “hotel”. Visually, it was another set of *estâncias*, identified as Pousada Padre Romão. Although I was in the center of Oiapoque, the price charged for a monthly rental seemed quite high, even taking into account its location. In the front area, I'm greeted by a shirtless man wearing sandals, around 50 years old, who introduces himself as Ceará. He said he is a truck driver residing in Itaituba (Pará), but traveling sporadically to the border to transport goods. After a short conversation, Ceará tells me a little about his impression of mining.

This initial conversation allows us to establish a comparison inherent to the idea of permanence on the Franco-Brazilian border. We cannot predict speeches, gestures, or looks – these naturally reveal the existing dynamics. In general, the bodily action on the border corresponds exactly to the hierarchical forms that are being exercised in specific circumstances: who arrives, pretensions, and how to deal with outsiders. Ceará shows me the room available from this perspective. He was in front of another wooden room, windowless, with an antique iron fan on top of a small dusty bench. Ceará says that the place is “very good” and that it is “always full”. In other words, if he identified the profile of the “adventurer” in his search, then he could be a potential guest. The environment had all the characteristics of ranches and does not differ much in visual appearance from other forms of housing existing in the Amazon.

Ceará argues that the place is “ideal for those who won’t be staying long”. I asked if many people were going to the “other side” there. That place, specifically, was directed to the people who headed to the mines. His mother, who also worked at the site, offered me a cup of coffee, which allowed me to talk better about some basic information, such as what it means to be “successful” in mining:

The problem is that the gold miner is a guy without knowledge. He doesn’t know anything. When he picks up gold, he goes crazy. He only wants to buy a Lacoste shirt and be with the hottest women (Ceará, 50 years old, owner of an *estância*).

The deponent brings a particular view about the lifestyle in the gold miner culture. In this regard, I believe that the speech can bring symbolic representations of a given type of experience. The gold miner as “a guy without knowledge”, personifies what can be accomplished in terms of monetary wealth, craving economic capital to accomplish certain deeds or desires. The deponent here places the body as an object to be acquired, following a logic of capitalist appropriation. Having an “expensive” woman has the same symbolic relevance as owning a foreign designer T-shirt. Ceará also said he knew the *Oceano* Hotel, describing it as a “dangerous place”, whose “door facing the street” made it “a bad element to enter the room”.

People died there. The guy shot the other in the room with a shotgun. I know the owner there. It's dangerous there.

The relationship between Ceará's speech and mining can attenuate or enhance discursive forms that make up the naturalization of this constitution: what is a deviation can be a *modus operandi*. This contravention of values appears in Ceará's speech under the bias of a type of order:

My Oiapoque is very calm. It's very good here. Now if you go to Infraero it's dangerous. There are only no good people. Only those people from Macapá and Maranhão. There are only thieves there!

This is the reference to a neighborhood outside the city center, Infraero. The idea that the city "is mine" also allows us to think that this delimits specific spaces. The local demarcation between "unwanted" people living in the same territory through different areas is quite noticeable in Oiapoque. The same happens with the neighborhood/area known as *Perto do Céu* ("Near of the sky"). The Infraero neighborhood can be seen on the banks of BR-156, right at the entrance to the city. The deponent's view, in a sense, separates some profiles of passersby who access clandestine mines in French Guiana.

Talking with residents of Oiapoque between the periods related to 2015 and 2016 (before the development of the research), I noticed that the relationship between insiders and outsiders on the border concentrates groups from specific regions – in the case of remote neighborhoods (from the perspective of who lives in the city) – predominantly from Maranhão and Pará. The cultural proximity between people from Amapá and Pará, for example, is noticeable in the prejudiced speech of Ceará. From the point of view of field observation, it is possible to see that there are far fewer people from the capital, Macapá. Infraero and Perto do Céu are also border demarcations with distinct sociabilities, originated in the experience of the physical frontier and bring these social strata in a very well demarcated way.

Infraero and Perto do Céu are also border demarcations of another order, originated in the experience of the physical frontier. On the issue, we can observe:

[...] Occasionally, we can observe that members of groups more powerful than other interdependent groups think of themselves (self-represented) as humanly superior [...] This is the normal self-image of groups who, in terms of their power differential, are surely superior to other interdependent groups. [...]. (ELIAS; SCOTSON, 2000, p. 19)

The difficulties encountered on the way to the Pousada Padre Romão, on that day, were preceded by intense observation of the different paths that the city presents, such as a dusty trunk, open at different times of the day, bringing new costumes for different characters. From the Hotel Oceano to the Pousada Padre Romão, a considerable amount of new ethnographic information was revealed. The tone of speech about the idea of superiority conceptually presented by Elias and Scotson (2000) is revealing in the sense of bringing a perception about hierarchical groups belonging to a group and their relationship with the other.

Having chosen not to lease this environment, I decided to seek help from a couple of friends who live in the city. At the exit, through one of the busiest streets in the city, passing the Central Square, passersby crowd the streets. The bars were in full swing with a lot of people turnover. In some spots, it's possible to see teenagers with cans of beer and cigarettes without any major worries. The pool tables can also be seen under great dispute between customers – mostly men – that well to the sound of traditional music style. Lesser metropolitan French also circulate on the streets.

In groups of five to ten, many indigenous people from the Oiapoque region can be seen walking around with bottles of drink and cigarettes, always talking in their local language. They laugh out loud and speak hastily. Some relatively younger, show off new shoes and clothes among themselves. The speed with which they consume alcohol is peculiar, given the intensity of body movements, gestures, and facial expressions that can be observed. This is all



interspersed with the arrival of several pirates on the BR-156 in their trucks full of merchandise.

When I arrive at Elaine and Thomás' house, I am invited to dinner. Both are long-time friends and before the development of the research already shared some ideas related to mining on the border. I was soon contacted by António (known as Portuguese, according to Thomás), who was managing a set of studios in the city. Farther away from the center, the environment was undergoing renovations, being owned by a Frenchman known as François.<sup>25</sup> The next day I arranged the payment details with António and made the move. The fact is that he became the first formal deponent of this work. As a foreigner, he also had the characteristics of a local insider, as a result of his experience as a resident of French Guiana and Suriname.

António became the first formal deponent of this work. As a foreigner, he had the characteristics of an outsider on the field. The strangeness of the territory, configured to its form of resistance to border codes, as we will see below, demonstrates this factor. This first immersion in the countryside, under the justification of a search for housing location, allowed entering a context that, despite being familiar, enabled this inside-for-inside relationship and established connections under circumstances peculiar to the observation of the countryside. The predisposition of this Malinowskian exercise, so to speak, contributed to understanding a context of unpredictability.

From the sudden movement of passersby in the streets to small establishments, the performances between groups and their distinct sociability observed at the Cordão de Pérolas restaurant, to the slanted gaze of the employees of the Hotel Beira Rio, everything seems to flow into apparent everyday normality.

All these political, social, and economic connections lead to the search for the "other side". As a matter of fact, "the other side" as a common expression of this border is not a reference to the French-speaking world existing in these limits of the Far North of Brazil. It is a generic term that has its meaning

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<sup>25</sup> There is an unmeasured amount of real estate in Oiapoque owned by foreigners or people residing in other states of the country. As it is a frontier and is directly related to the gold miner culture, properties for sale or purchase, as well as rentals, are offered at very high prices.

for those who want to achieve it. Thus, an entire network that subliminally configures itself from the gestures and attentive eyes of those who transit through the small center and glimpse the “other side” across the Oiapoque River. The “other side” that works as a parallel territory is also full of varied stories: people who disappear, conflicts, and recurrent speeches about the presence of the French military in the region. This entire set composes the synthesis of an Ethos based on this experience that seeks the “other side” for its greatest acquisition: gold.

**Figure 16:** Boat station in Beira Rio waiting for passengers bound for the municipality of Saint-Georges de l'Oyapock, in French Guiana



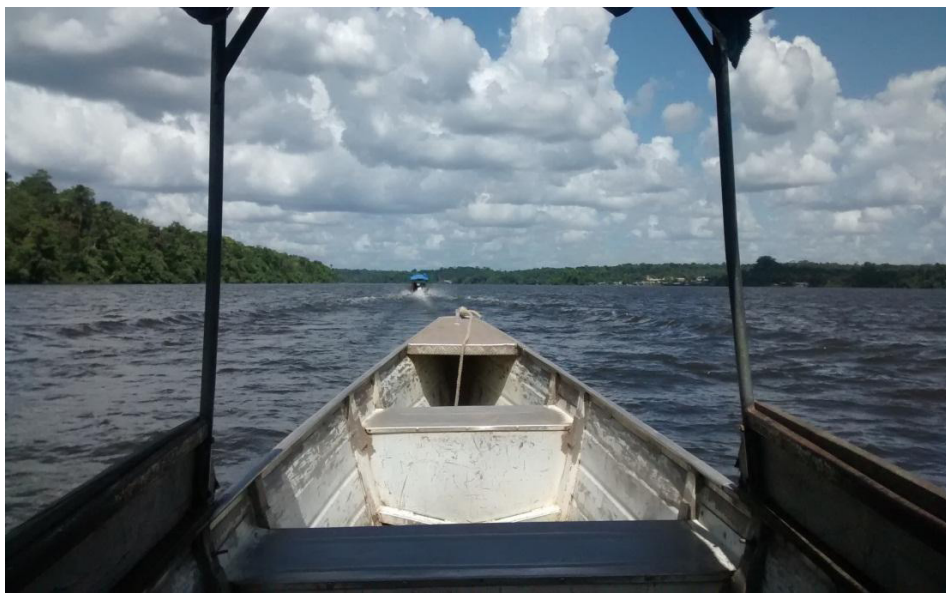
**Source:** Personal archive (2019)

**Figure 17:** Border of Beira Rio in Oiapoque, entry and exit area for passersby between Amapá and French Guiana



**Source:** Personal archive (2019)

**Figure 18:** Travel by boat on the Oiapoque River towards Saint-Georges de l'Oyapock, French Guiana



**Source:** Personal archive (2019)

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**Figure 19:** Bust around the Central Square of Oiapoque (where a considerable part of the population gathers for parties and night activities). An interesting detail is that there is no identification/ inscription on the statue. This perception is fundamental to understanding a boundary as non-place, which is an intermittent traffic.



**Source:** Personal archive (2019)



# EL CONTEXTO DE LAS MIGRACIONES EN LA FRONTERA FRANCO- BRASILEÑA: REFLEXIONES SOBRE COVID-19<sup>26</sup>

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*El significado literal de la pandemia de coronavirus es el miedo caótico generalizado y la muerte sin fronteras causados por un enemigo invisible. Pero lo que expresa es mucho más que eso. Estos son algunos de los significados que surgen de ella [...] (Boaventura Santos, 2020, p.32)*

La frontera entre Brasil y Francia en los límites amazónicos mezcla algunos elementos que pueden entenderse en el ámbito de las Relaciones Internacionales desde un marco político y diplomático. Y aquí radica una cuestión crucial en lo que Anderson (1993) presenta como una reelaboración identitaria. Políticamente hablando, los cimientos de un territorio o nación suelen estar constituidos por los poderes del Estado. Lo que miraba como la idea más cerca de una nacionalidad. El contexto analizado aquí es la franja fronteriza ubicada en Oiapoque, limítrofe con la Guayana Francesa, en el extremo norte de Brasil. En su casco urbano, según el último censo demográfico realizado en 2010, Oiapoque cuenta con aproximadamente 27 mil habitantes.<sup>27</sup>

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26 Artículo presentado originalmente como comunicación en II Congreso Internacional de Ciencias Sociales y Humanas - La Amazonía Brasileña: problemas y desafíos, realizado entre Marzo y Abril de 2022 na Universidad de Salamanca (España).

27 Disponible en: <https://cidades.ibge.gov.br/brasil/ap/oiapoque/panorama>. Acceso em: 08 de Abril 2022.

La existencia de un espacio colonial en América del Sur en una región estratégica de la Panamazonía, sumado al hecho de la convivencia entre diversos grupos sociales en culturas endógenas, produce un efecto análogo al del imperialismo francés en el norte de África. En la práctica, este proyecto ilustrado iniciado en el siglo XVIII sigue siendo predominante. La jurisdicción entendida como Departamento de Ultramar (agregando Guayana Francesa, Martinica, Nueva Caledonia y Tahití) contempla la tardía institucionalización del universalismo europeo. No sería un error inferir que el bonapartismo militarista y económico iniciado con la Francia imperialista apuntaba no solo a una ardua disputa con sus análogos británicos en los siglos XIX y XX, sino a la explotación mercantil por poderes.

A su vez, esta población flotante surge en un dilema central sobre las fronteras amazónicas en el contexto de la crisis sanitaria: ¿es la jurisdicción del Estado francés capaz de “contener” o “distribuir” a estas personas? ¿Serían “deportados” o víctimas del contagio del nuevo coronavirus? ¿Qué se coloca en esta perspectiva de un horizonte complejo en cuanto a medidas de salud?

El avance de la explotación capitalista en las zonas fronterizas amazónicas, especialmente en conjunción con el panorama pandémico, anuncia una relación catastrófica con las poblaciones nativas, ribereñas y culturas indígenas en general. En este preámbulo, buscamos comprender la constitución de formas análogas a la esclavitud en el contexto capitalista periférico concerniente a la Guayana Francesa y sus minas de oro clandestinas.

Aquí, enfatizamos el concepto de colonialismo interno de González Casanova (2007) sobre el espacio de la Amazonía francesa como una área colonial contemporánea, especialmente con la expansión de la minería aurífera en medio de la Pandemia COVID-19. Este espacio infracolonial entre París y Cayena, por mantenerse como área de acumulación / explotación en la periferia capitalista de extracción de minerales, corrobora expandir su apropiación irrestricta sobre la tierra. ¿Qué nuevos vínculos se están condicionando a los ‘transeúntes’ en diferentes grupos sociales pertenecientes a la lógica del ‘flotar’ (ahora ni brasileños ni franceses) y, sobre todo, portar el virus en territorios ilegales?



En este preámbulo nos interesa conocer qué nuevas configuraciones están introduciendo estos nuevos agentes fronterizos, sus traslapes con el llamado “otro lado” (denominación común para referirse a los territorios mineros ilegales), así como las nuevas relaciones de sociabilidad que se establecen. Ahora, el virus se erige como un nuevo paradigma de las relaciones sociales fronterizas más allá del drama de la supervivencia humana. Como una de las bases metodológicas establecidas, el trabajo se basa en la etnografía y la incursión del campo, utilizando como base analítica la base empírica de la observación participante. Este método nos permitió comprender de manera más objetiva las complejas relaciones sociales que se establecen en la frontera franco-brasileña desde su frente, la pequeña localidad de Oiapoque, ubicada a 600 km de la capital Macapá (FONSECA, 2021).

Entre 2014 y 2020, a través de una investigación que culminó en una tesis doctoral en Sociología, observé que a partir de la dinámica social entre diferentes grupos en la frontera franco-brasileña, lo que los conectaba era la búsqueda de oro en las selvas de Guyana (FONSECA, 2021). Por otro lado, el contexto pandémico abrió otras variantes de comprensión de este espacio (ya sea en el ámbito político o económico) con el surgimiento de la Pandemia.

El perímetro urbano de la pequeña ciudad de Oiapoque es la encarnación exacta de lo que entiendo por Brasil profundo. Entre la ausencia del Estado y el “reino” de la ilegalidad, su espacio fronterizo presenta una cuestión sociológica central: ¿cómo establecer variantes precisas para comprender las formas peculiares de exploración capitalista que se dan en estos espacios? ¿Cómo se entrelaza el poder público local con formas tan insólitas de sociabilidad? Y en este punto, la minería en el estado de Amapá es quizás una de las más antiguas de la Amazonía. De esta manera, entiendo que la actividad económica central en este espacio fronterizo representa lo que Marx (2017) establece como formas de acumulación primitiva, a partir de la expropiación de la tierra en el contexto de la modernidad europea.

Empíricamente, aún no es posible vislumbrar una posibilidad etnográfica actual en estas áreas de minería ilegal. El potencial contagio de la COVID-19, sobre todo, por el intenso tráfico y el difícil acceso al “otro lado”. Según Vargas y Aquino (2019), podemos observar una cantidad de esta población fluctuante:

El gobierno de la Guayana Francesa estima que actualmente hay alrededor de 479 operaciones mineras clandestinas en sus bosques y montañas, en las que aproximadamente 10.000 brasileños trabajarían ilegalmente. Desde mediados de la década de 1990, los tránsitos y migraciones hacia la Guayana Francesa han sido recurrentes, con miras a dedicarse a la minería ilegal. A partir de la década de 2000, debido a los aumentos recurrentes del precio del oro en el mercado internacional, la presencia brasileña en el país vecino se multiplicó [...] Según estimaciones del gobierno francés, sólo el 20% del oro de la Guayana Francesa proviene de minería ilegal. La minería clandestina sería responsable de unas diez toneladas de oro guyanés por año, que sería ilegalmente explorado por mineros brasileños, llevado de contrabando a Oiapoque e insertado en el mercado nacional desde las estaciones de compuestos minerales de la ciudad, en un proceso que involucraría varias etapas y agentes (VARGAS; AQUINO, 2019, pp.220-221)<sup>28</sup>

## El contexto de la pandemia y migración: Oiapoque

Ay, pueblo amazónico, hace siglos fuisteis condenados a vivir olvidados, sin los beneficios del poder público, a buscar soluciones caseras a problemas sofisticados; se ve a sí mismo aún más perdido, desamparado, abandonado a sus propios recursos como un niño sin amor. La gente del pueblo también está sufriendo, porque este maldito quebrantamiento no es una plaga como el hambre, que mata a una clase mientras la otra come. La enfermedad parece no hacer distinciones. ¿Qué será de nosotros, Señor? Nos estamos asfixiando abandonados en el pulmón místico del mundo,

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28 Todas las citas en el cuerpo del texto son traducciones directas de trabajos publicados en portugués (Brasil).

sin poder respirar, frente a un enemigo desconocido, con solo hierbas, oraciones y curanderos. Se me considera un pesimista exagerado, pero analizando la realidad en la que nos encontramos, hay mucho tiempo en el que un estado de pandemia constante sin hospitales, médicos ni medicinas, sin la más mínima estructura, con políticos preocupados solo por engordar sus cuentas bancarias. mientras el pueblo sufre abandonado; casi podemos sentir la zanja fría y colectiva, ofreciéndose como nuestra última moral... (ROGERS, 2021, pp.119-120)

Sin embargo, desde el inicio de la Pandemia, el flujo de transeúntes ilegales ha seguido siendo intenso desde Oiapoque.<sup>29</sup> Desde el inicio de la Pandemia, el flujo de transeúntes ilegales continuó activo desde Oiapoque, mismo con problemas locales de su administración<sup>30</sup>. Asimismo, el trabajo de Vargas y Aquino (2019) señala que, contrariamente a lo que pudieran predecir las aduanas, el tránsito clandestino no cambia. Podría inferirse que la Pandemia se ha convertido en una importante “moneda de cambio” en relación a los grupos sociales activos en la frontera.

En la Amazonía, así como diferentes regiones del mundo, esta crisis sanitaria y económica ha redistribuido internamente una gama de poblaciones que aún se encuentran al margen de los programas de vacunación en los territorios que habitan. Cabe destacar que en la Guayana Francesa se registraron aproximadamente 80.000 contagios y más de 400 muertes.<sup>31</sup> Según el reporte brindado por la Red Eclesial Panamazónica (REPAM), en agosto de 2020, aproximadamente 815,000 personas contrajeron el Nuevo Coronavirus en la Panamazonía. De estos, ya suman más de 22 mil muertos. En la Amazonía legal brasileña, el estado de Amapá concentra una de las tasas de contaminación más altas del Norte de Brasil.

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29 **Invasão de garimpeiros brasileiros nas Guianas.** Disponible en: <https://climainfo.org.br/2020/04/03/invasão-de-garimpeiros-brasileiros-nas-guianas/>. Acceso em 30 de março de 2022.

30 **Coronavírus: Esquecida, sem UTI e com prefeita afastada, Oiapoque apela à Guiana Francesa por ajuda contra COVID-19.** Disponible en: <https://www.google.com.br/amap/s/www.bbc.com/portuguese/brasil-53171432.amp>. Acceso em 30 de março de 2022.

31 Disponible en: <https://graphics.reuters.com/world-coronavirus-tracker-and-maps/pt/countries-and-territories/french-guiana/> Acceso em 04 de Abril 2022.

Así, podemos mirar otros contextos panamazónicos:

En el subcontinente sudamericano, con Brasil superando la marca de 1 millón de casos de Covid-19 en junio de 2020, la transmisión es generalizada. Según la Organización Panamericana de la Salud (OPS), la perspectiva es que el país pueda, en los próximos dos años, seguir experimentando brotes recurrentes de Covid-19, intercalados con períodos de transmisión limitada [...]. Vale también mencionando el caso de Colombia, que, a pesar de la relativamente menor incidencia de casos, tiene el mayor número de infectados en Letícia, ciudad que limita con Tabatinga, en la Amazonía. Para el Ministro de Salud de ese país, la ausencia de diálogo con las autoridades brasileñas es un factor de la causa, dado el nivel de contaminación que llegó al estado de Amazonas en Brasil [...]. Se puede decir que, una vez que se cerró, el virus se propagó en cada país, siguiendo los caminos de la civilización y dando lugar a diferentes escenarios de pandemia, pero mostrando un comportamiento común: manifestando su rostro más cruel en los lugares más distantes y periféricos, con baja infraestructura para la atención médica y hospitalaria, y baja capacidad de protección contra la infección, ya sea por falta de información o por vulnerabilidad socioeconómica ya instalada. (NAGAMINE; FERREIRA; KRÜGER; MOURA, 2020, pp. 205-207)

Asociado a la idea de una frontera hipotéticamente integrada, Oiapoque y su homóloga Saint-Georges de L'Oyapock (Guayana Francesa) están conectadas por el río del mismo nombre. El río Oiapoque es responsable de casi toda la vida económica local, siendo el Puente Binacional su franja territorial oficial. Justo al comienzo de la pandemia, una de las primeras medidas adoptadas por el gobierno francés fue el cierre exclusivo en relación con el lado brasileño.

Granger (2008) señala que el perfil demográfico de la región franco-guyanesa es esencialmente “caribeño y sudamericano”, con rasgos culturales establecidos entre los diferentes pueblos de la región. Si históricamente esta geografía del espacio ya estaba constituida desde hace décadas, futuros estudios mostrarán cómo se presentará este nuevo mapa de composición demográfica. Así,

La Guayana Francesa es un enclave, una verdadera isla europea en medio de un océano de pobreza, por lo que está atrayendo a muchos inmigrantes de países cercanos. A los cientos de colombianos y principalmente brasileños que llegaron a principios de la década de 1960 para construir la base espacial (estos últimos ahora constituyen el 10% de la población), se sumaron unos 10.000 surinameses que huían de la guerra civil a fines de la década de 1980, y miles de haitianos (ahora la comunidad más grande), dominicanos y guyaneses de Georgetown. La población de la Guayana Francesa está oficialmente compuesta por un 40% de extranjeros (mucho más de hecho), y más de la mitad de los nacimientos se deben a mujeres extranjeras que mantienen el comportamiento demográfico de sus países de origen, donde la fecundidad es más alta. Estos inmigrantes, por la facilidad de llegar a la Guayana Francesa, pasando por Surinam o Brasil, están demostrando a sus habitantes, que muchas veces lo han olvidado, que realmente es sudamericana. (GRANGER, 2008, p.13)

Con la aparición de la Pandemia, no es posible asegurar que los datos presentados sobre los perfiles demográficos en guayanesas se mantendrán en esta configuración social. Según datos recabados por la carrera de Geografía de la Universidad Federal de Amapá, el tránsito de peruanos es el más grande en la zona fronteriza de Oiapoque.<sup>32</sup> En este contexto de pandemia, también debemos observar las circunstancias que llevaron a una parte considerable de la población francoguyanese a rechazar la vacuna y un fuerte llamado a *Antivax* desde la metrópolis. Los recientes acontecimientos relacionados con las elecciones francesas en la carrera presidencial parecen atestiguar no solo una amenaza directa a la democracia liberal imperante, sino también el vertiginoso crecimiento de la Extrema Derecha en Europa y, en consecuencia, el negacionismo científico.<sup>33</sup>

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32 Disponible en: <https://www2.unifap.br/geografia-oiapoque/files/2019/10/Banner-Ramon-e-Adriano.pdf>. Acceso em: 31 de Março 2022.

33 Disponible en: <https://www.rfi.fr/podcasts/linha-direta/20211216-entre-chás-medicinais-e-descrença-política-guiana-francesa-é-uma-das-regiões-mais-resistentes-à-vacina>. Acceso em: 04 de Abril 2022.

Esto se ve en Guayana Francesa y profesionales de la salud pública resistentes a la inmunización. Es necesario reflexionar sobre la rentabilidad del negacionismo paraestatal: ¿quién se beneficia de él? Asimismo, la reubicación y el éxodo interno de la región, característico de la Meseta Guayanesa, parece indicar que colombianos/as, haitianas/os, peruanas/os, así como otros grupos sociales – ya sea ilegalmente o no – son transeúntes en medio de una pandemia. En conclusión, la posibilidad de comprender la reconfiguración económica y social de este espacio amazónico en medio del contexto sanitario actual dista mucho de ser comprendida de manera estable.

**Figura 20:** Puente Binacional entre Brasil y Guayana Francesa



**Source:** Selesnafes (2012)

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# STATE, IDENTITY AND BORDERS

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Without much delay, I retain the following general features of the romantic challenge of modern identity. Against a decontextualized and abstract rationality increasingly colonized by scientific instrumentalism and economic calculation, romanticism proposes a radical search for identity that implies a new relationship with nature and the revaluation of the irrational, the unconscious, the mythical and the popular and the reunion with its own forms of social organization. Against the individual-state pair and the abstract legals that regulates it, romanticism glorifies individual subjectivity because of what is original, irregular, unpredictable [...] The Marxist contestation of modern identity has more points of contact with the ideological contestation than I wanted to admit for a long time, but the direction it takes is very different. The recontextualization of the identity proposed by Marxism against abstract individualism and statism is done through the focus on social relations of production, their constitutive role, the ideas and practices of concrete individuals, and their asymmetric and differentiated relations with the State [...] (SANTOS, 1994, p.36)<sup>34</sup>

In late November 2019, on a scorching afternoon, I had returned from a small town called *Saint-Georges de L'Oyapock* on the banks of the river of the same name. The French word, however, mixed with the indigenous culture of the ancient Wajãpi people, produces another meaning in Brazilian Portuguese: House from *Wajãpi*.<sup>35</sup> Its homonymous border, “twin city”, Oiapoque, that was the place I was heading back to.. Located in the country’s north side, it

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<sup>34</sup> Freely translated excerpt from a work published in Portuguese (Brazil).

<sup>35</sup> Romani (2010).

is a city of just over 27 thousand inhabitants<sup>36</sup>. Founded in 1941 during the New State of Vargas (1937-1945), it carries the singularities of an Amazonian border. The two cities delimit the land border between Brazil and France, although this front, in the theoretical dimension proposed by Águas (2017). The architectural and state project that links the state of Amapá with the French overseas department by land is the Binational Bridge, connecting Brazil and France by land.<sup>37</sup>

On board a *Catraia* boat (the name given to these small boats that travel the Oiapoque River daily), I observe the flow of people on the so-called Beira Rio (Riverside): money changers, street vendors, motorcycle taxi drivers, and *Piratas* (local expression for Pick Up drivers) compete among baggage handlers.<sup>38</sup> It is possible to identify languages other than Portuguese, such as French, English, and *Crèole*, in addition to the region's indigenous languages. I was doing fieldwork, and had to stay there for as long as necessary. Apparently, this type of work never ceases. In the midst of this confusion, I notice the absence of inspection agents (IRS or Federal Police). Empirically speaking, thinking about the state perspective through the circularity of this space is a separate sociological problematization.

The Oiapoque urban perimeter is the exact embodiment of what I understand as deep Brazil. Between the absence of the State and the illegality ruling, its border space presents a central sociological question: how to establish precise variants to understand the particular forms of capitalist accumulation in these spaces? How does the local government intertwine with such unusual forms of sociability? In my doctoral research in Sociology, I bring a socio-spatial view of Pan-Amazon to try to understand the relations of sociability between different participating groups<sup>39</sup>. And at this point, the mining in Amapá is perhaps one of the oldest in the Amazon. Thus, I understand that the major economic activity in this border space represents what Marx (2017, p.788)

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36 Source of the Brazilian Institute of Geography and Estatisc (2010).

37 Conte (2007).

38 The translation to English is Pirate.

39 Fonseca (2021).



establishes as forms of primitive accumulation based on the expropriation of lands in the context of European modernity.

We are approaching a distinct spatial location, with forms of production analogous to debt slavery, which is very common in the region, described in the works of Martins (1997) and Chagas (2019) as a kind of map of the pioneering expansion fronts in the Brazilian Amazon. Here, we inevitably deal with effective forms and illegal gold exploration and extraction, an essential key to research. Instead, in this universe of human and physical borders, there are different forms of land occupation through internal displacement, directly affecting indigenous and riverside populations, and the local biodiversity. This land occupation/dispute ultimately destabilizes the local way of life, giving rise to new internal configurations within the prospecting territories.

There is a crucial difference, obviously, when it comes to the border relations between social groups existing in this mining culture and defenders of the same rules, although disparate<sup>40</sup>. In this preamble, what we understand as State policies on physical borders, in general, is a specific aspect of sociological research. At first glance, Oiapoque presents itself as a field of interactions and varied dispositions. For example, the cultural distance between the border and the capital Macapá exceeds its geographical distance. And that is precisely in this dynamic that I would like to explore the theoretical choice involved in this first part of the work.

The border between Brazil and France on this Amazonian breaking point mixes some elements that we can understand in the sphere of International Relations, such as border, diplomatic and intergovernmental cooperation. Politically speaking, the bases of a territory or nation tend to be constituted by the powers of the State. However, from the point of view of certain ethnic-racial groups not contemplated by the state logic – through their laws and rules – in many cases, they tend to diverge from an imposed national project.

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40 In Brazilian Portuguese, the commonly used expression “garimpo” or “garimpagem” is employed. I decided to keep the description in English, although I would like to emphasize that the meaning is different in the Portuguese language in many cases.

Their identity configuration is divergent when exercised in the universal context and mandatory citizenship.

Saint-Georges and Oiapoque belong to the same river. With the partial inauguration of the Binacional Bridge in April 2017, its migratory flow was no less intense – since it was configured, in practice, as a terrestrial barrier, making access difficult for Brazilians on the French side. I say this because historically, this bridge has never meant integrating both sides. French Guiana is an overseas colony, and as such, it projects itself into the economic and political context of the European Union.

The vision imposed by the French State, its Enlightenment, Western and post-colonialist perspectives we can understand in the daily life of these bilateral relations through the so-called floating population that lives between two worlds. For example, the so-called clandestine mines present in French Guiana are still great attractions for those seeking short-term income and prosperity. The flow of young women in the area is also intense, but according to reports from spoken sources who chose to live in Oiapoque, it was already more profitable to risk prostitution in the mines.

When someone in the city uses the expression “the other side” (for example, “I made money there on the other side”), it means that they have already been to Guyana and had some financial success. The “other side” still symbolizes a replica of the idea of “easy gain” in the local imagination. However, in the current economic crisis in the country, Oiapoque has been experiencing a drop in its local trade, especially with the intensification of Federal Police operations in the region.

Therefore, the existence of a colonial space in South America in a strategic region of the Pan-Amazon, added to the coexistence between diverse social groups in endogenous cultures, produces an effect analogous to French imperialism in North Africa. This Enlightenment project that began in the 18th century is still prevalent. The jurisdiction understood as the Overseas Department (comprising French Guiana, Martinique, New Caledonia, and Tahiti) contemplates the late institutionalization of European universalism. It would not be a mistake to infer that the militaristic and economic bonapartism

initiated with Napoleonic France was aimed not only at an arduous dispute with British imperialism in the 19th and 20th centuries but at mercantile exploitation by proxy.

The consolidation of what we can understand as a *Máfia das Pedras* (Stone Mafia), according to Procópio (2007), is the central business characteristic linked to European metropolises and the permanence of their colonial extension. French Guiana, of course, is the internal colonial space used for this purpose. This imagery is not exclusive to the Franco-Brazilian border. As writer Ernest Hemingway (1899-1961) once said, “A hefty salary as an administrator of the Ottoman Imperial Bank, a French capital firm...” Referring to the French imperialist presence in Turkey during the First War (1914-1918 ).<sup>41</sup> It is not new that bourgeois liberal democracy is the imperialist colonial state. After all, these are solid bases for the internal capitalist exploitation pointed out by González (2002).

Let's consider the periphery of the colonial system still in force (whose French Guiana is one of the last strongholds) as territories expanding along the frontiers of capital. In that case it is enough to imagine the persistence of Francophone colonialism in mineral exploration on the African continent. This *modus operandi* of transnational capitalism is no less evident in the current South American context.

The construction of an identity as a border culture needs to be grounded in other issues, such as the idea of nationality. A political and territorial condition. Boaventura Santos (1994) addresses the issue of the Portuguese maritime universe and its peripheral condition. During the 17th and 18th centuries, its mercantilist status by other colonialist metropolises was surpassed, such as Holland and England.

It is essential to point out that the military contingent was used on a border –whether land or river – meets certain specifications of a political nature. We are talking about a state dimension. It means that the frontier is the State itself in its institutional form: territory, language, and population.

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41 MACHLIN (1967). Direct translation of the book in Portuguese.

The dimension of a sovereign state on the border dynamics, in the Pan-Amazon case, is based on the developmentalism of big capital in the region. There's a lot of money involved. In the past, the borders proposed by the overseas kingdom of Portugal placed Europe in another maritime position through Lisbon. Today, large projects (hydroelectric plants and mining) have opened "new fronts" for expansion.

The sociologist José de Souza Martins (1997) defined this occupation movement in the Amazon region as a pioneering expansion front. Over decades, especially in the regions comprising the states of Rondônia, Acre and Roraima, the flow of deterritorialization concerning traditional peoples caused a great exodus between their internal borders. This means that we had the presence of other populations occupying this regional space.

In the case of French Guiana, a historical dispute culminates in the elaboration of a regional social imaginary, placing France and Brazil on the stage of disputes on the banks of the Oiapoque River. The river channel is the main border bastion between the two countries. The rite of vessels between legal and illegal configures the complexity in terms of regional development: focus on disputes between mineral exploration, military control on border lines, consular cooperation, and interests in the preservation of biodiversity. This certainly guide the agenda of the Amazon Fund in the current presidential government of Luís Inácio Lula da Silva.

On the other hand, the recent crisis of accusations of a veritable necropolitics propagated by the previous government (Bolsonaro), placed at the center of international attention not only the survival of the Yanomami people in the state of Roraima but the very political condition of maintaining their ethnic and cultural sovereignty in the face of economic interests prevailing in the region. Likewise, part of the territory of the state of Amazonas also forms a significant part of the territories of the Yanomami and other indigenous peoples. Sovereignty and traditional knowledge are compromised by the forced displacement imposed by the advance of mining.

That said, it reinforces that the problem of the Amazon borders is far from being a local peculiarity among social groups but an expansion of capitalist fronts from different angles in the poorest areas of the Brazilian State. The federative territories of Roraima and Amazonas, for example, comprise regions with indigenous demography on a larger scale, making them a potential target. The illegal gold rush presupposes the occupation of land based on the imposed state safeguard: the greater the inspection of regularized Indigenous Lands, the greater the intrusion of external groups linked to illegal exploitation, a logic explained by the illegal geological survey of the mining companies.

In the state of Amazonas, the most comprehensive case in terms of environmental and human impacts was the presence of the Paranapanema Group, which in the 1980s set up a mining village called Pitinga (an allusion to a river in the region). This supposed homogenization on the Amazon frontiers - which I have already refuted on other occasions - would suggest that the specific case of Roraima is analogous to the indigenous territories of French Guiana. In terms of state policy, for example, it is interesting to note that the French government grants citizenship to all indigenous inhabitants of its “contemporary colony”. Amapá, unlike Guyana, follows a complex government route due to its European neighbor, the Amazon. Here, I would like to welcome/connect with Boaventura Santos the concept of identity and borders, addressed in the text *Identidade e Cultura de Fronteira* (1994)<sup>42</sup>. I believe that there should be a debate about the frontiers of capital and frontiers in the plural.

Let's think about this state issue from the epistemological focus of Michele Lamont (2002) on the borders between sciences or social groups, for example. This explains the ethnographic relationship that an anthropological study requires, in the sense of its variations in the field. In this way, the construction of a frontier identity or culture is developed with local agents and their specific sociability. The conditions imposed on the Franco-Brazilian border refer to territorial control in its political and economic dimensions. What we observe in Boaventura Santos is the perspective of influence suffered by the cultural identity or social construct from the emergence of these in long periods.

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42 Identity and Culture of the Border.

Singularized identity, when understood as plural identities, reveals this fundamental notion that classical anthropology explored. The idea that these “multiple borders” can become interdependent in their support networks (now based on the interaction and sociability of different groups) does not exclude the fact that big capital is mainly responsible.

Another vital element is regional aggregation and the redefinition of the role of cities on the Amazon frontiers in terms of the use of political space involving state processes and actions. In this way, we need to distance ourselves from binary oppositions because of the dynamics and complexity of such structures in the practices of agents in the economic field and their interference in land ownership. For example, indigenous or riverine peoples rot in an informal market through agriculture, fishing, and logging for subsistence.

In this perspective of plural identity, in this context, transcends notions of state sovereignty. I think there is viability in defending a “Border Culture” in the sense of an Ethos. That is, structured as a link between different social groups composing the egreore of sociability relations between the margins of the Franco-Brazilian border. In another part of the Amazon, we have an interesting case. The city of Islândia, located on the banks of the Javari River, is a tributary of the Solimões River.

The city was founded at the beginning of the 20th century and had a political, social and economic structure linked to the wine country, Peru, on the border with the state of Amazonas. However, its inhabitants are Spanish speakers. They even profess a religion that has nothing to do with Catholic Christianity. Although the Peruvian state has recognized the transnational difficulty of this discontinuous territory for decades, there is no diplomatic imbroglio between the two sides. On the other hand, if we think about the identity aspect, we have difficulty imagining a common sociological situation, let's say when we recognize the possibility of Islândia being a “parallel state” in Brazilian territory.

This formulation is not merely a theoretical speculation about this place: its identity and Ethos are based on an imaginary line that is the Javari River demarcates. Likewise, the exodus of these populations and, the formation of an imagined community corroborate this *sui generis* element of this relationship of national and local belonging. Between the pluralism and the uniqueness of the relationships between populations mixed with life on the frontier, the French-speaking Amazon does not represent the needs of the Brazilian state, especially concerning its jurisdiction. Something empirically perceptible is the intention between social and ethnic groups on the border.

The linguistic border perpetrates the sense of belonging of the local community. However, this is not a graphic element when we try to interpret its sociability bonds: European legislation on Amazonian soil only reinforces the role of the State; Women and men born in French Guiana and who lead their lives in a multiethnic, linguistic everyday life and access other sociability networks.

In conclusion, I understand that identity – directly linked to Ethos – can corroborate how the State defines its limits or even redefine them in terms of borders. The idea of a plural identity, directly linked to the social, political, and economic structure of the state, finds itself in a complex dilemma between “imagined community” and “invented”. However, the borders are variations of time and space that are not directly linked by the borders of the capital.

**Figure 21: Oiapoque Riverside**



**Source:** Personal archive (2022)

**Figure 22: Oiapoque Downtown Riverside**



**Source:** Personal archive (2022)



# LA CRIQUE: LITERATURE AND RESISTANCE IN THE FRENCH AMAZON<sup>43</sup>

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Literature and resistance in the French Amazon is the theme of our second meeting, still addressing issues related to the borders of the Brazilian Amazon. We talk here about *La Crique* (The Creek), the work of Guyanese writer Sylviane Vayaboury. Why did I choose this work so that we can think “a little” about this place in the French Amazon? In the first class, remember the issues related to this French-speaking and colonial world located in South America from a territorial perspective, and its borders in the political and economic sphere.

On the other hand, it is a Eurozone in the Americas. Therefore, we need to understand its borderline aspects, as well as the social conflicts that exist on this border. The composition of the Franco-Guyanese state. *La Crique* (2009), a work launched 14 years ago by a Parisian publisher (Caribbean Letters collection), aimed at Antillean authors. My first question: how can Literature help them in the Social Sciences? Research object and methodology are “different things”, however, jettisoned in scientific research.

Well, as they are inserting in a Masters in Regional Development, and today we are talking about a literary work to help us, let’s say, to think a little – to imagine sociologically! – this place... Vayaboury is a relevant writer and pedagogue in this French-speaking universe. A relevant author. We must address the initial question of the Guiana Plateau and its cultural and linguistic

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<sup>43</sup> Lecture given during meetings of the State, Politic and Borders in the Brazilian Amazon seminary, offered at the Master Program in Regional Development at the Federal University of Amapá (Brazil), September of 2022.

amalgamation. Oiapoque is not so geographically distant from this place, as well as its imaginary representations of a frontier. Here is the background of this novel. If you haven't had the opportunity to visit Cayenne, you can start at La Crique. For very obvious reasons, Paris subordinates this administrative capital due to it being an infra-colonial space. Of course, when we observe a colonial region, we must consider the social transformations that occurred throughout the 20th and 21st centuries. How this place presented itself in the 1960s. 2022 is another thing. From the 1980s onwards, there was a policy of easing the French legislation on its overseas departments. This rule applies to Tahiti (Oceania), Guadeloupe (Caribbean), New Caledonia (Pacific), and French Guiana (Caribbean Amazon). There are many distinct social groups living together in Guyanese space. When we talk about French Guiana, curious references also arise, such as the Devil's Island portrayed in the film "Papillon" (1973), based on the homonymous novel and starring actor Steve McQueen. The generalist look presents clear evidence of an Amazonian stereotype. In fact, one of many. Just imagine though this film version that the worst criminals in France were sent to French Guiana in exile and forced labor.

On the other hand, we have the carnival in the streets of Cayenne, Kourou, and Saint-Loraine du Maroni, with its masks, tambourines, and Afro-Caribbean chants. The same example is also suggestible for Stuart Hall in the English-speaking world. Nationality, independence, metropolis, center, and periphery. The lens of the Social Sciences observes different methodological or theoretical currents on the issue, sometimes as antagonistic and other times as synonymous. Whether through Marxism or structural-functionalism and in the field of Philosophy and Literature. All of these makeup Vayabouri's writing.

Here, we have already entered the urban perimeter portrayed by the novel. In this case, the Cayenne Center can help us. The Laussat Canal in the city center (stream) is part of a peripheral zone, as this canal cuts through the city. Commonly, we call it "community" here in Brazil, but this is not an ironic comment on my part. There are different points of tension located in this region. Its borders are not just physical or territorial but between social groups.

But I emphasize that this background as a sociological imagination is something the book presents. In this case, we have a good example in this excerpt: “How did the air smell in the old days? Cayenne, with its Laussat Canal, cut and dug down to the sea, riveted right and left, under the still benevolent gaze of its governor builder, Pierre Clement, Baron de Laussat. Cayenna channel, Cayenna creek. Leaning on its high, poor, hot left bank. Mineralogical plated southern suburbs. The Chinese village was marked with the “Chicago” seal.

What reigns in South American Downtown? I must remember that the first market is Chinese when crossing the Oiapoque river to Saint-Georges. An area is so multifaceted that it resembles large metropolises from the Global North. Vayaboury places both his geopolitical and affective references in an “ethno-literary” scenario, so to speak. What reigns is capitalism, its expansion as a sign and reference. We have the literary genre (soap opera), but this is the logic of fiction – real life. The struggle and resistance in this poor neighborhood called La Crique is a literary and sociological imagination. Yes, the presence of “women and men” with a difficult life. Felícia, the protagonist, has a thirst for justice! It is about a woman, another survivor: this character is fascinating for the plot: becoming a militant. I see Felícia as a self-reference of Vayaboury. It is the way the author places herself in the novel.

In the case of Man Flor, for example, it is a symbolic maternal figure. It’s as if we were talking about an entity. The strong presence of Afro-Caribbean culture in French Guiana justifies such a literary presentation. It could bottom that approximately 80% of its population is black, a percentage that brings not only the African phenotype but also the linguistic trait! Yes, a French Afro-Caribbean Amazon with its shades of mysticism, musicality, ritualisms, and ethno-racial negotiations...

There is another character named Pablo, a prospector. When we talk about clandestine mining, its direct association is with the figure of the Brazilian. When we talk about clandestine mining and its irregular traffic, whether in Suriname or French Guiana as a rule for this “other side” imagined from the city of Oiapoque. Another Xavier, in turn, is a real estate agent and Felícia’s

love interest. Throughout history, other names have emerged. Here is another description of this multifaceted area: “The poor neighborhood was first home to its indigenous populations. Working-class Creole and English-speaking communities spread with insolence, defiance, and scathing provocation their new sample. A patchwork of populations carried by the winds of economic recession the remains of Haiti, Dominican Republic, Guyana, and its imposing Brazilian neighbor. In a first impulse, he welcomed them to his bosom in a refuge far from their agitated regions”.

What is it possible to imagine in this space of Cayenne? Can we talk about refugees? Haiti has experienced a civil war and two earthquakes in the past twenty years. In other words, the political and social epicenter of the Caribbean created scatter in the region. The condition of a refugee is not being able to return to their country... But it remains to be seen whether the “new homeland” give them shelter. Therefore, new agents connect in this space of peripheral capitalism, including a French-speaking Chinatown.

As we are reading, now we are in the 1980s... And now! Yes, the Cayenne represents itself in a journey of different temporalities. Now we can be in Felícia’s affective memories: her origin, childhood, school... Perhaps this is Vayaboury’s autobiographical part: “The Dominican women adorned themselves as well as their voluminous hair buns gigantic rolls that coated prisoners [...] they would see the meat stretched or less stretched, cellulite, stretch marks and would release the strings from their recurrent state of tension under the burst flesh, strangled over tight or molded clothes [...] the conversations diluted in the musical flow like Ragga, Reggae, Zouke, Salsa and Compas”.

Let’s imagine the diversity and the amount of cultural/musical references that appear in this almost ethnographic vision that she established. Analyze this excerpt, for example, if we compare it with an anthropological work from the 1970s. Through this participant observation, anthropologists approached the field with their descriptions and participant observation. But we are thinking sociologically, as C. Wright Mills describes it. You can see an interesting highlight on the fetishization of the woman’s body. Her “gigantic hair burns, her hair tied up – hairstyle used by Dominican women – if you are, for example,

on the streets of Cayenne. In this region, everyone has probably heard Zouk Love: from the waist down. Very different from Brazilian samba and with its body language and music. Thus, we can observe: “Felícia knew that she was in the genesis of the fight [...] that was becoming more and more caressing for the joy of so many vehicles [...] Walking, backing down streets as long as the Amazon. But she rejoiced at the collective awareness, the first mobilization in the face of the magnitude of the announced disaster”. Such is the reference to the struggle for land and housing in Cayenne. In other words, the same expansionist process generated by real estate speculation is similar to what happened on the banks of the Lassaut canal.

In conclusion, I consider this literary work seminal for us to consider the Guyanese context. A central aspect of the book that he decides to bring to our class. And to close, I bring another excerpt from Vayaboury: “All of them, Felícia, Andreana, Liza, Alexa. For all her voices in the media, she would at least carry their voices in ways that felt unexpected. Offer new, more readable media to the masses.”

The struggle, militancy, and how it project itself politically, as well as its people. Thanks to my friend Paulo Marcelo for translating the text into Portuguese directly from the French language.

Thank you so much!

**Figure 23:** Canal Laussaut in the center of Cayenna (French Guiana)



**Source:** Mapio.net (2022)

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