MINERAL EXPLORATION IN INDIGENOUS LANDS: THE DISCURSIVE NORMALIZATION OF ILLEGAL MINING IN BRAZIL

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Introduction

In January 2023, the discovery that 570 children aged zero to five died of preventable diseases between 2019 and 2022 in the Yanomami Indigenous Land shocked Brazil and the world. This number represents just a sample of the devastating situation faced by the community, which saw mortality due to malnutrition increase by more than 300% in the four years of the Bolsonaro government [1]. The severe humanitarian crisis resulted from factors intrinsically linked to the last government, such as the weakening of public policies to protect these communities, the dismantling of environmental policies, State omission, and the Bolsonaro government's encouragement of mining in indigenous lands.

However, it is fundamental to recognize that the situation of the Yanomami people, as well as that of the majority of the original peoples remaining in Brazil, is not just the result of a government that hates indigenous people. That is also deeply rooted in our society and how we perceive the indigenous peoples and their rights. Illegal mining in indigenous lands is the kind of a challenge that needs to be faced by the state and the judiciary, but also by society and, mainly, by the press, which often approaches the issue from an exclusively economic perspective, as if the debate on environmental preservation and the recognition of the rights of indigenous peoples was a threat to the financial market and the brazilian economic interests.

In this context, this study arises from the perception that a process of erasing the environmental and indigenous agenda in the political and media debate (FAIRCLOUGH, 2013) is taking place in Brazil. With this, the effect is the normalization (FOUCAULT, 2003) of indigenous people's precarious living conditions and mining in indigenous lands as a simple economic activity. In a country that experienced a 495% increase in mining in indigenous lands and 301% in conservation units between 2010 and 2020 [2], we believe that analyzing how such profound transformations in a society

like the Brazilian has been discursively constructed is fundamental to understanding the current and relevant challenges such as environmental preservation and the subsistence of indigenous peoples.

Methods

On March 9, 2022, Brazilian artists and influencers gathered to hold a festival to defend the environment and indigenous peoples in an "Ato pela terra" event [3]. The activity was led by singer and composer Caetano Veloso and brought together thousands of people in Brasília to defend environmental preservation and the rejection of project number 191, which authorizes mining on indigenous lands. Intending to analyze the conversation on the environmental agenda, especially on mining in indigenous lands, which was under debate in the Chamber of Deputies, on social media platforms, we collected through the Social Feed Manager (PROM, 2017) Twitter posts between March 8th and 10th, 2022, based on the terms "#AtoPelaTerra"; "#CaetanoPelaTerra", "#PL191Não" and "#PL191Sim". We collected 49,986 publications from 30,254 accounts that participated in the debate. From this data set, we seek to understand:

RQ1: What does the network structure tell us about the groups involved in the debate on Twitter?
RQ2: What is the framework given to the theme of mining in indigenous lands by these groups?
RQ3: How was the environmental and indigenous agenda framed by the mainstream media?

To understand the conversation dynamics and speeches (WODAK, 2015) of supporters and opponents of the event on the networks, we adopted a mixed approach of methods. To analyze the structure of networks, we used Social Network Analysis (WASSERMAN & FAUST, 1994). To understand the discourse in the clusters, we analyzed occurrences and co-occurrences from the perspective of the Connected Concept Analysis (LINDGREEN 2016).

Findings

By calculating the network modularity (Blondel et al., 2008), we observed that the conversation took place in a polarized way, being segmented by two thematic axes, #AtoPelaTerra and the project on mining in indigenous lands (PL 191). It is relevant that we did not observe direct disputes in the conversation. That is, the members of each group spoke only with their peers, reinforcing the group's ideas and values. The conversation was also centered on a few influencers, who had their speeches spread and legitimized within their network. In one side, artists, digital influencers, alternative media, social movements, and left-wing politicians sought to give visibility to the act and the environmental agenda. On the other side, far-right influencers and politicians defended the project that authorizes mining on indigenous lands and criticized environmentalists and opponents of the agenda. Mainstream media outlets had an isolated presence and focused their comments on the analysis of the mining project. In this regard, one of the most relevant points is to observe that even with a sizeable public protest in the federal capital, the environmental and indigenous agenda proved to

be a niche topic with little capacity to pierce the militancy bubble itself (SUNSTEIN, 2001).

When we analyze the discourses circulated in the period, we observe different strategies on the left and the extreme right. The network formed by actors linked to #AtoPelaTerra focused on publicizing the event and reproducing its central guidelines, such as rejecting the mining project on indigenous lands and preserving the Amazon. The network made up of extreme right-wing individuals, however, appropriated the indigenous agenda to distort the conversation about PL 191, related to its approval of concepts such as "food sustainability"; "national development" and "indigenous rights". These Arguments represent the exact opposite of what mining in indigenous lands actually brought, as observed in the tragedy experienced by the Yanomami people. Once again, the extreme right focuses its communication strategy on the informational disorder (WARDLE, 2017), which confuses and undermines the debate on the subject.

However, we consider it essential to observe how the mainstream media structured the discourse on the subject, focusing on the debate on the processing of the project and practically ignoring the activities carried out in Brasília. The vehicles erase the term "garimpo" from the debate and adopt "mineral exploration" and "mining" to talk about the project. More than a simple discursive choice, mineral exploration takes up a discourse from former President Jair Bolsonaro and his militancy to defend mining in indigenous lands. The use of this term by mass communication vehicles, especially in a debate as sensitive as this one, has a normalizing effect that, as Foucault (2005) highlights, establishes an ideal pattern of supposedly rational knowledge from which any and all individuality is measured and enforced in a normalizing society.

By adopting the concept "mineral exploration", the press vehicles take the strength of terms like "garimpo" and "mining", which have a negative weight in the Brazilian context, marked by the tragedies of the state of Minas Gerais[4]. In doing so, they end up reducing the debate to economic and bureaucratic aspects and acting as an auxiliary line of a discourse that erases what is central to this debate, which are indigenous peoples, who have been suffering an accelerated extinction process and environmental preservation of these territories, a theme of international relevance and interest.

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Notes

[1] https://g1.globo.com/politica/post/2023/02/17/sob-bolsonaro-mortes-de-yanomami-por-desnutricao-cresceram-331.ghtml

[2] https://valor.globo.com/brasil/noticia/2021/08/30/area-ocupada-pelo-garimpo-em-terras-indigenas-cresceu-495-de-2010-a-2020.ghtml

[3] https://www.terra.com.br/planeta/sustentabilidade/ato-pela-terra-e-meio-ambiente-vai-reunir-caetano-veloso-e-convidados-em-frente-ao-congresso,ba7306d9bc2cf29a1fce7a7a21f1a2948ff6w60f.html

[4] https://www.otempo.com.br/politica/congresso/comissao-fara-vistoria-em-barragens-com-as-das-tragedias-de-mariana-e-brumadinho-1.2821645