

Political Edges in a Racial Democracy: Indigenous peoples, expansion of economic frontiers and limited citizenship at Brazilian borders

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Abstract:

There are two facts about Brazil political scientists interested in the country frames quite often, albeit not promoting any interplay between them. One is that it is a racial democracy through which supposedly racial tensions are diluted in an open, intercultural democratic system. The other is the country is becoming an economic power, reducing poverty and bridging gaps where inclusive public policies were not outreaching. If we look at Indigenous Peoples at the borders, the interplay between these two factors becomes clear by the limited inclusion the economic expansion promotes to those not fitting into the diluted racial tensions allegedly decreased by the advent of citizenship rights. Especially when Indigenous peoples sit at the borders of a country committed to use its territory for developmental practices, the limits citizenship imposes on mobility and cultural dialogue are evident with cultural and political difference ending up being allowed as long as it means no political mobilisation in traditional territories. The apparent natural conversation and coexistence present in the racial democracy is defied by the developmental state. In this sense, this paper aims at looking in how the contemporary nation rebuilding in Brazil through the developmental discourse is taming Indigenous peoples and their political practices, especially at the Amazon borders. The objective is to expose the limits of the so called racial democracy as well as of citizenship played out through multiculturalism when the political beings in question are contentious to the enactments of it because its very enactment through economic development denies their distinct political condition.

Introduction:

Even though indigenous peoples are commonly framed as actors in the Western political stage since Las Casas and Victoria political writings, their role as political agents has been constantly at the edge since colonial times. Seen as contentious to state evolution as a political and economic enterprise, the effort to include or to eliminate - as it is mostly the case - indigenous peoples from political life involves a battle for stretching rights in a way that they can be politically, economically and socially encompassed by the so called mainstream society, with the state as arbiter. In Brazil, the encompassing of those historically unprivileged is named racial democracy. The paradox of the terminology does not end with its naming. Although, the term was coined for dealing with the apparent non-conflictive racial mixing between white, black, mestizos and indigenous in the Brazilian democratization process, it actually involves a conflictive character inasmuch as it causes a gradation in the rights promoted by this process. When looking at indigenous peoples' situation, the political capacities ensued by the citizenship for all promoted through democratization in the 1980s are clearly hierarchized based on their pre-assumed a-political condition, what brings not just conflict into table, but also profound inequality based on race.

The idea in this paper is to look at this paradox through another point extensively discussed about Brazil in the current days, namely, its shifting political identity to an idea of an emergent economy sustained by political innovation and alliances for development. The argument that there is a racial democracy whereby supposedly racial tensions dilute in an open, intercultural democratic system is not often confronted to the effects on citizenship regimes brought by ostensive economic development that is in fact reducing poverty, but that does not necessarily bridge gaps in political inclusiveness through public policies outreach and formulation. The 1988 Constitution that finally recognized indigenous peoples as political subjects clearly cannot provide the instruments for indigenous peoples to keep up with the gaps developmental policies are carving out in what citizenship entails, especially in places far from the decision-making centres and definitive to remark the state political identity, as it is the case of Amazonian borders. There is an interplay between democracy and development that directly affects indigenous peoples in these places where the state is committed to use its territory for the expansion of economic frontiers. At these borders, political difference and mobilization, promoted by the idea of racial democracy, is allowed as long as it means no hindrance to developmental policies, in other words, to state projects.

In this sense, this paper will look at how the developmental gaze turned at indigenous peoples coupled to the myth of racial democracy is eschewing the limits of expanded citizenship in distant areas and for excluded peoples. In these areas, citizenship has been contested by indigenous peoples because its enactment related to the equalization of access to rights - not necessarily the experience of having rights - denies the political distinction of their life projects. In looking at the situation of indigenous peoples in the biggest reservation in Brazil, Raposa Serra do Sol (hereafter RSS), the intention is to expose these limits drawing from Deborah Yashar's idea of contested citizenship in Latin America by indigenous peoples. It is worth mentioning that the aim for this discussion is not to be restricted to her critique lying on contentious politics. The main objective is to offer hints for the debate about moving beyond the limitations faced by indigenous peoples via the answers they are giving to limits of citizenship

through their own understandings of the political. For this, I will offer a counter example to the situation in RSS, the Ashaninka case, for the purposes of enhancing the political distinction of indigeneity as countering citizenship in promoting political difference and dialogue.

Racial Democracy as Interculturality, Citizenship as a Project

The expression racial democracy came out in Brazil the mid 1940s and it was not really ever coined as it emerged out from the intellectual encounters between the French intellectual Roger Bastide and the Brazilian Gilberto Freyre¹. The expression was drawn from the idea that in Brazil the shift from slavery to abolition, although permeated by political struggles and violence, did not result in political conflict between races (mainly white and black people). After abolition, blacks and whites have gotten mingled and the relations became more reliant on social differences, which apparently were not related to the race, but to class. Nevertheless, it is well known and easy to deduct that the class or social differences reproduced and produced since these times represent in part a reflection on the colonial structure through which slaves and indigenous peoples, for example, have no freedom, let alone political rights or room for political and social mobility.

Racial Democracy can then be translated into the idea of a social democratic arena where differences are transferred to the social level and only and detached from its racial or ethnic content and potential for conflict based on that. This leads to the understanding of the Brazilian society as pacific and peaceful in its differences where political, social and economic rights guaranteed by the Constitution mediate the potential injustice and source of conflict coming from racial hierarchization. Further on this point, it is assumed there is no hierarchization and the intense hybridization have contributed to dissolve conflictive nodal points, leaving prejudice and discrimination to the very personal level. This kind of conceptualization encroaching on the official national political culture mitigates manifestations of prejudice and institutional discrimination as the majority of the people accept and deal well with the idea that all races are equal and that Brazilian society is a result of the mixing of races and its experiences. Due to this miscegenation that prevents legislation to emerge for tackling cultural and racial differences at the constitutional level, whereby hierarchies and oppressions are mostly erased by the idea of a constant dialogue among cultures, racial democracy ends up being taken for granted as part of the Brazilian citizenship and citizenry. In actuality, this is not really the case, although it permeated the political, cultural and legal discourse until the early 1980s exerting lingering, although soft, influence in the legal discourse nowadays, especially when it refers to contention to compensatory public policies².

The precise reason for that racial democracy is considered a myth relies in one of the basis of its conceptualization, which is the balancing through experiences. If one considers

¹ Gilberto Freyre is one of the most important Brazilian social thinkers. It is from his academic work on Brazilian culture and social conformation that stems the idea that all the three races live in relative peace in the country masking the social hierarchies in social stability. His book *The Masters and the Slaves* (Casa Grande e Senzala) is a handbook on Brazilian culture and history of social thought.

² The quotas system that was implemented in Brazil in 2001 is an example of it, although indigenous peoples did not have access to it, especially at the university entrance level as there very few universities in the Northern region in the country and few have bilingual programs for indigenous peoples.

citizenship the common political language that people will draw from for being in political and social dialogue in their everyday living, these experiences are certainly varied, however, by no means they are balanced. For this reason, I want to look at race, more specifically to the condition of being political as indigenous, as part of an ethnic cleavage (Yashar, 2005) in this supposed racial constituted racial democracy to show that the differences in experiences they have with citizenship attest the fact they are seen not just as inferior, racially speaking, but also as incapable in terms of political action. In looking at it, it is necessary to understand citizenship as alterity, as a political instrument to produce political subjectivities, and sometimes to “other” them (Isin, 2005).

This movement towards producing political subjectivities involves everyday practices that show citizenship as a regime imposing boundaries to “who can be a citizen, under what terms and conditions (form) and with what rights and practices (content)” (Yashar 2005: 35). Certainly, it requires more than having a birth certificate or to have human rights as an individual in a specific state. As Yashar points out, the experiences in pushing the boundaries, discussing terms and conditions and problematizing the rights stemming from citizenship is what is going to illustrate it as it really is, as a practice that varies and need to be observed empirically for that the contestations to it may be figured out. The myth of racial democracy in Brazil, when still defended, trusts that democratization and its consequential 1988 Constitution has solved the imbalances in these experiences. Nevertheless, indigenous experiences, which were as matter of fact specified in two constitutional articles (231 and 232)³ in the chapters on civil and social organization, are a good example to showing how experiences with citizenship attest for variations in how their interests are mediated locally and at the federal level. Furthermore, these experiences attest the modifications in terms of being political indigenous groups have been going through precisely because the variations in interests resultant of the combination between their local necessities via federal representation and the federal or national endeavour via local projects.

The recognition of these variations in the level of political projects, as it the case of developmental projects, asks for the examination of what Yashar calls citizenship regimes⁴. Nevertheless, it also requests to go beyond the critique that democracy is not perfect applicable when there are variations in experiences of citizenship, recognizing that there are variations in

³ As in the Constitution: “**Article 231.** Indians shall have their social organization, customs, languages, creeds and traditions recognized, as well as their original rights to the lands they traditionally occupy, it being incumbent upon the Union to demarcate them, protect and ensure respect for all of their property” followed by “**Article 232.** The Indians, their communities and organizations have standing under the law to sue to defend their rights and interests, the Public Prosecution intervening in all the procedural acts”.

⁴ Citizenship regimes refer to the patterned combination of choices about three fundamentals in how the citizenship can be built in terms of the origins of rights. As she lays out, these regimes varies in accordance to questions such as who has access to citizenship? What is the form of citizenship in the sense of reproducing and being a result of the primary modes of interest intermediation? And what is the content of the citizenship rights? This content will vary in accordance with 1) an Aristotelian ideal about merit and justice, 2) the jus sanguinis principle, 3) the jus soli principle and 4) the idea of an universal citizenship, more related to the international level and that, for her, appears more as a political project. For an intense debate on the matter, see chapter 1 of Yashar 2005.

human experiences of the political. To do that, means noticing that citizenship is not the sole arena for indigenous peoples negotiating and contesting their values as political beings. However, what usually happens is that the alleged access to democracy they have through intercultural projects seeking the dialogue with them for the formulation of policies that can honour the provision of social and political rights erase these “other” experiences of the political, highlighting the experience of citizenship as contested terrain, albeit eschewing interculturality as part of citizenship as a project accessible to indigenous groups as long as they commit to translating their historical differences and situated experiences into national (and manageable) public policies.

Deborah Yashar in her study of contested regimes of citizenship in Latin America attests that indigenous groups in this context were able to carry on negotiations based on their local claims for the betterment of their political condition and representation (Yashar, 2005). They mostly took advantage of the failures in the provision of citizenship rights (access to education, health and land and the right to voting, for instance) and of the absence of the state in many distant places to organize themselves through national and international political associations for mobilizing for claiming rights through the construction of their political space in the national arena. For her, the fact that citizenship was organized in a very corporatist sense or regime⁵, with the concept and its legal enactments corresponding to the creation of new modes of interest intermediation for the purposes of specific groups to have access to the social welfare, contributed for that indigenous movements organized around specific issues related to national politics, culminating on the critique that citizenship was not inclusive enough of their group interests. As much as citizenship was used by the new democratic Latin American states and political parties to “capture political support and to control the masses with the creation of new modes of interest intermediation and social rights” (Yashar 2005:57), indigenous groups used the limitation of this endeavour to acquiring rights and gaining political momentum and space for participation in the national political stage.

An interesting point made by her that will be useful for looking at interculturality as a step to elaborating developmental state projects in the forest, is that the way citizenship was ingrained in state-society relations as a venue for negotiating interests as claiming for rights turned out to set up the terrain for a neoliberal citizenship. According to her, “corporatist and neoliberal citizenship regimes have foundational projects for state and society that were consequential” (Yashar 2005: 59), in the sense that to prepare individuals in groups to fight for their rights via citizenship regimes already attest that are unevenness in the institutionalization of these rights and their experiencing in everyday lives. In this way, in the neoliberal state where the state capacity is purposively reduced for the optimization of state functioning, citizens have to be leaders and modify their activities and political action in tandem with the modifications in state provision.

To be able to negotiating interests in the initial moments of democratization for stating the terms of how to experience citizenship ended up authorizing differences in this experiencing and framing it as a project for groups articulating the terms of its use and benefits in neoliberal times. The project was not just for the groups, but, in my point of view, much more to the state that used these differences to implement projects in distant places based on the needs of specific

indigenous groups, using their knowledge and political culture for supposedly attending them better in accordance to the constitutional mandate. Actually, when looking at the projects, mainly the ones carried on by the Ministry of Health and Environment, it was more a matter of developing and making borderlands productive and protected⁶, as I will discuss in the next session.

Even Deborah Yashar provides an important and innovative insight for understanding the mobilization of indigenous groups, putting them at the forefront of the challenges to the neoliberal logic, framing their movements as the postliberal challenge, the political culture issue and the dialogues within and among the polities articulated by indigenous peoples, through their own lenses of the political are left behind. As he says, she is interested in looking at the variations and different experiences groups in Latin America had with citizenship. In my case, what I am suggesting here along the lines of what happens in Brazil, is that more than variations in experience that are obviously there in very hierarchical sense, there is a sense of absence of hierarchies and differentiation. Firstly, because indigenous peoples as according to the constitution have the right to manage their own territories as they see fit. Secondly, because of the strong idea permeating the political culture that there is no racial tension and that currently it is guaranteed via interculturality in the elaboration of policies.

In this sense, indigenous peoples could both be exercising their political identities in the territories they live in and still get the collaboration of several national and regional ministries and secretariats to develop their projects, taking advantage of the social and cultural rights provided in an equal basis in the constitution. It could be offering the modes of interest mediation for indigenous peoples to decide when, how and where exactly to participate in the citizenship regime or, contrariwise, to contest the lack of ability of this regime in providing the means for this intercultural conversation at the policy level. The conversations may be happening and movements may be gaining strength since the implementation of these policies began back in 2003 with the reformulation of environmental and developmental policies in the country. However, it is precisely when confronted with the objectives of these planning that the conversation get to be very much based on the language or the terms proposed by the government.

The racial democracy as interculturality in translating these projects gets very monolingual when the unfinished project of citizenship for indigenous peoples stumbles into development, especially at borderlands where these policies are associated with national sovereignty. Perhaps, that is why citizenship is often a project for these groups as it cannot be finalized as an end itself as the full experience of it would put in jeopardy the state form that guarantee it to exist. I believe it is also due to this reason there has been always an effort to depoliticize indigenous identities and problems as issues to be taken care by special agencies in Brazil. The very act of locating them in intercultural projects run by specialized agents and professionals as the way of including them in national politics is already an effort to get their struggles to have access to these projects or to contest them as out of a broader history in national

⁶ This is assumption is based on the interviews made in Brasilia in 2009 with bureaucrats and indigenous leaders working for the recently created National Council on Indigenist Policies back in that year. Along with that, all the observations about the defiance of interculturality in the promotion of the local ways of living via contentious and official politics derives from seven months of field research in borderlands in the Amazon region also during 2009.

borders formation and recently at the expansion of economic frontiers. Citizenship as a project, a political point of departure for indigenous peoples turns out to be a way of de-historicizing and depoliticizing them in the places where many governmental projects have been implemented. Not to mention that in restraining their means of participation and inclusion to citizenship as access to these projects related to community and sustainable development, there is an obfuscation of indigenous peoples in the racial conflicts and tensions occurring in the country since the 16th century through which they have been trying to make a point about their ways of living.

Development and nation (re)building

The associations between development and nation building in Brazil are not new. In fact, they go back to the nineteenth century when the contact in the Amazonian region with indigenous peoples got really intense as the new independent republic was trying to define (and expand) its limits in the North. This encounter meant for most indigenous peoples assimilation policies and direct violence that ended up eliminating many cultural practices and sites in the Amazon as what social scientists call as internal colonization advanced onto their traditional lands to bring development and people to the interior (Little 2005). Looking at this trend in Brazilian late colonization, the legal concept of terra nullius meaning that the land was unoccupied was part of the justification for arriving and possessing territories in the Amazon. Nevertheless, there is another aspect that was used also in these times that open up the political edge for indigenous peoples in the future to associate among themselves and other actors, which is that indigenous were seen as part of this possession, as Brazilian people and, therefore, the territory they were occupying needed to be guarded by the Republic. The presence of indigenous peoples at the borders was used under this logic as justification to protect the territory and exercise political authority over it. Also, their transiting and relationships in other side of the borders with peoples that happened to be in other political territory due to colonization make it easier to expand and keep the borders in relative peace.

The actual indigenous territory of RSS is one of these places at the borders where the expansion of the Brazilian state and its way on development, especially referring to agricultural growth, has been always in conflict with what is supposed to be indigenous rights in a land where experience of having rights through citizenship is dependable on developmental politics. Still in the nineteenth century, when the borders with at that time English Guyana and the Gran Colombia (currently part of it, Venezuela), indigenous peoples in the area participated as workers in the building and implementation of landmarks at the borders. More towards the end of this century, when the marks were already there, most of them inside their traditional lands bringing to the fore a concept they were not very familiar, namely property, they started to be indentified by the Indian Protection Bureau for the Localization of National Workers (SPILTN, acronym in Portuguese) as peasants and agrarian workers. In this sense, if they were to have any rights by that time was in the terms of being peasants, working for the colonists and settlers that were coming mainly from the Southern part of the country, changing completely the political, familial and territorial dynamics in the area along with the idea of the borders separating communities and property regulating life ways.

These regimes of life regulation based on borders and property were the basis of the implementation of developmental projects in the early 20th century in Brazil. The more the land was worked and inhabited, contributing to the insertion of the country in the global political

economy as a commodity exporter, the more borders would be kept safe and operative as a productive space. For indigenous peoples, the first half of the twentieth century was an epoch of assimilation and integration. As mentioned earlier, seen as part of the territory, they were regulated as such and, for that, the best way was to allocate them in underpaid agricultural work, educate them in Portuguese and in the Catholic faith, for that dependence on the system could keep them away from contestation and protest. In the second half of the century, with dictatorship and the integration and development motto encroaching via military occupation all the distant lands in the Amazon, indigenous peoples turned out to be strategic in the defence of the territory. Their rituals and costumes were respected in exchange of collaboration.

The tricky point is that rituals and costumes are part of a specific way of being political and exercising political activities and these not usually matched the requirements of collaboration. Cultural rights, although not mentioned in the constitution by this time⁷, are a reflection of a way of living very much related to a combination between the land, the people in this land and the relationships developed in a place by the people in it. This ensemble involves constant transiting to the other side of the borders and this did not please the military. On top of it, with mining activity going full power during this time in the Amazon, indigenous peoples in what today is considered RSS were pushed many times to illegality as they have more facility to dislocate along the borders. Due to this factor, the combination between low provision of rights – sometimes not even the enactment of it - intense presence of the military, high level of environmental degradation and intensive surveillance led to the beginning of a political articulation in the area for the recognition of traditional land and political autonomy. Indigenous peoples start to claim for a the alleged interculturality in the Brazilian state, this time reflected on the demarcation of their lands. I still call it interculturality as a great part of the claims were made using the language of citizenship rights and the guarantees stemming from it and institutionalized, so to speak, in the constitution. As such, we can observe the contentious characteristic to citizenship by this movement, although the very citizenship sets the bar for contestation.

Going against the partitioning in the territory promoted by military surveillance and strategies of development, Indigenous peoples in RSS started to claim the continuity of their territory, but using the legal mechanisms of the state that advanced onto their lands and limited their ways of living. As the huge territory of approximately 1,600 hectares was and still is strategic for border control and for developmental projects, currently specific related to regional integration, indigenous peoples associated with groups also interested in containing the advances of the developmental state in the area, although interested in the social services experienced unevenly by the population, and contested citizenship and the territory. The way Brazil is and was shaping its national identity, especially in foreign relations reflecting in its internal governability, contributed to this kind of articulation and the failure of interculturality in national projects towards indigenous peoples brought up its very definition to discussion when thinking it through another angle. This is one of the reasons I believe what is proposed by Yashar in evaluating the context of indigenous movements in light of their experiences in extremely valuable for looking at the constitution of the political arena in the country they are. Nonetheless,

⁷ Even being under a military political regime, Brazil had a constitution during these times approved by a bi-partisan system with an official and authorized opposition.

I also think that their experiences and other ways of reading the political should also be taken into consideration for that the paradoxes are not assumed as the only way of taking about politics when referring to these groups. The advent of developmental politics as it is played out nowadays and as it is part of the Brazilian national identity formation in the past is insightful in this sense.

As one of the leaders in RSS emphasized, “constitutional and citizen rights, which white men allege had evolved and got better since the extinct Indian Protection Bureau in the 1970s are just deceitful”. In his opinion, constitutional rights make people fight based on principles, which are not part of the freedom indigenous peoples want or understand. On this note, he also complemented saying that what came along with the citizenship discourse in the beginning of the 1980s when dictatorship was reaching its end in Brazil was party politics. This ended up fragmenting citizenship and how it was presented to indigenous peoples at RSS, mostly through projects party sponsored for containing health problems caused by environmental degradation. The leader said citizenship could be important as long as all the indigenous persons, independently of their ethnicity, could reflect upon whom they are and what their identities are depending on the place they stand physically and symbolically. For him, the sense of belonging that was exchanged in the past for clothing, immediate survival and land, which was already theirs, should not be transplanted to citizenship, now that people for government say they have development. This is so as the rights and political subjectivity it entails does not really include indigenous peoples in their necessities and ways of living. Citizenship should not be what define them as agents of their history and of their politics as it is too limiting and has been always taming them in accordance to what they are not allowed to do as opposed to what they could be doing because they are citizens. Access to health services and education does not mean much in the end if it is not enhancing of their educational and health systems.

The developmental state, which grew stronger in Brazil in 2000 very much based on a neoliberal citizenship grounded on entrepreneurship, arrived stronger in RSS with mining activities and subsidized projects for monocropping. In the battle for land and its consequent social rights between indigenous peoples and farmers, the ones more connected to developmental politics won. This conflictive arena set the terrain for party politics that took advantage of the emergent fear in indigenous communities out of the weakening in community bonds for proposing projects that would include indigenous peoples in development and, consequently, in the new trend in nation-building. With that, political parties came to be the stage for political negotiation and, more profoundly, to negotiate the continuity and the basis for community action. Representation took over participation in this time and to do it across borders, of course, was out of the limits of the party and of the politics in place.

With that, seditions initiated in the community and the discourse about being a national space in and for its own came to be the bulk of politics in RSS. This had happened much before the traditional land was recognized and demarcated the way it is nowadays and conflicts related to the demarcation had emerged. What I mean to say is that the conflictive aspect is very much linked to the nation-building process in the area and the demarcation and post-demarcation conflictive unfolding is not new as it has been part of contact and political negotiations in the area since the end of the nineteenth century. The anthropologist and political activist Stephen Baines, who has been working at the tri-border area since the early 1980s, call attention to the

territorial and land dynamic going on there where “the concept of territory is moulded within highly politicized contexts which reflect political divisions in the region.” (Baines, 2005)

By the time dictatorship was almost over in the early 1980s and people were celebrating redemocratization in the region as whole, the politicized indigenous peoples, so to speak, had been already carrying on their struggles based on the emergent political parties and the support of the liberation theology brought by the Consolata missionaries. In economic terms, the region was getting richer at the expense of indigenous decadence and a-culturation and this was the moment, precisely in 1975, of the rising up for the recognition and ulterior demarcation of the land as of indigenous land⁸. The absence of faith in the community had led to an upheaval. However, the emergent faith in indigenous politics has been deposited in the young institutions coming out with the redemocratization process as well as in international declarations for cultural and political rights. This is now recognized as deceitful to the leader I have mentioned and reflects what indigenous scholars as Taiaiake Alfred would say is the false liberation coming from land claims and sovereignty discourse, which in the end are not about the survival of the community and its politics. I would say is about accommodating them inside the state political community, which is multiple for sure, but whose discourse is for a unity that can embrace difference in political action and community building as long as it does not put in jeopardy its project as a state and the interests of the groups involved in it.

One example of this accommodation is that in 1984, before the decision for demarcating RSS in a continuous form, indigenous peoples unite and demarcated the area themselves. With the help of the Jesuits, they bought land to accelerate the land tenure process. The money was offered as a line of credit and, in return, the indigenous had to work the land and provide for the families to reorganize the communities. With that, they were hoping for the recognition of the traditional land. The tricky part of the story is that even with indigenous standing for their communities and not expecting final decisions and solutions from the government, it got very convenient for them as the final border settlements were still going on. With indigenous peoples buying the land, the government would not be picking sides in making a decision about the territory, eliminating the possibilities of contradictions to arise and social movements to get stronger. Dictatorship was not yet over and any political and social sparks, especially at the borders, were not desirable at this moment. In this sense, with no opposition from the government, tuxauas had decided to buy the land after several meetings with FUNAI and the Catholic church. During the meetings, they realized that the total area through which the communities had been dispersed would involve 2,000 hectares up to the borders with Venezuela

⁸ By this movement, the plea for what later would be the claiming for RSS as continuous territory started. The proposal was made in 1975 by the Tuxauas, the political leaders, and was sent to the new agency in the Ministry of Justice in charge of indigenous peoples, the Indian National Foundation (FUNAI, acronym in Portuguese). The document asked initially for the recognition of 578.918 hectares of indigenous land. In 1977, the extinct Ministry of Interior issues, dated back to dictatorship political apparatus, formed a working group to follow up with the regularization of indigenous lands in a continuous way. During this period, the allegation continued to be that if all the villages and lands were to be regulated and demarcated continuously, most of the provincial area would be encompassed by it, putting sovereignty and the federalist concept in jeopardy. Presumably, this would create an imbalance politically in terms of representation for this territory, even if it was still part of another province (Frank, 2006, *Collection of Reports to FUNAI and the Supreme Court for the Evaluation of the Homologation of the Raposa Serra do Sol as Continuous Territory*, personal archive, unpublished).

and Guyana. This space was set up as the goal for purchasing as well as the target for continuous negotiation with the government. Consequently, this was settled as the political place for action, having in it people for and against the demarcation.

The leader I talked to confirmed the way indigenous peoples organized for the reclamation was convenient for the government, even though it became constantly inconvenient to them along the years. In the beginning of the 1990s the probability for not getting the continuous demarcation increased as the army, navy and air force in Brazil, along with the Ministry of Foreign Relations, attested that the extensive borderlands and the 305 farmlands in the territory would make impossible the demarcation. The fact that indigenous peoples bought the land created a kind of buffer to the emergency of the situation related to the communities, restricting the political debates to land issues. In reality, the indigenous politics in place was more about local disputes of power and ways of understanding the demarcation for the purposes of the exercise of power in the reservation. Nonetheless, as in a borderland area the conflict between the different indigenous groups was translated to the language of the national, which by the early 1990s was reflected by constitutional reforms and a constant movement towards the judicialization of politics, another movement part of citizenship as project.

As sit in a borderland so important for the definition of Brazilian national identity and projects, RSS has been always at the edge of political action. This happens in the sense that the conflicts engendered by the incommensurable characteristic between indigenous and national politics were always opening the opportunity for indigenous actions, although constantly taming them by the citizenship discourse and by the idea that if they are in, they have to bring the debate to this arena for negotiating *possible* differences. The Article 231 in the Brazilian constitution, for example, guarantees to indigenous peoples the autonomy of their traditional land for the use and management of natural resources for their sustainability of their communal living. Nevertheless, the parameters for this living are not defined by them and when in face of developmental project and even to the most simple nation building related measures, the state can dislocate indigenous from these lands or amend the law in order to have an agreement about the management and the demarcation of this land. Their communal living is, in this sense, always disputable in accordance to the variations in the definitions and applications of development in areas bordering their lands. When in border areas, the variations in definition make indigenous peoples lives even more difficult as national interest will be always the mode of articulation of interest to negotiate citizenship locally, which most of times does not accommodate their lives ways as distinctive political manifestation.

Citizenship at the edge: political subjectivity in intercultural conversation

The negotiations for land tenure and for having citizenship rights are taking here as a manner of making possible indigenous ways of living and political perspectives not just by the state, but by indigenous peoples as well, as a strategy. In this sense, there is a corroboration of Yashar argument that citizenship has to be evaluated in terms of the experiences, in this case, indigenous have when being affected or contemplated by the rights provided by it in practice. Taking the case of Brazil as a supposedly racial democracy, I argued that indigenous peoples being part of the nation building process in tandem with the development discourse and practice ended up being at the edge of citizenship in becoming political in intercultural negotiations with the state.

As developmental practices walk side by side with both dictatorship and democratization in Brazil, interculturality in projects directed to indigenous peoples applied simultaneously with the processes for land regularization and recognition seemed a productive way to look at how their experiences with citizenship are varied. Mostly, using this framework it is believed to be possible to observe gradations in these experiences depending on the political subjectivity assumed and constituted along the negotiations. This, as discussed, creates edges for political action and it is preferred to multicultural solutions by indigenous peoples and the some governmental sectors. Such is the case because it is believed interculturality contributes to evincing political nuances in history and in places indigenous peoples are forging their political participation.

In the case of RSS, this use of interculturality is very much related to the state as protagonist in elaborating policies and law to accommodate indigenous presence at the frontiers of nation building. That is the reason I call it citizenship at the edge. As much as the example of RSS is connected to the idea of nation building, the discussions about citizenship in perspective with interculturality will oftentimes put indigenous peoples in a condition of disadvantage as they make use of the toolbox of rights offered by the state to counter state expansion. Nonetheless, there are other groups that can make use of the gradation in interculturality – in the sense there is not really dialogue, but a preponderance of state language- in their own favour. They do it in order to enhance political subjectivity through indigeneity, referring to their ways of being political without making use of the rights which, in truth, assume them as vulnerable just to begin with⁹. For that, I will look at the Ashaninka, in the lower Amazon basin and their relationships with peoples in the other side of the border for promoting sustainable development. This area is also one where nowadays the state is advancing with developmental projects.

In RSS, the decision for the recognition of the land as continuous and for the necessity of this to be so not for the here and now, but for the continuity of the co-existence of the communities within it, unfortunately, did not bring a spirit of unit to the RSS. The Supreme Court decision for the land to be continuous was not enough for them to believe that the place of politics was not in party politics or in the definition of the territory and the political forces in charge of it. They went back searching for affirmation outside their political system and the connections forged based on their life ways. One of the facts illustrating that is leaders in reservation start restricting people coming from Guyana and Venezuela to get into the territory to go to schools or traditional hospitals, implying that the presence of “foreigners” would jeopardize the incentives acquired through governmental policies. As one elder in RSS pointed out, this activity was misleading for their struggles since the 19th century as “there are no

⁹ I am not implying with that the indigenous peoples are not vulnerable populations or that they are not in disadvantage in the national and global scenario. However, the approach used by most of the nation-states when dealing with indigenous peoples is to assume this vulnerability in a sense of taking the political content out of indigenous struggles for justice. It is agreed here with what liberals like Iris Marion Young say that it is not possible to have equality or justice if oppression is not taken out of the table through the participation of oppressed groups in elaborating Constitutional or fundamental laws. However, it is also important to highlight all the struggles that were already at the forefront before the inclusion in law making. Especially because law making will not be able to incorporate the struggles amongst the very own groups for having their interests negotiated with the additional fact that many times law leaves the political aside when it is referred to oppressed groups, putting all in the manageable language of state structure.

foreigners or others, there are us.”¹⁰ This refusal of having indigenous of the same community coming from other side of the border shows that, after the demarcation, the state continues to be the main interlocutor for RSS. All the planning for political mobilization is arranged in a way to be legible to this state. Nevertheless, state action and planning is clearly not legible to them in the sense that its actions do not correspond and, managerially, do not come to terms to the manner they live politically (Scott, 1998).

In the case of the Ashaninka, citizenship at the edge, in other words, citizenship as being a limitation at the borders for indigenous peoples was used in their own favour and in the advantage groups at the Peruvian side as well. In their situation, the intercultural focus of the state more in projects towards the community was used by the community to boost community development, regardless the border separating them, and as a way to countering the very state in its developmental projects. In situations like these, the indigenous political movement does not only seize the opportunity to mobilize within the “cracks” of the constitutional system and the neoliberal citizenship regime that lowers state capacity (Yashar 2005), but emerge out of the interstices of indigenous practices on the ground and their associations with neighbour communities. It can happen simultaneously and countering state action, but it is based on their view of political action and mobilization. Due to this reason, in taking advantage of the presumably intercultural component of projects direct to them they flip the position of victims and oppressed to the one of survivals and negotiators of their own self-determination and self-governance. First, this breaks the illusion that there is such a thing as complete autonomy, and second, that indigenous peoples have not already been, since long time before the state, negotiating their political conditions and territories of action, in constant contact with other political groups.

Since 1992, the Ashaninka people of the territory Kampa do Rio Amona have their territory recognized and demarcated by the government. Likewise in RSS, their territory was defined under circumstances of extreme violence, although this was not as divulged as it was with RSS case. At those times, Ashaninka had to carve out their political space in their traditional territory at the borders with Peru. Originally from the area nowadays standing for the Peruvian Amazon, the conditions of violence Ashaninka were exposed to, mainly related to the expansion of economic frontiers involving logging and mining, has led them to dislocate to what is legally the Brazilian side. The displacement did not break the contact with the communities in the other side of the border, still suffering the impacts of the expansion of economic frontiers in the Peruvian side. Also, the fact the Ashaninka territory was recognized in the Brazilian side, was not a reason for indigenous peoples in there to push the ones coming from Peru out as way

¹⁰ According to Engin Isin, the act of becoming political involves struggles, organizations and claims for people to have citizenship rights and, ultimately, for being citizens (Isin 2002). Citizenship, in this sense, may not be the final goal, but is a condition of alterity, which pushes political subjects in framing and constantly building their political subjectivity (Isin 2002). The ones becoming political are in this condition of alterity when searching for the enactments brought by citizenship and, at the same time, are contesting the limits of the concept as an enabler of the political. For indigenous peoples in RSS, citizenship, even with its limitations, equals more access to social services and more strength in their political voice to reclaim land and the rights tied to it. To a certain extent, it can be affirmed that citizenship permeates the political imaginary and the discourse related to the post-recognition and post-demarcation mobilizations.

of being more competitive or suitable to be included in governmental projects. Much to the contrary, the fact they were eligible to the projects coming from the Ministry of Environment and Health along the lines of racial democracy and citizenship as a project as I explained previously, made them to use it this to offer assistance to displaced indigenous community in the other side of the border. In addition to it, Ashaninka used the distance from the decision-making centres and the projects directed to them as departure point not for association with the government drawing from citizenship regime as project, but to have the material resources to creating a kind of network with neighbour communities of rubber tappers and nut gatherers.

In the midst of this constructed environment of cooperation based on the principles of sustainable development for political autonomy in terms of conducting politics in accordance to what they cast as important for them in their territory, Ashaninka mitigated the potential of conflict with other communities. For this, they use citizenship as a project to protect communities in Peru. This ended up protecting the very Brazilian borders from the advances coming from the Peruvian side by loggers. This happened because their territory was turned into a kind of environmental heaven whereby politics was perpetrated in totally different way and citizenship was used to offer a better experience to political communities in the surroundings. The point of departure for this experience of the political departed from the Ashaninka evaluations about the unfolding of state funded projects in their land. They, actually, have been using the positive learning aspects and results of this experiences to multiply to other communities, with the traditional territory been used as hub. The turning point here is that the state project is neither a funding imposition, as since 2003 they are deciding what to do with the funding in face of a mobilization elders and young activists developed in the community to stop state direct control on internal policies, nor it represents a restriction to old patterns of mobility and to what life was before the borders and the expansion of economic frontiers.

Of course there are asymmetries in political power if one realizes that the money comes from the government. However, the fact the community identified the problems caused by the expansion of economic frontiers and associated the incentive coming from the government to tackle it through their life projects is really unique as a form of participation going against the limitations on political activity imposed by the developmental state. Their territory was also defined and recognized under violence and facing developmental politics. As with RSS, the definition of borders in this front has been an issue for Brazil in terms of defining its political and national identity amidst the deep Amazon forest. However, the manner these people used the almost zoning in the Amazon forest to include indigenous peoples in specific projects according to natural resources common to the area made their encounter with development - a sign of forced interculturality as paradoxical as it may seem – as strategy of alliance and endurance for what they call *florestania* (citizenship from the forest). In this sense, as Paul E. Little highlights in a number of studies related to indigenist postdevelopmental policies in the Amazon, even with all the problems interculturality can bring to indigenous groups, it might be an important means to understand the intricacies – or interstices, as I call – of what is the intercultural politically and the differences it convey in political entitlement (Little 2003). Not just that, interculturality in projects which indigenous communities take the lead can leave to them in relation to their distribution of power internally and regionally the decision about how to manage it, as it is ultimately part of their lives.

The illegibility of the state, to borrow James Scott expression, is most of times related to the inability to recognize different ways of living (Scott 1998) added to a lack of acknowledgement about the already politicized condition of these life ways. The gradations in citizenship in the sense of having the ability to exercise social and political rights under specific situations (Ong 2005) turn out to be gradations in political subjectivity. By this, indigenous subjectivities are seen as agencies that are less active and valuable, so to speak, and that need to be managed or controlled in order not to hinder state plans. Their inclusion through intercultural projects is part of this hindrance. However, their alliances and understandings of mobility as natural integration and of development as something that have to be shared and played out by the whole community for that nature and the lives in it can endure read and practice this hindrance as part of the alliance, smoothing the asymmetry and politicizing the everydayness as a political representation of their political condition, namely, indigeneity. This way of understanding and practicing politics and perpetrating policies as relationality is not an official measure detached of their lives; it is part of their own lives. When Ashaninka get out of the zoning related to the health and environmental projects, classified as intercultural because of their formulation in accordance to the problems they have, expanding the local capabilities enhanced by them to neighbour communities, they are practicing indigeneity. By this expansion, they evince the gradations in citizenship by extrapolating its localized and national enactments to the ones that do not have access to it by the specialized policies that try to come to terms to Constitutional rights that put them as equal, as they are clearly not. They use the paradox in their own favour and understand where exactly the paradox lies by contradicting it with their ways of becoming political through relationality.

Conclusion: Indigeneity as subversion at the edge

The imagined community has always been imagined by determinate groups for a specific purpose and people not part of the dominant group may certainly identify with this imagination and eventually with the power relation fuelling it, offering no resistance and becoming part of the political imaginary of the nation. In the case of indigenous peoples, arguments toward institutional design for more inclusiveness of their traditional rights into national legislation conceding them land rights and autonomy through their participation in institutional formation by their intrinsic political arrangement (Young 2000; Berne and Dodds 2000) could be fraught precisely because of the power relations pervasive to such imaginary. This would be the case both in its symbolic and procedural aspects. Symbolically, because the concept of collective could be shaken by the transference of the heart of indigenous politics to someplace else where the collective would not really be taken into consideration in its everyday challenges and opportunities, as it was seen in RSS. Procedurally, because the situation provokes imbalance in power relations within specific groups, particularly while trying to forge an alliance towards the collective, if it is anyhow possible when dealing with a politics of constitutional rights based on the individual.

Based on this perspective, debates on “appropriate representation of indigenous identity and indigenous’ peoples interests” (Bern and Dodds 2000:163), are not enough anymore insofar groups in charge are “geared toward some aspect of self-determination or of negotiation with the wider state” (Bern and Dodds 2000:163), as it was also seen with how the idea of interculturality was not workable in RSS when faced with development. In the first case examined here, self-determination through native politics institutionalization via demarcation and dialogue with other

scales of politics, via public policy projects, has left aside the complexity of the web of relationships inside the reservation. Furthermore, such perspective that can appear as a liberal solution to the problem remains neutral and not critical, institutionally speaking, of the influences external groups have on indigenous peoples and in their political associations.

In RSS, during the post-demarcation, the act of becoming political in tandem with the (il)legibility of the state (Scott, 1998) relates to the wider endeavour of the developmental state in the upper Amazon basin. Inasmuch as becoming political is immersed in developmental practices in the area, the shaping of politics based in the discourse of citizenship will point towards what one can get out of the accelerated and specialized development, even it is little and demeaning of their political condition. This has led to consequent gradations in participation and inclusion (Ong 2005) in face of the design of the country economic frontiers as well as in the reservation political edges with citizenship at the limit of them, literally.

On the other side of the story of indigenous politics as related to the intercultural and developmental backdrop, it was shown that a “politics otherwise” is possible when practiced at the intricacies and interstices of policies informed by interculturality. Defying the myth of racial democracy while at the same time embracing its new form of perpetration, Ashaninka at Kampa do Rio Amonea territory exercise indigeneity in and beyond borders to counter citizenship. Instead of relying heavily on the state apparatus in terms of rights as well as in terms of policies, they really used their politics in their own ways upfront any improbable modification in how individual constitutional rights could be informed by cultural communitarian practices (Kymlicka 2000).

As one side of the argument in this paper is how the idea of racial democracy and interculturality as reflected in the allowance of political difference to indigenous communities might be defied by developmental politics, I used the Ashaninka case as a counterfactual to make a point that ensemble of constitutional rights and politics cannot account for indigeneity. Nevertheless, as indigeneity is heavily based on relationality, it can be used at the edges of state illegible policies – edges, in this sense understood as openings in political space for action – to strengthen indigenous political agencies and the exercise of their rights at the borders, where citizenship is usually limited and limiting of their political actions. In this way, the guarantee of political autonomy and the right to use a territory along the lines of their specific culture will never be enough if leadership could not be shaped by their ways of being political. As the provision of public policies is also part of the constitutional mandate, the acting through it seems more productive than solely based on articles 231 and 232 that contemplate their political rights. The idea of a contested citizenship to read indigenous movements offered by Yashar is paramount to begin with an analysis in these terms. However, as discussed, to look at the negotiations to act outside, although in parallel with these regimes and their changes in time, through the indigenous lenses when not informed by state capacity and legibility seems to examine critically not just racial democracy, but democracy in all its aspects. This includes not just the contestation to its main instrument, that is citizenship, but its subversion by other ways of becoming political.

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