

A Short Record of the Public Policy of Irrigated Perimeters Implemented in Northeastern Brazil

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Abstract

This research presents reflections on the irrigated perimeter policy, which was defended in the official speech as an important solution to the problems of access to land in the semiarid northeastern region, as well as an alternative to the development of agricultural activities in the region, going over the problems resulting from droughts. However, what was perceived was the capture of this policy by the capital that transformed these public projects into an alternative to the development of business agriculture in the semiarid region. Furthermore, this public policy promoted changes in the countryside, causing processes of deterritorialization and reterritorialization as well as actions to depoliticize the peasants who, upon entering the projects, went through processes which contributed to the disarticulation of movements of struggles for the peasants' wishes, such as for land reform. These and other issues discussed here justify this research, which has as a general objective the discussion of the main events and relationships that mark the history of the irrigated perimeter policy in the semiarid region, having as specific objectives the approach of the first moments of the irrigated perimeter policy in the semiarid northeastern region, that is, reflections on some of the socio-political impacts caused by public policy on irrigated perimeters in that region. Therefore, this article makes considerations about the policy, addressing its impacts, revealing a profile of the conflicts and relations instituted by itself in the northeastern semiarid portion.

Keywords: Irrigated perimeter public policy; Reorganization of irrigated perimeters; Northeastern semiarid region; State; Settlers.

Introduction

The irrigated perimeters are public irrigation projects implemented in the northeastern semiarid region. Such perimeters are the result of strategic measures elaborated in the context in which Brazil lived: the Military Dictatorship (1964-1985), which undertook efforts to dismantle and stifle social movements, among which were those struggling for land reform, like the peasant leagues that, since the 1950s, has claimed this measure to solve countless other social problems arising from the historical concentration of land in Brazil, a legacy from the colonial period that has persisted until today.

This research justifies the fact that this policy emerged in the official speech as an important solution to regional problems, whether these were of the natural order, arising from droughts, in particular, characterized by the threats posed by social movements and the struggle for land reform to the permanence and stability of military and economic governments, through the modernization of the field with a view to national development from the solution of specific problems related to that which they considered a “problematic region”.

However, as well as the many public policies outlined for the semiarid region, among which were focused on the water solution, the policy of irrigated perimeters was captured by business groups that had neither tradition in agriculture nor were peasants, thus fleeing from what was claimed in the first official documents dated from the 1970s. To justify the aforementioned policy, those documents listed as beneficiaries the peasants without access to land.

When dealing with this capture of public policies in the semiarid region, by local hegemonic groups, Chacon and Bursztyn (2016) clarify that such public actions served more to keep these groups in power than promoting the long-awaited regional development, thus maintaining the current political and economic power structures, since, in the Northeast of the country, these powers would be historically intertwined inseparably.

In this way, with the entrance of groups other than peasants in the irrigated areas, the change in the political perspective of those who started to gradually meet the interests of capital was consolidated through the insertion of the aspects that configure business agriculture in these irrigation projects.

With this, an attempt is made here to discuss the main events and relationships that have marked the history of irrigated perimeter policy in the semiarid region, with specific objectives: a) the approach of the first moments of the irrigated perimeter policy in the semiarid northeastern region; and b) the reflection on some of the socio-political impacts caused by public policy on irrigated perimeters in that region.

Thus, when studying the aforementioned public policy, it is noticed that it brings exclusionary aspects in its core, evidenced in the selective processes of the 1970s, mainly, which had a patriarchal sexist character, since only men were selected, preferably young ones, with aptitude and willingness to work in the field.

Subsequently, from the 1980s onwards, preference is given to those who show a certain appreciation for the entrepreneurial agricultural molds, which, subtly or abruptly (depending on the irrigated perimeter and the way their occupants perceive these processes), are inserted in the daily productive and social relationships that occur in these projects.

Among the processes that marked the implantation of irrigated perimeters in the semiarid region are the selection of areas and, in cases of lack of legal documentation proving their ownership, their expropriation. Subsequently, irrigation, selection, settlement and training colonists were implanted in the 1970s and irrigators from the 1980s onwards, when politics were taking on a new character, moving from welfare to capitalism with a business view, assuming a different character from that used as a justification for the creation of this policy and presented as an alternative to land reform.

However, what was verified were, at least, aspects of “topsy-turvy” land reform, that is, conservative, because the land concentration character was maintained, through a policy based on the latifundium, since settlers were given a piece of land with an extension, many times, greater than what they could take care of with their families. On the other hand, peasants who did not meet the criteria required by the Departamento Nacional de Obras Contra a Seca (National Department of Works Against Drought, DNOCS), when sharing land, were excluded from this policy. These, therefore, remained without access to land.

Thus, the Brazilian State used these and many other arguments. It involved the countryside population in the discourse of irrigated perimeters as a synonym for a “progressive wave” that would take those people out of agricultural backwardness and include them in the national territory as protagonists and no longer, just, as the excluded parcel in which they would be fated to always follow after the remains of the advances made by the central-southern region.

The public policy of irrigated perimeters in the semiarid region: notes and reflection

About the first moments of the irrigated perimeter policy in the Northeastern Semi-arid

Strategically, the military and civilian governments resorted to countless devices to implement, in conservative social strata, fears which linked the performance of these movements to possible threats to the unity and national security, criminalizing social movements with the support of the media (as they even do today), controlled and entirely submissive to the governments with which they maintained close relations.

Then, the desire arose to implement a policy capable of meeting the desires of land non-reform, on the part of agrarian elites and access to land by social movements and peasants.

To silence possible demonstrations contrary to the measures adopted by the military government, popular support was gained, the resources went beyond the violent methods of torture known, the engaging speech of modernity and progress, from which development would come, used as a legitimizing factor for the vertical actions implemented during this period.

As an insurgent that was the cradle of countless struggles for social improvements, the Brazilian northeastern region, at the time, pejoratively referred to it as “a problematic region”, was soon involved in the field of dominant influences of the dictatorial government that tried to control the articulations that took place in the countryside, through the creation of measures aimed at the Brazilian agrarian space, especially in the Northeastern portion.

Such measures were aimed at controlling this population and it was under the prerogative of development and modernization that a depoliticizing and manipulative influence was established in the countryside, subordinating the peasant to capital through the acquisition of the technical package, subjection to the market, among other “modernizing” factors.

When reflecting on this moment, Braga (2009, p. 35) points out that “the idea of the struggle for land was very 'dangerous', with the need to implement more concrete measures that would serve as a reliever for conflicts in the countryside”.

Composing the set of interventionist actions aimed at the Brazilian Northeast, implemented in the 1970s, it was created the Fundo de Investimentos do Nordeste (Investment Fund for the Northeast, FINOR), in 1974; the Programa de Desenvolvimento de Áreas Integradas do Nordeste (Program for the Development of Integrated Areas of the Northeast, POLONORDESTE) also in 1974; the Programa de Redistribuição de Terras e de Estímulo a Agroindústria do Norte e Nordeste do Brasil (Land Redistribution and Encouragement Program for Agroindustry in the North and Northeast of Brazil, PROTERRA) in 1975; the Empresa de Assistência Técnica e Extensão Rural (Technical Assistance and Rural Extension Company, EMATER) in 1976; the Programa Especial de Apoio ao Desenvolvimento da Região semiárida do Nordeste (Special Program to Support the Development of the Semiarid Region of the Northeast, PROJETO SERTANEJO) in 1976; the Empresa Brasileira de Pesquisa Agropecuária (Brazilian Agricultural Research Corporation, EMBRAPA) in 1981; the Programa de Irrigação no Nordeste (Irrigation Program in the Northeast, PROINE) in 1986 and the Programa Nacional de Irrigação (National Irrigation Program, PRONI) in 1986.

In addition to these, the Plano de Integração Nacional (National Integration Plan, PIN) was created by Decree-Law No. 1,106 of June 16, 1970, in which the then President of Brazil, Emílio Garrastazu Médici (1969-1974), claimed to be the “most important project in the agricultural area” in the country at that time (MARTINS, 2008, p. 43). The plan was defended in the official speech as being the “solution to the problems arising from droughts and to improving the standard of living of the population of the semiarid region” (DINIZ, 1999, p. 84).

The purpose of the PIN was to promote the integration of national territories, articulating and interconnecting them, giving them a unifying character. In this way, it planned measures to be carried out by the different portfolios that comprised the military and civilian governments, covering the entire national territory, mainly, the more “disconnected” areas, such as those of the Amazon region, and “problematic” areas such as the northeastern region.

Concerning the Ministry of Transport, for example, it promoted the construction of highways, such as the Transamazônica, of ports and river docks, thus inserting the Amazon region in the context of market relations from its connection with the Center-South and, consequently, with the globalizing world of business. In partnership with the Ministry of Mines and Energy, PIN proposals were: the topographic, forest and geomorphological survey of areas, to know aspects related to soil moisture and the possible existence of energy mineral resources. (FGV, 2017).

About the Ministries of Agriculture and Interior, the PIN provided for the creation of colonization mechanisms and what they advocated to be “land reform”. Those would be your main goals. To this end, agricultural and agroindustrial projects would be implemented at a time when irrigation became “the central axis of a public policy to fight drought, which aimed to modernize the field by encouraging the use of modern techniques and public financial investments, organizing the space for capitalist activity in the countryside”, as pointed out by Diniz (1997, p. 74).

In the case of the public irrigation perimeter policy, it was established that the application of the policy was the responsibility of the state agency DNOCS, which, until then, had its activities in the Northeast region directed to the construction of dams, wells and other water storage mechanisms with a view to “facing” the problems brought about by prolonged droughts.

Thus, in the 1970s, aiming at legitimizing state actions in the semiarid region, the irrigated perimeters were presented in the DNOCS reports as part of effective measures to improve structural issues, such as the low productivity of semiarid land which, henceforth, with the insertion of techniques and modern technology characterized by the sprinkler watering system and the machines present in the projects, would achieve more satisfactory production rates.

In this context, there was also a high concentration of land, recognized in the reports as being one of the causes of regional socioeconomic problems, whose fight would come from this policy which, through expropriation processes, would promote redistributive land reforms. Trying to convince that, through the irrigated perimeters, they would meet the desires of those who fought for reforms in the distribution of Brazilian land, thus adjusting the land problem to the objectives of economic development that guided the actions of the military and civilian governments.

Still according to the official speech, when acting on these fronts, the irrigated perimeters would appear as a redemption to the historical regional problems, as among the benefits brought by them, they would be their positive reflexes in the reduction of the rural exodus, since, they would promote a greater establishment of people in the countryside, from the settlement of their areas by the peasant families entering them, defending this policy as the creator of mechanisms that guarantee permanence in the countryside.

Among the many fallacies of the official speech and optimism regarding the irrigated perimeter policy, the researcher Diniz (1997) points out its conservative and little transforming character of the unequal and exclusionary reality experienced in the Northeastern semiarid region, since:

During this period, the capitalist state implements changes of a conservative character, directed to a process of modernization of agriculture, via irrigation policy modifying the productive process, labor relations and intensifying the use of artificial inputs. Such changes have not altered the land structure based on the latifundium, nor have they meant an improvement in working conditions in the field, which well expresses the concept used by Graziano da Silva (1981) of painful modernization. (DINIZ 1997,74)

This conservative character of the old land structures, highlighted by Diniz (1997), became evident over the years, when this policy underwent important changes, being, therefore, classified in two distinct phases: before and after its political reorientation, a reorientation that is also the (re)orientation of capital, that is, the policy of irrigated perimeters is submitted to the yearnings of the economic policy outlined for Brazil at specific moments in its history.

Thus, there is the first phase of the irrigated perimeter policy, which is dated from the 1970s to the 1980s and which brought with it interventionist, paternalistic and authoritarian aspects which, employing assistance measures intermediated by DNOCS, held as hostages those they served.

State authoritarianism, characteristic of military and civilian governments, also present in actions aimed at agriculture in the semiarid region, is evident in speeches like the one given by the then minister of agriculture of the Geisel government (1974-1979), Alysson Paulinelli, when determining that the “farmers who thought in terms of subsistence will have to think in terms of the market. They start to have to organize themselves as a company, concerned not only with production but with commercialization”(CNBB, apud MARTINS, 2008, p. 45).

Such determinations were part of the context of rules imposed by DNOCS on ex-peasants converted into small producers within the irrigated perimeters. These aspirations were even part of a larger context, whose main desire was to transform not only the peasant into a capitalist person but agriculture into agribusiness.

The main factor responsible for the changes suffered by the irrigated perimeter policy has its origin in the performance of the Brazilian State, responsible for these projects that, when adhering to economic neoliberalism, directed the irrigated perimeters to meet the demands of capitalism, submitting this social policy to economic desires that started to influence primarily its directions.

Thus, there are clear changes in the public served by the irrigated perimeters, as well as in the focus of their performance. In the 1970s, in the documents and reports about public irrigation projects, only peasant families appear to have benefited, who, after being selected by DNOCS, would inhabit the projects, dedicating themselves to the practice of family farming, associated or not to the creation of animals, depending on what the DNOCS determined as the “vocation” of each project.

Over time, this characteristic has changed, however, for the time being, attention is paid to the fact that the projects presented in the 1970s had a welfareperspective, whose presentation made by the official speech, sought to equate them with reformist measures aimed at promoting land distribution in the northeastern semiarid region. The way this policy took place in the 1970s, with the presentation of the same and the first projects, shows paternalistic and authoritarian aspects of the Brazilian State under the aegis of the military and civilian governments.

Among the processes that would result in the implementation of the projects, there was the choice of areas to be expropriated by the State for insertion. Expropriation occurred in cases where the documentation of the land was not duly proven, that is, through the absence of documents of possession in the name of the peasants who lived on them. What was common at the time, given the lack of information and the informal characteristic of those times, when access to information and literacy was the privilege of a few.

In this context, it was up to DNOCS to select and transform spaces/territories, creating infrastructure and technology, thus configuring themselves in a luminous spot in the middle of the sertão seen as being “dry and backward”. Thus, the policy of irrigated perimeters imprinted in sertões the progressive aspects of agricultural modernization, here characterized by the creation of mechanisms that enable the development and practice of irrigated agriculture.

The expropriation occurred upon proof of the effective possession of the lands, observed by DNOCS technicians who, after analyzing the lands, attributed a value to them, based on attributes such as their extension and the improvements they might have.

The expropriation processes were presented as one of the many breakdowns caused by the vertical policy because when they were elaborated, public opinion was not consulted nor was it considered possible maladjustments to be caused in the lives of the families involved, either as expropriated or selected as settlers of the projects.

The first breakdowns concern those whose victims were expropriated families who were suddenly told that they should leave their lands so that they could receive the implementation of a public irrigated agriculture project in which they could even enroll and participate in the process. selective to become a settler. However, there would be no guarantee that these would be selected. If so, there was no guarantee of staying in the same lands where they lived until the arrival of DNOCS.

Some of the socio-political impacts caused by the public policy of irrigated perimeters in the northeastern semiarid region.

It is important to pay attention to the fact that this sudden state intervention established important disruptions in the lives of the families affected by it. The severity of the eviction order of the selected areas expelled family groups that, in turn, had those lands as home, refuge, source of food, workplace, synonymous with social life and contact with nature, among many other personal meanings.

This set of affective connections among the evicted families and the expropriated lands made the lands their place in the world. One who can keep his history and that of ancestors.

Hence the intensity of the ruptures and subtlety of the issues involving these processes that can be understood, based on the geographical view, as being deterritorialization and reterritorialization, since, with the removal of families from their lands, there was migration to other places where they had to adapt and restart a new story.

This perception is even valid for those who, even though they were selected by DNOCS as irrigators, start to occupy areas different from those in which their lands were located and, therefore, they seemed strange because they do not keep their memories or tell their story, there was no identification with them. Therefore, the settlers would have a new beginning. This adaptation process would not be limited to the new place of residence, as it would also include the new way of living and producing what was determined by DNOCS.

Expropriated families not selected as settlers by DNOCS were left to move to other areas, in large part, to urban areas located close to their former lands. When settling in these places, they started to live differently, following a more urbanized dynamic that, little by little and with different intensities, moved them away from the field and the set of relationships that it involves. Mainly transforming their relationship with the land and with work.

Urban life has made ex-peasants engage in other activities. In most cases, in those components of the tertiary sector, gradually moving away from agriculture, as the context to which they were inserted did not contribute to the resumption of contact with the land. Ironically, this link with the land had been weakened or lost when they were expelled from the countryside by a policy defended in the official discourse as being able to promote the settlement in the countryside.

Thus, through the expropriation process of land by DNOCS in the northeastern semiarid region since the end of the 1960s, a total of 38 irrigation projects have been implemented, distributed among the federal units of Bahia, Paraíba, Pernambuco, Piauí, Rio Grande do Norte and Ceará, as shown in Table 1, below:

Table 1. *Distribution of irrigated perimeters in the semiarid region per federative unit.*

FEDERATIVE UNIT	PERIMETERS QUANTITY	CONSTRUCTION PERIOD		
		1968-1979	1980-1989	1990-1992
Bahia	3	3	0	0
Ceará	14	10	3	1
Paraíba	3	3	0	0
Pernambuco	4	4	0	0
Piauí	6	4	2	0
Rio Grande do Norte	5	4	1	0
Maranhão	3	0	3	0
TOTAL	38	28	9	1

Source: DNOCS, 2012.

Notes: Organized by XIMENES, Vanessa, 2013.

The spatial distribution of these irrigated perimeters in the northeastern semiarid region can be seen in figure 1.

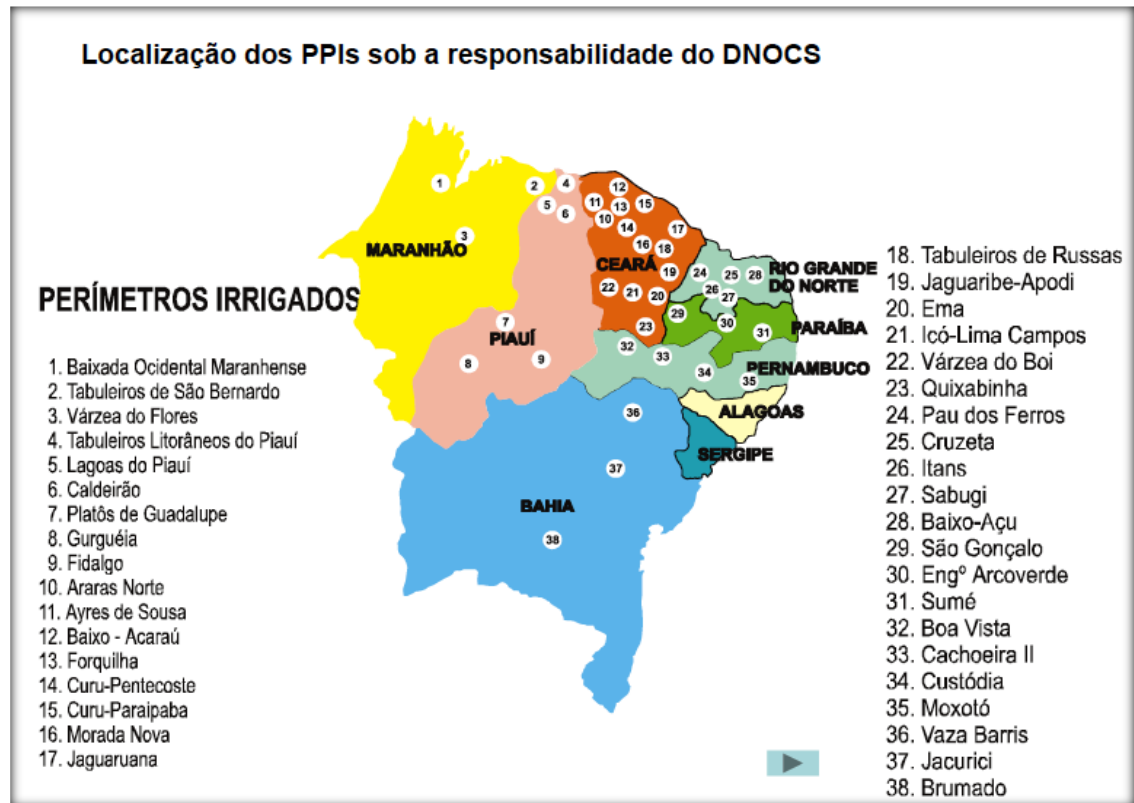


Figure 1. *Irrigated perimeters implemented in the semiarid region* Figure by the Ministério de Integração Nacional (Ministry of National Integration, MI) and Secretaria de Infraestrutura Hídrica (Departamento de Water Infrastructure), 2013.

In the 1980s, when the policy was still under the precepts of its first phase, there was a significant change in it, regarding its beneficiaries, who in the previous decade were restricted to peasants with a tradition in agriculture, but, from now on it would also include three other groups, referred to by DNOCS as being categories. These are the people from companies, agricultural technicians and agricultural engineers.

In turn, these three categories, despite being foreseen in a smaller quantity in each project, would be entitled to piece of land superior to those destined to the ex-peasants inserted in these, which, because they are inserted in the productive logic imposed by DNOCS, were now called small owners.

This opening of projects for the settlement of companies and technicians would be the harbinger of a transition process that they would go through with the creation and entrance of these new categories, bringing the desire to adapt the activities developed there so that they could meet more specific economic concerns. To this end, the performance of these categories would serve as a model to be followed by small producers, leaving them to adapt and follow the DNOCS guidelines, given the performance of these categories.

Enabling irrigated agriculture to be developed in these projects, there were the water reservoirs, whose location was a determining factor in the selection of areas for the implementation of irrigated perimeters. The weirs responsible for the water supply were also built by DNOCS in a period that preceded the policy of irrigated perimeters, in which the referred agency had its performance marked by the construction of reservoirs, a period that was conventionally called as its hydraulic phase (from 1909 to 1960).

The desire to make irrigated agriculture in the perimeters a reality and thereby spread the legacy of the military and civilian governments led to the inauguration of the projects even though some sectors of them presented unfinished works. As a result, the infrastructure present in the projects does not appear to be distributed in their areas in an equal and total way, there are sectors in which they have never received water (neither for irrigation nor for human consumption) since the irrigation infrastructure was not implemented in them, which, in turn, is precisely what characterizes the irrigated perimeters and differentiates them from other cultivated areas.

Thus, marking the initial period of the history of the irrigated perimeters in the semiarid region, there was also the selection of those subjects responsible for occupation and production in the projects: the settlers. Those who managed to pass the DNOCS selection process to choose settlers, remained to adapt to the new way of life and agricultural production to which they would be submissive from their entry into the projects.

This was a new moment of breakdowns and rearrangements in the lives of selected families, who were undergoing deterritorialization/reterritorialization processes. DNOCS technicians are responsible for harmonious coexistence and obedience, thus following the set of rules of conduct to be obeyed by settler families.

When reflecting on this delicate moment in the lives of families, marked by their entrance into irrigation projects, Diniz (1997, p. 34), based on the study he carried out on the experience lived by these actors in the irrigated perimeter of Icó-Lima Campos, defends that: “when arriving at the perimeter, the worker not only receives a new nickname but a new way of living, of producing, of working the land, of living.”

The author also points out the existing strategic measures behind the colonization established in the irrigated perimeters, which would be nothing more than “a palliative measure implemented by the military governments to demobilize the growing conflicts in the countryside, placing itself, also, as a way to increase productivity in rural areas”(DINIZ, 2002, p. 42).

Thus, the establishment of the projects would contribute to peasant depoliticization, in addition to subjecting these peasants, now transformed into settlers, to the productive demands of modernized agriculture. Bringing to the scope of the projects, from the beginning, the capitalist marketing precepts would end up transforming all the relationships established inside and outside the projects and led by the actors involved with them.

How this process of insertion of settlers in the projects took place established what the official speech announced as being a redistributive measure, in which, in addition to meeting the modernizing demands imposed by development, they would have access to land, therefore, they would be contemplating the longings of those who fought for land decentralization, from the expropriation of land and redistribution of these in the form of lots.

When discussing the policy of irrigated perimeters and their negative repercussions in the struggle for the conquest of the land, by social movements, Freitas (2010, p. 51-52) points out that: “the perimeter project aimed to alleviate social conflicts that came mainly from the struggles of the Peasant Leagues. The irrigation policy ended up making a real land reform unfeasible”, with consensus among authors, like the researchers Diniz (1997) and Freitas (2010), the conclusion that these projects are a maneuver for the non-resolution of the problem of land concentration in the northeastern semiarid region.

Besides making land reform unfeasible and weakening the mechanisms for fighting for it, the policy of irrigated perimeters brought disarray to the lives of peasants, since it promoted processes of expropriation of the lands of families who lived in them, inserting other families in these lands. which, in turn, would have to adapt not only to the new place they belonged to since then but also to the productive model and living standards imposed by DNOCS so that the experience of colonization and agricultural modernization, through irrigated perimeters, was successful.

With this, at the end of the processes that resulted in the implantation of irrigated perimeters, the imbalances or “rearrangements” caused in the life of the peasants were perceived, who, before the creation of the irrigated perimeter policy, developed activities in the family regime and, due to the state intervention, those who “were already” established in the countryside, were forced to leave those lands to give “space” to the implementation of a new way of living, working and producing the land, where other criteria and priorities were created, through meeting needs external to that territory, defending the interests of others and therefore strange” to these peasants intensely affected by this policy (XIMENES, 2015, p. 78).

The infrastructure present in the irrigated perimeters, modern by the standards of the time, was defended in the official speech as being one of the many advantages that, in turn, would differentiate the producers linked to the projects from the others, thus creating a hierarchical system in the field or intensifying the pre-existing unequal relationships.

In this official speech, there was a clear attempt to create, in the imagination of the peasants selected for the projects, the notion that from the use of the technical package, these peasants, now called small producers, would have guaranteed their production, as it would no longer be susceptible to climatic conditions, so the harvest would be independent of yearly rainfall.

Regarding the management of the perimeters, DNOCS printed the interventionist, authoritarian and paternalistic mark of the Brazilian State under the governments of the civil-military regime. This is perceptible when trying to understand how this organ worked, which brings clear nuances of this regime to the daily life of the irrigated perimeters, including some rules of conduct in the daily lives of the families selected as settlers of the irrigated perimeters.

In this process of subjection to the rules imposed by the Brazilian State, the transformation of the peasant who, upon entering the irrigated perimeter, loses his identity, being made impossible by the rules of conduct imposed to think, live and produce with freedom of choice. As the identity is lost, this now "ex-peasant", involved with the new context, gradually becomes subject to capital and the market.

This process marks the transformation of the peasants into capitalist who, for this purpose, start to think, work and produce as such to remain in the project which, in turn, over the years associated with political and economic dynamics, they incorporate more and more characteristics that equate themselves to the agribusiness. Thus emptying this policy of irrigated perimeters, which is unable to consider the complexities that involve family farming and the relationships established in the peasant lifestyle.

As a result, the successive inversions of values by the capitalist state concerning irrigated perimeters would result in the transition of a welfare and paternalistic policy to a neoliberal one aimed at agribusiness. Among the justifications for this, there is the indebtedness of the Brazilian government, remnants of the developmental policy, which demanded the capture of large loans and the contraction of public debts with international capital. In dealing with this political, social and economic reorientation of public irrigation projects, Freitas states that:

The new logic of this agriculture has as its matrix the broad support and incentive to private companies, restricting the figure of the settler residing in the production area. This is a pilot project for agribusiness in the semi-arid area, to the detriment of the lives of peasant family farmers and workers in the city and the surrounding irrigated areas. (Freitas 2010,34)

As a result, four distinct categories have been presented from the irrigated perimeters, created from the 1980s onwards: small producers; people from companies; agricultural technicians and agronomists. These would occupy and produce on the lands previously occupied by peasant families and which, after their appropriation by DNOCS, were transformed into a favorable territory for the implementation of a new productive logic that had the capitalist accumulation as the focus of action, to the detriment of the development of agriculture focused on food security and sovereignty.

With this, there is the political reorientation of projects that would start to meet market demands, with a view to the expansion of agribusiness in the region. In discussing this important feature of the irrigated perimeter policy, as well as its implications for the peasantry, Freitas explains that:

In the modernization of agriculture in the Northeast, two phases are well defined, with different features in their structure and objectives: 1 the perimeters of the 1970s that maintained "welfare" relationships and inserted, in the first moment, part of the family peasant farmers; 2 the perimeters from the 1990s, when the expropriation of peasants intensified (this process started in the previous phase), thus favoring the 'entrepreneurship' of public perimeters. (Freitas 2010, 52)

The political reorientation is shown in the 1990s when the adherence to economic neoliberalism by the Brazilian State has been formalized. With this, the neoliberal aspects enter and propagate in the relations established in the Brazilian field, which is directed towards the expansion of agribusiness and with this, the irrigated perimeters are swallowed up by this revolutionary wave of "save yourself if you can!"

At this historic moment in this policy, there is a focus on serving agribusiness, through the implementation of business agriculture in the perimeters that are open to receive investors and no longer peasants with tradition and vocation for agriculture. Settlers with this profile start to appear as a problem within the projects as they are unable to readapt to the production system that now aims at large-scale production to serve the market at the expense of diversified production focused on meeting internal needs.

Based on this, the maximum competence and competitiveness are incorporated into the state speech given by DNOCS representatives within the irrigated perimeters, which constrain and pressure these settlers to produce more and better, directing their products to distant consuming markets.

Thus, they cease to serve the local market, which, to have access to these fruits, they need to be content with the production waste, that is, with the consumption of those products that met the selective criteria of the buyers of the production, and therefore, remain in the place of production, or even expect that the same production acquired by intermediaries and sold in distant markets return to the local market with added value and in the form of merchandise.

The consequences of changing the political perspective of the irrigated perimeters are shown in different ways and with different intensities in the projects that, in turn, experienced and adapted to these in a particular way, as a consequence of this, these projects currently present different dynamics, whose main differentiating factor is in the way each project was organized, perceived and experienced the political transition.

Such factors allowed the coexistence of projects that, although created under the same precepts that characterized the first phase of this policy, are nowadays shown to be antagonistic in some aspects, showing very few similarities between them.

The distinctions derive mainly from how their occupants, in this case, settlers, perceive the land and relate to it. This results in numerous other differentiations that materialize in the territory of these projects, being perceived in the way of being, living and expressing themselves from the people involved with them.

Methodology

To achieve the objectives of this research, this took place from the selection of readings pertinent to the object and the reality studied, as well as field research, in which the realities of two of these irrigated perimeters implanted in the northeastern semi-arid region were studied, namely Araras Norte and Ayres de Souza, both in Ceará.

Thus, this qualitative research took place through the association of theory and empiricism, using research from historical documentary sources, whose access had been obtained through consultations with public libraries, newspapers and private documents of settlers.

Interviews were carried out with settlers, people who had land expropriated during the implementation period of the two projects mentioned, representatives of state power of the researched projects as well as with buyers of the production of these irrigated perimeters. Thus, sixty interviews were carried out in the Araras Norte and Ayres de Souza projects but also in the cities in which they are located, that is, Reriutaba and Varjota, where Araras Norte is located, and Sobral, where Ayres de Souza was implemented.

Conclusion

Based on the analysis of the conflicts and complexities resulting from the irrigated perimeter policy, it is understood that, despite the exciting speech propagated by the Brazilian State, which presents it as an opportunity to those benefited by it, it brings to its core numerous questions whose reflection is made needed.

It is a policy permeated by contradictions that arose at the beginning, during the 1980s, with the inclusion of new categories of beneficiaries who were not farmers, revealing new and worrying contradictions over time.

Among the practices provided by the policy, which in itself is already exclusive, is the fact that it emerged as an alternative to land reform, as it is a redistributive measure of land that ended up removing families from the countryside, following the expropriation of the lands where they lived, installing in these areas similar producers those removed once for the implementation of irrigated perimeters and who suffered from processes of deterritorialization and reterritorialization, having, therefore, their lives abruptly and intensely modified by a verticalized state action.

Amid the breakdown and rearrangement processes provided by this policy, those affected by or inserted in it experienced new experiences that brought them uncertainties, losses and gains that were not restricted to the lands, but also experiences, among other human and social aspects.

Such processes remained in constant evolution following the very dynamics of the irrigated perimeters, which, in turn, constantly seek to adapt to the parameters of the country's economic policy. Therefore, from the beginning to the present day, economic aspects prevailed in the policy of irrigated perimeters to the detriment of social factors.

The overlap of the economic aspects concerning the social ones has been shown in this policy since the 1980s, however, it was better evidenced as the characteristics that in the 1990s ended up defining its second phase, directed to the expansion of agribusiness that, through the development of business agriculture, it produced with a view to the market and, consequently, to capitalist accumulation on the part of the few who own the means of production or, in the context studied, the land of the perimeters.

This political reorientation of irrigated perimeters ends up aggravating old problems, such as land concentration in the semi-arid region that is taking place. Likewise, it contributed to the worsening of social inequalities inside and outside the perimeters, as well as the precarious work performed by rural workers hired to work on the land pieces.

In addition to these social, political and economic conflicts from the irrigated perimeters, there is the creation or aggravation of environmental problems, directly resulting from agricultural modernization and the adoption of new techniques and inputs that are part of the technical package.

In the context of damage to the environment, the use of pesticides in production and the high consumption of water used in the realization of watered crops are highlighted, and this demand is intensified through the implementation of the agricultural model directed to agribusiness and business agriculture, Araras Norte for instance.

The dependence on high water consumption in production incompatible with the water supply in the semiarid region demonstrates the vulnerability of these projects, thus showing the many weaknesses of this vertical policy, which is extremely exclusive and unequal. These nuances are perceived since its first phase and preserved, when not aggravated, until today.

Thus, it is understood that water solutions designed in a vertical way for the Northeast failed because they did not consider the local reality and because they did not think of solutions that would provide better coexistence with the semiarid region, because of this, the irrigated perimeters are bound to have instability of their activities because they are based on an agricultural model that uses a large volume of water and this water supply is not enough to the demand of the activity.

Therefore, it is not an issue about the water crisis but rather a crisis of capital, which is installed in these irrigated perimeters, showing its contradictions, who had the capital to invest in the activity to the detriment of those who did not.

It is also important to emphasize that, in the context of agribusiness, the wealth produced in the projects does not return to the local population, which still has no access to food production from the activities practiced in these projects, since this production is aimed at the regional market.

When the lands of the irrigated perimeters are accessed by the local population, they are increased by values related to the flow of production, taken to the markets and which returns in the form of merchandise, brought by local traders who can still purchase the production waste, that is, those products not selected to regional markets. This is the movement of capital. The settlers or any producers inserted in these irrigated perimeters, just follow the dynamics established by the system.

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