

The meanings of Belo Monte in the discourse of social media

Os significados de Belo Monte no discurso das mídias sociais

Los significados de Belo Monte en el discurso de los medios sociales

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Abstract *The aim of this paper is to explore the discursive construction of Belo Monte Plant from the perspective of users and followers of social media on the internet. We seek to understand what image is being constructed by society about motion and arguments through which individuals seek to legitimise their opinions. The approach of this work is developed from the perspective of Discourse Theory proposed by Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe and reception studies in the media of Stuart Hall.*

Keywords: *Discourse Theory; Belo Monte Plant; Social Media*

Resumo *O objetivo central deste artigo é explorar o discurso da construção da Usina Belo Monte sob a ótica dos usuários e seguidores de mídias sociais na internet. Procurou-se entender que imagem está sendo construída pela sociedade sobre esse movimento e através de que argumentos os indivíduos procuram legitimar suas opiniões. A abordagem desse trabalho desenvolve-se na perspectiva da Teoria do Discurso proposta por Ernesto Laclau e Chantal Mouffe e estudos de recepção nos meios de comunicação de Stuart Hall.*

Palavras-chave: *Teoria do Discurso; Usina Belo Monte; Mídias Sociais*

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Resumen *El objetivo central de este trabajo es explorar el discurso de la construcción de Planta Belo Monte desde la perspectiva de los usuarios y seguidores de las redes sociales en Internet. Tratamos de entender lo que la imagen está siendo construida por la sociedad sobre esta moción y los argumentos a través de las cuales los individuos tratan de legitimar sus opiniones. El enfoque de este trabajo se desarrolla desde la perspectiva de la Teoría del Discurso propuesto por Ernesto Laclau y Chantal Mouffe y estudios de recepción en los medios de comunicación de Stuart Hall.*

Palabras-clave: *Teoría del Discurso; Planta Belo Monte; Social Media*

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Presentation

This article analyses the discourses of users and followers of social media on the internet, specifically on sites and blogs with a content relative to environmental problems, concerning their position on the construction of the Belo Monte plant, one of the projects which constitutes the *Programa de Aceleração do Crescimento (PAC) do Governo Federal* [Growth Acceleration Programme (PAC)] of the Federal Government] for the development of the Amazon. The purpose of the project is to build the second largest hydroelectric power plant of Latin America. The intention is to problematise in which way these users approach the issue, because it is the focus of a polemical discussion which has extended over years. The construction of the plant is considered as a polemical issue which divides opinions between those who are against the project or who are cautious – environmentalists and university members – and those who are in favour of the enterprise – government and the companies that are involved in the project.

In 2011 the construction of the Belo Monte Plant became an issue on the social networks after a video linking of the campaign “*Gota d’água*” [Drop of water] which was created by the actor Sérgio Marone and carried out in partnership with various actors of TV Globo. In this campaign, various actors of national fame speak against the construction of the plant, alleging that it is an unviable project, which will prejudice Brazil (www.movimentogotadagua.com.br/). Some days after the video had created a “murmuring” on the social networks, a group of engineering students of Unicamp – Universidade Estadual de Campinas [State University of Campinas – in the State of São Paulo], under the leadership of Professor Sebastião de Amorim made a video entitled “*Tempestade em Copo D’água*” [Tempest in a Glass of Water]. With the same format of the video of the TV Globo’s actors, the students argued in favour of the construction of the plant (www.tempestadeemcopodagua.com/) and criticised the affirmations which had been posted in the anterior video, thus they augmented the debate on the internet even more. The sharing of these videos in the following years generated a moment of discussion

about the positive and negative possibilities of the construction of the Belo Monte Plant, as well as a questioning related to various environmental problems contemporary society is facing. The propagation of these videos cannot be considered as the beginning of the discussions about the topic, but as a form of democratising and broadening the discussions on the social networks on the internet and within society.

The construction of the Belo Monte Plant awakes questionings which derive from the discussion around the environmental problems and the social movements that appeared and continue discussing this problematic. According to Castells (1999), the environmental movement is the most salient of all the social movements which had appeared due to the economic and social changes of the last century. Environmentalism is a movement of fight against a practically global economic logic, which leads to the exhaustion of the environment and abuses the “diversity of its composition and of its forms of manifestation in each country and culture” (CASTELLS, 1999, p. 142).

Castells (1999) still emphasises that much of the success of the environmental movement derives from its evident capacity of adaptation to the communication and mobilisation conditions by means of the new technological paradigm, specifically the media or the social networks. This happens because the social networks already exceeded more than one billion followers in the whole world and, in terms of communication, they reveal themselves as a powerful tool for social communication on all the frameworks of human activity.

The social networks enable people to create and to propagate content and to exercise citizenship. Society is experiencing a change of paradigm on the web. The relationships are not only commercial; today people engage themselves in favour of social changes. An example of this is the signing of petitions online which are used as forms of requiring actions from the public authorities. The sharing of videos, links, protests, manifestoes has never been so intense, as well as the meetings of demonstrations which were planned on the social networks. The social media became fertile frameworks for discussions about various topics which affect society; the environmental activists became great users of the so-

cial networks and propagated ideas and pictures in a surprising velocity, which justifies the relevance of this study.

Knowing that the meanings around the construction of the Belo Monte Plant occur through discourses, it is relevant to understand which image of this movement society is constructing and through which arguments the individuals seek to legitimate their opinions. Thus we intend to characterise the discourse of the users and followers of the social media on the internet about the construction of the Belo Plant by identifying the elements in their constitution, their changes and the meanings which are being constructed around it with regard to its socio-historical context. The approach of this article is being developed from the perspective of the discourse theory Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe propose and of Stuart Hall's reception studies in the means of communication.

Problematising the Belo Monte plant

The hydroelectric power plant of Belo Monte is a project the aim of which is to build a hydroelectric power plant on the margins of the Xingu River, in the Federal State of Pará. The project foresees the construction of a main dam, located 40 km away from the city of Altamira and it will form the Xingu Reservoir. With this reservoir, part of the water will be deviated by a deviation canal of 20 km to another intermediate reservoir and it will cover a total area of 516 km² and it will flood parts of the municipalities of Vitória do Xingu, Brasil Novo and Altamira (NORTE ENERGIA, 2011).

In order to understand this phenomenon, in an abridged way, we present the more outstanding events which mark the degree of tension around the construction of this gigantic enterprise and we will establish a parallel with Laclau's and Mouffe's theoretical perspectives. Thus we succeed in dimensioning the size of the conflict and in crossing the information in order to understand how all these events reflected on society's discourse around the construction (or not) of Belo Monte Plant.

The notion of discourse Laclau and Mouffe developed can be understood as a sequence of elements in a constant renegotiation of its meanings within a set of specific discourses (PINTO, 1999; BARRET, 1994/1999). This occurs because discourse theory understands that all the objects and actions are meanings and their objective is to investigate how the social practices are being constructed (HOWARTH, 2000). From this perspective we can understand the Belo Monte project as a set of social practices which are constructed by means of a constant renegotiation of meanings. The project of the construction of the plant and its process of social articulation are old. It has extended over more than 20 years and it has already gone through various changes and adaptations. The year which marks the beginning of the project is 1975, when studies of the hydroelectric inventory of the hydrographic basin of the Xingu River were carried out. Five years later, in 1980, *Eletronorte – Centrais Eletricas do Norte do Brasil* [Electric Plants of Northern Brazil] started studies of technical and economic viability of the so-called *Complexo Hidrelétrico de Altamira* [Altamira Hydroelectric Complex] (INSTITUTO SOCIOAMBIENTAL [Socio-Environmental Institute], 2011). In 1989 the *1º Encontro dos Povos Indígenas do Xingu* [1st Meeting of the Indigenous Peoples of the Xingu] was organised with the purpose to discuss the impacts of the plant on the indigenous populations; it gathered about 3,000 people (LUNA, 2010).

In 2001, under the government of President Fernando Henrique Cardoso, an emergency plan of R\$ 30 billion was propagated in order to augment the energy offer in Brazil. This plan included the construction of the Belo Monte Plant and another 14 plants all over Brazil. At the same time, in an attempt to accelerate the construction process of the plant, the Federal Justice suspended the *Estudos de Impacto Ambiental* (EIA) [Environmental Impact Studies] of the Belo Monte Plant.

In 2002 they contracted a consulting agency the task of which was to define the way in which the Belo Monte project would be carried out, nonetheless nothing effective was propagated, since the environmentalists' pressure was very strong and it counted on the support of the then presidential candidate Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva, who published a docu-

ment entitled “*o Lugar da Amazônia no Desenvolvimento do Brasil*” [the Place of the Amazon in Brazil’s Development] which emphasised the environmental impacts of the project. This made the work of the consulting agency more difficult and it retarded the planning (LUNA, 2010).

In 2007, the *Tribunal Regional Federal da 1ª Região* [Federal Regional Tribunal of the 1st Region] of Brasília, authorised the participation of the entrepreneurs Camargo Corrêa, Norberto Odebrecht and Andrade Gutierrez in the studies of the environmental impact of the plant (NORTE ENERGIA, 2011). Nonetheless, in 2009, the Federal Justice suspended the licensing again and determined new hearings for Belo Monte. In January 2011 IBAMA – *Instituto Brasileiro do Meio Ambiente* [Brazil’s environment agency] grants Norte Energia a new license, which is valid for 360 days, for the construction of the infrastructure which established the basis for the plant. Due to this license, the year 2011 was marked by various demonstrations which tried to paralyse the progress of the project. Nonetheless, the works are still in progress and they already reached 25,000 workers (LEITE, 2013).

In 2013, Norte Energia revealed that, during the works in the plant, they discovered gold mines in Belo Monte. Nonetheless the company opted to cover the pit of the possible vein with concrete in order to prevent the plant to be delayed because of a probable “gold rush” since Belo Monte is 400 KM away from Serra Pelada and near the *sítio* Pimentel, the place where the largest mine in the open air of Brazil was discovered, Belo Sun (LEITE, 2013). In the same year the Federal Police dismantled a woman trafficking and drug dealing ring in the region of Altamira, the city which was the most affected by the installation of the plant. Sociologists argue that Belo Monte stimulated a disordered population growth (46,000 inhabitants) in the region, without any planning and with a deficient structure, which caused various social problems (LOURENÇO, 2013).

These events can be considered as articulations between those who support the project and those who consider Belo Monte an error and this is what Laclau and Mouffe (1987) call disputes for the hegemony of discourse. By adopting this term, Laclau inaugurates a new logic of the social which will require a strategic movement that is being

constituted by the negotiation between **conflictive discursive bases** (LACLAU, 1990).

Thus Laclau makes us understand that the various discourses around Belo Monte (be it that of the government, of the NGOs, of the riparian and indigenous populations, of the socio-environmentalists or the entrepreneurs' discourse) try to hegemonise themselves in this dispute field. Since we know that the social practices are always discursive, that is to say that there is no discursive nature and a non-discursive nature of a phenomenon; that which exists is a chain of meanings where the social subjects fight in order to establish their truths. Laclau develops his notion of hegemony, via the following analysis categories: discourse, subject, chains of equivalence, practices of articulation, social antagonism, nodal point, empty signifier (LACLAU & MOUFFE, 1985, p. 107).

This way, every social space is a discursive space if we consider “all kind of link between words and actions, that forms significant totalities” as all that which articulates (LACLAU, 2000). According to Laclau and Mouffe (1985, p. 85) the signification process is based upon three main notions: 1) element; 2) moment e; 3) articulation practice. The first is considered as “any difference which is not discursively articulated”. The second, moment, occurs when differentiated positions appear to be articulated in a determined discourse. The third notion, articulation, is any practice which links the elements in such a way that their identities are modified and make the discourse become the totality of this articulation. Thus everything is within the discourse, “it is the primary ground of the constitution of objectivity as such” (LACLAU, 2005, p. 70).

Since everything is in the discourse, the construction of Belo Monte is a discursive field, that is to say, a **moment**, in which **elements**, which were not connected before (government, local population, NGOs, companies) are related in a process of **articulation** and they modify their identities so that they constitute themselves as a totality of this articulation, that is to say, in a discourse.

Thus the discourse is the attempt to dominate the meanings within society. The more privileged points of the discourses, that is to say, the **nodal points** are, at the same time, “targets and results of the hegemonic

fighters that are being fought in a given social formation” (GIORDANI, 2009, p. 6). In this point, Laclau (1985) develops his argument about the logics which involve the construction of the discourse and he inserts two types of logic which are part of this construction: the logic of difference and the logic of equivalence. Laclau (1985) affirms that in order to be equivalent two terms must be different before, because the logic of equivalence sustains itself on the basis of the difference. There is always an incompleteness of meaning which enables the constitution of the discourse. Laclau (2005) calls this incompleteness antagonism.

In the case of Belo Monte the antagonism constitutes itself in the dispute between the elements which are in favour of the construction and those which are against the project. We can say that the discourse “in favour” of Belo Monte has as main **nodal point** the idea of Brazil’s progress or development and, in the discourse of the socio-environmentalists and of the local population that are involved in the Belo Monte case, the **nodal point** of their arguments resides in the environmental and social impact the construction will cause on the sustainability of the planet. These positions are neither static nor immutable, on the contrary, they present themselves as a continuum which approaches a determined position or deviates from it.

Tensions around Belo Monte

The construction of the Belo Monte Plant, as we already mentioned it, has conflictive views. Public scenes of tension and movements of specific groups of society are part of the history of the construction of this project. That is why we consider important to depict some of the main events which marked this enterprise in the course of these 20 years of discussion and to make the questions of antagonism and articulation practices which constitute this discourse clearer.

One of the first events occurred in 1989 during the 1º Encontro dos Povos Indígenas do Xingu, which took place in February, in Altamira (PA). In the guise of protest, the Indian woman Tuíra, leaves the audience and puts the blade of her big knife against the face of the president

of Eletronorte, José Antonio Muniz, who speaks about the construction of the Belo Monte Plant. The scene is reproduced in newspapers and turns to be history. The singer Sting was present at the meeting (LACLAU, 2010). This event demonstrated the dissatisfaction of the indigenous peoples of that region with the construction of the Plant.

In 2008, some Indians wounded an engineer of Eletrobrás during a debate. In the following year, 40 researchers of various Brazilian and foreign universities and research institutes organised a specialist panel which contained social, cultural, economic aspects, aspects linked with health, security, with the education of the local Indians and with the technical and economic viability of the plant. The panel concluded that the construction of the plant is unviable because it presents high social and environmental costs (MAGALHÃES SANTOS & HERNANDEZ, 2009). In the meantime, the governmental organs had divergent opinions about the construction of the plant. In December 2009, the Ministério Público [Public Prosecution Service] of the Federal State of Pará promoted a public hearing with representatives of the Xingu Indians, a fact which would mark their position against the work (FARIELLO, 2010). In the government, the process provoked a discussion between the ex environment minister Marina Silva and President Dilma Rousseff, at that time Chief of Staff (BRITO, 2011). The first is against the construction and the second encourages the project.

The demonstrations of resistance against the plant which had been organised by environmentalists and by common citizens for decades, have gained international repercussion during the past years, mainly due to the proximity of the auction which would define the companies that would be responsible for the construction of the plant. In April 2010, international personalities such as the film director James Cameron and the actors Sigourney Weaver and Joel David Moore participated in a public act against the work (ANDRADE, 2010). In the same month, Greenpeace threw bovine dung at the entrance of ANEEL – Agência Nacional de Energia Elétrica [Brazil's National Electric Energy Agency] (GI, 2010). The demonstrators, wearing masks and bound in chains, held up flags with sentences such as “Brazil needs energy and not Belo Mon-

te”. On the same day, around 500 demonstrators also protested against the work and also in Transamazônica and Sítio Pimental, where the Belo Monte dam will be built (G1, 2010).

Still in 2010 international events against the Belo Monte Plant took place. The book *Memórias de Um Chefe Indígena* [*Memories of an Indian Chief*], written by the Indian Chief Raoni – main indigenous leader of the movement against Belo Monte – with a preface by France’s ex Prime Minister, Jacques Chirac, was launched in Paris. During the ceremony of the book launching, Indian Chief Raoni was received by the French president Nicolas Sarkozy, who demonstrated the position against the construction of the plant of the French authorities. At the same occasion, the Indian chief threatened to kill all the “white” who would construct the dams in Belo Monte (CARDOSO, 2010).

The first month of 2011 was marked by important events around the construction of Belo Monte: the government’s pressure to obtain the license concession and the retirement of the then IBAMA president, Abelardo Bayma, augmented the pressure, so that IBAMA authorised the beginning of the works in Belo Monte and Pimental (NORTE ENERGIA, 2011; IBAMA, 2011). In the same period, twenty associations and Brazilian scientific societies affirmed that they rejected the enterprise in Belo Monte by means of a letter which was handed in to president Dilma (XINGU VIVO, 2011). They also organised a petition with 500,000 signatures of the people in general and of ecologists and Indigenous from the region and the Justiça Federal do Pará [Federal Justice of the State of Pará] annulled the license for the construction of the plant which had been granted by the Ministério Público [Public Prosecution Service] (COSTA, 2011).

Nonetheless, even with all these actions against the construction of the plant, in June 2011 IBAMA reaffirmed the environmental concession which authorised the project, in the same month in which Amnesty International, together with the CIDH (Comissão Interamericana de Direitos Humanos [Inter-American Commission on Human Rights]), required the suspension of the construction of the project and forwarded the request to the United Nations Human Rights Council (FRANCE PRES-

SE/FOLHA DE S. PAULO, 2011). In the attempt to put pressure on the government to give up the project, there was a hearing in Washington (USA) at the end of October, which was convoked by the CIDH about a supposed failure to comply with provisional measures which aim at the protection of the Indigenous populations of Xingu (LIMA, 2011). The denunciations had been forwarded in November 2010 by entities that are linked to the Indians' rights, nevertheless the Federal Government did not turn up; they alleged that they had no definitive representation of Brazil in the OAS – Organisation of American States. On the same day, about 600 people, among them Indigenous, fishermen, and riparian dwellers, occupied the building site of the hydroelectric plant and blocked a section of the Trans-Amazon highway (LIMA, 2011).

These antagonisms and resistances, which are so present in the discourse around Belo Monte, are considered fundamental in Laclau's theory, what the author calls discursivity field. The antagonism is that which enables the formation of the whole identity. "The antagonistic relationship establishes itself to the extent that the presence of the "other" does not allow that the 'I' be completely 'I'" (PINTO, 1999, p. 84). Thus it is possible to say that the mere presence of an "other" prevents the total constitution of an "I", characterising an antagonism.

Since a social identity is always incomplete and susceptible of changes, it is through articulatory practices and through the antagonisms that some discourses stand out and enable hegemonies. The discourse is the articulator of the hegemony and it always seeks a closing (even if provisional) of the meaning. Thus hegemony is an empty concept or argument. An empty identity, in the individuality of which there is a necessary and at the same time unattainable totality (LACLAU, 2005). When a discourse universalises itself to the extent that it is impossible to signify it in an exact way, we can say that this discourse is an empty signifier (MENDONÇA, 2006) and therefore, hegemonic.

The construction of the Belo Monte Plant is an example of a social movement which presents articulations and ideological fights for the hegemony of the signifier. This article analyses the discourse of a group of society on the basis of the discussions about the construction of Belo

Monte Plant, which were held on forums and chats on sites and social networks on the internet.

This discourse is constructed on the basis of the discussions in these means of communication. The users we study here are not only receivers of the news. As Hall teaches Hall (2003) they decode the information and the other discourses of other subjects and form their discourse and chains of equivalence with other discourses. This perspective avoids the traditional communication model which understood communication as a linear process between sender and receiver. In recent times, this model was considered too simple to be able to explain the complexity of the communication process.

Hall (2003) criticises this traditional communication model to the extent that he understands that it is “also possible (and useful) to think this process in terms of a structure which is produced and sustained by means of the articulation of distinct, but interlinked moments; this would be to think the process as a ‘complex structure in dominance’” (HALL, 2003, p. 387).

It is possible to understand that a message is always a message of “appearance” in the form of discourses. It is in this sense that Kellner (2001) considers that media culture is a dominant culture. Where the mediatic content is the “mirror” in which the families and the individuals look at themselves. Within the communication process the codified message is not necessarily identical to the message which is decoded by the receiver. “The encoding and decoding codes can be perfectly symmetrical”. Thus, what we call misunderstanding is actually the *lack of equivalence* between both sides in the communicative exchange (HALL, 2003, p. 391).

Hall (2003) sustains that there is no intelligible discourse without the operation of a code. Some signs are already so disseminated / naturalised within society that it seems that they were not constructed. Since we know that no sign is “natural”, it is easier to detach oneself from the equivocal conception of the linguistic tradition of two well-known terms: denotation and connotation.

According to Hall (2003, p. 395) this distinction between denotation and connotation does not exist. There is only an *analytic* distinction: “It

is useful, in the analysis, because it allows the use of a practical method which distinguishes those aspects of a sign that seem to be considered, in any language community at any time, as its 'literal' meaning (denotation), of the significations which are being generated in association with the sign (connotation)". These terms serve to define the ideology levels in each discourse and in the different contexts.

Hall's criticism (2003) of traditional communication shows us the necessity to overcome this model and to understand communication as a complex process of construction and dispute of meanings. It is through communication that diversity will be able to update itself and to live together, thus transforming social spaces. And it is in this sense that we understand the articulation practices of meanings which are the objects of this article. Communication is the motor for the manifestation of diversity; this is why we must think communication in its broadness. We must overcome the unilateral conception of the informational paradigm and emphasise the relational and participative character of communication. It is in the discussions and participations that the discourse of Belo Monte constitutes itself in the intense process of the encoding and decoding of signs and codes which are produced and reproduced by the media.

According to the example of the way in which a modern paradigm must be overcome is the advent of new communication forms and technologies, which revolutionised the way in which people communicate, consume and produce content. Contemporary society experiences the phenomenon of the so-called social networks or social media which have characteristics that distance them from traditional media such as the radio, TV or the newspaper. In these media there is the possibility to create and to share data which generate contents and information at almost zero cost (before this activity was restricted to big communication groups). Nowadays, through the tools of social media, any person can publish contents in the most different formats.

Besides this, the social media depend on the interaction between people, which enables the construction of shared contents having technology as main connecting thread. This is why we chose social media to compose the corpus of this research to the detriment of other media

such as newspapers or TV, because of the possibility of the construction and interaction of contents reader/constructor in real time (CASTELLS, 1999; VIEIRA & NUNES, 2012).

Methodological strategies

In order to achieve the objective, the analysis of the phenomenon was carried out by means of Discourse Analysis (DA) (MINAYO, 2000) which aims at examining a broad variety of empiric materials and information that use Laclau and Mouffe's (1985) Discourse Theory (DT) we presented above as key concepts to understand the phenomenon. We took as observation phenomenon comments in forums and discussion chats on the internet. The period we analysed goes from January 2010 to December 2011. This cutting was given, mainly because it is the period which coincides with the resuming of the discussions about the construction of the plant and because of the fact that it presents a large number of interactions of the users and their interest in discussing the issue. This is why during this period the sources we analysed contained a significant number of reports and debates about the topic of the construction of Belo Monte Plant.

For the construction of the corpus we should select the blogs and sites which represent an important number and content and which provide diversity in their profiles; significant individuals' frequency and assiduity in the discussions about the topic. Assiduity in the discussions is not sufficient, but the number of posts about the analysed object is important. Thus, if we summarise the criteria we quoted, we also took into consideration the number of posts about the events around Belo Monte and the number of comments on the pages. Therefore we would have a material of great reach and representation to be analysed. After a minute research, we organised our corpus with two blogs and one site, representatives of an appropriate research corpus.

The first corresponds to a non-profit site, which discusses the environmental problems of the planet with the objective to contribute to the increase of environmental awareness in Brazil (<http://www.problema->

sambientais.com.br). The second is a blog which discusses the specific environmental and social problems of the Amazon (<http://blogdaamazonia.blog.terra.com.br>). The last, entitled “Blog do Sakamoto” [Sakamoto’s blog], is a blog which discusses the “hot” issues that are being discussed in society. Diversified topics, daily problems, which generate polemic within society, are being discussed (<http://blogdosakamoto.uol.com.br>), besides the official sites of the “Drop of water” and “Tempest in a Water Glass” campaigns (www.movimentogotadagua.com.br/) (www.tempestadeemcopodagua.com/).

Once we had defined the research corpus, we began the analytic process, which allowed us to identify the enunciations which demonstrate the opinion in a clear way. We thoroughly read the comments we divided them into frames and selected keywords for our analyses. We enhanced the words with different colours, in order to develop some hypotheses. In this process, we also tented to respect the chronological sequence of the comments in order to avoid the loss of the line of reasoning of the discussion. Thus, each comment, which was enhanced, became a selected passage which was transcribed for further analysis.

After we had read and enhanced the words in the comments, we read the same comments again with the objective to exploit the individuals’ speeches and to identify in the discourse about the construction of the Belo Monte Plant the main categories of Laclau and Mouffe’s Discourse Theory (1985). We considered that this rereading enabled a familiarity on the basis of which it was possible to identify which information the discourse provided us about the object.

From the site “Problemas Ambientais” [Environmental Problems] we collected 106 comments, from the “Blog da Amazônia” [Amazon Blog], 162 and from the “Blog do Sakamoto” [Sakamoto’s Blog], 108. When we summarise these comments, they correspond to a total of 376 opinions. This material, together with the information of the blogs, formed a data book of 153 pages with single space, font Times New Roman, size 12, which we do not make available here for reasons of space. But they contain all the comments in full text together with the study of the material. Look at some frames with comments about the research object:

End. Eletrônico, Title of the Post, Year	Comment: 1) Element. 2) meaning (nodal points). 3) the subject's position. 4) equivalence chain. 5) differences. 6) moment	Study
<p>http://www.problemasambientais.com.br Environmental problems: Hydroelectric plant of Belo Monte 11 comments 2010</p>	<p>Cristina {3.18.10 to 10:16} It is difficult to understand why there is so much propaganda in the defence of the environment (1) if what we actually more see is the government, (1) that is destroying it and deceiving the population (1) that accepts everything in the name of “national progress” (2).</p>	<p>Articulation of signification elements against the construction of Belo Monte.</p>
<p>http://www.problemasambientais.com.br Environmental problems: Hydroelectric plant of Belo Monte 11 comments 2010</p>	<p>Gaby {9.25.10 at 11:28} There are so may other means to get energy (2)!!!! it's absurd!! There are so many idiot demonstrations (marijuana march, gay parade...) (4) why do we not get organised and make one against this hydroelectric plant which affects a thousand families (1), which had destroyed the fauna and the flora (1)!sacrifices, environmental disaster, death (2)! in order to provide our civilized and consumerist people (3) with energy (1) so that they can go on consuming and consuming!!!!!!</p>	<p>Logic of the equivalence, mobilisation which is equivalent to social movements. Alternative energy generation, the families of the place, the destruction of the fauna and of the flora are elements which are being articulated in the “moment” construction of Belo Monte in the attempt to signify it as the destruction and death of nature and to make the discourse against the plant become a discursive hegemony.</p>

In the first column, there are the e-mails of the blog, the title of the post which generated the comments and the year. The column of the middle contains the comments. The third column serves to study the comments.

The constitution of differential positions about Belo Monte plant and its quest for hegemony

In the analysis, which is based upon Laclau's work, the subject resists and interacts in the processes that constitute the social relationships and within this movement he articulates himself and transforms himself, thus creating new ways of viewing the world. In this entanglement of relationships the meanings are being negotiated in a hegemony process which transforms itself and permanently creates and recreates itself.

We observe five points of resistance and of fight for hegemony: the discourse of the State, the discourse of the companies, the discourse of the NGOs and of the environmentalist groups, the discourse of the local populations (riparian and indigenous, the government of the Federal State) and the discourse of the users and followers of the social media on the internet. The last one, which is the object of our analysis, to some extent articulates meanings which are near to those of the three first points. Particularly in the discourse of the users and followers of the social media on the internet we observe two points of the fight for hegemony: there are those who are in favour of the construction of the plant because they understand the project as fundamental for Brazil's development and those who are against the enterprise because, according to them, the construction of the plant signifies a project which damages the natural and social environment of the region. Thus these discourses evidence an antagonistic position, but which has the capacity to move. In the interaction/influence of the different discourses (State, companies, NGOs, environmentalist groups and local populations) which are presented in the media, the discourse of the users and followers of these social media on the internet articulate connected meanings around the object Belo Monte.

The presence of the “other”, for those who support the construction of the Belo Monte Plant, can be considered as a situation of full meaning construction, which is not completed, since it conveys the limits of its objectivity in its form and prevents a full and final constitution, that is to say, an ultimate generalising meaning.

These discourses “in favour of” and “against”, which constitute the discourse of the Belo Monte Plant, present chains of equivalence and of difference in their structures, which constitute and differentiate them. The discourse of those who are in favour of the construction of the plant presents itself as an articulating mechanism in favour of the meaning that the Belo Monte Plant is necessary for Brazil’s progress and to meet the population’s demand for energy (meaning which is equivalent to the government’s and to the entrepreneurs’ discourse). This discourse (here understood as the totality of the articulatory practices) disputes space with the discourse of those who are against the construction of the plant, which is shared by NGOs and environmentalist groups and also by the local governments (such as the Government and the Justice Tribunal of the State of Pará). These discourses are articulatory practices which attempt to fix meanings around the object Belo Monte Plant, which, on its turn, is part of a chain of signification that seeks nodal points in order to fix itself. In this case, they fight in order to establish truths and try to eliminate other meanings from the discursive field and form equivalences between different elements.

Mendonça (2006, p. 6) affirms that nodal points are “where different identities converge, which were not organised between each other before”. In the antagonistic relationship, if we take Laclau e Mouffe’s analytic conception, it is possible to perceive the moments in which the **nodal points** and the establishment of the articulatory practice about this thematic appear. The main nodal points we found in the discourse about the plant which allows the crossing of the favourable and unfavourable discourses to the construction of Belo Monte are hope and/or the preoccupation with “**the future**” (9, 10, 42, 65, 82, 92, 124, 130, 131,

167, 186, 250, 285, 296, 348, 420, 444, 459, 485, 503, 531, 546, 577, 588)³. Brazil's future is considered a point where the elements of the discourse meet. Another point are the possible “**environmental impacts**” (5, 11, 39, 62, 65, 99, 290, 483) which will be caused by the construction. They are presented as the main nodal points of the discourse.

Other signification points can be seen in those who are in favour of the construction of the plant and signify Belo Monte as the beginning of a “national progress” (1), “Brazil's progress” (7), “a better future” for Brazil (9), “a miracle which will transform the region” (20). Whereas those who are against the construction, signify Belo Monte as “sacrifices, environmental disaster, death” (4) a “white elephant” (5, 20), “crime against nature” (5), “buffoonery” (10), causing “environmental impacts” (11, 21), a “retrogression of nature” (18), “absurd” (19, 21, 20), “ethnocide and genocide” of indigenous and riparian populations (21, 33), “the white man's gigantic ambition” (31).

As we said it before, the process of signification is based upon three main notions: 1) element; 2) moment e; 3) articulatory practice. The discourse constitutes itself in the exact moment in which it is possible to institute an articulation between all these different moments; it establishes equivalence relations, with regard to the “other”, the inimical discourse on an antagonistic frontier. The discourse intends to organise that which was dispersed and isolated.

Therefore it is possible to say that the two discursive positions, when they are confronted, have different contents and establish antagonistic relationships about the same subject. Thus in the articulatory practices which were sparked off by civil society, the object is the same: the Belo Monte Plant. But although they are equivalent, they are not the same, because they have antagonistic meanings fixed around the object, which characterise their differences. That it is to say that even those whose discourse is in favour of the construction of the plant move into

³ Each number in parenthesis corresponds to a comment, in which appears the topic which is considered as the nodal point of the discourse, according to its order in the analysis frame which constitutes the data agenda with all the analysed comments.

this position for different reasons or meanings. Their discourses are not identical, but positions evidence the idea of the myth of progress, as we can see it in the ironic comment in the answer to the opinions against Belo Monte:

Excellent, so we will all live without electricity, sewerage, and canalised water. We will live again in the caverns or in the *ocas* [an open-sided thatched Indian construction] in the middle of the jungle. Or, construct more highly polluting coal-or-oil-fired thermal power plants... (273)

In spite of the environmental impacts, the construction of the Belo Monte Plant is very important for Brazil. In order to sustain the economic growth and to reduce the social gap in Brazil. (290)

The same thing occurs with the discourse of those who are against the construction of the plant:

The government does not have any sensibility, what we all want is the percentage of 10%. Well, we have the largest hydroelectric plant of the world, which is the Tucuruí plant and we pay the highest electricity bill of Brazil, who is benefiting from it are other regions, because according to many people the North is only the energy generator. (26)

Besides being expensive, it does not bring so many benefits! Don't they see the impacts that are emerging? (27)

...actually, these projects serve only and exclusively as an electoral corral of these corrupt politicians. (30)

In the passages we quoted we evidenced the individuals' opinions about the plant and, in this way, we presented the articulated meanings we intend to fix. As far as this point is concerned, the discourse of those who are in favour of Belo Monte defends the project as necessary to meet Brazil's energy demand and to enable the economic growth and to avoid foreign taxations (faith in progress). Those, who are against the project, propose resistance and a new way of understanding the enterprise as a project which causes damages to nature and to the indigenous population (social rescue/preservation of nature).

As we said it before, Laclau affirms that the antagonism between terms is the condition of the possibility for the constitution of every identity. In the case of this analysis, the articulatory practices around the construction of the Belo Monte Plant and its antagonisms are the essential conditions for the appearance of hegemony. It is by means of the hegemonic practices that the debates via discourse constitute themselves, they are spaces “where the social agents emerge as subjects who are conscientious of their role in history” (GIORDANI, 2009, p. 12).

As Laclau affirms it, the discourse is the structured totality which results from the articulatory practices. Thus we must indicate the moment and the element which constitute the meanings in the discourse. The discourse about the Belo Monte Plant articulates elements and aims at fixing meanings: progress X preservation of nature; Forest X Plant; Indians X invaders; riparian dwellers X entrepreneurs; government X local population; *fazendeiros* [a person who owns or occupies a *fazenda*, an estate or large farm] X Indians; development X stagnation; foreigners X Brazilians; people X State; rich people X poor people. These are some elements which convert themselves into moments within the discourse about the construction of the hydroelectric plant. These elements appear in moments of the discourse via equivalence relations in the process of interaction and antagonistic disputes about the meanings around the object. The dispute over the meanings, which occur in this social field, configures the equivalence chain around the Belo Monte Plant. We remind the reader that these meanings are always passing between the meaning poles in quest for fixation and hegemony.

The confrontation of these opposed discourses within a broad field, which the discussion around the project of Belo Monte is, presents its unstable limits within an antagonistic relationship, where it is possible to identify the appearance of hegemony. According to Laclau, to hegemonise content would be “to fix its signification around a nodal point, the social field can be viewed as a trench warfare in which different political projects intent to articulate around themselves a larger number of social meanings” (LACLAU, 1990, p. 28).

To acquire this hegemonic character is exactly to fill an empty space with its discursive content. It is possible to say that Belo Monte is an empty signifier. The discourse in favour of Belo Monte and the discourse against the plant have their particularities. But, at the same time, they share “something” in common, **Brazil’s future**. The discourses of both sides tend to acquire a general character, a meaning which transmits the unity idea which would be Brazil’s development, but which also presents signs of precariousness and contingency, the question of the necessity to preserve the environment and Brazil’s technological and economic.

Some considerations

On the basis of the notions of the discourse Laclau and Mouffe propose, we discussed the subject in the attempt to perceive the social relationships, which are dialogic. Since we know that the topic exists, society and the discourses which circulate and that these discourse concomitantly interact by means of the articulating practices, we can understand that it is exactly this movement which attributes meanings and continuously re-signify them. The existence of the project Belo Monte Plant points out that subjects emerge and position themselves and seek to hegemonise their values by means of their discourses. In the case of the analysis of this article two discursive identities are evident in the discourse of the media users, two discursive identities, one is in favour of the plant, which is common to the discourse of the Federal Government and of the companies which are involved in it and another one is against the project, which is common to the discourse of national and international NGOs and of local entities (of the State of Pará).

This opinion duality in the discourse is replete with questionings and claims, which leads us to discuss the not very democratic way in which the project is being led, the cost-benefit relationship of the work, the destiny of the energy which must be produced and the existence of an energy policy for Brazil. More than this, the discussions end up limiting themselves to a dualistic, polarised and, very often, Machiavellian logic of good against evil.

This project constitutes itself as an empty meaning which represents a diversity of things: progress, good and evil “Brazil’s future” and within this unity there are differences, as Laclau (1990) taught us; they constitute this hegemony: the destruction of nature, the loss of the Amazon in favour of international organisations, the disregard towards indigenous and riparian populations, the demonstration of the national elites’ power, an imposition of opportunist governments, progress, the need for energy provision, etc.

Thus having as a basis Laclau’s (1990, 2000, 2005) and Laclau’s and Mouffe’s understandings (1985), this article understood discourse as a space of constant dialogues, where the social subjects are permanently fighting for hegemony. In the discourse of the social media about Belo Monte we analysed there are voices which try to hegemonise their positions with regard to the project. We can consider that the discourse about the Belo Monte Plant is divided into two main battlefronts, in a duality, in a fight for hegemony. Although the construction of the plant is progressing, society does not demonstrate evident consensus with regard to the project. They are divided opinions which are influenced by occasional discourses of NGOs, governments, companies and local entities, but which have a main nodal point: the future. An open and democratic dialogue is necessary between all the subjects of the discourse so that we can evolve from this binary thought “We X They”. Society must be informed so that they can act in the discursive fields in a more efficient and conscious way. This duality also shows that none of the discourses presents an effectively clear proposal to resolve the questions and problems which involve the construction of the Belo Monte Plant. The discourse in favour of the construction, based upon the idea of Brazil’s progress as well as the discourse against the construction of the plant – which in a general way does not take into consideration the needs for electric energy that is required – do not provide satisfactory proposals which consider all the dimensions of an enterprise such as the Belo Monte Plant. How is it possible to think about the Belo Monte Plant in an economic, social and environmental viable way?

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