

## CÂNDIDO MARIANO DA SILVA RONDON AND THE POLITICS OF INDIAN PROTECTION IN BRAZIL

The development of central state policies governing relations with indigenous peoples continues to attract scholarly attention.<sup>1</sup> This interest is due partly to ongoing clashes and massacres in places such as Brazil, and partly to indigenous peoples' attempts to assert their rights and identities vis-à-vis national governments.<sup>2</sup> Continuing scholarly attention also derives from what the comparative study of central state policies towards indigenes can tell us about the histories of nation states in places such as the United States, Canada and Australia.<sup>3</sup> This article contributes to the literature by examining the policies of Brazilian central state officials when confronting newly 'contacted' peoples at the turn of the twentieth century. It does so by evaluating the thoughts and actions of one representative of the Brazilian state: Cândido Mariano da Silva Rondon.

Any educated Brazilian today knows of Rondon and his career, but writings on him in English are surprisingly sparse.<sup>4</sup> Born in

<sup>1</sup> Seth Garfield, *Indigenous Struggle at the Heart of Brazil: State Policy, Frontier Expansion, and the Xavante Indians, 1937–1988* (Durham, NC, 2001); David Wallace Adams, *Education for Extinction: American Indians and the Boarding School Experience, 1875–1928* (Lawrence, 1995). The author wishes to thank Bruce Wheeler and Joel Wolfe for their helpful comments on an earlier version of this article.

<sup>2</sup> Both the acts of violence and Indian resistance are examined in Jonathan W. Warren, *Racial Revolution: Antiracism and Indian Resurgence in Brazil* (Durham, NC, 2001).

<sup>3</sup> Richard J. Perry, *From Time Immemorial: Indigenous Peoples and State Systems* (Austin, 1996). For Latin America, see Greg Urban and Joel Sherzer (eds.), *Nation States and Indians in Latin America* (Austin, 1991). Throughout this article I will use the terms 'Indian' and 'indigene' interchangeably. As Alcida Ramos notes, the generic term 'Indian' has been reappropriated for use by indigenous peoples in Brazil today. Indigene is employed to avoid the repetitious use of only one term. Alcida Rita Ramos, *Indigenism: Ethnic Politics in Brazil* (Madison, 1998), 5–6.

<sup>4</sup> Dirceu Viana Júnior, 'A aventura do herói da selva', *O Globo*, 5 Jan. 1997, 1–2 (2nd section). The most famous work in English is Theodore Roosevelt, *Into the Brazilian Wilderness* (New York, 1916). For brief examinations of Rondon, see Hal Langfur, 'Myths of Pacification: Brazilian Frontier Settlement and the Subjugation of the Bororo Indians', *Jl Social Hist.*, xxxii (1999); Antonio Carlos de Souza Lima, 'On Indigenism and Nationality in Brazil', in Urban and Sherzer, *Nation States and Indians in Latin America*; see also Mércio P. Gomes, *The Indians and Brazil*, trans. John W. Moon (Gainesville, 2000).

the far western state of Mato Grosso in 1865, Rondon descended on his mother's side from the Terena and Bororo peoples. After playing a small role, as a young army officer, in the declaration of the Republic in 1890, he spent the next thirty years constructing telegraph lines across Mato Grosso and the Amazon Basin. Incredibly, at the age of sixty-two he began, in 1927, an arduous three-year inspection and survey of Brazil's international boundaries, during which he covered forty thousand kilometres (much of it on foot and in canoes), and travelled from Argentina to present-day Surinam. After retirement in 1930 he led a very active public life until his death, at the age of ninety-two, in 1958.<sup>5</sup>

Rondon is best known to English-speaking audiences as the man who guided Theodore Roosevelt down Brazil's River of Doubt in 1914. Brazilians remember him as the founder and first director of the Indian Protection Service (1910), as the chief architect of the government's policies with respect to Indians, and especially for the guiding tenet of his indigenist policy: 'To die if necessary; to kill, never'. Schools, avenues and high-rise buildings bear his name in Brazil, as does the state of Rondônia.<sup>6</sup>

Rondon began public service just as the issue of how to administer indigenous peoples and their lands, a central preoccupation during the colonial era, re-emerged in Brazil during the last quarter of the nineteenth century.<sup>7</sup> The dramatic growth of world trade, and Brazil's increasing participation in that trade as a supplier of agricultural products, meant the expansion of export agriculture into lands located deeper in the interior. The occupation of new spaces produced new conflicts with indigenous peoples, as landowners sought both land and labour to fuel Brazil's agricultural boom.<sup>8</sup> In the wake of these developments

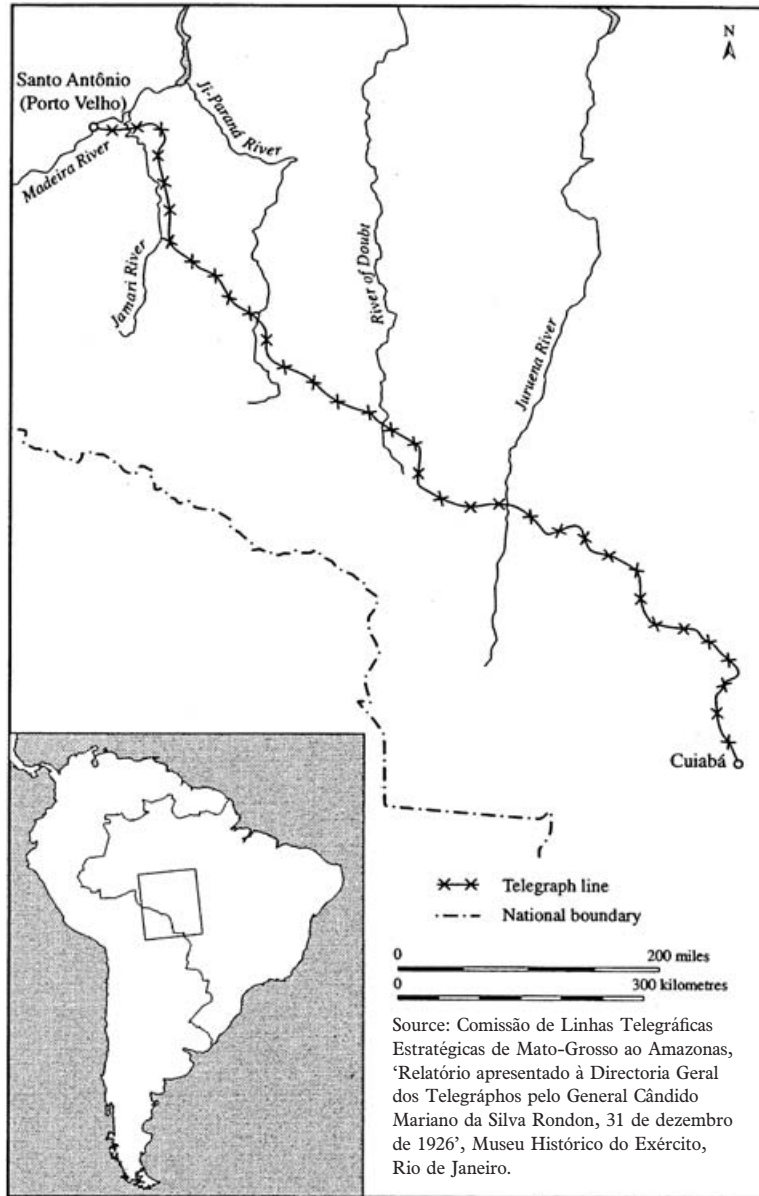
<sup>5</sup> Esther de Viveiros, *Rondon conta a sua vida* (Rio de Janeiro, 1958), 18, 28, 61–4, 505–74; Gen. F. Jaguaribe de Mattos, *Rondon merecia o Prêmio Nobel de Paz* (Rio de Janeiro, 1958), 12–13; Neill Macaulay, *The Prestes Column: Revolution in Brazil* (New York, 1974), 64.

<sup>6</sup> 'Morrer, se necessário; matar, nunca': Viveiros, *Rondon conta a sua vida*, 621; Joseph R. Ornig, *My Last Chance To Be a Boy: Theodore Roosevelt's South American Expedition of 1913–1914* (Mechanicsburg, 1994).

<sup>7</sup> Viveiros, *Rondon conta a sua vida*, 621; Robin M. Wright and Manuela Carneiro da Cunha, 'Destruction, Resistance, and Transformation: Southern, Coastal, and Northern Brazil (1580–1890)', in Frank Salomon and Stuart B. Schwartz (eds.), *The Cambridge History of the Native Peoples of the Americas*, iii, *South America* (New York, 1999), pt 2.

<sup>8</sup> Langfur, 'Myths of Pacification'; Emilia Viotti da Costa, 'Brazil: The Age of Reform, 1870–1889', in Leslie Bethell (ed.), *The Cambridge History of Latin America*,

(cont. on p. 160)



RONDON COMMISSION: CUIABÁ – SANTO ANTÔNIO TELEGRAPH

Brazilian authorities placed renewed emphasis on the incorporation of faraway lands and peoples. Incorporation meant the assertion of central state authority over the vast Brazilian interior, especially the sparsely populated areas near international borders. It also meant something less concrete, but ultimately more important: the transformation of indigenous peoples into 'Brazilians' as defined by white, coastal-dwelling politicians and thinkers.<sup>9</sup>

This article dissects one extended effort to assert central state authority in the interior, and especially to bring indigenes within the Brazilian 'nation'. However, the scholar reviewing Portuguese-language sources on the indigenist policies of Cândido Mariano da Silva Rondon immediately faces a divide, or indeed a chasm, between a vast hagiographic literature on one side, and a rapidly expanding revisionist *œuvre* on the other. Binary opposites such as humane/exploitative, protection/conquest, and enlightened/barbaric confront each other like pieces on a chessboard. It is, indeed, as if each side was describing a completely different individual. On the one hand, Rondon is portrayed as a forward thinker, a man ahead of his time, a leader who deserved the Nobel Prize for his efforts to improve Indian-white relations in Brazil during the first decades of the twentieth century. On the other, he is seen as a man bent on the extermination of indigenes, and a man who, despite his sophisticated use of a humane discourse, was little different from the slave hunters who preyed on Indians during the colonial era.<sup>10</sup>

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v, c.1870–1930 (Cambridge, 1986); Joe Foweraker, *The Struggle for Land: A Political Economy of the Pioneer Frontier* (Cambridge and New York, 1981), 41, 47, 55–7, 59–60, 62; Sílvia Coelho dos Santos, *Índios e brancos no sul do Brasil* (Florianópolis, 1973).

<sup>9</sup> This is a primary theme in Antonio Carlos de Souza Lima, *Um grande cerco de paz: poder tutelar, indianidade e formação do Estado no Brasil* (Vozes, 1995).

<sup>10</sup> For the hagiography, see, for example, V. Benício da Silva and Firmino Lages Castello Branco, *Rondon: civilizador do sertão* (Rio de Janeiro, 1952); Amílcar Botelho de Magalhães, *A obra ciclópica do General Rondon* (Rio de Janeiro, 1956); Jaguaribe de Mattos, *Rondon merecia o Prêmio Nobel de Paz*; Edgar Roquette-Pinto, *Rondônia*, 4th edn (São Paulo, 1938); Edgar Coutinho, *Rondon: o civilizador da última fronteira* (São Paulo, 1975); Darcy Ribeiro, *A política indigenista brasileira* (Rio de Janeiro, 1962). The revisionists would add Darcy Ribeiro, *Os índios e a civilização: a integração das populações indígenas no Brasil moderno* (São Paulo, 1996) to this list, although doing so simplifies his argument. For the revisionist literature, see n. 52 below. Alcida Ramos defines indigenism (indigenist policies) as the state project of incorporation of Indians, plus 'popular and learned imagery': Ramos, *Indigenism*, 6. For more on what is meant by the term 'indigenist policies', see Lima, *Um grande cerco de paz*, 12–15.

Wide as the chasm is between the two schools of thought, one thing nevertheless unites them to an extent; though it does not, unfortunately, help us to a clearer understanding of Rondon's work. Both the hagiography and the revisionist literature are united by the failure to present and explain adequately the theoretical underpinning of Rondon's policies: positivism. To be sure, everyone mentions positivism, and indeed it would be impossible not to mention it, given its importance for understanding Rondon. And yet in both literatures we see, almost without exception, very short (one- to three-paragraph) descriptions of positivism and the positivist plan for Indian-white relations in Brazil.<sup>11</sup>

My aim is to explore in depth both the positivist programme for Indian-white relations, and Rondon's attempt to implement that programme as commander of the army unit charged with building a telegraph line across the south-western edge of the Amazon between 1906 and 1915. This examination demonstrates that the revisionist literature fails to capture the complexities and ambiguities of Rondon's positivism, thus hampering its welcomed, yet exaggerated, correction of the existing hagiography. In addition, this article goes beyond the tendency in both literatures to rely on a few, highly selective citations of Rondon's public pronouncements and published sources when examining and evaluating his work. Instead, it is informed by a far broader and deeper range of sources, including unpublished letters, diaries, army records and newspaper accounts. The result is a better understanding of the historical context of Rondon's policies, and a more solid bridge across the interpretative chasm.

In conclusion, this re-evaluation identifies the ultimate and most damaging contradiction in Rondon's indigenist thought: his belief that he could 'protect' Indians while at the same time

<sup>11</sup> See, for example, Ribeiro, *Os índios e a civilização*, 154–5; Ribeiro, *A política indigenista brasileira*, 17–18; Ramos, *Indigenism*, 80; Shelton H. Davis, *Victims of the Miracle: Development and the Indians of Brazil* (Cambridge and New York, 1977), 2; Seth Garfield, "Civilized but Discontent": The Xavante Indians and Government Policy in Brazil, 1937–88' (Yale Univ. Ph.D. thesis, 1996), 45–6. Hal Langfur never mentions positivism when discussing Rondon and his policies in 'Myths of Pacification'. Lima avoids any direct presentation of positivism in *Um grande cerco de paz*, but does refer to it at various points in his book. At first glance another work by Lima seems to be an analysis of positivism. However, it is instead a Pierre Bourdieu-inspired meditation on the relationship between the biographer and her/his subject, and very little specific information about positivism is presented. Antonio Carlos de Souza Lima, 'O santo soldado: pacificador, bandeirante, amansador de índios, civilizador dos sertões, apóstolo da Humanidade: uma leitura de Rondon conta a sua vida de Esther de Viveiros', *Comunicação*, xxi (1990).

fomenting development in their homelands in north-west Brazil. The examples of Rondon and Brazil, in the end, provide important evidence for continuing attempts to assess and compare central state policies towards indigenes at the turn of the twentieth century. They will also help us to a better understanding of the problems and challenges of state–indigene relations at the turn of the twenty-first century.

## I

### POSITIVISM AND INDIAN POLICY

Cândido Mariano da Silva Rondon was a positivist. He was a member of Rio's Positivist Church, and positivism, as we shall see, permeated his writings throughout his lifetime. As developed by Auguste Comte in the early nineteenth century, positivism, and what later became known as the 'religion of humanity', identified laws governing nature and society. Positivist doctrine argued that humanity passed through three evolutionary stages: the theological, the metaphysical, and the positivist (or scientific). A learned elite would guide the rest of society, since such an elite could properly identify and understand the laws governing nature and society.<sup>12</sup>

Brazilian positivist leaders, especially Raimundo Teixeira Mendes, and even Rondon himself, turned to their doctrine when developing a plan to govern relations with indigenes. In a series of letters to the editors of newspapers, which were then reprinted in a series of pamphlets and annual reports, Teixeira Mendes presented an Indian policy based on protection and acculturation. He drew from Comte's writings on Africa, in which the French thinker argued that Africans lived in the 'fetishistic age' of social development, which he (Comte) considered to be the original human condition.<sup>13</sup>

<sup>12</sup> Celso Castro, *Os militares e a República* (Rio de Janeiro, 1995), 54, 63–8; João Cruz Costa, *A History of Ideas in Brazil*, trans. Suzette Macedo (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1964), 112, 117, 141–2, 163; Charles A. Hale, 'Political and Social Ideas in Latin America, 1870–1930', in Leslie Bethell (ed.), *The Cambridge History of Latin America*, iv, c.1870–1930 (Cambridge, 1986); Simon Collier, 'Positivism', *Encyclopedia of Latin American History and Culture*, 5 vols. (New York, 1996), iv, 457–8; José Murilo de Carvalho, *A formação das almas* (São Paulo, 1990); Ivan Lins, *História do Positivismo no Brasil* (São Paulo, 1964); João Cruz Costa, *O Positivismo na República* (São Paulo, 1956).

<sup>13</sup> Raimundo Teixeira Mendes, *O sientismo e a defeza dos indígenas brasileiros (a proposito do artigo do Dr. Hermann von Ihering — 'Exterminio do indígenas ou dos*

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Teixeira Mendes believed that the scientific study of civilizations demonstrated that the correct strategy was to establish peaceful relations with Indians, and then to wait for their social evolution. Protection of indigenes, especially the protection of their lands, was thus the first positivist policy. 'No human being', he wrote, 'can deny that it is the savages [*selvagens*] who are the rightful owners of the lands they occupy, with titles every bit as valid as those that any western nation could invoke'.<sup>14</sup> Indeed, he wrote elsewhere, indigenous groups should be recognized as sovereign nations, with that term, *nações livres*, being underlined in the original. Usurped lands should be returned, or, where this was impossible, new lands should be given to the inhabitants of these indigenous nations. He further argued that Indians had every right to resist incursions onto their lands. And he noted wryly that the armed defence of these lands could hardly be considered a crime, for '[n]o one considers the Spanish and Portuguese as being criminals for having expelled the Arabs from the Iberian peninsula'.<sup>15</sup>

As suggested above, protection would allow for the implementation of the second part of the positivist policy: acculturation (or 'the civilizing process' as positivists sometimes called it). This 'civilizing' of indigenes would consist of 'elevating' them from their current fetishistic stage to the 'scientific-industrial' stage of positivism. Teixeira Mendes further argued that, with positivist tutelage, indigenes could bypass the theocratic stage, which, he said, was anarchic and in the process of extinction.<sup>16</sup> Acculturation, which in positivist terminology would lead to the evolution of indigenous society, was to be gradual, non-violent,

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*sertanejos?*' — publicado no 'Jornal do Comércio' de 15 de dezembro corrente) (Rio de Janeiro, 1908), 1, 5; Raimundo Teixeira Mendes, *Em defesa dos selvagens Brasileiros* (Rio de Janeiro, 1910), 4; Raimundo Teixeira Mendes (Vice Director da Igreja e Apostolado Positivista do Brasil), 'Igreja e Apostolado Positivista do Brasil', *Jornal do Comércio*, 22 June 1913.

<sup>14</sup> Teixeira Mendes, *Em defesa dos selvagens Brasileiros*, 11. Unless otherwise noted all translations are my own.

<sup>15</sup> Raimundo Teixeira Mendes, *Ainda os indígenas do Brasil e a política moderna* (Rio de Janeiro, 1908), 8; Teixeira Mendes, 'Igreja e Apostolado Positivista do Brasil'; Teixeira Mendes, *Em defesa dos selvagens Brasileiros*, 10–14. The quotation is from p. 13. Elsewhere Teixeira Mendes criticized the Brazilian government for favouring the interests of immigrants over Indians: Teixeira Mendes, *O sientismo e a defesa dos indígenas brasileiros*, 3–4.

<sup>16</sup> Teixeira Mendes, *Ainda os indígenas do Brasil e a política moderna*, 7; José M. Gagliardi, *O indígena e a República* (São Paulo, 1989), 176–7; Ribeiro, *A política indigenista brasileira*, 17–18, 26.

non-coercive, and encouraged only via demonstration and example. Teixeira Mendes wrote that the fruits of science and industry ‘would demonstrate to the savages [*selvagens*] the grandiose power of the West . . . it will amaze them and convince them of the benefits Humanity possesses’.<sup>17</sup> Positivists trumpeted social evolution because Comte wrote of the impossibility of revolutionary change. Thus, what positivists believed to be the highest form of civilization — positivism — had to be adopted by the free will of indigenes (*livre aceitação*), otherwise one would not know if the evolutionary process had truly transpired, or if force had merely created the illusion of change.<sup>18</sup>

Given these beliefs, Teixeira Mendes and other Brazilian positivists firmly opposed past and current efforts to convert indigenes to Christianity forcibly. They objected to forced conversion partly because it violated the evolutionary laws of nature. As one positivist put it as late as 1966 in a letter to the then Brazilian President Castelo Branco, Christian missionaries ‘seek to break with the normal course of evolution, forcing [upon indigenes] a monotheism and sedentary lifestyle that is inconsistent with their cultural development’. This abrupt transformation, he continued, degraded Indians.<sup>19</sup> Furthermore, positivists opposed Christian, and especially Catholic, missionaries because they represented an evolutionary stage, the ‘theological’ stage, that positivists believed was near extinction. For Teixeira Mendes it made no sense to force Indians to abandon their beliefs ‘in favour of a faith

<sup>17</sup> Teixeira Mendes, *Ainda os indígenas do Brasil e a política moderna*, 13; Raimundo Teixeira Mendes, *A influência positivista no atual Serviço de Proteção dos Índios e Localização de Trabalhadores Nacionais* (Rio de Janeiro, 1912), 9; Ribeiro, *A política indigenista brasileira*, 26.

<sup>18</sup> Castro, *Os militares e a República*, 64; Teixeira Mendes, *A influência positivista*, 2; Teixeira Mendes, ‘Igreja e Apostolado Positivista do Brasil’; Ribeiro, *Os índios e a civilização*, 160–1.

<sup>19</sup> ‘Carta, Ruyter Demaria Boiteux, Diretor-secretário do Clube Positivista, ao Exmo. Sr. Presidente da República Marechal Humberto Castelo Branco, 8 de Homero de 178 (5 de fevereiro de 1966)’: Museu do Índio, Rio de Janeiro (hereafter MI), SPI-AC, doc. 212, film 381, (microfilm) frame 476; Teixeira Mendes, ‘Igreja e Apostolado Positivista do Brasil’. As Rondon’s friend and colleague Amílcar Botelho de Magalhães put it, forced conversion violated nature’s evolutionary laws, and thus ‘represent[ed] jumps that Nature doesn’t accept’, for positivist sociology maintains that ‘one shouldn’t intervene in, nor abolish the rituals used by tribes, but instead should allow them [Indians] to evolve gradually via regular contact with civilized people’: Botelho de Magalhães, *A obra ciclópica do General Rondon*, 22; see also Ribeiro, *A política indigenista brasileira*, 26.

[Christianity] in which we no longer believe and which is in the process of dissolution'.<sup>20</sup>

In summary, Brazilian positivists argued for the protection of indigenes and the defence of their lands, and taught that indigenes were not racially inferior, but merely living in a different (earlier) stage of social evolution. 'All men are brothers regardless of their race', Teixeira Mendes argued in 1910. In 1911 he noted that positivists 'recognize the universal fraternity of man . . . regardless of all distinctions based on family, class, nationality, race or religion'. Rondon himself stressed Comte's belief that under positivist rule distinctions based on race would disappear. He further noted that 'the best anthropological studies prove the shared identity of the human races', and celebrated 'the defeat of brutal racist theories as a victory for the greatest engineers of social progress'.<sup>21</sup>

Positivists sought to transform indigenes gradually into 'Westerners' and, more specifically, positivists, by exposing them to what they considered to be the 'obvious' benefits of modern industry and society. Meanwhile, the positivists argued, indigenes should be allowed to continue to practise their own religions, speak their own languages and follow existing customs. Perhaps Lieutenant Severo dos Santos, who served under Rondon, best summarized this highly paternalistic programme when introducing Rondon at a 1915 public lecture in Rio de Janeiro. Speaking to Rondon, the young officer proclaimed:

your mission was inspired by scientific faith based on the unchangeable laws of positive sociology, which shows us the various people of the earth, from the most primitive . . . up to the most enlightened . . . as being fundamentally constituted of the same organic elements . . . [and] . . . this being the case, what we have to do is not exterminate the Indian, in the same way that one does not exterminate a child: one educates [him], that is to say that we must lift [him] up to the level in which we live ourselves, peacefully and humanely placing within his reach the improvements of which we may dispose.<sup>22</sup>

<sup>20</sup> Teixeira Mendes, 'Igreja e Apostolado Positivista do Brasil'.

<sup>21</sup> Teixeira Mendes, *Em defesa dos selvagens Brasileiros*, 17; Teixeira Mendes, *A influência positivista*, 9; Viveiros, *Rondon conta a sua vida*, 328. In one publication Rondon cited Comte's call for miscegenation — 'The growing combination of races will give us, under the direction of the [positivist] sacred priesthood, the most precious of all perfections . . . [and man] will thus become even more capable of thinking, acting, and even loving': Cândido Mariano da Silva Rondon, *A etnografia e a etnologia no Brasil em revista* (Rio de Janeiro, 1946), 10.

<sup>22</sup> Comissão de Linhas Telegráficas Estratégicas de Matto Grosso ao Amazonas (hereafter CLTEMTA), *Conferências de 1915: versão inglês da publicação no. 42 por R. G. Reidy e Ed Murray* (Rio de Janeiro, 1916), p. xvi. For a similar summary, see

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## II

## RONDON'S INDIAN POLICY IN WORDS

In public lectures, private correspondence and lectures to the troops serving under him, Cândido Mariano da Silva Rondon tirelessly promoted both positivism and the positivist Indian policy. In fact, he helped develop the latter, drawing on his experiences of constructing telegraph lines in Mato Grosso. In both word and deed Rondon constantly and consistently stressed protection (including Indian land rights), acculturation and the superiority of positivism and positivist policies toward indigenes.

In public lectures Rondon relentlessly pressed his agenda, especially when important public officials were present in the audience. In three highly publicized and well-attended lectures given in Rio de Janeiro in 1915 Rondon addressed the President and Vice-President of Brazil, along with key government ministers and foreign officials (he had already given a similar series of lectures in Rio and São Paulo in 1910). In typical fashion Rondon the positivist began the first lecture praising Comte and positivism (and Comte's 'religion of humanity'), as if to preach to the gathered officials, most of whom were Catholic. Much of the content of the three lectures was devoted to lengthy, emotional stories condemning the past and current treatment of Indians in Brazil, and the power of his policies to rectify this abuse.<sup>23</sup>

In private correspondence with public officials Rondon likewise pressed his agenda. In 1910 he wrote to the Minister of Agriculture, Rodolfo Nogueira da Rocha Miranda, accepting the latter's invitation to become the first director of Brazil's Indian Protection Service (SPI). In a long letter Rondon presented the positivist blueprint for regulating relations with indigenous peoples. That he was presenting the positivist plan is beyond doubt, for he noted that: 'As a positivist and member of the Positivist Church of Brazil, I am convinced that our indigenes should incorporate themselves into the West without passing

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Luis Bueno Horta Barbosa, *O problema indígena no Brasil (conferência realizada no Atheneu de Montevideo, a 1º de abril de 1925)*, 2nd edn (Rio de Janeiro, 1947), 19–20. Luis Bueno Horta Barbosa was a positivist, a friend and associate of Rondon, and served as director of the Indian Protection Service (SPI).

<sup>23</sup> CLTEMTA, *Conferencias de 1915: versão inglês*, 4–5, 45–50, 167–80, 192–5, 204–8, 222–33, 249–53, 260–70. For more examples, see CLTEMTA, *Conferencias realizadas em 1910 no Rio de Janeiro e em São Paulo pelo Tenente-Coronel Cândido Mariano da Silva Rondon* (Rio de Janeiro, 1922).

through the “theological” stage [of human evolution], which they will do as soon as positivism has triumphed sufficiently [in Brazil]’.<sup>24</sup>

Outlining the policies he would pursue as director of the SPI, Rondon stressed the protection of indigenes against attack, their right to guaranteed titles to the lands they occupied, and the need to restore lands previously usurped by whites. The heart of the letter outlines Rondon’s, and the positivists’, plan for acculturation based on example, not force. This gradual process, he noted, would respect the internal organization of indigenous communities, ‘relying only on fraternal and peaceful demonstrations [of Western manners], while always respecting the will of those consulted’.<sup>25</sup>

Rondon also stressed positivism and his positivist Indian policy while commanding the Fifth Engineering Battalion’s construction of telegraph lines in Mato Grosso. He preached positivism and the workings of his Indian policy in lectures to troops on Brazilian and positivist holidays. During the decades of telegraph construction Rondon spoke on these matters on all such holidays. For example, in August 1912 Rondon celebrated the anniversary of the promulgation of the Brazilian Constitution with a speech at the José Bonifácio telegraph station. In the speech he praised his telegraph commission’s efforts vis-à-vis indigenes, and stressed the need to incorporate ‘tribes into modern society’ peacefully. Earlier that year, on the positivist ‘Day of Humanity’ (1 January), Rondon delivered a lengthy address, reprinted as an ‘Ordem do

<sup>24</sup> ‘Carta, Tenente-Coronel Cândido Mariano da Silva Rondon ao Cidadão Dr. Rodolpho Miranda, Ministro de Agricultura, Indústria, e Comércio, Rio de Janeiro, 14 de março de 1910’, repr. in Ministério da Agricultura, Indústria e Comércio, *Relatório apresentado ao Presidente da República dos Estados Unidos do Brasil pelo Ministro de Estado da Agricultura, Indústria e Comércio, Rodolpho Nogueira da Rocha Miranda no anno de 1910*, ii (Rio de Janeiro, 1910), 8. This letter is also reprinted in Teixeira Mendes, *Em defesa dos selvagens Brasileiros*.

<sup>25</sup> Ministério da Agricultura, *Relatório . . . 1910*, ii, 10. This is but one of many examples of how Rondon ‘taught’ positivism to public officials. See also [hand-delivered letter?], Tenente-Coronel Rondon [ao Ministro da Agricultura], 19 de maio de 1910’, repr. *ibid.*, 37; Rondon, ‘Ofícios de Sr. General Cândido Mariano da Silva Rondon, apresentando sugestões pedidos pelo Ministro das Relações Exteriores, em memorandam, 11 de abril de 1932’: MI, SPI-AG-Cx13, doc. 2, film 1, frames 3423–32; Rondon, ‘Carta (sem data [1937]) . . . ao Presidente Getúlio Vargas’: MI, SPI-AG-Cx13, doc. 12, film 1, frames 3777–81; Rondon, ‘Carta . . . ao Sr. Dr. Manoel Neto Campelo Junior, Ministro da Agricultura, Rio de Janeiro, 7 de junho de 1946’: MI, SPI-AC, doc. 145, film 380, frames 274–82.

Dia' (agenda), celebrating Comte, positivism and the acculturation of indigenes, among other things. In honour of the positivist holiday he then freed all soldiers currently incarcerated in the camp stockade.<sup>26</sup>

Rondon is best remembered in Brazil as the first director of the Indian Protection Service, a post he held for some five years. In those years he devoted much energy and attention to the SPI, but his was largely a directorship *in absentia*, because at that time he was more involved with efforts to build a telegraph line across north-west Mato Grosso (today the state of Rondônia). Indeed, since 1890 Rondon had spent most of his time in Mato Grosso engaged in telegraph construction. Thus, while many authors have examined at length the SPI and Rondon's term as its director, it is also important to look at his development and implementation of an Indian policy while in the field. The records of the 'Rondon Commission', responsible for the building of telegraph lines in the Brazilian north-west, provide extensive testament to these efforts, and allow the historian to present and evaluate Rondon's policies and actions.<sup>27</sup>

Rondon and the positivists emphasized the need to protect Indians. This meant, first and foremost, the protection of Indian

<sup>26</sup> Rondon, 'Ordem do Dia, no. 15, 15 de agosto de 1912': MI, SPI-AC, film 326, frame 1308; Arquivo Rondon, Forte de Copacabana, Rio de Janeiro (hereafter AR), Ten. Cel. Rondon, 'Ordem do Dia, no. 1, 1 de janeiro de 1912 [handwritten copy]'. Note that the materials in the Arquivo Rondon are not catalogued, and have not yet been organized in any fashion — hence the brevity of the citation. For further examples, see Rondon, 'Ordem do Dia, no. 77, 24 de fevereiro de 1908': MI, SPI-AC, film 326, frame 800; Rondon, 'Ordem do Dia, 7 de setembro de 1909', repr. in CLTEMTA, *Relatório à Directoria Geral dos Telégraphos e à Divisão Geral de Engenharia (G. 5) do Departamento da Guerra pelo Coronel Cândido Mariano da Silva Rondon*, i (Rio de Janeiro, 1913), 253–4; Rondon, 'Ordem do Dia, no. 1, 1 de janeiro de 1915': MI, SPI-AC, film 326, frames 1331–6; Rondon, 'Ordem do Dia, no. 2, 23 de maio de 1913': MI, SPI-AC, film 326, frames 1314–15. In this 'Ordem do Dia', Rondon praises the efforts of two of his officers in establishing peaceful contacts with members of the Nambikuára nation. In addition to speeches made to troops on holidays, Rondon did the same at telegraph station inaugurations. See, for example, Rondon, 'Ordem do Dia, 13 de junho de 1912', repr. in CLTEMTA, *Relatório apresentado à Divisão de Engenharia (G. 5) do Departamento da Guerra e à Directoria Geral dos Telégrafos pelo coronel Cândido Mariano da Silva Rondon*, iii (Rio de Janeiro, 1915), 28–9.

<sup>27</sup> For recent works that examine the SPI and not the Rondon telegraph commission, see Lima, *Um grande cerco de paz*; Gagliardi, *O indígena e a República*. A recent study of the Rondon Commission largely ignores Rondon's Indian policy: Laura Antunes Maciel, 'A nação por um fio: caminhos, práticas e imagens da "Comissão Rondon"' (Pontifical Univ., São Paulo, Ph.D. thesis, 1997). The official title of the Rondon Commission was 'Comissão de Linhas Telegráficas Estratégicas de Mato-Grosso ao Amazonas (CLTEMTA)', although in most documents and in public it was referred to as the Rondon Commission.

landholdings. Hence, even in a mundane Commission document that seemingly had nothing to do with Indians or his Indian policy, Rondon nevertheless stressed that policy. In 1910 he issued instructions to create a new unit for building a road from the Commission warehouse at Tapirapoan to the vanguard of telegraph construction at Juruena. Filled with numerous articles defining construction types and procedures, the instructions also included, in Article IX, orders to protect Indian holdings, and to convince rubber tappers operating in the region to do the same. Likewise, in a letter to the Minister of Agriculture that had nothing to do with Indian landholdings, Rondon nevertheless took advantage of the communication to insist that 'Indian holdings must be respected, especially given that "civilizados" have violently invaded them for years'.<sup>28</sup>

Rondon's defence of indigenous lands was often combined with a second theme of protection: protection of indigenes from invasions, attacks and local landowner attempts to force Indians to labour against their will on area properties. Given that Rondon operated in north-west Brazil at the beginning of the twentieth century, this meant in particular the need to intervene against the owners of rubber estates and against rubber tappers. This 1909 telegram, reprinted in the *Jornal do Comércio*, is typical: he blasted 'the inhumane tappers who burn Indian villages and assassinate the legitimate owners of the land [Indians], robbing them of their tranquillity and destroying their legitimate traditions'.<sup>29</sup>

### III

#### RONDON'S INDIAN POLICY IN ACTION

Throughout a career in Mato Grosso lasting nearly forty years (1891–1930), Rondon consistently denounced the abuse of Indians. He condemned the seizure of indigenous lands, and he pleaded with local and state officials to do something about it, although most of his interventions were unsuccessful. In October 1904 Rondon was supervising the construction of telegraph lines

<sup>28</sup> Rondon, 'Ordem do Dia, no. [?], 4 de novembro de 1910': MI, SPI-AC, film 326, frame 1265. Rondon, 'Carta . . . ao Sr. Dr. Manoel Neto Campelo Junior, Ministro da Agricultura, Rio de Janeiro, 7 de junho de 1946': MI, SPI-AC, doc. 145, film 380, frame 279.

<sup>29</sup> 'Telegrama, Cândido Mariano da Silva Rondon ao Sr. Dr. João Batista de Lacerda, Director do Museu Nacional, 4 de fevereiro de 1909', repr. in *Jornal do Comércio*, 11 Feb. 1909, 2.

in what is today the state of Mato Grosso do Sul. Angered by the massacre of members of what is now known as the Ofaié nation, Rondon spoke to José Alves Ribeiro, owner of the Fazenda Tobôco, the landowner who allegedly ordered the attack. Ribeiro responded with what Rondon termed an 'evasive' letter; more attacks followed, and so Rondon sent an angry telegram to the governor of Mato Grosso requesting that state troops be sent to protect the Ofaié. But little was accomplished, for Rondon's report on the incident ends with the comment that 'in spite of the governor's favourable attitude, more killings occurred six months later, and were carried out by the same individuals'.<sup>30</sup>

Interventions on behalf of indigenes, as well as Rondon's general inability to enforce his will, can also be seen in a case from 1910. Near Rosário, in northern Mato Grosso, people described as belonging to the Cajabis (Kayabi) nation attacked and killed the labour contractor known as Manoel Velho. Explaining matters to Miranda, the Minister of Agriculture, Rondon noted that rubber tappers in Velho's employ had been attacking the Kayabi for some time, and that Velho's death was an act of retaliation. 'I can assure you', Rondon wrote, 'that Indians never attack without a reason; they attack for no other reason than to defend themselves against treason and falsehoods'.<sup>31</sup>

The murder of Manoel Velho generated calls for an armed expedition against the Kayabi. Rondon telegraphed Miranda, asking him to intercede on the Indians' behalf with the governor of Mato Grosso. Miranda telegraphed the governor, but the result was not the desired one: the governor had already authorized local landowners to contract hired guns (*jagunços*) at the state's expense. Two months later a telegram from another Commission officer confirmed the result: Alexandre Adder, the owner of a rubber estate near Rosário, had hired twenty-six men, who had attacked Indians along the Arinos River. They had destroyed villages, killed 'many people' and kidnapped several children. At this point the documentation ends with an exasperated Rondon telling the Minister of Agriculture that he would soon be meeting

<sup>30</sup> CLTEMTA, *Relatório dos trabalhos realizados de 1900–1906 pelo major de Eng. Cândido Mariano da Silva Rondon*, iv–v (Rio de Janeiro, 1946), 62. The report on this incident is presented on pp. 49–62.

<sup>31</sup> 'Telegrama, Tenente-Coronel Cândido Mariano da Silva Rondon ao Exmo. Sr. Ministro da Agricultura, Friburgo, 25 de abril de 1910', repr. in Ministério da Agricultura, *Relatório . . . 1910*, ii, 29.

the governor of Mato Grosso to press for the return of the kidnapped children.<sup>32</sup>

The Rondon Commission's inability to intervene successfully on behalf of indigenes is not surprising given the size and constant movement of its personnel. Never numbering more than 350–500 soldiers and officers, the Commission was often divided into units and subunits and then distributed throughout Mato Grosso, which was at that time larger than any South American country with the exception of Argentina.<sup>33</sup> Furthermore, Commission members were always on the move, especially during the most intense era of telegraph construction (1906–15). Commission officers and soldiers simply were not concentrated in any one location for more than a few weeks, or at most a few months, at a time.

The radically decentralized political system of the Old Republic further narrowed the prospects for successful intervention with local potentates. After the overthrow of the centralized monarchy in 1889, state residents now elected their own governors and legislators. They maintained their own militias, which often rivalled federal garrisons in troop strength and materiel. Furthermore, the federal government was unwilling, and often unable, to take action against private interests operating within the states, as the above examples from Mato Grosso vividly demonstrate. A decentralized system with a weak federal government and strong states' rights combined with the isolation of northern Mato Grosso to limit the power of federal agents such as Rondon.<sup>34</sup>

Moreover, we should not assume that his soldiers shared Rondon's vision of Indian relations, and thus that they actively supported his policies and actions. In fact, the opposite appears to have been true. Most of the common soldiers in the Brazilian army at this time were poor, uneducated citizens pressed into

<sup>32</sup> 'Telegrama, 1º Tenente Nicolau Bueno Horta Barbosa ao . . . Rondon', repr. in 'Telegrama, Tenente-Coronel Rondon ao Sr. Ministro da Agricultura, 20 de junho de 1910', repr. in Ministério da Agricultura, *Relatório . . . 1910*, ii, 38. For his part Nicolau Bueno Horta Barbosa complained that reports of these attacks had appeared in the local press, but that the governor had done nothing to stop the violence.

<sup>33</sup> Garfield, "Civilized but Discontent", 218.

<sup>34</sup> Thomas E. Skidmore, *Brazil: Five Centuries of Change* (Oxford, 1999), 75, 88, 105–7. For a brief review of the issue of decentralization in the Old Republic, see Todd A. Diacon, 'Bringing the Countryside Back In: A Case Study in State Building in the Brazilian Old Republic', *Jl Latin Amer. Studies*, xxvii (1995). For a delightful and now classic examination of local landowner power during the Old Republic, see Eul Soo Pang, *Bahia in the First Brazilian Republic* (Gainesville, 1979).

service against their will. The same was true for many of the soldiers of the Fifth Engineering Battalion. Rondon admitted to the use of corporal punishment on them, and at one point even faced an official investigation into the treatment of his troops.<sup>35</sup>

Ever fearful of the attitudes of his subordinates, Rondon explained and ordered the implementation of his policy of non-violent relations with indigenes in lectures to his soldiers, in orders to his officers and in official reports. In a speech to troops gathered for the inauguration of the José Bonifácio telegraph station in 1912, Rondon emphasized the past exploitation of Indians and the need to make amends, while condemning the *bandeirantes*, the colonial-era explorers and slavers, for their barbaric campaigns against indigenes. He continued:

Now . . . it is we who are the invaders, but this time we are inspired by the principles of Justice that a new civilization [positivism] has inculcated in us. We feel profoundly the weight of our historic errors, understanding that the time has arrived to atone for our past sins.<sup>36</sup>

Rondon warned his troops of possible attacks by the Nambikuára people on the eve of a historic expedition across north-west Mato Grosso in 1908. 'Even if we are wounded by the warriors of the Juruena [river]', he told them, 'absolutely no reprisal against our attackers will be allowed'.<sup>37</sup> Later in his report on the expedition Rondon noted that his troops found it hard to accept his orders. 'This theory contrasted with the bellicose sentiments of our soldiers . . . for whom Indians were but ferocious animals that should be attacked'.<sup>38</sup>

Another example of Rondon's efforts to control his troops appears in the orders he left with two of his officers before leaving on an extended trip in 1912. To them he conferred 'the protection of the Tribal Families that periodically visit us along the [telegraph] line'. Then, in the same orders, he warned against improper behaviour towards indigenes and especially women,

<sup>35</sup> Conselho Nacional de Proteção aos Índios, 'Fé de Ofício . . . Rondon', 3-4: MI, CNPI-AG, Cx5; Viveiros, *Rondon conta sua vida*, 112-13. For a social history of soldiers in this period, see Peter M. Beattie, 'Transforming Enlisted Army Service in Brazil, 1864-1940: Penal Servitude versus Conscriptio and Changing Conceptions of Honor, Race and Nation' (Univ. of Miami Ph.D. thesis, 1994).

<sup>36</sup> Rondon, 'Ordem do Dia, no. 12, 13 de junho de 1912': MI, SPI-AC, film 326, frame 1302; Ribeiro, *Os índios e a civilização*, 139.

<sup>37</sup> Rondon, 'Ordem do Dia, no. 1, 20 de julho de 1908', repr. in CLTEMTA, *Relatório à Directoria Geral*, i, 76.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, 88.

saying that 'from each functionary I expect the purest sentiments of patriotism and chivalry, and that each soldier will defend Indian women, and their pure innocence, from the gross masculinity and brutality [of men]'.<sup>39</sup>

Rondon often explained Indian attacks against telegraph station personnel as legitimate reprisals against those who had engaged in improper behaviour and thus violated Commission rules. Over the years members of the Nambikuára nation launched several lethal strikes against stations built in what is today the border region between the states of Rondônia and Mato Grosso. In April 1919 one such raid at the Juruena station killed two telegraph employees. As Rondon later explained, the attack was in response to the earlier actions of one of the men. Antônio Pereira was crossing the Juruena River in a canoe with two Nambikuára passengers when one of the passengers demanded a piece of Pereira's plug tobacco. He refused, the men argued, and Pereira pushed them out of the canoe and into the river. Days later Pereira and his colleague were dead.<sup>40</sup>

Less than two years later members of the Nambikuára nation killed two more Commission employees in a gruesome attack near the Juruena telegraph station: following a gathering of vultures above the forest, a search party discovered the smashed skulls and dismembered bodies of Raul Avila de Araujo and Vicente Paulinho da Silva. So many of their body parts were heaped together that the search party buried them together in a common grave.<sup>41</sup> After conducting an extensive inquiry Captain Alencarliense Fernandes da Costa concluded that the Nambikuára were not to blame for the attack. It was, he noted in his report, a legitimate response to the improper actions of the station personnel, who for some time had been visiting the nearby Nambikuára village in search of women. In the aftermath of this attack Rondon energetically repeated his orders that Commission

<sup>39</sup> Rondon, 'Ordem do Dia, no. 15, 15 de agosto de 1912': MI, SPI-AC, film 326, frame 1310.

<sup>40</sup> AR, CLTEMTA, 'Relatório apresentado à Directoria Geral dos Telégraphos pelo General Cândido Mariano da Silva Rondon, 31 de dezembro de 1926', 88–91. For examples of other attacks, see CLTEMTA, 'Relação dos Civis falecidos na Comissão de Linhas Telegráficas Estratégicas do Matto-Grosso ao Amazonas (desde 1906 a 1919)': MI, CRCx3, film 1, frames 2554–9.

<sup>41</sup> Capitão Alencarliense Fernandes da Costa, 'Inquerito Administrativo, 20 de janeiro de 1921': MI, CRCx3, film 1, frames 2718–48.

personnel were to avoid Indian settlements, and he reminded officers that they could enter such places only with his personal permission.<sup>42</sup>

Apart from their largely unsuccessful attempts at protection, Rondon and his officers also worked to implement the core of his Indian policy: the 'attraction' of indigenes and their gradual acculturation. Rondon had developed his 'attraction' strategy over time, beginning first in the 1890s while serving in Mato Grosso under Major Antônio Ernesto Gomes Carneiro. His efforts to 'attract' indigenous populations evolved into the practice of leaving presents, the gradual establishment of contacts, and a strict policy of non-violence and avoidance of conflicts. While there is now no doubt that Rondon exaggerated the number of nations he 'pacified', no one doubts that he was the first to establish peaceful relations with the Nambikuára.<sup>43</sup>

The Nambikuára occupied the lands Rondon crossed when building the most important part of his telegraph network — the line between Cuiabá and Santo Antônio do Madeira (now Porto Velho). Few whites lived in the region; there were no roads, and no maps of the area. For seven years (1908–15) the Commission explored, surveyed and mapped these lands, and then built the line across the territory. At the same time Rondon and his officers set about establishing peaceful relations with the Nambikuára.<sup>44</sup> The process involved leaving presents of machetes, thread, cloth, matches and other items along indigenous hunting trails. At one point Rondon even left a painting that depicted a peaceful encounter between members of the Commission and the Nambikuára, one that showed his men receiving indigenes with open arms. Gradually Rondon, who taught himself the language

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*; CLTEMTA, 'Fallecidos em 10/XII/1920': MI, CRCx3, film 1, frame 2548; 'Telegrama, RONDON ao Snr. Capitão Alencarliense, 2 janeiro, 1921, Vilhena. Urgente. S. Lourenço', repr. in Capitão Fernandes da Costa, 'Inquerito Administrativo': MI, CRCx3, film 1, frame 2719.

<sup>43</sup> For a list of seven nations Rondon claimed he 'pacified', see AR, CLTEMTA, 'Relatório . . . 31 de dezembro de 1926', 83–6; see also Langfur, 'Myths of Pacification'; Lima, *Um grande cerco de paz*, 166; Maciel, 'A nação por um fio', 115; Gagliardi, *O indígena e a República*, 165–6; Ribeiro, *Os índios e a civilização*, 172–6; Elias dos Santos Bigio, *Cândido Rondon: a integração nacional* (Rio de Janeiro, 2000), 7; Viveiros, *Rondon conta sua vida*, 61–85.

<sup>44</sup> David Price estimates a Nambikuára population of five thousand in 1900: David Price, 'Nambiquara Society' (Univ. of Chicago Ph.D. thesis, 1972), 84. For his description of the lands occupied by the Nambikuára, see 50–8.

of the Nambikuára, began to visit villages, and invite residents to Commission camps.<sup>45</sup>

Attempts to acculturate indigenes occupied much of the Commission's time and budget. In accordance with Rondon's positivist beliefs, the emphasis was on respecting indigene social organization and cultural practices, and on respecting the use of indigenous languages, even while introducing various Western practices. Acculturation essentially meant transforming indigenes into Brazilians. It meant turning them into small farmers, and especially cattle ranchers, since Rondon felt that ranching was particularly appropriate for existing indigene communal lifestyle. It meant supplying indigenes with modern tools and agricultural machinery, and encouraging the construction of houses with internal walls as opposed to one-room huts.<sup>46</sup>

Rondon sometimes speculated as to how long the acculturation process would take. Turning hunters and gatherers into farmers would not take long, he opined, given that indigenes would soon voluntarily adopt the use of Western tools and Western agricultural practices. However, he argued that the evolution of their social activities and beliefs, including religion, would take much longer, and at one point he mentioned that a hundred years might pass (he also talks of 'several generations') before indigenes abandoned their religions. As a positivist he expected indigenes to bypass monotheism on their way to the 'scientific' (or positivist) stage of social evolution. And again, force could not be used to speed the process, for to do so would violate the 'laws of nature'

<sup>45</sup> Tenente Coronel Cândido Mariano da Silva Rondon, *Conferências realizadas em 1910 no Rio de Janeiro e São Paulo* (Rio de Janeiro, 1922), 35, 47; Roquette-Pinto, *Rondônia*, 111; AR, Cândido Mariano da Silva Rondon, 'Dados históricos da pacificação dos Nambiquaras', handwritten report, n.d. For another example of Commission attraction efforts, see Joaquim Gondin, 'A pacificação dos Parintintins': AR, unpublished MS, 1925; CLTEMTA, *Conferências de 1915: versão inglês*, 167–80, 184–9, 194, 205–8; Rondon, 'Ordem do Dia, no. 2, 23 de maio de 1913': MI, SPI-AC, film 326, frame 1314; Price, 'Nambiquara Society'; Gagliardi, *O indígena e a República*, 147.

<sup>46</sup> Rondon, 'Carta . . . ao Getúlio Vargas', n.d. [1937]: MI, SPI-AG-Cx13, doc. 12, film 1, frames 3779–80; Rondon(?), 'Instruções internas . . . 1910': MI, SPI-AC, doc. 34, films 380, 722, 739–40; Rondon, 'Instruções para uso . . . 31 de outubro de 1910': MI, SPI-AC, doc. 31, film 380, frames 673–7; 'Telegrama, Tenente Coronel Rondon ao Dr. Pedro de Toledo, [1911]', repr. in *Correio da Manhã*, 22 June 1911; CLTEMTA, *Conferências de 1915: versão inglês*, 208; 'A catequese no Brasil', *Correio da Manhã*, 12 Apr. 1913; Garfield, "'Civilized but Discontent'", 47–8; Ribeiro, *A política indigenista brasileira*, 26.

and would be reminiscent of the practices of those caught in the theological stage.<sup>47</sup>

The Commission established and operated two *núcleos*, or residential posts, to implement Rondon's acculturation policy. Interestingly, although Rondon thought such *núcleos* should be established on lands indigenes already occupied, these two posts were inhabited by members of the Paresí nation whom Rondon moved from northern Goiás and Mato Grosso to along the telegraph line in north-west Mato Grosso. The *núcleos* operated next to the telegraph stations at Ponte de Pedra and at Utiariti.<sup>48</sup>

Usually around a hundred Paresí lived in each post between the years 1912 and 1927 (the only years for which information on them has been found). Children (both boys and girls) attended

<sup>47</sup> 'Carta, Tenente-Coronel Rondon ao Ministro da Agricultura, 14 de março de 1910', repr. in Teixeira Mendes, *Em defesa dos selvagens Brasileiros*, 21–7; 'A catequese no Brasil', *Correio da Manhã*, 12 Apr. 1913; 'Integrando o Índio na civilização: uma entrevista com General Rondon', *O Paiz*, 20 May 1926. In a speech given in Rio de Janeiro in 1940 Rondon noted that: 'Given that the incorporation of the Indian must follow certain scientific laws

1. we must not remove the Indian from his environment, as we all know the disastrous impact this produces;
2. we must not force [them] to labour in ways that would alter their tribal organization;
3. we should create in them, by providing useful items, the need for new necessities;
4. [we should] induce them, without coercion, to accept work that agrees with them, and provide them with the funds necessary to purchase their new necessities;
5. [we should] present them, through free and adequate education, with new horizons, taking pains to select the most appropriate [Indians] to serve as guides for the others;
6. [we should] keep in mind the communal nature of these societies when encouraging them to engage in certain kinds of labour . . . and because of this [communal nature] we should oppose any attempt to divide Indian lands into separate holdings [lots]'.

In the same lecture he then went on to encourage the federal government to purchase Indian agricultural production, to teach them about the market, and eventually to incorporate them into the market. General Rondon, *Rumo ao Oeste: Conferência realizada pelo General Rondon no D.I.P. em 3-IX-40 e discursos do Dr. Ivan Lins e do General Rondon, pronunciados na Associação Brasileira de Educação* (Rio de Janeiro, 1942), 30–1. In the secondary literature the only mention of the extended time it would take to achieve acculturation under Rondon's policies is in Garfield, '“Civilized but Discontent”', 182.

<sup>48</sup> Rondon, 'Instruções para uso . . . 31 de outubro de 1910': MI, SPI-AC, doc. 31, film 380, frames 673, 676; Rondon, 'Instruções internas . . . 1910': MI, SPI-AC, doc. 34, film 380, frames 739–40; Miranda, 'Regulamento . . . 20 de junho de 1910', repr. in Ministério da Agricultura, *Relatório . . . 1910*, ii, 47. According to Ribeiro, Rondon justified this move by claiming that the Paresí were already threatened fatally by rubber tappers, so that his decision to move them to other lands was a protective measure: Ribeiro, *Os índios e a civilização*, 137.

classes taught by the wife of the station telegrapher, in which they learned reading, writing and arithmetic. In addition, boys learned shoe repair and telegraph skills, while girls received instruction in sewing and crochet. Children of both sexes also practised callisthenics, or 'Swedish gymnastics' as Rondon called them.<sup>49</sup> Several of the boys went on to become Commission telegraphers, maintenance workers and line inspectors. Their parents, meanwhile, learned to cultivate crops using seeds and tools provided by the Commission, so that in 1927, for example, the Paresí living at Utiariti produced 165 litres of beans, 7,366 litres of corn, 26,087 litres of manioc flour and 1,550 kilos of sugar. Both adults and children were also taught to be 'good Brazilians'. This meant learning the Brazilian national anthem and other patriotic songs, which they sang particularly during daily flag raising and lowering ceremonies.<sup>50</sup>

In 1910, with the establishment of the Brazilian Indian Protection Service, Rondon's Indian pacification techniques became the official policy of the federal government. His ideas and policies then shaped and directed government-Indian relations for at least the next four decades. They earned him great fame in Brazil and abroad, and he basked in the praise of geographers and anthropologists. 'Rondon' and 'Indian policy' quickly became synonymous in Brazil. Even today discussions of

<sup>49</sup> This discussion is based on the following sources: AR, Capitão Alencarliense Fernandes da Costa, 'Relatório do 27º Distrito Telegráfico, compreendendo os annos de 1915, 1916, 1917, 1918, 1919 e o primeiro semestre do 1920 apresentado a Chefia da Comissão', vol. 1 [n.d.], 3; AR, CLTEMTA, 'Relatório apresentado à Directoria da Repartição Geral dos Telégraphos pelo General Cândido Mariano da Silva Rondon, Chefe da Comissão, 31 de julho de 1928', 26-8; AR, CLTEMTA, 'Relatório . . . 31 de dezembro de 1926', 62-5; AR, Capitão Alencarliense Fernandes da Costa, 'Relatório da Inspeção Geral do Distrito [27], 1920-1921, apresentado à Chefia da Comissão, 19 de dezembro de 1921', 33-7; 'Relatório da inspeção feita de Diamantino a Vilhena e o Diário a partir da cabeceira do Tamanduá até Calama do rio Madeira: apresentado ao Cidadão Coronel Cândido da Silva Rondon, Chefe da Comissão pelo 1º Tenente Nicolau Bueno Horta Barbosa, 13 de janeiro de 1913', in CLTEMTA, *Relatório apresentado à Divisão de Engenharia (G. 5) do Departamento da Guerra e à Directoria Geral dos Telégrafos pelo coronel Cândido Mariano da Silva Rondon*, iii (Rio de Janeiro, 1915), 192-201; AR, Laurentino André de Sant'Anna, 'Relação de Índios localizados em Ponte de Pedra e diversos relações de alunos da escola primaria dessa estação, 2 de agosto de 1913'. In 1917 Rondon turned the operation of the two primary schools over to the state of Mato Grosso.

<sup>50</sup> As if to further this identification with national symbols, Rondon Commission photographers often photographed indigenes wrapped in the Brazilian flag: see, for example, photographs included in Lima, *Um grande cerco de paz*.

indigenist policy in Brazil focus on Rondon and his work, albeit with a dramatically different interpretation.<sup>51</sup>

#### IV

##### THE RECENT DEBATE OVER RONDON

For decades Rondon's associates and scholars praised his policies and actions with respect to indigenes. However, a new group of Brazilian scholars, most of them anthropologists, have recently produced a cogent, penetrating, complex and harshly critical analysis of Rondon's indigenist policies. Most of these studies, written by scholars associated with the Federal University of Rio de Janeiro, frankly condemn Rondon, his telegraph commission and the Indian Protection Service.<sup>52</sup>

As can be seen especially in the work of Antonio Carlos de Souza Lima, the recent revisionist argument is that Rondon's policies, the SPI and the Rondon Commission were more about expanding state power than they were about assisting indigenes. Furthermore, it is argued, euphemisms such as 'assistance', 'protection' and 'pacification' should not blind us to the essentially violent nature of Rondon's project: the conquest of indigenes. In the view of the revisionists, the extinction of indigenous peoples and cultures, not protection, was the real goal of Rondon's assimilationist policy.

In impressive fashion Lima develops his argument that Rondon and the SPI were concerned primarily with expanding the power

<sup>51</sup> Two sources that strongly assert Rondon's legacy are Ribeiro, *Os índios e a civilização* and Ribeiro, *A política indigenista brasileira*. In addition, see the sources listed in n. 10 above.

<sup>52</sup> This literature owes most to Professor Antonio Carlos de Souza Lima and his students enrolled in the Programa de Pós-Graduação em Antropologia Social do Museu Nacional da Universidade Federal do Rio de Janeiro (PPGAS). See, for example, Lima, *Um grande cerco de paz*; Lima, 'On Indigenism and Nationality in Brazil'; Antonio Carlos de Souza Lima, 'O governo dos índios sob a gestão do Serviço de Proteção aos Índios', in Manuela Carneiro da Cunha (ed.), *Histórica indígena no Brasil* (São Paulo, 1992); Regina Maria de Carvalho Erthal, 'Atrair e pacificar: a estratégia da conquista' (Federal Univ. of Rio de Janeiro MA thesis, 1992); Maria Fátima Roberto Machado, 'Índios de Rondon: Rondon e as linhas telegráficas na visão dos sobreviventes Wáimare e Kaxiníti, grupos Paresi' (Federal Univ. of Rio de Janeiro Ph.D. thesis, 1994); Maciel, 'A nação por um fio'; Ramos, *Indigenism*. See also Héctor Díaz Polanco, *Indigenous Peoples in Latin America: The Quest for Self-Determination*, trans. Lúcia Rayas (Boulder, 1997). The following summary of this literature is limited due to space constraints. Readers are urged to consult it for themselves.

of the central state, and, perhaps more importantly, with expanding the authority of the SPI and the Ministry of Agriculture within the federal bureaucracy. The development and application of an indigenist policy, the myriad expeditions and explorations, the generation of knowledge about indigenes and the flora and fauna of the north-west, were done primarily to expand authority within the federal bureaucracy, and to impose state power in the hinterlands. State-building was accomplished by reducing the heterogeneity of indigenous peoples into a generic, state-created 'Indian' category. Secondly, by asserting an expertise that only they possessed, Rondon and his associates justified state intervention in the interior, and as central state representatives they began to insert themselves between indigenes and members of the local, white society. They built, to use Lima's favourite metaphor, 'a great wall' of state power between Indians and local whites.<sup>53</sup>

The most dramatic revisionist assertion is Lima's oft-repeated claim that Rondon practised a form of warfare that constituted the conquest of indigenes. Drawing on the work of Michel Foucault, Lima notes that 'power is essentially repressive . . . it represses individuals, instincts [and] classes'.<sup>54</sup> Rondon, his commission and the SPI warred against indigenes by constructing a particular kind of state power over them, one that Lima calls 'poder tutelar' (tutelary power). Contact with the 'other', in this case 'Indians', became a form of conquest, for it imposed a particular image on the 'other'. By redefining and reorganizing this 'other', Rondon and his cohort sought to conquer indigenes, for 'conquest is . . . also a cognitive endeavour, one oriented by semiotic procedures'.<sup>55</sup>

For Lima this was nowhere more the case than in the residential posts (*núcleos indígenas*) operated by the Rondon Commission and, to a greater extent, by the SPI. Here the state-builders

<sup>53</sup> Lima, *Um grande cerco de paz*, 18, 23, 55, 73–4, 101–12, 114, 124–5, 128–9, 160, 213, 233; Maciel, 'A nação por um fio', 9, 18–19, 130–5, 219–22.

<sup>54</sup> Lima, *Um grande cerco de paz*, 44.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, 55; see also 42–6, 48–53. In a similar vein, Polanco writes that '[t]he various indigenisms . . . are at once alien (with regard to ethnic groups) and extremely homogenizing . . . Indigenism employed as state policy may go as far as genocide, ethnocide, ethnophagy, or a combination of these . . . In any event the solution to the ethnic problem lies . . . in escaping *the very logic of any indigenism*': Polanco, *Indigenous Peoples in Latin America*, 24 (emphasis in original); see also 66, 71–2.

extracted Indian wealth and labour power in the same extra-economic fashion as local landowners, so that for Lima the post director 'occupied the social position previously filled by the labour broker or rubber estate owner'.<sup>56</sup> With seemingly great efficiency post personnel robbed indigenes of their languages, altered their dress, and even their posture, and succeeded 'beyond a doubt in attacking the totality of native activities, inserting them [Indians] in times and spaces quite different from the rhythms and limits of indigenous life'.<sup>57</sup>

Lima forcefully asserts that Rondon's policies were not any more progressive than, or even fundamentally different from, the days of armed conquest. 'During the first two decades [of the twentieth century]', he argues, 'they [Rondon *et al.*] not only desired, but also acted to dissolve and destroy, at even the most basic level, the socio-economic and political forms of native organization'.<sup>58</sup> Rondon and his men thus 'mounted a war of conquest by imagining a mono-national political community'.<sup>59</sup> Or, as Laura Maciel puts it in even more dramatic fashion:

To explore and tame the wilderness and all that was in it, including Indians, was similar to what one does to domesticate wild animals . . . [T]hese were political decisions of conquest and the occupation of space, translated into acts of force, with an eye towards subjugation and domination.<sup>60</sup>

## V

### THE HISTORICAL AND COMPARATIVE CONTEXT

There is much to admire in the revisionist literature, and much to criticize in the policies and actions of General Cândido Mariano da Silva Rondon. The positivists and Rondon were by definition paternalistic in their attitudes towards indigenes, with all the attendant problems such an attitude carried for the objects of their attention. As positivists they felt that they alone understood the 'laws of humanity', and that they alone could integrate

<sup>56</sup> Lima, *Um grande cerco de paz*, 185.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, 191.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, 184; see also 143.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, 229. Polanco comes to a similar conclusion for the colonial period in Spanish America — 'Overall, the activity of the clergy during the colonial period amounted to a very efficient continuation of warfare, through other means, against the indigenous sociocultural system': Polanco, *Indigenous Peoples in Latin America*, 51.

<sup>60</sup> Maciel, 'A nação por um fio', 134; Polanco, *Indigenous Peoples in Latin America*, 65–77.

indigenes into modern society. Positivism was very much a doctrine in which a small group of national leaders were to protect and guide the rest of the population. Indeed, positivists applied this attitude not only to indigenes, but to the urban Brazilian proletariat as well.<sup>61</sup>

This vision of state paternalism towards indigenes was institutionalized by the 1916 Civil Code. It proclaimed Indians to be 'relatively incapable', and thus in need of state protection. Indians could not purchase, sell or transfer lands without the federal government's approval. They could not sign labour contracts, nor myriad other contracts. Indians became wards of the state, and Rondon and the SPI became their tutors, in a system of state wardship known as *tutela* in Brazil.<sup>62</sup>

Through their discussions of the ramifications of *tutela*, revisionist scholars offer a powerful critique of Rondon's policies. *Tutela* meant that Rondon and the state determined the essence of Indians. They were defined as childlike in order to protect them from rapacious whites. The state, as Lima notes, now claimed total power over indigenes, to the point of asserting the sole right to define the future of these people. *Tutela*, Seth Garfield observes, promised aid and protection, but 'on the flipside . . . lurked the specter of government repression'. Its biggest flaw, he continues, was that the state decided what was best for Indians, but did so based on its 'own narrow-minded views about Indians and their future'.<sup>63</sup>

<sup>61</sup> Costa, *A History of Ideas in Brazil*, 140–1; Thomas E. Skidmore, *Black into White: Race and Nationality in Brazilian Thought* (Durham, NC, 1993), 11–13; Roger Kittleson, 'A New Regime of Ideas in Porto Alegre: or, What Was at Stake in the Federalista Revolt of 1893–1895', paper presented at the annual meeting of the Conference of Latin American Historians, Seattle, Washington, 10 January 1998. Like all positivists, Rondon was against a broad, participatory democracy. Thus, after the creation of Getúlio Vargas's Estado Novo dictatorship, Rondon wrote to Vargas saying: 'As . . . a proponent of a strong, stable government able to avoid parliamentary manoeuvrings that are almost always inspired by electoral campaigns, I applaud . . . the situation Your Excellency created with the coup d'état of 10 November 1937, which was of great benefit to our country'. 'Carta, Marechal Rondon ao Presidente Vargas [1937 or 1938]': ML, SPI-AG-Cx13, doc. 12, film 1, frame 3777.

<sup>62</sup> Ramos, *Indigenism*, 18–19, 80; Garfield, '“Civilized but Discontent”', 78–9; Lima, *Um grande cerco de paz*, ch. 3, 203–4, 209–10.

<sup>63</sup> Ramos, *Indigenism*, 82–3, 95–7; Lima, *Um grande cerco de paz*, 73–4; Garfield, '“Civilized but Discontent”', 79, 110. '*Tutela* was, above all, an instrument for the defence of Indian lands by the state, but eventually came to emphasize more the infantile nature of Indians and their societies': Nádia Farage and Manuela Carneiro da Cunha, 'Caráter da tutela dos índios: origens e metamorfoses', in Manuela Carneiro da Cunha (ed.), *Os direitos do índio: ensaios e documentos* (São Paulo, 1987), 114.

The contradictions of *tutela* point to the key contribution of the revisionist literature. As Alcida Ramos notes, ‘Brazilians — that is, adults — know what is best for the infantile Indians, and for Indians to reach adulthood they must relinquish their Indianness’. Certainly Rondon’s oft-stated aim was the transformation of indigenes into Brazilians (or ‘nationalization’ as he termed it), and the residential posts were indeed to be the primary sites for this transformation. Commission photographs and reports document the schoolwork, the teaching of trades, the Westernization of dress that, as Lima eloquently puts it, ‘altered native rhythms and limits’.<sup>64</sup>

Indeed, it is tempting to accept Lima’s assertions that the logical conclusion of acculturation would be extermination. Even the anthropologist Darcy Ribeiro, Rondon’s friend and admirer, and the favourite target of revisionist venom, criticized this aspect of Rondon’s policy. The positivist model, Garfield notes, did indeed dictate a solution or a specific end point to Indian ‘evolution’. As such it lacked the cultural relativity practised by today’s ethnographers.<sup>65</sup> There also is no denying that Rondon was much engaged in the attempt to expand state power. His telegraph commission and the SPI were long-lived, nationwide bureaucracies. Commission and SPI personnel did indeed intervene in the hinterland. They certainly attempted, in Lima’s eloquent words, to place a ‘great wall’ of state authority between indigenes and local society. They also used the power of the state to redefine identities, to redefine ‘the other’.

That having been said, however, there is for the historian a gnawing incompleteness, or perhaps one-sidedness, to Lima’s revisionist portrait. This is the result of the refusal to assign any credibility to, or find any complexity in, the language, intentions, acts and rhetoric of Rondon and his associates. Lima deftly employs his Foucauldian sword to skewer those who at least might want to consider it possible that ‘protection’ and ‘assimilation’ could carry with them positive, yet contradictory, meanings, leading to both positive and negative actions, not to mention the possibility of indigene agency (a topic Lima ignores completely,

<sup>64</sup> Lima, *Um grande cerco de paz*, 191; Ramos, *Indigenism*, 83.

<sup>65</sup> Ribeiro, *Os índios e a civilização*, 211–12; Garfield, ‘“Civilized but Discontent”’, 49, 140.

thus portraying indigenes as powerless victims).<sup>66</sup> No doubt power is repressive, as Lima asserts, borrowing from Foucault. Yet power can also be contradictory, can it not? Are we not allowed to consider at least the possibility of a dialectic?

For example, Lima's assertion of state-building grossly exaggerates the de facto power exercised by the Rondon Commission in the Brazilian interior. In federal documents (which are the only sources Lima examines), Commission officers certainly seem to have asserted their expertise and power. But the examples presented earlier portray a far different reality of a federal agency that never, in any real sense, succeeded in implementing state authority over local landowners. What on paper might seem like a 'great wall of state power' to Lima looks, upon a deeper examination, more like a leaky net of little more than federal discourse.<sup>67</sup>

It is certainly fair to note that the ultimate goal of assimilation was the disappearance of indigenes. But we also should acknowledge the ambiguous nature of Rondon's thoughts on this matter. While calling for assimilation he nevertheless urged his personnel to respect indigenous social and religious practices until they were 'ready' for positivism. And while we find this idea objectionable today, we should note that at the time this meant Rondon was

<sup>66</sup> For an interesting assertion of Indian agency and resistance, see Langfur, 'Myths of Pacification'. In this article Langfur is much more critical of Rondon's policies than I am, and indeed he sides with Lima's interpretation of Rondon and the SPI. However, Langfur's own information clearly demonstrates that Rondon was much more respectful of indigenous rights than were either the Salesian missionaries or local landowners (885–8, 893). See Seth Garfield, '“All the Indians are at Brazil's Service”: Indigenous Peoples and the Brazilian State, 1937–1945', paper presented at the 112th meeting of the American Historical Association, New York City, 5 January 1997. For an especially cogent discussion of indigene agency in Africa, see Pier M. Larson, '“Capacities and Modes of Thinking”: Intellectual Engagements and Subaltern Hegemony in the Early History of Malagasy Christianity', *Amer. Hist. Rev.*, cii (1997). It is worth noting that Polanco probably would also criticize scholars such as Lima and Maciel for being 'ethnocrats' who 'invert ethnocentrism' and who, contrary 'to the historical record, [posit] an unchanging ethnic essence . . . as the necessary basis for the continuity of indigenous societies': Polanco, *Indigenous Peoples in Latin America*, 74. Garfield criticizes Lima for 'perpetuat[ing] the view of Indians as inconsequential actors in the making of their own history, overwhelmed by the Brazilian leviathan': Garfield, '“Civilized but Discontent”', 19.

<sup>67</sup> As Darcy Ribeiro notes, to implement its programme successfully the SPI would have to overcome the interests and power of local leaders, many of whom benefited from access to indigenous lands and labour; this, he says, never happened: Ribeiro, *Os índios e a civilização*, 163–9, 396.

ready to wait generations, more than a century, for integration to occur.<sup>68</sup>

It is the historian's task to provide evidence of the complexities of this situation. Lima writes that Rondon and SPI personnel forced indigenes to abandon their languages. Certainly in myriad speeches, letters and reports Rondon argued just the opposite. But what about in deed? In 1920 Captain Alencarliense Fernandes da Costa began his inspection of the Commission telegraph line running across north-west Brazil. At the Ponte de Pedra station he also visited the school attended by Paresí children, which by this point was operated by the Ministry of Education of the state of Mato Grosso. 'Examining the guest registry of the school', he later wrote in a report to General Rondon, 'I noticed an entry from the [state of Mato Grosso] school inspector recommending that the Indian students be prohibited from speaking their language'. Then without explaining exactly how, or to whom, he did so, the Commission officer noted that 'I disagreed with this opinion, given the understanding that we should teach the children the official language [Portuguese], *without discouraging the use of the language of each tribe*'.<sup>69</sup>

It is also worth noting that Rondon generated dogged opposition from locals who thought his assimilation process was ineffective, was much too tolerant of indigenous practices and was much too drawn-out. This does not make the policy right, of course, but it suggests the complexities of that time and place. In 1918 newspapers in the state of Mato Grosso carried a series of complaints made by landowners and editors against Rondon and his Indian policy. At the heart of the matter was their belief that Rondon's policies were destined to fail because they did not force Indians to become 'responsible citizens'.<sup>70</sup> In the opinion of one

<sup>68</sup> Compare my assertion here with Langfur's observation that for Rondon '[w]hen Indians stood in the way of progress they would have to be incorporated into society as rapidly, if peacefully, as possible': Langfur, 'Myths of Pacification', 884. Egon Schaden claims, based on a 1949 interview with Rondon, that late in his life Rondon abandoned the idea of assimilation altogether. 'He [Rondon] had decided that we should no longer try to "nationalize" the Indian, because it [here he quotes Rondon] "causes serious problems and maladjustments"'. Indeed, Schaden noted, Rondon had decided that 'all cultures, regardless of their basic values, constitute a legitimate expression of human values': Egon Schaden, 'O problema indígena', *Revista de história*, xx (1960), 455.

<sup>69</sup> AR, Fernandes da Costa, 'Relatório da Inspeção Geral . . . 19 de dezembro de 1921' (my emphasis).

<sup>70</sup> 'Serviço improficuo', *O Matto Grosso*, 10 Feb. 1918.

editor, Indians were unproductive because Rondon protected them, but left their lives and cultures alone.<sup>71</sup> The flaw was that Rondon prevented locals from 'introducing the kinds of policies that would modify their [the Indians'] primitive habitat'.<sup>72</sup> Emphasizing precisely these points, 'a few rubber plantation owners' sent a letter to the newspaper *A Cruz*, in response to a meeting between Rondon and the governor of Mato Grosso, stating: 'He who lets his soldiers die of hunger while distributing food to the savages is Colonel Rondon'.<sup>73</sup> In the heat of the 1918 attacks against Rondon and his policies, the local press in Cuiabá, Mato Grosso, referred to Rondon's indigenous ancestry (of which Rondon was quite proud) as one source of his errors. 'The colonel', a local journalist noted, 'possesses the temperament of the savage. In the centres of civilization he feels out of place'. Thus, 'the colonel is a lost cause . . . because he has a high percentage of Indian blood mixed with the worst habits the centres of civilization have to offer'.<sup>74</sup>

This language and this opposition reminds us of the context in which Rondon and the positivists developed their theory that indigenes were not racially inferior, were every bit as capable as whites, but were simply living in an earlier stage of social (but not racial) evolution. It reminds us that for many prominent Brazilians in this era scientific racism explained the 'problems' of non-whites in Brazil, with all the attendant 'solutions' such an attitude entailed.<sup>75</sup> Indeed, the French writer Arthur de

<sup>71</sup> 'Serviço improficuo', *A Cruz*, 24 Mar. 1918.

<sup>72</sup> 'Serviço improficuo', *A Cruz*, 14 Apr. 1918. Another article at the time chastised SPI personnel for attracting Indians with presents 'without obliging them to practise the necessary obligations . . . [or proper behaviour]': see 'Serviço improficuo', *O Mato Grosso*, 10 Feb. 1918. In Rio de Janeiro an article in the *Jornal do Comércio* likewise criticized Rondon for failing to teach indigenes 'anything'. The article emphasized this fact by pointing out that Rondon had learned the language of the Paresí, and implied that for this reason he was not even teaching them Portuguese. Finishing in a rhetorical flourish the article asked: 'Should they [the Paresí] be allowed to continue just the same as they were before they met Rondon?': *Jornal do Comércio*, 30 May 1911.

<sup>73</sup> 'Apedido', *A Cruz*, 17 Mar. 1918.

<sup>74</sup> 'Serviço improficuo', *A Cruz*, 14 Apr. 1918; Viveiros, *Rondon conta sua vida*, 17–18. In letters to his wife Rondon sometimes signed his name as 'seu Pery', in reference to the indigenous main character in José de Alencar's romantic novel *O Guarani*. Examples of this can be found in the Arquivo Rondon.

<sup>75</sup> Julyan G. Peard, 'Tropical Disorders and the Forging of a Brazilian Medical Identity, 1860–1890', *Hispanic Amer. Hist. Rev.*, lxxvii (1997), 25–6; Nancy Stepan, *The Hour of Eugenics: Race, Gender, and Nation in Latin America* (Ithaca, 1991). Lilia Moritz Schwarcz offers a somewhat different view when she argues that by 1930 racism was no longer embraced officially in Brazil, but was still a very important

Gobineau, one of the founders of racial determinism, lived in Brazil from 1869 to 1870, and concluded that 'the native population was destined to disappear, due to its genetic "degeneracy"'.<sup>76</sup> Thus, while Rondon was in the hinterland developing policies that discounted the importance of race, urban intellectuals such as Sílvio Romero were writing about the racial inferiority of indigenes, whom Romero regarded as 'certainly the lowest [race] on the ethnographic scale'.<sup>77</sup> In 1911, again while Rondon was in the interior implementing his policies, Afrânio Peixoto was writing of the inevitable disappearance of 'sub-races' such as indigenes in his widely read novel *A Esfinge* (*The Sphinx*).<sup>78</sup> Thus, one cannot fully judge Rondon's ideas and policies without placing them in their historical context, and without recognizing their ambiguity and complexity. When this is done, it becomes apparent that Rondon's policies were far more respectful of indigenous ways than the policies proposed by others of that era. For this reason it is instructive to review briefly the most famous of the debates over Indian policy during those years: the debate between Rondon and Herman von Ihering, the director of the Museu Paulista.<sup>79</sup>

This debate is crucial to those who support and praise Rondon. These scholars argue that in 1908 and 1909 von Ihering proposed the extermination of indigenes, that Rondon and others condemned the proposal, and that out of the commotion that followed the Indian Protection Service was born.<sup>80</sup> Meanwhile, in his revisionist work Antonio Carlos de Souza Lima argues that von Ihering never proposed extermination. Rather, he says, Rondon,

(n. 75 cont.)

component of popular culture: Lília Moritz Schwarcz, *O espetáculo das raças: cientistas, instituições e questão racial no Brasil, 1870-1930* (São Paulo, 1995), esp. 243-50.

<sup>76</sup> Skidmore, *Black into White*, 30.

<sup>77</sup> Romero quoted: *ibid.*, 35. For more on Romero's thought on race and Indians, see Dante Moreira Leite, *O caráter nacional brasileiro: história de uma ideologia*, 5th edn (São Paulo, 1992), 179-94.

<sup>78</sup> Skidmore, *Black into White*, 73-4.

<sup>79</sup> It is beyond the scope of this article to compare Rondon's policies with those of the Salesian missionaries. For helpful comparisons, see Garfield, 'Civilized but Discontent', 111-19; Ribeiro, *Os índios e a civilização*, 136-7. See also Langfur, 'Myths of Pacification'.

<sup>80</sup> For an early English-language version of this dispute, see David Hall Stauffer, 'The Origin and Establishment of Brazil's Indian Service, 1889-1910' (Univ. of Texas Ph.D. thesis, 1955); Gagliardi, *O indígena e a República*, 71-87, 157-8; Ribeiro, *Os índios e a civilização*, 149-51; Ribeiro, *A política indigenista brasileira*, 7-13.

his associates and later scholars invented the charge of extermination in order to justify their calls for increased state intervention in indigene affairs, doing so under the guise of 'protection'. Von Ihering thus became a convenient straw man for the state-builders to attack. Indeed, Lima repeatedly refers to the 'supposed' extermination policies of von Ihering.<sup>81</sup>

A careful reading of the debate suggests that while von Ihering may not have called directly for extermination, he did propose policies essentially designed to produce that end. Admittedly, he did suggest that reservations be established to protect indigenes. However, in contrast to Rondon, he also stressed that Indians were largely incapable of learning in a Western sense, and that they 'were indolent and indifferent and would not make a minimum contribution to our [Brazilian] culture and progress'.<sup>82</sup> Because of their inferiority, von Ihering argued, Indians were destined to disappear no matter what Rondon and his associates did to protect them.<sup>83</sup>

Given his analysis von Ihering felt it important to promote progress and civilization by sponsoring European colonization, and by protecting immigrant colonists from Indian attacks. He strongly condemned the government's slowness to protect colonists from Indian attacks in western São Paulo state and in the state of Santa Catarina. He worried that these attacks would create an unfavourable impression in Europe, which then might slow emigration to Brazil.<sup>84</sup> Thus:

Indians in São Paulo are an obstacle to progress. We cannot hope for serious and capable work from civilized Indians, and, therefore, like the savage Cangangs [Kaingangs, in western São Paulo] they are an obstacle to the colonization of the interior and there appears to be no solution other than extermination.<sup>85</sup>

Von Ihering ended another article by noting that 'it is worth

<sup>81</sup> Lima, *Um grande cerco de paz*, 18, 78, 113; Lima, 'On Indigenism and Nationality in Brazil'; Lima, 'O governo dos índios'.

<sup>82</sup> Dr Herman von Ihering, 'Extermínio dos indígenas ou dos sertanejos', *Jornal do Comércio*, 15 Dec. 1908.

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.*; Dr Herman von Ihering, 'O futuro dos indígenas do Estado de S. Paulo', *O Estado de São Paulo*, 20 Oct. 1908.

<sup>84</sup> Von Ihering, 'Extermínio dos indígenas ou dos sertanejos'.

<sup>85</sup> Dr Herman von Ihering, 'Os índios do Brasil meridional', *Correio Paulistano*, 29 Oct. 1908. A footnote at the end of this paragraph reads as follows: 'When I speak of the extermination of Indians, naturally I do so only for those who are a barrier to the expansion of our culture, especially in terms of complications and assaults'. Yet, as we have seen, von Ihering believed that Indians in reservations became degenerate, and were destined to disappear.

registering here what the American General Custer said: “the only good Indian is a dead Indian”.<sup>86</sup>

This attitude was not limited to von Ihering. In a 1911 article published in a prominent Rio daily, an unnamed journalist also condemned what he saw as Rondon’s and the SPI’s defence of indigene rights over those of the European colonists. Referring specifically to conflicts between German colonists and the Xokleng in the state of Santa Catarina, the author complained that ‘Brazil prefers the “bugre” (savage) over the foreign colonist’.<sup>87</sup> The clearest statement of these attitudes appears in a 1917 anonymous editorial published in Rio’s *Correio da Manhã* newspaper. Written in response to recent reports of rubber tapper atrocities against indigenes along the Madeira River (in other words, precisely where the Rondon Commission operated), the piece began by noting that coastal Brazilians held a romanticized view of indigenes because they never came into contact with such people. Rondon’s actions, no matter how impressive and altruistic, reinforced this naive attitude, giving the public ‘the erroneous notion that the Indian problem could be solved by constructing an idyllic peace and fraternity with the Indians’. However, the editorial continued, a rubber estate could not serve ‘simultaneously as hunting ground for the savages and the source of precious latex’. Conflict was inevitable, for ‘to order the civilized man to respect the land of the Indians is the same as asking that civilization cease’. And because the author could not conceive of this he ended his editorial by noting that ‘here, as in other countries, the victory of the civilized is certain’.<sup>88</sup>

At least at the time, then, a number of prominent Brazilians recognized the different nature of Rondon’s policies, and they opposed them. Thus, while the revisionist deconstruction of Rondon’s language does provide new insight into Indian policy and the attempts to expand state power, it fails to consider fully

<sup>86</sup> Von Ihering, ‘Extermínio dos indígenas ou dos sertanejos’. General Sheridan actually issued these words.

<sup>87</sup> ‘Protecção aos índios e perseguições aos trabalhadores nacionaes e colonos estrangeiros’, *Jornal do Comércio*, 7 Aug. 1911. The article went on to say: ‘Go ahead and protect Indians, even though they are of no use to the country, if you want to, but keep in mind our first obligation to protect the colonists’ who are really useful to the country.

<sup>88</sup> *Correio da Manhã*, 15 Jan. 1917. For more on urban, romanticized views of Indians, see Ramos, *Indigenism*, ch. 2; Ribeiro, *Os índios e a civilização*, 148–9; Pedro Maligo, *Land of Metaphorical Desires: The Representation of Amazonia in Brazilian Literature* (New York, 1998), 1–95.

the context of that language, and just what was possible at that time. Indeed, there is an anachronistic tone to the revisionist argument. The very real abuse and exploitation of Indians by SPI personnel in the 1950s and later seems to be one source of the revisionist condemnation of acts committed decades earlier.<sup>89</sup> Significantly, a recent comparative history of state policies towards indigenous peoples in Mexico, Canada, the United States of America and Australia confirms this. Rondon's policies at the turn of the twentieth century used less force, and were less violent and less abusive of indigenous practices than those of other national governments.<sup>90</sup> Thus, while the revisionists are correct to point out the contradictions, ramifications, problems and deeper meanings of Rondon's indigenist policies, they fail to locate such policies adequately within their historical context.

## VI

### THE DILEMMA OF DEVELOPMENT

It is interesting to note that both sides of this historical debate are largely silent on what I see as the ultimate contradiction of Rondon's policies. General Cândido Mariano da Silva Rondon firmly believed that he could both protect Indians living in the Brazilian north-west and at the same time develop the region through infrastructural expansion, colonization and support for the rubber industry. Instead, the Rondon Commission's telegraph activities, its construction of roads in the region and its general presence produced pressures inimical to the Commission's stated policy towards indigenes. At times even Commission members themselves recognized this contradiction.<sup>91</sup>

<sup>89</sup> The growing abuse and exploitation of indigenes by SPI personnel in the 1950s is discussed in Garfield, '“Civilized but Discontent”', 182–4, 203–6. According to Ribeiro, 'considered in their historical context the positivist policies were the most advanced of that era': Ribeiro, *Os índios e a civilização*, 161.

<sup>90</sup> Perry, *From Time Immemorial*. Readers are especially encouraged to compare Rondon's assimilation policies with the much more abusive policies in Canada and the United States.

<sup>91</sup> An exception to this generalization is Hal Langfur's recent article. He writes: 'The greatest harm caused by the [Rondon] telegraph project was that it accelerated the incorporation of the frontier, attracting new settlers whose foothold in the region was strengthened by improved communication and access via the broad paths opened by Rondon': Langfur, 'Myths of Pacification', 886. Shelton Davis also mentions the issue briefly in *Victims of the Miracle*, 4.

The instructions relevant to the creation of the Rondon Telegraph Commission specifically ordered the collection of information for use in the development of the region. Later, when accepting the offer to head the SPI in 1910, Rondon stressed his belief that, in addition to defending indigenous populations and their lands, his personnel could nonetheless encourage the extraction of natural resources in the north-west. 'Experience teaches us', he noted, 'that if we don't threaten their [Indian] settlements and gardens they won't oppose the work of those wishing to exploit the mineral and other resources that are of no interest to them'.<sup>92</sup>

Commission employees regularly observed with pride that rubber tappers and estate owners quickly moved to exploit areas that the Commission had recently explored. In the years before telegraph construction rubber tappers worked only along the banks of major rivers, such as the Madeira River, the lower Ji-Paraná (near where it flows into the Madeira) and the lower reaches of the Jamari River (where it also empties into the Madeira). These lands, occupied since colonial times, were well to the north and west of the lands Rondon explored during his three famous expeditions of 1907–9. When he and his men marched across the region between Cuiabá and the Madeira River in 1909, Rondon encountered rubber tappers on the banks of the Jamari only in the traditional area of occupation, near where the river flows into the Madeira. By 1915, he later noted with pleasure, tappers now operated along the entire length of the river (and thus far to the east of the previous zone of exploitation). Likewise, tappers began to move up the banks of the Ji-Paraná River, establishing a 'trading post [far up the river] soon after the Commission's expedition of 1909'.<sup>93</sup>

At times Commission members admitted that there was a correlation between this expansion of the rubber business and attacks

<sup>92</sup> 'Carta, Tenente-Coronel Rondon ao Ministro da Agricultura, Rio de Janeiro, 14 de março de 1910', repr. in Teixeira Mendes, *Em defesa dos selvagens Brasileiros*, 24; Maciel, 'A nação por um fio', 120. For other examples of the promotion of development by Rondon and others, see CLTEMTA, 'Documento no. 5', 1917: MI, SPI-AC, film 327, frame 1575; 'Carta, Amilcar Armando Botelho de Magalhães aos Srs. Membros da Comissão de Finanças da Câmara dos Deputados, 11 de novembro de 1916': MI, SPI-AC, film 327, frame 1590. Celso Castro notes the positivist faith in development and technology. Indeed, a hallmark of the positivist stage of social evolution was to be man's domination of nature. Castro, *Os militares e a República*, 64.

<sup>93</sup> 'Relatório da inspeção feita de Diamantino a Vilhena . . . Horta Barbosa, 13 de janeiro de 1913', 23; CLTEMTA, *Conferencias de 1915: versão inglês*, 221–2.

against indigenes. Nicolau Bueno Horta Barbosa wrote that attacks against indigenes along the upper Ji-Paraná River began in 1910, shortly after Rondon's third expedition, and shortly after the inauguration of an Asensi and Company trading post. Another Commission employee forcefully denounced Asensi and Company-sponsored attacks against Indians to the press in Rio de Janeiro. This was especially significant because at that very moment, and for several years after, the Commission relied on that same company for mail delivery, food and other supplies, and for troop transport.<sup>94</sup>

This fundamental contradiction between a policy of protection that was quite enlightened for its day, and a pro-development policy that eventually led to new attacks against indigenes in regions 'opened' by Rondon, would continue to plague those associated with the Indian Protection Service, and indeed does so up to the present day. In 1945, for example, 'Manuelão', the director of the SPI post at Tabatinga (Acre), began organizing manioc and sugar cane cultivation by Ticuna peoples on lands believed by white residents to be of marginal quality. When Ticuna agricultural production proved quite successful these indigenes' white neighbours took an interest in the lands, invaded them and began their own cultivation. Local officials supported white claims to the lands, and thus an SPI initiative, no matter how well intentioned (and there was considerable indigenous support for Manuelão), led to new assaults against the Ticuna.<sup>95</sup>

Especially instructive is the emotional and contradictory report of SPI agent José de Mello Fiuza, who was sent to investigate Karitiana and Karipuna attacks against rubber tappers along the Ji-Paraná River in 1966. Fiuza reported on the death of one rubber tapper, and on Karitiana/Karipuna plans to kill more, for

<sup>94</sup> 'Relatório da inspeção feita de Diamantino a Vilhena . . . Horta Barbosa, 13 de janeiro de 1913', 2-5; *A Rua*, 10 Jan. 1917; *A Noite*, 10 Jan. 1917; *A Razão*, 11 Jan. 1917. For more on Commission relations with Asensi and Company, see CLTEMTA, 'Crédito aberto por decreto 11.849 de 29 de dezembro de 1915': MI, SPI-AC, film 330, frame 0040; CLTEMTA, 'Relatório do Escriptório Central em 1916: Suplemento no. 8 — Documentos relativos à entrega de material ao Museu Nacional': MI, SPI-AC, film 328, frame 1134; 'Carta, Cândido Mariano da Silva ao Sr. Ministro d'Estado dos Negócios de Viação e Obras Públicas Augusto Tavares de Lyra, 16 de junho de 1915': MI, SPI-AC, film 326, frame 984; CLTEMTA (Segundo Tenente Eduardo de Abreu Botelho), 'Ordem do Dia, no. 74, 22 de agosto de 1914': MI, SPI-AC, film 326, frame 964; Ribeiro, *Os índios e a civilização*, 142, 275.

<sup>95</sup> João Pacheco de Oliveira, 'O nosso governo': *os Ticuna e o regime tutelar* (São Paulo, 1988), 165-74.

these tappers had recently begun to collect rubber on indigenous lands. In his report Fiuza clearly blamed the tappers, condemning them for forcing indigenes from their settlements and lands 'in a flagrant show of disrespect for both the principles of humanity and the laws that ensure the right to own land'.<sup>96</sup> Yet, in an impressive display of the contradictions of development, Fiuza then turned his attention to describing the natural riches to be exploited in the region. He noted the quality of the forests which, he thought, could easily be exploited commercially. He noted the fertility of the soil and its suitability for commercial agriculture. He even noted with satisfaction that his arrival had encouraged rubber tappers to resume their activities, which they had abandoned after the attacks. Like those in the Rondon Commission before him, Fiuza also relied on the owner of the rubber estate to provide the motorized canoes for his investigation.<sup>97</sup> Perhaps sensing the weight of this contradiction, Fiuza ended his report by recognizing a growing impasse:

If on the one hand the SPI has as its number one priority the protection of these Indians, on the other hand there is no less a desire on the part of the government to . . . exploit forest and mineral reserves. The two [goals] are in conflict, and they call for our urgent attention.<sup>98</sup>

## VII

### CONCLUSION

Two images neatly capture the complexities of Rondon's indigenist policies. The first is a black and white photograph taken in the 1940s. A smiling, bare-chested man poses for the camera. A leather headband keeps his black, shoulder-length hair in place. He wears what appear to be army trousers. On the reverse side the subject of the photograph thanks Rondon for providing protection, friendship and an education for him and his people.<sup>99</sup> The other image is a map of the state of Rondônia. A thick, red, diagonal line cuts across the map. Running from south-east to

<sup>96</sup> José de Mello Fiuza, 'Relatório das atividades da expedição do SPI destinada a pacificar os índios que atacaram o seringal São José, 7 de fevereiro de 1966': MI, SPI-AC, doc. 213, film 380, frame 2025.

<sup>97</sup> *Ibid.*, frames 2028–9.

<sup>98</sup> *Ibid.*, frame 2029.

<sup>99</sup> This photograph, taken in Goiânia, is among the many items not yet catalogued in the Arquivo Rondon at the Copacabana Fort. No additional information about the subject of the photograph is given.

north-west, this indicates highway BR364. This red line (and the very real highway it represents) reminds us of the annual forest fires, of the ecological damage and of the costs of the ‘development’ of the Amazon given that land-hungry immigrants invaded the region shortly after the paving of this road in the early 1980s.<sup>100</sup>

The photograph of the unnamed individual, a man with indigenous features but dressed in Western style, reminds us of Rondon’s problematic acculturation policy. As Lima has argued, the ultimate goal of this policy was the elimination of ‘Indians’ by turning them into ‘Brazilians’. Even Darcy Ribeiro, one of Rondon’s staunchest defenders, acknowledged that ‘integration’ ultimately meant ‘disappearance’. The policy was, he says, the one glaring flaw in Rondon’s work, and it was later abandoned in practice by the SPI. This policy was, David Price asserts, immoral, for it dictated to indigenes the terms of their incorporation into Western society. It was ethnocentric, Seth Garfield notes, because ‘Indians could only be conceptualized and valued in so far as they served white goals and embodied white ideals — never on their own merit’.<sup>101</sup>

Thus, it is because of the revisionists that we now have a helpful, alternative reading of Rondon’s policies. And yet, what I have tried to demonstrate in this article is that Rondon’s ideas were more complex than the revisionist analysis of them. His policies were often ambiguous, but I would argue that, given the context of the times, they were surprisingly respectful of indigenous practices. Yes, his ideas may have been misguided, and his ethnocentricity did misrepresent indigenes and their histories. Nevertheless, this Brazilian general defended indigenous land

<sup>100</sup> The standard work on the disastrous impact of development on indigenous peoples in the Amazon is Davis, *Victims of the Miracle*. For works specifically about Rondônia, see Ricardo Grinbaum, ‘O novo eldorado verde: soja, dinheiro e cidades brotam numa faixa de Rondônia ao Piauí que tem o tamanho da Espanha’, *Veja*, 2 Apr. 1997, 110–15; Gordon MacMillan, *At the End of the Rainbow? Gold, Land, and People in the Brazilian Amazon* (New York, 1995), 15–23, 32–3, 53, 56–7, 63, 84, 128–34; David Price, *Before the Bulldozer: The Nambiquara Indians and the World Bank* (Washington DC, 1989), 177–94. See also Linda Rabben, *Unnatural Selection: The Ynomami, the Kayapó and the Onslaught of Civilisation* (London, 1998), 11–16. For the World Bank’s own review of its participation in the POLONOROESTE project, see Dennis J. Mahar and Cécile E. H. Ducrot, *Land-Use Zoning on Tropical Frontiers: Emerging Lessons from the Brazilian Amazon* (Washington DC, 1998). This account includes figures on deforestation in Rondônia.

<sup>101</sup> Ribeiro, *Os índios e a civilização*, 211–12; Price, *Before the Bulldozer*, 151; Garfield, ‘“Civilized but Discontent”’, 49.

rights publicly and energetically. He and his positivist colleagues publicly called for the recognition of the sovereignty of indigenous groups. They condemned the racial determinism of the era. Despite the now objectionable goal of acculturation, we have seen that Rondon felt that this would be a long, slow process, and in the meantime he ordered his men to respect indigenous religious practices. Clearly this was paternalism, and it was ethnocentric, but there were worse alternatives proposed at the time.

Finally, the map provides further commentary on the policies of General Cândido Mariano da Silva Rondon. BR364 cuts through towns such as Vilhena, Pimenta Bueno and Ariquemes. Ninety years ago these towns did not exist. In each case they began, between 1910 and 1915, as telegraph stations. They represented the Rondon Commission's entry into a region that at the time contained virtually no residents of European descent. BR364 follows the route of the telegraph line. Just as the telegraph line initiated the development Rondon so avidly sought, the paving of BR364 opened the region to the latest round of development. It was Rondon's belief that migration, mineral extraction and commercial agriculture could be managed in such a way as not to threaten indigenous holdings and lives. Rubber-tapper attacks against indigenes at the beginning of the twentieth century, and settler attacks at the end, demonstrate that he was wrong.

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