

## **Belo Monte and Ethics**

The Brazilian government is more focused on the potential economic benefits of the Belo Monte dam than the environmental, social, and cultural ethical duties they have to the Xingu River, its organisms, and its people. Because the Brazilian government is pushing their economic agendas forward, they are creating a structure of violence that ignores the voices of the marginalized and powerless, does not meet the needs of the environment or the indigenous communities, and denies them access to the water they need to survive.

The Xingu River and all of the organisms that rely on it have the intrinsic right to live. By building the Belo Monte dam, the Brazilian government was not upholding the environmental ethic and sustaining the rights of the ecosystems in and along the river. The dam's construction has led to a variety of negative environmental impacts including flooding and deforestation. The flooding of the reservoir for the dam destroyed many established ecosystems, both in and around the Xingu River (Watts). The reservoir takes up 250 square miles of rainforest, and 80% of water has been diverted from downstream locations, which has significantly damaged rainforest and river ecosystems, impacting the wildlife, especially fish and turtles (Watts). Additionally, to make room for the dam, many trees were cleared. And, increasingly, as more people moved near the dam, more room was required, and deforestation rose (Fearnside). The lack of respect and caring for the environment shows a violation of the environmental domain of ethics on the part of the Brazilian government and the companies involved in the building of the dam. Additionally, the dam has infringed upon the rights of the environment and its inhabitants. They have natural rights to exist, but the Brazilian government has ignored their intrinsic value in favor of their economic profit.

The social, cultural, and economic rights of indigenous people along the Xingu River have been overlooked by the Brazilian government. The government has been ignoring their duties to fulfil the social and cultural domains of ethics for the country's inhabitants in favor of solely focusing on economics. The indigenous people around the river do not have a great deal of power that they can use to actualize their rights. Because the indigneous communities are economically and politically outside of the group in power, the Brazilian government, they do not have the ability to make decisions regarding their own lives and futures. The dam's construction has resulted in the "ethnocides" of their cultures as well as a multitude of other social, cultural, and economic losses (Sullivan). For example, because of the Belo Monte dam, there was a decrease in fishing that resulted in the inability of indigenous people to provide for their families, practice their traditional subsistence patterns, and share traditions with other members of their culture (Anderson). Part of the ability of the Brazilian government to ignore the rights of indigenous groups along the Xingu River is because of the system of structural violence. The government is not meeting the needs and not honoring the rights of the indigenous people due to society's insistence on holding potential economic benefits as more important than the basic rights of indigenous communities.

Unfortunately, there is a disconnect in the people who have the power to make decisions regarding water rights and the people who have the right to access that water (Pradhan). Not only does the river provide indigenous communities water, it provides them food, transportation, and jobs and holds cultural and religious significance (Sullivan, Santos). Their claims to water access are being ignored by the Brazilian government because they do not have the political or economic power to defend their rights. The Brazilian government is able to make decisions about

the water in the Xingu River, but the indigenous communities that depend on that water are left out of managing the river. They are therefore unable to gain access to the water that they need to support their traditional cultural and economic systems, leading to their destruction (Sullivan).

In the case of the Belo Monte Dam, the Brazilian government holds all of the power. They are able to make decisions regarding the river, which in turn affects the environments and people that are reliant on its waters. Because the government is more focused on how they can profit economically from the dam, they are ignoring their ethical duties and denying the rights of the indigenous communities and the ecosystems that depend upon the Xingu River.

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