



O Legado dos Bandeirantes, a Ocupação Territorial Brasileira, e *Settler Colonialism*

El Legado de los Bandeirantes, la Ocupación Territorial de Brasil y el *Settler Colonialism*

E5_02 Infraestructuras públicas en la producción del territorio, el
ambiente y el orden social en Latinoamérica, siglos XIX-XXI

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Resumo: A ocupação do interior do Brasil sempre foi um desafio e um objetivo tanto para os colonizadores portugueses quanto para o Estado brasileiro. A partir do século XVII, expedições de bandeirantes reivindicaram terras e buscaram riquezas minerais, promovendo a expansão territorial por meio da violência contra povos indígenas. Apesar dessas incursões, os centros econômicos e populacionais permaneceram no litoral. No início do século XX, após a abolição da escravidão e a proclamação da República, líderes republicanos investiram em infraestrutura, inicialmente ferrovias e telégrafos, depois rodovias, como forma de integrar o território nacional. O advento do automóvel foi visto como a solução para superar barreiras geográficas à interiorização. Nesse contexto, os bandeirantes foram ressignificados como heróis nacionais e utilizados como símbolo de continuidade histórica por elites que impulsionavam a expansão por meio de estradas. Paralelamente, essas elites promoveram a política de branqueamento, uma vertente eugenista brasileira que defendia a miscigenação com imigrantes europeus, acreditando na prevalência dos genes brancos como forma de produzir uma população mais “saudável” e moderna. Este artigo analisa como a construção de rodovias se articulou a esse projeto racial, servindo como ferramenta para interiorizar populações brancas e reconfigurar demograficamente o país. Através da análise de fontes primárias do final do século XIX até meados do século XX, demonstro como a linguagem racializada permeava discursos de modernização, higiene e produtividade, revelando a dimensão racial das políticas infraestruturais. Esses ideais também se materializaram no espaço construído, por meio da arquitetura e do planejamento territorial. Por fim, insiro esse processo na teoria de *settler colonialism*, ainda pouco aplicada ao caso brasileiro. Argumento que o Brasil contribui para ampliar esse arcabouço teórico, revelando como a engenharia racial e territorial foi central na conformação do Brasil moderno.

Keywords: *Brasil; bandeirantes; rodovias; branqueamento; settler colonialism*

Resumen: La ocupación del interior de Brasil ha sido históricamente un desafío y una meta tanto para los colonizadores portugueses como para el Estado brasileño. Desde el siglo XVII, expediciones de *bandeirantes* reclamaron tierras y buscaron riquezas minerales, expandiendo el territorio mediante la violencia contra los pueblos indígenas. Sin embargo, los principales centros económicos y demográficos permanecieron en la costa. A comienzos del siglo XX, tras la abolición de la esclavitud y la proclamación de la República, los líderes republicanos apostaron por la infraestructura como herramienta de integración nacional. Primero con ferrocarriles y telégrafos, y más tarde con carreteras, aprovecharon la llegada del automóvil para superar las barreras geográficas que dificultaban la expansión hacia el interior. En ese contexto, los *bandeirantes* fueron reinterpretados como héroes nacionales, y su figura se utilizó como símbolo de continuidad histórica por parte de las élites. Al mismo tiempo, estas promovieron la política del blanqueamiento, una forma de eugenesia local que incentivaba el mestizaje con inmigrantes europeos bajo la creencia de que los genes blancos prevalecerían, produciendo una población “más saludable” y moderna. Este artículo analiza cómo la construcción de carreteras se vinculó con dicho proyecto racial, funcionando como instrumento para atraer inmigrantes blancos al interior y transformar demográficamente el país. Mediante el análisis de fuentes primarias desde fines del siglo XIX hasta mediados del XX, demuestro cómo el lenguaje racializado impregnó los discursos sobre modernización, higiene y productividad, y cómo estos ideales se materializaron en el entorno construido, especialmente en la arquitectura y la planificación territorial. Finalmente, enmarco este proceso dentro de la teoría del *settler colonialism*, aún poco aplicada al caso brasileño. Sostengo que Brasil aporta elementos clave para expandir este marco teórico y comprender cómo la ingeniería racial y territorial moldeó el Brasil moderno.

Palabras-clave: Brasil, *bandeirantes*, carretera, branqueamento, settler colonialism

Introduction

Da largura que a terra do Brasil tem para o sertão não trato, porque até agora não houve quem a andasse, por negligência dos portugueses que, sendo grandes conquistadores de terras, não se aproveitam delas, mas contentam-se de as andar arranhando ao longo do mar como caranguejos.

I do not seek out Brazil's vast interior, because as of now, no one has walked upon it. This neglect is due to the Portuguese, who are great land conquerors, but do not take full advantage of their spoils. They are content to scramble along the beach like crabs (Vicente do Salvador, 1627, p. 5).

This quote appeared in what many scholars consider the first book on the history of Brazil, written by Friar Vicente do Salvador in 1627, simply entitled *História do Brasil* (History of Brazil). Writing more than a century after the Portuguese sailor Pedro Cabral first landed in South America, Salvador's observations covered many topics ranging from flora and fauna to climate and indigenous people. He constructed the inchoate narrative about the origins of the country that would become Brazil. His notions that the Portuguese colonists were happy to remain on the coast has become a reality in contemporary Brazil, a country of continental size, where 70% of the 212M Brazilians live within two hours of the beach (IBGE, 2010). The population imbalance of today produces *Os Dois Brasis* (The Two Brazils) where the population along the coast enjoy a higher standard of living compared to the interior. In between *Os Dois Brasis*, a jungle, thicker than any European had seen before, divided the country. Nature was the impediment to inward expansion. First there was the *Mata Atlântica* the coastal, tropical rainforest along the Atlantic Ocean, which also paralleled the Serra do Mar, a coastal range of mountains keeping the population by the beach. Upon the highlands there was yet another jungle, the Amazon Rainforest, much larger in scale and another obstacle to overcome or tame in order to occupy the entirety of the country. In addition, the indigenous populations did not give up without a fight as colonists made invasions into their land.

Throughout history there have been attempts to occupy the interior territory of Brazil and this paper seeks to trace these efforts, situating the first ventures as inspiration for all subsequent incursions which took on the form of settler colonialism. During colonial times, groups of men called *bandeirantes* would rove through the interior in search of gold and emeralds becoming national heroes as their violent invasions were transformed into symbols of national pride. In the early twentieth century, the autocratic ruler Getúlio Vargas called upon his country to March towards the West, evoking the trailblazing *bandeirantes* as role models for those who ventured into the interior. By the middle of the twentieth century, a new technology would allow for interior colonization: the automobile. Brazil implanted a new federal capital in the interior and embarked on a great road building endeavor, finally connecting the vast interior of the Amazon Rainforest to the rest of the country with the Belém-Brasília Highway. Decisions to grow the automotive industry aided the effort to occupy the interior as industrialization became a national priority. National integration, economic and otherwise, has been the goal for the Portuguese Empire and then Brazilian governments. On all occasions of Brazilian internal colonization two themes are common: (1) any individual who moves into the interior is undertaking a valiant effort like the *bandeirantes*, and this rhetoric is widely used to compare subsequent attempts back to their colonial roots, and (2) nature is the biggest impediment to interior expansion, and it must be declared an enemy of Brazil's progress.

The paper will proceed with a discussion of settler colonialism by defining its separation from conventional theories of colonialism and attempting to situate it within the Latin American and Brazilian contexts. The next part will explain the *bandeirantes* through their actions, reception, and promotion throughout time. The following section is a look at modernization and road building in Brazil followed by the specific policies of Presidents Vargas and Kubitschek to settle the interior of the country. The paper also examines Brazil's aspirations to whiten the country's population through immigration and how these aspirations connect to road building. The conclusion will highlight what was the pinnacle of national integration/settler colonialism in the

mid-twentieth century coinciding with the inauguration of the new federal capital, Brasília in 1960.

Settler Colonialism

Settler colonialism is a distinct form of colonization that scholars are continuing to define and can be expanded to other inconspicuous places in the world that the majority of settler colonial theorists have often overlooked. Latin America is a relatively new region to consider the logics of settler colonialism as most of the literature concerns the US, Canada, Australia, and New Zealand as cases. Theorization concerning these regions dominate this theory space because of the hegemonic nature of the English language academic publishing world and power of the institutions in these countries (Castellanos, 2017; Taylor; Lublin, 2021). Settler colonialism is a particular form of colonialism because settler colonists stay in the colonized land rather than enrich themselves to return to the metropole as they do in “franchise” or “dependent” colonialism (J. Kehaulani Kauanui; Patrick Wolfe, 2012).

The largest difference between colonialism and settler colonialism is the colony’s relationship to the metropole. “Colonialism reinforces the distinction between colony and metropole, settler colonialism erases it” (Veracini, 2011). The colonists aid in this distinction because in a settler colony they come to stay rather than extract resources in order to return to the metropole (Wolfe, 2006). In dependent colonialism a minority of colonial expatriates aim primarily to exploit the wealth and resources of the colonized space, which has implications on the urbanization of colonies (Hugill, 2017). The reasoning for building a city where you plan to stay versus purely extractive activities will change the built environment. Hugill continues that colonial cities reinforce metropolitan dominance through architecture while settler colonies may change building techniques and patterns focusing more internally. Since colonial cities are different from settler colonial cities, scholars need to study them with a different lens (Porter; Yiftachel, 2019). Hugill (2017) also attests that a major facet of settler colonialism is the occupation of indigenous space and that it is a continual process today.

Another way to understand the difference between the two types of colonization is that settler colonialism is a bacterium able to survive self-sufficiently, where colonialism is a virus, needing a host to survive (Veracini, 2014). The host in the latter understanding is both the metropole and the indigenous labor in the colony. This idea of labor exploitation defines the two styles:

[t]he first, the franchise or dependent colonialism, refers to a colonization by a relatively small minority population of an area with an extant majority population on whose labor the incoming minority comes to be dependent. The second is that of settler colonialism that is not established to extract surplus value from indigenous labor (Sánchez & Pita, 2014, p. 1041).

The settler colonies were dependent on large land areas to become successful, thus this labor/land binary is one marker of the differences of types of colonialism (Taylor, 2021). Taylor (2021) continues with three more foundations of settler colonial theory beyond this first binary land and labor: (1) the colonists view their colony as *terra nullius*; (2) blackness/slavery are integral to their society; and (3) there is a hard line and segregation of settler and indigenous. Although concise, these four foundations do not present a clear path to locating settler colonialism. In the New World, the nations do not think of themselves as colonizers as they became independent from their previous metropolises, yet “[s]ettler colonialism occurs everywhere that there are settler collectives, and it occurs constantly” (Barker, 2012, p. 4). Therefore, most countries in the New World, including Brazil, could fit into this theory.

Much like segregation, settler colonialism usually employs the organizing grammar of race (Wolfe, 2006). Other aspects of settler colonialism that Wolfe suggests is the focus on the elimination of the native, what he terms as the logic of elimination. Although the indigenous populations were enslaved for labor, the main goal would be to eliminate them eventually to provide space for settlers. Barker (2012) holds similar ideas about settler colonialism as Wolfe attests that it is not a historical event, but a system that perpetuates the erasure of the native populations as requirement for the settler expropriation of land and resources. This framework

provides space for today's multiculturalism which I will touch on later as a form of elimination of indigenous people.

Latin America troubles the established foundations of settler colonial theory. The majority of settler colonial theory scholarship today applies to countries where there is abundant land and scares labor, mostly in the former British colonies of the US, Canada, Australia and New Zealand (Salvatore, 2008). By this definition, certain countries in Latin America, specifically Argentina and Brazil could be settler colonial societies.

[L]ogics of dispossession and elimination were also central to Spanish and Portuguese imperial projects” but have been ignored because of the hegemonic nature of the US/English language experience (Castellanos, 2017). Taylor & Lubin (2021) enumerate some issues with applying settler colonialism to Latin America. First, settler colonialism is difficult to translate into Portuguese and Spanish producing the tautological terms “*colonialismo colono*” or “*colonialismo de colonos*,” translated back to English as “colony colonialism.” Another ‘*colonialismo de asentamientos*’ or ‘*colonialismo de assentamento*’ sound equally awkward, expressing something like ‘colonialism of settlements’ (Taylor & Lublin, 2021, p. 260).

Since the terminology is based in English language literature, a barrier exists for many Latin American scholars to enter this theoretical space, not to mention the structural dominance of Northern institutions. They also state that by embracing settler colonial theory, the theory works to detracts from indigenous epistemologies, focusing more on the colonizer. The simple binary in settler colonial theory of the settler and indigenous does not always hold up in Latin America which has much higher rates of miscegenation. The final major difference these scholars put forward is that today the Anglophone settler states are very different concerning rule of law and ability to provide services compared to those in Latin America. Where Anglophone countries tend to have robust bureaucratic systems that do not stray from the written law, Latin America is home to countries with politicized armed forces, lacking implementation power for laws, and an overall fragile rule of law.

Gott (2007) explains the whitening projects of Latin America during the nineteenth century as forms of settler colonialism. The term Latin America is even a tool of white settler ideology. French intellectuals coined the terms *Latinité* or *Latinidad* ‘in the middle of the nineteenth century, which the South American white elites embraced with alacrity to relate more to European culture (Gott, 2007, p. 267). He continues that scholars usually do not describe Latin America as a white settler society, but in reality, as in the cases of Cuba, Chile, and Venezuela, when there were advances by non-white people who came into power, there was mainly violent opposition, because it threatened the white elites who had been in power. Even when a nation is independent, it still remains colonial with power structures. These newly independent countries looked towards the US and Europe because they were liberal and progressive, but mostly the Latin American countries were ignoring their own populations.

Argentina is one of the first Latin American countries to enter into settler colonial theory because of its connection to British economic ties in the nineteenth century (Salvatore, 2008). But the country does not follow the normal logics of settler colonial theory. The settlers in Argentina were not only trying to obtain land, and although the settlers enslaved the indigenous population for labor, they also saw indigenous people as a resource (Lublin, 2021; Taylor, 2021). Argentine settlers also did not incorporate a *terra nullius* or manifest destiny logic from the beginning but adopted policies later in the nineteenth century. Afro-Argentines were not working on plantations, but mostly for urban residents, laboring and returning most of their pay to their enslavers. Argentine society also assimilated this black population because of their relatively small and urban population. Taylor (2021) makes the final point that miscegenation runs contrary to the prevailing elimination logic as Wolfe (2006) states, but today there is a way to sustain indigeneity because of a resurgence of language and culture.

Brazil, being a large country land-wise, can provide an example of settler colonialism as well. Poets (2021a) explains that Brazil really follows the logic of elimination in multiple formations.

In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries there was the policy of *branqueamento* (whitening, discussed later in this paper) to dilute the darker population through immigration and miscegenation. Nearly a century later, after the return to democracy and the new constitution in 1988, multiculturalism is the tool of elimination. As indigenous people become more integrated with Brazilian “society”, the less distinct they become, losing special rights, as nomadic tribes are given a higher level of freedom. Urban indigenous peoples become regular Brazilians, thus using assimilation as elimination. The land/labor binary does not hold up in Brazil either as “Black and Indigenous people have both experienced processes of dispossession, labor exploitation, assimilation/elimination, and racism under its settler colonial structure” (Poets, 2021b). There is certainly a gap that scholars are beginning to fill with work done on settler colonialism and Latin America, but it is difficult to do as the concept is a Northern idea imposed onto the South.

When thinking about decolonization, settler colonies experience a different reality than franchise colonies. As the case with many former Asian colonies, the colonizers completely left, leaving the indigenous population to regain power. Settler colonialism was defeated in Africa and triumphed in the Americas (Mamdani, 2015). African decolonization was somewhat straightforward; the white settlers mostly left, although it happened later in colonies that had larger populations of settlers such as Angola, Mozambique, and Zimbabwe. Decolonization is difficult to accomplish in the Americas because although the colonizing power left after losing violent independence wars, the descendants of colonizers are the majority of today’s elite (Stastny, 2022). Decolonization of a settler colony upholds coloniality because settlers are still in power in most of these independent polities in the Americas (Veracini, 2011). Speed (2022) explains contemporary settler colonialism as...

...the catalyst of capitalism’s expansion and continues to structure life under capitalism as it moves through different phases. Capitalism’s current iteration—neoliberalism—continues to be shaped by the settler colonial imperative of dispossession/extraction/elimination justified by racialized and gendered logics that while shifting continue to emerge from that imperative (Speed, 2022, p. 788).

This quote shows how the forms of settler colonialism continue to change but are present today with similar logics. This area of inquiry is very ripe for exploration in Latin America to see how this region can produce its own narratives, distinct but comparable to elsewhere.

Considering this literature, the *bandeirantes* have a hard time fitting into this concept of settler colonialism but may help expand the theory. As I will expound upon in the following section, the actions of *bandeirantes* do fit into some of the established logics, such as elimination of the indigenous populations, employing slavery, and exploiting a large land mass. What they did not do was settle the land in the sense of establishing communities that endured, but they did provide the paths which would become the roads to establish permanent settlement in the interior later in Brazil’s history. More importantly, they were inspiration for the later settler colonial project in the twentieth century through the idea of national integration. Here, I read national integration as code for settler colonialism, since scholars have conflated the two concepts before specifically in Brazil regarding the dictatorship’s development programs in the Amazon in the 1970s (Nordenson, 2022; Urzedo; Chatterjee, 2021) as well as in the US (Sim, 2021) and Palestine/Israel (Hackl, 2020). What I am trying to assert is that these calls for the interior settlement or national integration of Brazil in the early to mid-twentieth century were also settler colonial projects.

***Bandeirantes* and Early Interior Settlements of Brazil**

As Portuguese settlement of Brazil developed mainly on the coast, the first major entrance to the hinterlands was conducted through armed incursions led by groups of men in search of riches starting in the sixteenth century lasting through the eighteenth century. These invasions were called *bandeiras* (literally flags, translated as raids), and those who led them, *bandeirantes*. The English translation for *bandeirantes* is literally flag-carriers, but colloquially they are known as explorers, adventure hunters, bandits, although most commonly referred to as pathfinders. Instead

of permanently settling land, the main objective of the *bandeirantes* was to build paths or a network of paths in the interior to extract mineral wealth, particularly gold, silver, and precious stones but also abduct indigenous people to be sold to slave traders on the coast. Small, temporary, mining settlements did develop, but as soon as the mineral or precious stone that was being extracted became scarce, the miners would abandon the place. Several *bandeiras* could simultaneously occur and continue for multiple years. Since the *bandeirantes* were not establishing permanent settlements, their violent processes may not fit into settler colonial theory. I can consider them as engaging in dependent colonialism because of their relationship to Portugal, where they sent a portion of their riches back to their metropole. What I propose is that they served as essential inspiration for later settler colonial projects rather than being settler colonial themselves.

The majority of *bandeiras* originated in the present-day state of São Paulo. These expeditions of Paulistas (residents of the São Paulo region, later termed *bandeirantes*) were privately funded, always led by a Portuguese man or European-descendent Brazilian and were staunchly Catholic endeavors. A chaplain was always present in the entourage to perform last rites for those who died in the field, but also to proselytize to captive indigenous people who were not slaughtered by the *bandeirantes*. Enslaved people could also accompany the group acting as porters along with mules, and because of the dense vegetation, the expeditions were conducted on foot. There are few sources that describe these journeys, and most are similar in their accounts. Many sources depict armed *bandeirantes* attacking native villages and setting fire to their gardens and dwellings all while attempting to find mineral wealth and indigenous people to enslave (Dutra e Silva, 2018a). An anonymous letter sent to the King of Portugal in the 1690s changed the narrative of the *bandeirantes* from one of violence to heroism:

Your Majesty could make good use of the Paulistas by honoring them and granting them concessions. Awards and interest will make men take great risks. And these are the sort of men who will venture all through the backlands. They are always tramping through it, with no more sustenance than forest game: animals, snakes, lizards, wild fruit, and roots of several different trees. They do not mind spending years on end in the backlands...And even if these Paulistas, owing to some fracas among one another, might seem unruly, no one can deny it was they who wrested from the wild heathens all the backlands we now possess...So Your Majesty should make use of the Paulistas to conquer your lands (quoted in Capistrano de Abreu, 1997, 100-101).

The letter urges the King to forget the violence committed by the *bandeirantes* (referred here as Paulistas) and focus on the territorial claims they were making. The reframing of the *bandeirantes* as heroic men conquering land for the Portuguese crown in need of compensation was now embedded in Brazilian history. Much akin to the first Thanksgiving between the Pilgrims and Native Americans in early seventeenth century New England, the false narrative of heroic men has become an important myth of the greatness of early Brazil. This letter also situated the interior of Brazil as a wild, untamable place, yet important to dominate.

Although these violent pathfinders were responsible for murdering and enslaving indigenous people while decimating native settlements, there is no denying that they expanded the Portuguese and then Brazilian territory in South America. As stated before, the majority of early Portuguese Colonization remained on the coast because of the natural barriers of mountains, jungle, and the native defenses, but these *bandeirantes* did move (although violently) into these lands to claim more territory for Portugal than was stipulated by the Papal Treaty of Tordesillas (1494), which split the world into two domains for the Spanish and Portuguese to exploit (Cardozo, 1946). The current Brazilian territory would not be as continentally large today if the *bandeirantes* had not made their violent incursions.

Ouro Preto (Black Gold, named because of the black iron oxide covering the gold found in the area) became the center for mineral extraction in colonial Brazil. Founded in 1711, in the inland area that would become the state of Minas Gerais (General Mines), the town flourished through

the Brazilian Gold Rush of the eighteenth century. Earlier, the path to this area was found by Fernão Dias Pais, a *bandeirante* from São Paulo. Although Pais did not settle the area, Ouro Preto would not have come to be without his *bandeira*. Very little other settlement of the interior occurred during this time period. For the purposes of this paper, the next historical conjuncture that is important for internal colonization was Brazil's modernization projects starting in the twentieth century. Importantly, very early on in Brazilian history, the tale of the *bandeirante* as a Brazilian hero worth emulation was solidly part of the Brazilian national identity and expansionist aspirations.

Modernization and Road Building

At the end of the nineteenth century, Brazil underwent multiple foundational transitions. In 1888, Brazil was the last country to abolish modern slavery, which had the unintended consequence of delaying Brazilian industrialization because of the dominance of primary material export economy and agriculture only viable with enslaved labor. One year after abolition, in 1889, Brazil ceased being an empire and transitioned to a republic. Shedding its imperial legacy, the republic would be a modern nation state focused on growing new economies and industrialization. In addition, the new constitution in 1891 stipulated the construction of a new federal capital on the Central Highlands, abandoning Rio de Janeiro as the seat of national power and codifying an idea that had been ruminating since independence in 1822 (Story, 2021). The location of the new federal capital was in the underpopulated interior, hard to access because of the natural barriers that had kept development along the coast, but achievable through settler colonialism. The state of Minas Gerais can serve as a metaphor for this Brazilian transition. The state's elites viewed the state capital, Ouro Preto, as a creature of colonialism and then imperialism, therefore, the government of Minas Gerais selected a different location for a new capital to reflect the modernizing state. Planning and construction of the new state capital started in 1893 and finished four years later, when Belo Horizonte (Beautiful Horizon) became the new capital of Minas Gerais. Although located inland, the new capital is still considered part of the Southeast Region, just 440kms north of Rio de Janeiro. These actions to move the capital taken by the state of Minas Gerais would play out at the national scale seventy years later.

Before these transitions, the Brazilian Empire faced immense international pressure about continuing the slave trade and slavery. Although England banned the Transatlantic Slave Trade in 1833, Brazil continued to import enslaved Africans for decades. Mounting geopolitical pressures pushed the Brazilian Emperor to enact gradual emancipation through laws. First there was the Free Womb Law (1871), that any child born to an enslaved woman would be free and followed by the Sexagenarian Law (1885), which granted freedom to enslaved people that reached 60 years of age.

At this point, the Brazilian landed elite faced a crisis: the abolition of slavery was inevitable. The impending labor shift prompted the Emperor to hold agriculture conferences in 1878, one in Rio de Janeiro and another in Recife, Pernambuco. The conferences were a forum to discuss what to do in the future when abolition occurred. The elite feared a labor shortage and argued that the soon to be freed black population was unfit for work. They called for European white immigration to "improve" the population. And here I quote a member of the conference: "We always prefer European colonization, the only one that suits us, due to the advanced state of civilization in that part of the world." (Murilo De Carvalho, 1989).

This quote is very emblematic of the conferences' tone and ideas and here we can see *branqueamento*, or racial whitening, emerging as a national strategy and ideology. *Branqueamento* is related to eugenics, differing from European and US forms of eugenics. Rather than segregating or eliminating the "inferior" races, Brazilian elites sought to dilute them through miscegenation. As Sadighian (2023) notes, Brazilian elites saw white immigration as essential to make Brazil a white nation, since in their theory, white blood could dominate over black. Another particularity for Brazil was the way in which Brazilians viewed immigrants. Most New World countries are countries of immigrants. The US immigration vision was that immigrants improve

themselves once they get there because the US is intrinsically great, while in Brazil, the immigrant will make Brazil a better country (Lesser, 2014).

The racist ideology embedded labor policy into immigration. Between the late 19th century and 1937, nearly five million European immigrants arrived in Brazil, which is roughly equal to the total number of Africans forcefully brought to Brazil during the entire slave trade. Half of the new immigrants went to São Paulo, with that state and nation subsidizing immigrant's passages to Brazil. Thus, Brazil had the intention to whiten the country while importing new labor and this combination occurred in the Southeast which was poised to become the industrial center of the country.

Before and after the transitions of the late nineteenth century, the Southeast Region, and particularly the state of São Paulo, saw the largest economic expansion in the country. The sugarcane plantations in the Southeast began to produce coffee, progressing westward as new railroad lines became the main mode to transport the new cash crop. Railroad lines also connected the growers to the port of Santos for the export of coffee, but all railroad lines ran through the city of São Paulo. Still relying on enslaved labor, the elites were able to amass amazing amounts of capital which would position São Paulo well for becoming the center of Brazilian industrialization (Naritomi; Soares; Assunção, 2012). The coffee export business grew management and logistics know-how plus installed requisite infrastructure in the region which allowed for industrial growth. In the early twentieth century, elites reinvested the profits from the coffee sector into the industrial sector which employed newly immigrated Europeans migrating under the *branqueamento* immigration policies. These racist immigration policies, coupled with racist business practices of not employing the newly emancipated enslaved Brazilians, excluded Afro-Brazilians from industrial jobs (Catalan; Fernández-De-Sevilla, 2020). Because of the accumulated wealth, a new labor force, and the requisite infrastructure, the city and region of São Paulo emerged as the most logical place for industrialization to first occur in Brazil.

Because of all the geographic concentration of industries in São Paulo, when the automotive industry entered Brazil, it chose that region to set up the first factories. The Ford Motor Company was the first automotive company to set up shop in Brazil in 1919 followed by General Motors in 1925 (Botelho, 2002). As the automotive industry was in its infancy in Brazil, the two companies decided to import nearly all the parts of a car, bus, or truck to then be assembled in Brazil (Wolfe, 2010). This decision makes sense since the infrastructure in Brazil was mostly designed for export of primary materials and the import of manufactured consumer products. Thus, the automotive industry grew as an assemblage industry rather than a manufacturing industry, where parts manufactured in the United States arrived in Brazil to be assembled into cars sold in the domestic market. Car ownership increased and private automobile clubs lobbied for better roads to connect São Paulo and Rio de Janeiro. By 1926, the Brazilian motorway system consisted of 1.126 kms of road (mostly unpaved) radiating out of São Paulo as seen in Figure 1.



Figura 01: “Sections of Interstate Roads from São Paulo, constructed for automobiles, inaugurated by May 13, 1926.” Fonte: (Tavares, 2014).

As car ownership was mainly concentrated in São Paulo, the radial road system suited the demand of the country at this time period. The map in Figure 1 shows one outlying road that connected the city of Rio de Janeiro to the city of Petropolis, but this map illustrates the dominance of São Paulo. Because of the centrality of São Paulo, the state was responsible for building these roads during this time period. Washington Luis, mayor of the city of São Paulo (1914-1919), president of the state of São Paulo (1920-1924), and president of the Republic (1926-1930) was a major proponent of road building, creating a highway department at the state level in 1921.

Before the establishment of the road building bureaucracy, private automobile clubs advocated for improved roads. One of the tactics to draw attention to the need for road building was that the autoclubs would fund caravans to travel in between cities to highlight the poor road conditions and thus make a spectacle to pressure the public sector to build more roads. They called these caravans *bandeiras* to link the modern motorists to the colonial *bandeirantes*. The clubs continued the soft reframing of the violent *bandeirantes* as gentle pioneers of national unity, just like the new roads would unite the country (Story, 2021).

As the private autoclubs lobbied for better roads, the state of São Paulo, of which Washington Luiz was now governor, convened three road congresses starting in 1917. There is a lot of colorful language debated about the need for constructing roads, but this quote from a local politician sums up what the collective thinking was:

The road...it is also education, hygiene and the uplifting of our race; it is also national defense, the fraternization of the various States, the integration of the federation, the unity of the homeland - the crowning of the great work of the intrepid *bandeirantes* (Secretária da Agricultura, 1917, p. 111).

Here is this quote, you can see the allusion to the *bandeirantes* and how roads were able to complete the national integration they had started. Of course, the elites of the early 20th century assertion that the *bandeirantes* were engaging in national integration is a convenient reframing or invention. They are able to situate road building as this valiant enterprise which will fulfil the long deferred national integration the *bandeirantes* started, which is a pretense.

Beyond the mention of *bandeirantes* and national integration, I want to zero in on the link between hygiene and race. Since Haussman's Paris, planners have invoked hygiene to justify physical interventions. The French Belle-Époque, hygienic standard transformed into the City Beautiful Movement in the United States but Brazilian architects and proto-planners embraced not only the word and aesthetics of the movement, they also incorporated hygiene to fit into their racial logics. A hygienic population was now the goal, and for the Brazilian elites, which meant a white population. As Berthold (2010) notes, whiteness was imagined as a form of physical purity, without marks of pollution, moral or bodily. Although Berthold was speaking about the United States, his concept of non-whiteness as contamination fits Brazil's post-abolition context. Architecture and infrastructure (roads) could now embody whiteness, or the whiteness to which Brazilian elites aspired. The *bandeirantes* or the myth of them was a tool for politicians to embark on more colonization in the interior, claiming national integration, which I again read as settler colonialism.

Getúlio Vargas and the *Marcha para o Oeste* (March Towards the West)

In 1930, Getúlio Vargas seized power after a coup led by a military junta deposed President Luis and the President-elect Julio Prestes, bringing a close to the First Republic after just forty-one years. Vargas consolidated power with a new constitution in 1932 and then ruled under the dictatorship *Estado Novo* (New State) from 1937. The details of the military dictatorship are outside this paper, but, Vargas continued with fervor to develop both the automotive industry and road network in Brazil. The *Estado Novo* viewed the vast interior of Brazil as a place to inhabit, exploit, and make productive. Like in colonial times, the Brazilian government considered nature as the impediment of this interior expansion, but still Vargas started the modern territorial

expansion imploring his nation to get on board with his expansionist policy in his New Year's address of December 31, 1937:

Brazilian civilization is at the mercy of geographical factors and has spread itself in the direction of longitudes, occupying the vast coastline, where the main centers of activity, wealth and life have been located. More than just a simple image, it is an urgent and necessary reality to climb the mountains, cross the plateaus and expand in the direction of the latitudes. **Retracing the path of the pioneers** who planted the landmarks of the territorial frontiers in the heart of the continent in a vigorous and epic sweep, we once again need to remove obstacles, shorten distances, open up roads and extend economic frontiers, definitively consolidating the foundations of the nation.

The true meaning of Brazilianness is the march to the West [emphasis added] (Vargas, 1937, p. 125).

Vargas refers to the “geographical factors” of mountains and forest which stand in the way of the coastal populations ability to access the “remote” interior, the same obstacles for interior expansion faced by the colonists. He is formulating the concept of *Os Dois Brasis* (Two Brazils), one prosperous and littoral, the other impoverished and interior. The “pioneers” is a reference to the *bandeirantes*, who, in Vargas’ conception, started this westward march, making no reference to their violent actions, but elevating them to national heroes. The “paths” are a suggestion of roads that will reach the interior to bring economic development to the frontier. Vargas was calling on Brazilians to engage in territorial conquest like the *bandeirantes* had done before, but this time the colonists would settle the interior enmeshing the *bandeirantes*’ earlier process as essential for this new settler colonialism.

This nationalist, expansionist rhetoric was inflated by Cassiano Ricardo’s book *Marcha para Oeste: A influência da bandeira na formação social e política do Brasil* (March towards the West: The influence of the flag/raid in the social and political formation of Brazil), first published in 1940. Ricardo heroized the colonial pathfinders yet again and situated them as the instigators of the justified and valiant war against nature which impeded Brazil from reaching its full territorial potential (Sousa; Pacheco, 2013). This war would continue as Brazil’s aspirations for modernization pushed to integrate the Amazon with the rest of the country. Ricardo’s book also stated that the littoral band of Brazil’s development was under the influence of foreigners where the interior of the country was the foundation of the nation: the true Brazil. The State needed to continue the work of land occupation of the interior initiated by the *bandeirantes* (Ricardo, 1970). There is no reference to the indigenous populations who lived there, excluding them from Brazilianness, but encouraging the European decedents to colonize this land, incorrectly conceptualized as empty. This rhetoric fits distinctly into the settler colonial logic of the elimination of indigenous, the exploitation of a large land mass, and viewing this land as *terra nullius*.

To reach the interior and because the car was gaining favor over the railroad, highways would be the weapon to wage war through the forest. This aspiration inspired the first National Highway Plan in 1944, which was a departure from the São Paulo-centered conceptualization of a road network to reach all areas of Brazil as seen in Figure 2. This plan was also the first to be approved by the federal government and also had the specific intent to integrate the consumer market through the circulation of products during this period of great national industrialization (Tavares, 2014).



Figura 02: National Highway Plan, 1944. Fonte: (Silva, 1944).

This National Highway Plan was a departure from all earlier transportation plans as it solely rendered highways and did not depict railroad or maritime routes. The four guiding principles of the plan were: (1) avoid crossings with main railway trunk lines; (2) take advantage of existing or planned state roadways; (3) consider only roadways; and (4) establish convenient connections of the national highway network with air infrastructure (Sandoval, 2012). The plan established an orthogonal grid of axes either in the North-South or East-West directions connecting already existing state capitals or other important economic centers. One year following the adoption of this plan, Congress levied taxes on fuel and lubricants to fund road building, first constructing a road to connect the hinterland of the Northeastern state of Bahia to its coastal capital Salvador and upgrading the connection between São Paulo and Rio. Much of the plan remained on paper rather than constructed in reality.

Industrialization Policy Shift and Return to Democracy

As mentioned before, the Brazilian automotive industry started out as an assemblage industry rather than manufacturing, where foreign car companies would import all the necessary parts into Brazil to assemble them into the finished product. In this manner, Brazil was not building its own capabilities to manufacture automobiles and parts but rather continuing along a similar path of importing manufactured goods. After the fall of the *Estado Novo* in 1945, Vargas was then elected in 1950 in a democratic election. Interested in continuing foreign direct investment as well as spurring domestic production, Vargas enacted a very severe form of import substitution industrialization (ISI). Normally ISI is an economic theory to stimulate domestic manufacturing, where a country manufactures products domestically at the same time as raising tariffs on the same products that are imported, thus nudging the consumer to purchase the cheaper, domestically made product. By the middle of the twentieth century, Brazil was spending more money on importing cars and oil than on wheat. Therefore, in 1953, Vargas established Petrobrás, the national petroleum company to commence domestic oil exploration, refinement, and production instead of continuing to import foreign oil. That same year, the federal government also shifted their ISI policy to pass a law which banned the import of foreign automotive parts and required

any automotive vehicle sold in Brazil must be made with 90-95% Brazilian made parts. Not to lose out on the large Brazilian market, the foreign car companies complied with the new law, transferring production know-how and investing in factories to manufacture cars as well as auto parts in Brazil. Within seven years of the new ban and laws, the number of auto part factories in Brazil climbed from 250 to 1.200, and the number of car factories from 3 to 11 (Associação Nacional dos Fabricantes de Veículos Automotores, [S.d.]). The policy shift had worked to grow domestic automotive manufacturing industries.

After the suicide of Vargas in 1954, and a string of acting presidents, Brazil elected Juscelino Kubitschek, the governor of Minas Gerais, to the presidency in 1955 on the platform of progress of “Fifty Years in Five.” The central plank of his campaign was to build a new federal capital in the Central Highlands called Brasília, finally completing the desire to move political power away from the coast and into the interior. Along with this new capital, Kubitschek released his 31-point *Plano de Metas* (Target Plan) to invest in energy, education, health, and infrastructure, of which road building was a major component. For road building, the goals were to increase the paved highways from 920 kms to 5.920 kms, as well as constructing 12.000 kms of new “first class” unpaved roads (Kubitschek, 1958). The road system would be centered on the new capital, creating a new radial network connecting major cities to Brasília. The larger purpose of this new road system was also to allow for new development along these novel corridors and foster national integration, economically speaking. The economic analysis by Kubitschek administration identified the lack of communication between the industrialized Southeast Region and the agricultural zones of the interior as the principal choke point for further industrial development (Moreira, 2003). At the same time, the interior represented an untapped consumer market for industrial products produced in the Southeast (Andrade, 2015). The new capital would be the hub for all this new communication and commerce to run through the newly constructed highways achieving full national integration, which I view as a form of settler colonialism.

Construction of Brasília started in 1956 and was finished four years later with a grand inauguration in 1960. The plan to build the radial system centered on Brasília was nowhere near completion in 1960, except for one spoke of the network, the northern 2,100 km section called the Belém-Brasília Highway. The federal commission responsible for the construction of this link affirmed it was the most important part of the network stating in a report: “[T]he construction of Brasília, as the new capital, would be incomplete for its historic inauguration, in April 1960, if the trunk highway, which links it to the north of the country, had not been completed, simultaneously” (“Rodovia da Unidade Nacional,” 1958). One of the more ambitious sections, this highway would connect the city of Belém at the mouth of the Amazon River in the north to the new federal capital. It would be the first overland connection from the Amazon Rainforest to the rest of the country. Although prosperous at the turn of the twentieth century from the rubber boom, Belém was only connected to the rest of Brazil by maritime routes or up the river to Manaus.

The main obstacle to constructing the Belém-Brasília Highway, as with any interior Brazilian expansion, was nature, which had always seemed impenetrable. To forge a path through this dense vegetation was no longer a challenge because of the technological advances the Brazilian government possessed at mid-century: tractors and mechanized felling devices. This technical prowess gave rise to new *bandeirismo*, the third iteration of valiant Brazilians heading into the forest (Andrade, 2015). Aided by new technology, the nearly impossible task of entering the interior would be much easier than the first colonial *bandeirantes* or Vargas’s March towards the West. Now Brazilians would be able to dominate nature and integrate the entire country or achieve settler colonialism.

The *bandeirante* rhetoric was fully embraced by Kubitschek’s government, specifically in relation to the chief engineer Bernardo Sayão. Sayão had been working on engineering projects for the new capital but rose to the challenge of designing the Belém-Brasília Highway. He mobilized a fleet of 200 trucks, tractors, fellers, and solidifiers, distributing 3,400 workers in 11 task forces working on three fronts with bases in the cities of Belém in the North, Anápolis near Brasília in the South, and Imperatriz in the state of Maranhão, somewhat in the middle of the planned

highway. Figure 3 shows the construction of the highway through the dense forest. The uneven topography also presented another challenge to constructing the road.



Figura 03: Construction of Belém-Brasília Highway. Fonte: (De Sousa, 2019).

In 1959, one year before the inauguration of the Belém-Brasília Highway, a felled tree killed Sayão while he was working in a trailer. Upon his death the rhetoric of him being a valiant warrior against nature filled media outlets. The press elevated him to a mythical hero, a general who died in a terrible battle opening up a road to bring prosperity to the country (Dutra e Silva, 2018b). Sayão's death reaffirmed nature as the enemy to Brazil's progress, many times expressed in various press articles. Nothing was more direct to this point than Kubitschek's eulogy for Sayão, which he gave at his funeral, the first in Brasília:

He died standing, in the midst of the final resistance of the vast forest, when the end of his effort was in sight. He was struck by one of the plentiful trees that he had to bring down so that Brazil could open its forceful path...He was knocked down by a fatal blow by the fall of one of its colossal trees, which reverberated throughout the forest. It was nature's revenge against this modern pathfinder, this incomparable *bandeirante* (Kubitschek quoted in Dutra e Silva, 2019, p.).

Kubitschek calling Sayão a *bandeirante* is important for political reasons as there was growing opposition to the expense being laid out for the construction of the new capital and highways. By evoking the national heroes of the *bandeirantes*, Kubitschek hoped to emotionally connect with the public to justify the financial and human costs associated with national integration for economic development. The roadbuilder/pathfinder/*bandeirante* Sayão became a symbol of integration, progress, and national development while nature embodied the enemy that must be confronted and defeated to pave the way for national greatness (Evans; Dutra e Silva, 2017). Like the colonial *bandeirantes* who had built the paths for later colonization, the engineer was the twentieth-century *bandeirante*, building the paths that allow for settler colonialization.

Just two weeks after Sayão's death, construction crews working from the North and the South met outside the city of Açailândia in the state of Maranhão. Present were the ambassadors of Belgium, the Dominican Republic, and Switzerland, along with Brazil's ministers of War, Education, and Foreign Relations and a group of journalists to watch Kubitschek take helm of a tractor to fell the final tree. Failing to bring down the over one-hundred-foot tall jatobá tree, workers finished the task while the dignitaries enjoyed a lunch (Story, 2021). With the road link completed, the war had been won. Press exclaimed, "we were penetrating with our tires a jungle that has always been a barrier to progress" (R. de P. Andrade, 2012, p. 8). The triumph of Brazilians over the forest had come to pass, and the car's rubber tires was the mechanism to do so. The war was over and

Kubitschek, reflecting later in a book entitled “Why I Built Brasília” continues the triumphant language:

[There was] the epic of the struggle against the forest. Everything conspired to thwart the intention of the pathfinders - difficulties of every kind, the mystery of the region that had never been explored, the harshness of life in subhuman conditions, unforeseen dangers, thirst, hunger, fevers, snakes, mosquitoes and, above all, ticks and ants... So the road was opened up by saw, tractor, machete and dynamite. When a giant cedar or *maçaranduba* tree seemed irremovable, sticks of dynamite were inserted into cracks in the roots and the trunk was blown up. The fall of one of these kings of the forest was an unforgettable spectacle (Kubitschek, 2000, p. 187 e 189).

The natural obstacles were treated as enemies in this war for national progress. The engineers were violently cutting through the forest just as the colonial *bandeirantes* had. Although there were many challenges, the Brazilian technological superiority was able to tame nature, creating a narrative that progress was the goal at whatever cost. The environment was the impediment, now with the connection of the Amazon to the rest of the country, economic and industrial development was thought to occur easily with new settlements coming to be along the new roadways.

Conclusion

On February 2, 1960, just three months before the official inauguration of Brasília, there was an event that was the culmination of territorial occupation of the interior, road building, the Brazilian automotive industry, and settler colonization. On a rare rainy day for the region, the National Integration Caravan descended upon the city from all corners of the country (Ferreira Júnior, 2019). Four separate caravans converged on Brasília leaving from Belém in the North, Porto Alegre in the South, Cuiabá in the West, and Rio de Janeiro in the East. To showcase the Brazilian automotive industry, only cars made in Brazil could be part of the caravans which in 1960 included the Romi-Isetta; Jeep's Willys; Volkswagen's Kombi and Beetle; Simca's Chambord, Toyota's Land Cruiser, and trucks made by Mercedes, Chevrolet, and Scania (Mora, 2020). As the 287 members of the caravan went through the city, Kubitschek himself joined the parade in a Romi-Isetta as seen in Figures 4 & 5.



Figura 04: The National Integration Caravan parading through Brasília, 1960. Fonte: (Mora, 2020).



Figura 05: President Kubitschek joining the National Integration Caravan. Kubitschek holds “the Brazilian flag, in a Brazilian made car, with Brazilian made tires, powered on Brazilian gasoline, traveling on Brazilian made asphalt.”
Fonte: (Ferreira Júnior, 2019).

Kubitschek spoke the following words to the members of the caravans:

You were carried by these new roads, some still unfinished, with the remnants of the wild virginity of yesteryear, but already serving national unity, you have come cutting through the most different regions of our territory, driven by the same spirit of the pioneers of yore...[I]t is now possible to travel by land from Belém to Porto Alegre - which is equivalent to going from Lisbon to Moscow, or from New York to California. I say this, gentlemen, more with a sense of relief than joy. I confess that it has taken us far too long to achieve this result. (Kubitschek, 1960, p. 55).

Once again, the reference to the *bandeirantes* is clear, any incursion into the interior resembles a valiant effort much like the colonial expeditions to serve national unity/settler colonialism. Now the drivers of the cars were akin to the “pioneers of yore,” being able to claim the interior like their colonial counterparts. The second part of the quote puts the Brazilian Road system on the same level of roads in Europe and the United States. Kubitschek makes this comparison to say that Brazil has attained a certain level of desired development, although the journey took a bit longer than wanted. With the modernization and industrialization projects that Brazil undertook, these journeys through the interior for the caravans were much easier but still challenging and worthy of celebration.

The victory at all costs over the forest situates the building of the Belém-Brasília Highway as a great feat in the chronology of territorial occupation and settler colonization of the interior of Brazil. Road building was the way in which *Os Dois Brasis* were unified, but the result was mainly coastal elites colonizing the interior. The locus of federal power moved to the interior from Rio de Janeiro, but those in charge were still from the coast. Just as the *bandeirantes* left São Paulo to exploit the interior, the national plan for integration was to link the interior to the industrialized Southeast, providing a new market for products made there. The deliberate policies to grow the automotive industry were successful in conquering the nature of the interior. Without the confluence of all these contingent factors, the Brazilian settler colonial project would not have been possible. This paper can shed light on how the particular Brazilian case should enter the scholarly debate of settler colonialism expanding the concept to be more inclusive and diverse.

Today in Brasília, in the middle of the monumental axis, on the Ministries Esplanade, there is a landmark installed in 1960 to commemorate the National Integration Caravan, seen in Figure 6. The two-meter-tall cross has a letter for each direction of a compass at the four points, representing the four regions from where the caravan originated. The monumental edifices of the capital dwarf the commemorative cross, diminutive in size, seeming out of scale with the capital.

This small gesture is a direct reference to the role that the highway and automobile played in Brazilian national integration and thus settler colonialism. A reason why this landmark is relatively unremarkable may be because Brasília and the highways themselves (with Brazilian-made cars traveling on them) stand as the monumental triumph for the Brazilian occupation of the interior of the country. The interior had remained elusive for more the four centuries as nature kept Brazilians on the coast, but Frei Vicente do Salvador may be pleased to see the crabs were able to scramble away from the beach.



Figure 06: *Marco da Caravana da Integração Nacional* (National Integration Landmark) Fonte: (Author, 2025).

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