



O LEGADO DOS BANDEIRANTES E A OCUPAÇÃO TERRITORIAL BRASILEIRA

EIXO TEMÁTICO: Disputas do/pelo progresso e do/pelo moderno

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RESUMO

A ocupação do interior do território brasileiro sempre foi um desafio para os colonizadores portugueses e para o governo brasileiro posterior. Desnecessário dizer que essas tentativas de ocupação do interior foram invasões de terras indígenas, mas, para os invasores, estavam tentando abrir novas terras para o cultivo agrícola, conectar novos mercados à economia de consumo e concluir um projeto multissecular de integração nacional. Este artigo reconta a história dessas diferentes tentativas de ocupação do interior, desde a época colonial até o século XX. Os bandeirantes coloniais, que foram os primeiros europeus e descendentes de europeus a entrar violentamente no interior do Brasil, são um marco importante da colonização do interior. Os políticos evocaram os bandeirantes como heróis míticos e exemplos a serem seguidos para integrar o território brasileiro. Este artigo traça essas evocações dos bandeirantes para o interior e destaca como a nova tecnologia do automóvel, aliada a um grande impulso de política pública para a construção de estradas, permitiu uma ocupação mais sustentada do interior do Brasil apenas em meados do século XX. A Caravana da Integração Nacional, que viu grupos de veículos, originários dos quatro cantos do Brasil, descerem na nova capital federal, Brasília, torna-se um símbolo da realização desse sonho de ocupar todo o território brasileiro.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: Brasil, bandeirantes, construção de estradas, ocupação do interior

THE LEGACY OF THE *BANDEIRANTES* AND BRAZILIAN TERRITORIAL OCCUPATION

ABSTRACT

Occupying the interior of the Brazilian territory has always been challenging for the Portuguese colonizers and subsequent Brazilian government. Needless to say, these attempts into the interior were invasions into indigenous land, but for the invaders, they were attempting to open up new land for agricultural cultivation, connect new markets to the consumption economy, and to complete a centuries' old national integration project. This paper retells the history of these different occupying attempts into the interior from colonial times to the twentieth century. The colonial *bandeirantes*, who were the first European and European-descendant people to violently enter the Brazilian interior, are a prominent fixture of interior colonization. Politicians have evoked the *bandeirantes* as mythical heroes and examples to follow in order to integrate the Brazilian territory. This paper traces these evocations of the *bandeirantes* to move inward and highlights how the new technology of the automobile coupled with a major public policy push to build roads allowed for a more sustained occupation of the Brazilian interior only as recently as the mid-twentieth century. The National Integration Caravan, which saw groups of vehicles, originating from all four corners of Brazil, descend upon the new federal capital of Brasília, becomes a symbol of the realization of this dream to occupy all of the Brazilian territory.

KEY WORDS: Brazil, *bandeirantes*, road building, interior occupation

EL LEGADO DE LOS *BANDEIRANTES* Y LA OCUPACIÓN TERRITORIAL BRASILEÑA

RESUMEN

La ocupación del interior del territorio brasileño siempre ha sido un reto para los colonizadores portugueses y el posterior gobierno brasileño. Huelga decir que estos intentos de ocupación del interior fueron invasiones de tierras indígenas, pero para los invasores, se trataba de abrir nuevas tierras para el cultivo agrícola, conectar nuevos mercados a la economía de consumo y completar un proyecto de integración nacional de siglos de antigüedad. Este artículo repasa la historia de estos diferentes intentos de ocupación del interior desde la época colonial hasta el siglo XX. Los *bandeirantes* coloniales, que fueron los primeros europeos y descendientes de europeos que entraron violentamente en el interior de Brasil, son un elemento destacado de la colonización del interior. Los políticos han evocado a los *bandeirantes* como héroes míticos y ejemplos a seguir para integrar el territorio brasileño. Este artículo rastrea estas evocaciones de los *bandeirantes* para avanzar hacia el interior y destaca cómo la nueva tecnología del automóvil, unida a un importante impulso de las políticas públicas para construir carreteras, permitió una ocupación más sostenida del interior de Brasil sólo a mediados del siglo XX. La Caravana de Integración Nacional, en la que grupos de vehículos procedentes de todos los rincones de Brasil descendieron sobre la nueva capital federal de Brasília, se convierte en un símbolo de la realización de este sueño de ocupar todo el territorio brasileño.

PALABRAS CLAVE: Brasil, *bandeirantes*, construcción de carreteras, ocupación interior.

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. 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 government. 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.

***Bandeirantes* and Early Interior Settlements**

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* (flags), 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.

The majority of *bandeiras* originated in the present-day state of São Paulo. These expeditions of *Paulistas* (residents of the São Paulo region) 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*. Slaves 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, 2018). 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* 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 for domination.

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). Brazil 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, but 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 slavery, which had the unintended consequence of delaying 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. The state of Minas Gerais can serve as a metaphor for this Brazilian transition. As the state's capital, Ouro Preto was thought of 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 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 e 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 as racist business policies excluded the newly emancipated enslaved Brazilians from industrial jobs (Catalan e Fernández-de-Sevilla, 2020) (Catalan & Fernández-De-Sevilla, 2020). The city and region of São Paulo distinctly became the most logical place for industrialization for the entire country.

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. 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 become cars sold domestically. Car ownership increased and automobile clubs lobbied for better roads to connect São Paulo and Rio de Janeiro. By 1926, the Brazilian motorway system consisted of 1126 kms of road (mostly unpaved) radiating out of São Paulo as seen in Figure 1.

Figure 1: “Sections of Interstate Roads from São Paulo, constructed for automobiles, already 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 and centrality 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. Private automobile clubs also advocated for improved roads by sponsoring caravans to travel between cities, calling them *bandeiras*, a direct allusion to the colonial *bandeirantes*. The clubs continued the soft reframing of the violent *bandeirantes* as gentle pioneers of national unity, just like the roads would unite the country (Story, 2021). This claim was quite thin as the road system the clubs advocated for solely connected Rio de Janeiro with São Paulo.

Getúlio Vargas and the *Marcha para 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 ruled under the dictatorship *Estado Novo* (New State). Military dictatorship aside, 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:

“A civilização brasileira, mercê dos fatores geográficos, estendeu-se no sentido da longitude, ocupando o vasto litoral, onde se localizaram os centros principais de atividade, riqueza e vida. Mais do que uma simples imagem, é uma realidade urgente e necessária galgar a montanha, transpor os planaltos e expandir-nos no sentido das latitudes. Retomando a trilha dos pioneiros que plantaram no coração do Continente, em vigorosa e épica arremetida, os marcos das fronteiras territoriais, precisamos de novo suprimir obstáculos, encurtar distâncias, abrir caminhos e estender as fronteiras econômicas, consolidando, definitivamente, os alicerces da Nação.

O verdadeiro sentido de brasilidade é a marcha para o Oeste.”

“Brazilian civilization is at the mercy of geographical factors and has spread itself in the direction of longitude, 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” (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 the territorial conquest that the *bandeirantes* had before.

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 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 e 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* (Cassiano, 1940). There is no reference to the indigenous populations who lived there, excluding them from Brazilianess, but encouraging the European decedents to colonize this land, incorrectly conceptualized as empty.

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).

Figure 2: 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 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.

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 (s.p.)). 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 (R. 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.

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.

Figure 3: 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. 17).

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 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 e Dutra e Silva, 2017).

Just two weeks after Sayão 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" (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:

"[Havia] a epopeia dessa luta contra a floresta. Tudo conspirava para frustrar a intenção dos desbravadores — dificuldades de todo gênero, o mistério da região nunca explorada, a dureza da vida em condições subumanas, os perigos imprevistos, a sede, a fome, as febres, as cobras, os mosquitos e, sobretudo, os carrapatos e o formigão...Assim, a estrada ia sendo aberta a serrote, a trator, a facção e a dinamite. Quando um cedro ou uma maçaranduba gigante parecia irremovível, encaixavam-se bananas de dinamite em fendas, abertas nas raízes, e estrondava-se o tronco. A queda de um desses reis da floresta era um espetáculo inesquecível."

[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. 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.

Conclusion

On February 2, 1950, 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, and the Brazilian automotive industry. On a rare rainy day, 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.

Figure 4: The National Integration Caravan parading through Brasília, 1960



Fonte: (Mora, 2020)

Figure 5: President Kubitschek joining the National Integration Caravan, “holding 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 addressed the caravanners affirming that the capital is now in the heart of Brazil also stating:

“Trazidos por essas estradas novas, algumas ainda inacabadas, com os restos da selvagem virgindade da véspera, mas já servindo à unidade nacional, viestes cortando regiões as mais diferentes do nosso território, tangidos pelo mesmo espírito dos desbravadores de outrora...já é possível viajar por terra de Belém a Porto Alegre — o que equívale a ir de Lisboa a Moscou, ou de Nova York à Califórnia. Digo isto, meus senhores, mais com uma sensação de alívio do que de alegria. É que confesso que demoramos demais a chegar a este resultado.”

“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. 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 of the interior of Brazil. Road building was the way in which *Os Dois Brasis* were unified, but in effect 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 Sao 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.

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. 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 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 6: *Marco da Caravana da Integração Nacional* (National Integration Landmark)



Fonte: (Ferreira Júnior, 2019)

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