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A CASE STUDY OF THE
CLOSING FRONTIER IN BRAZIL

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A CASE STUDY OF THE CLOSING FRONTIER IN BRAZIL¹

The expanding frontier in Amazonia is a complex arena where the reproduction and transformation of social structures occurs over a relatively short period of time. The history of a given locality contains features in common with a broader historical process as well as its own particular character. The analysis of social change on the frontier may thus be carried out at several levels: the structural level which outlines the general mechanisms and patterns of socioeconomic and political changes; the historical level which examines how these general patterns are manifested during particular historical periods; and the empirical level which focuses on more detailed changes within a specific locality. Using a historical-structural approach, and focusing on a particular social group (the pioneering small farmer migrant), this study analyzes frontier expansion at all three levels of investigation.

In Brazil the "moving frontier" has long been the motor of agricultural growth, moving through similar stages of a recurrent cycle across different historical periods. The analysis presented here begins with a characterization of the frontier cycle in Brazilian history. With this general information as background, Section II presents a discussion of the Amazon frontier. Section III examines in greater detail the process of frontier expansion in a particular setting in southern Pará. The conclusion explores the implications of current trends for the future of small farmer migrants in Amazonia.

I. The Pioneer Frontier in Brazil

There is general agreement on the progression of stages involved in frontier expansion, although the meaning and defining characteristics of each vary drastically depending on the underlying theoretical framework used.² Indigenous peoples were the first inhabitants of Amazon territories, occupying them in their unique adaptive fashion with a low-density and semi-nomadic population. This phase is often ignored in the region's history since, from the point of view of the non-Indian population these lands are not effectively "occupied" and are therefore available for appropriation. The first intrusion of external commercial markets in the Amazon region was traditionally related to "boom" periods for jungle export commodities: rubber, Brazil nuts, pelts, spices. Extractive activities were the principal economic base, and non-capitalistic, debt-peonage types of social relations predominated. Such booms were followed by the decline or "bust" of extractive activities, leading to a breakdown of market-oriented activities, a return to subsistence activities, and depopulation.

Contemporary frontier expansion has been a fundamentally different process with permanent implications for the nature of the transformation of frontier areas. Since the surge of industrialization and urbanization in Brazil beginning about 1930, a specifically "pioneer frontier" cycle has appeared, directly linked to the internal migratory movements of surplus populations in the country. At least three distinct frontier cycles have occurred since that date (Paraná, 1945-1970; Mato Grosso, 1955-1975; Amazônia, 1965-present). Despite the differences in location and historical period, each frontier moved through a similar set of stages which make up the recurring frontier cycle in Brazil (Foweraker 1981).

The first stage is the penetration of extractive industries for such items as lumber, minerals, and rubber. The second features the immigration of small farmer migrants, the beginnings of a subsistence-and-surplus agriculture, and the first indications of the development of a market in land and labor. This is followed in the third stage by the consolidation of a capitalistic market in land and labor, the concentration of landholdings in the hands of large companies, and the demise of the small farmer. Roads permit access to the national economy, population grows rapidly, and a reserve of landless workers is created. In general it is recognized that by the end of the frontier process the historical tendency has been to evolve into a "big man's frontier." Landholdings and investments are progressively concentrated and the latifúndio/minifúndio pattern which persists in Brazil's other regions is reproduced on the frontier.

Studies of the Brazilian frontier have demonstrated the contradictions and social conflicts which have accompanied the process. In the intensified scramble for a foothold on the new frontier, the interests of bureaucrats, professionals, businessmen, small farmers, workers, and Indians, are often in conflict. The outcome of these interactions is determined by the relative power and resources available to particular classes or groups involved in the frontier expansion process at each particular stage. During the second stage of the pioneer frontier cycle, the primary conflict is between indigenous groups and those involved in extractive and speculative interests, on the one hand, and peasants and capitalists interested in securing access to land, on the other. The move to consolidate a capitalistic market in land and labor during the cycle's third stage brings peasants and capitalists into direct opposition (Foweraker 1981; Schmink 1981).

State agencies and policies mediate the different interests represented in frontier struggles and movements (Bunker 1979; Schmink 1981; Foweraker 1981). The outcome of a given situation depends on the extent to which different social classes or class fractions are able to influence policy content and/or utilize its provisions to their specific interests (Pompermayer 1979). This ability, in turn, is broadly determined by the prevailing form of the state, or the system of power and domination by which diverse social classes are articulated. In Brazil since 1930, and particularly since 1964, the economically dominant classes have included military and civilian government bureaucrats, executives, policymakers in state-owned enterprises, large-scale national and foreign entrepreneurs, and the professionals and technicians linked to these sectors. The interests of these groups have been politically represented by the bureaucratic-authoritarian state, which functions to guarantee social domination by these classes, to ensure favorable conditions for the accumulation of capital, and to impede the formation of a power base for those classes excluded from power (Cardoso 1975; Foweraker 1981; Pompermayer 1979).

On the other hand, peasants have been a subordinate group with no effective representation within the state. One of the motivating factors in the 1964 military takeover was the increasing organization and militancy of peasant groups in the Northeast region. Since that time the government has taken steps to prevent the re-emergence of a threatening level of peasant mobilization. Rural unions have little power and are directly controlled and manipulated by federal regulation and intervention. Although the Brazilian Land Statute of 1964 lays a firm basis for the defense of small farmer agriculture, many of its provisions have

not been implemented.³ Hence it is unsurprising that the outcome of state mediation in the conflicts generated during frontier expansion has favored the interests of large-scale capitalist enterprises rather than those of the small farmer migrant.

II. The Amazon Frontier

The general patterns of frontier expansion are reproduced in the Amazon region, but this most recent frontier also exhibits certain historical characteristics which set it off from earlier experiences. The most striking difference is the greatly increased direct role of the government in stimulating and orienting frontier occupation. This has caused the speeding up of the frontier cycle in the Amazon, so that stages have succeeded one another very rapidly or have overlapped almost entirely, intensifying and complicating patterns of conflict between different social groups. Furthermore, state policy and intervention, as opposed to the spontaneous operation of social actors, has left its mark on Amazon frontier expansion. The analysis of policy decisions and implementation has thus been of central importance in understanding concrete events in the region. Finally, the Amazon region takes on a special role as Brazil's last major frontier. The historically moving frontier has reached its last outlet in the Amazon, where the accumulated problems and tensions from other regions of rural Brazil have come to be played out in dramatic fashion. Thus the consolidation of the Amazon frontier represents the "closing" of Brazil's historical pioneer frontier cycle (Silva 1979).

Two years after the military takeover in Brazil, a consistent national policy for the Amazon region was defined in the "Operation

Amazonia." A "gradual and irreversible" occupation of the region by private enterprise was to be induced through three measures which would implement this initiative: the creation of SUDAM (the regional development agency), BASA (the Amazon bank), and the generous fiscal incentives programs designed to attract investments by national and multinational firms (Andreazza 1979:4). Alongside measures to encourage private investment, the government also began to take an aggressive role in providing the necessary infrastructure in roads, beginning with the Belém-Brasília highway. This basic strategy has continued until the present, with periodic shifts in emphasis.

Business interests have actively participated in the formulation of Amazon policy, primarily through their alliances within the relevant government agencies. The community of interest between large-scale capitalists and the state bureaucracy has produced a kind of "bureaucratic entrepreneurship" in which agencies act in the interests of their capitalist allies with respect to specific policies (Cardoso 1975; Foweraker 1981; Pompermayer 1979). Aside from individual contacts, 200 of the country's largest economic groups (nearly all national) have also operated through the Association of Amazon Entrepreneurs (AEA), a formalized São Paulo-based lobby group. The AEA worked first to promote cattle raising as the "vocation" of the Amazon as a means of obtaining access to substantial expanses of land with as much as 75 percent of investment costs provided through SUDAM's fiscal incentives program (Pompermayer 1979; 1980). Only after several hundred ranches had been established did growing criticisms of the impact of pasture conversion on the region lead SUDAM to de-emphasize future projects in this sector.

Before 1970 government policy favored the construction of roads to permit "spontaneous" occupation of new areas and fostered a program of inducing new economic investments through fiscal incentives administered by SUDAM. Small farmer migrants expanded into the Center-West region during this period, quickly followed by large enterprises which gradually came to dominate in the areas occupied during the 1950's and 1960's (Foweraker 1981; Hebette and Acevedo 1979; Lisansky 1980). These patterns soon extended into the southern Pará region of the Amazon.

The announcement of the widely-publicized National Integration Policy in 1970 gave the appearance of a significant shift in the direction of policy initiatives for the Amazon region. The core of the PIN program was the construction of major highways in the Amazon region and the commitment to finance and directly administer the colonization by small farmer migrants of lands made accessible by the new roads. This colonization effort was designed to relieve pressures in the highly concentrated agrarian sector of the Northeast by transferring "men without land" there to the "land without men" of Amazonia. Directed colonization was favored as a means of reducing the potentially explosive social tensions in the Northeast region, where poverty and exploitation had generated threatening peasant and worker organizations in the 1960's, and re-orienting Northeast emigration away from the crowded metropolitan centers of the Center-South. In this sense the colonization plan was to function as a "counter-land-reform" by avoiding reforms in the Northeast while giving the impression that the government was responding to the needs of the poor peasant (Ianni 1979).

colonial
counter
reform

While colonization was emphasized in INCRA policy pronouncements after 1970, the parallel fiscal incentives program under SUDAM continued to stimulate the establishment of large capitalist enterprises as an alternative to the solution of absorbing Brazil's excess rural population. By 1973, just a few years after they had begun, the colonization projects along the Transamazon highway were being strongly criticized. Numerous problems confronted the official colonization effort, including the lack of realistic planning and bottlenecks in implementing the complex system of bureaucratic and administrative supports foreseen in the original proposal. In the tradition of "blaming the victim," the colonists themselves were often faulted for the project's lack of success, citing their lack of management abilities, technological sophistication, or persistence (Wood and Schmink 1978). Alternatively, the blame was laid on the state agencies, especially INCRA, which were responsible for the programs (Bunker 1979).

By 1974, the new policy priorities for the region spelled out in the Polamazônia five-year plan (1975-1979) indicated an abandonment of the official colonization initiative in favor of a renewed emphasis on the role of the large enterprise. Since this policy reversal came far too soon to allow for the correction of the project's many difficulties in planning and implementation, the viability of colonization and the program's capacity for adjustment and adaptation remained untested. By the mid-1970's, new official colonization projects were confined to Rondônia, where growing migratory pressure had stimulated an effort to try to absorb the thousands of families seeking land in western Amazonia (Mueller 1980).

The rapidity of this shift called into question the "political will" behind the original colonization plan, which was certainly controversial from its inception. At the same time, the widely-publicized colonization effort itself had stimulated changes in the region which contributed to the subsequent shift in policy emphasis. Of the large numbers of migrants to the region, only a small proportion were ever absorbed in the INCRA projects; the remainder sought to stake out independent claims to land on the frontier. Simultaneously, the massive road-building effort led to a rapid increase in land values which further attracted the attention of large-scale investors. As the pace of occupation escalated, so did tension and conflicts over land. Together these trends contributed to the mid-seventies shift in policy emphasis (Schmink 1981).

As the official colonization projects came under criticism, business interests proposed an alternative model of small farmer settlement which would be carried out not by the government but by private enterprise. State agencies would play a supportive role in providing long-term financing for land, infrastructural investments, access to credit, and assistance in the selection and training of colonists. But the task of subdividing land and administering the project, and the profits generated by the sale of lots, would fall to private business. Proponents of this model made use of studies which have concluded that state involvement has negative consequences for the success of colonists, and that either "spontaneous" or privately-run colonization models are preferable. Both are believed to promise more efficient and rational colonization projects through a better colonist selection process, among other things (Nelson 1973:51). Since as early as 1973 these arguments in favor of a "selective"

colonization to be carried out by private firms have been advanced by São Paulo investors and their bureaucratic allies (Pompermayer 1979). Although it was never approved, the AEA presented an extremely ambitious proposal for the private colonization of 34 million hectares of land by a consortium of large enterprises, along the margins of the Cuiabá-Santarém Highway. In 1976, private colonization was given a more clearly delineated role in Amazon occupation, to be carried out with the guidance of the National Institute for Colonization and Agrarian Reform (INCRA). The agency was authorized to approve sales of up to 500,000 hectares in certain priority areas for private colonization, and by the end of the decade 25 projects had been authorized in northern Mato Grosso and southern Pará (Arruda 1979, cited in Skillings and Taylor 1979:84).

The private colonization model purports to respond to a complex set of problems, as outlined in both business and official documents. The first is the occupation of the Amazon region in such a way that a favorable rate of economic return is assured. Second, private colonization is touted as a means of simultaneously colonizing the Amazon and resolving the pressures for land reform in other regions of Brazil. This time the target is not so much the impoverished Northeast, but the more developed central and southern states (Rio Grande do Sul, Santa Catarina, Paraná, Minas Gerais, and Espírito Santo) where a variety of changes have caused increasing out-migration in recent years. The three goals of private colonization in the Amazon, as spelled out by INCRA in 1976, included: a) the transference of minifundista cultivators, with their skills and resources, from the agricultural cooperatives of the south to an Amazonia with improved infrastructure; b) to thereby allow the "regrouping" of

rural properties in their place of origin; and c) hence to raise national agricultural production (quoted in Ianni 1979:86).

The state, in favoring private colonization, not only saves heavy direct costs and avoids further criticism for its own failures, but also directly supports those groups on whom the dominant class alliance rests, even if the projects should fail. A powerful group of investors will reap the profits of these land development projects, and a middle-class group of merchants, bureaucrats, and technicians can be expected to emerge either directly or indirectly associated with the projects (Miller 1980). These same groups will benefit from the growing emphasis on mining and lumbering projects, now the centerpiece of Amazon planning agendas. As for the small farmer migrant, a "select" few will be able to buy lots in the private colonization projects, while settlement of official colonists is now restricted to the territory of Rondônia. Thousands of resource-poor migrants already in the Amazon region seeking land have virtually disappeared from the planning horizon, except as a reserve of labor for the large projects currently being favored. Yet cattle ranching, mining, and lumbering are activities which absorb relatively little labor, and the history of large capitalist projects in the region has failed to demonstrate their ability to attract a stable and satisfied labor force. The vast majority of migrants to the region moved there with the single objective of obtaining rights to their own land for farming; for the most part, wage labor is viewed merely as a temporary means of getting by while waiting to attain that goal.

It is specifically with respect to the small farmer migrant that the Amazon frontier may be said to be undergoing a new and final stage

which "closes" the pioneer frontier cycle. On earlier frontiers, it was the posseiro, with only usufruct rights, who first occupied new lands and was later usurped by expanding capitalist enterprises during the third phase of consolidation of the market in land and labor. The frontier cycle has historically been perpetuated in spite of this patterned outcome because of the subsequent movement of posseiros into the next expanding area where the cycle begins anew (Martins 1980). By acting as the advance guard for larger-scale operators, the pioneer peasant has historically contributed through his own labor to the primitive accumulation of capital on the frontier (Foweraker 1981; Ianni 1979). In the Amazon region, state investment in subsidies and infrastructure make investment opportunities so attractive that the expropriation of peasant lands represents only a minimal advantage (Pompermayer 1979). At the same time, the rapidity of the frontier expansion process in the region (due to state intervention) has increased the level of conflict between different groups of frontier actors. Peasant and capitalist "fronts" have not so much succeeded one another as they have come into direct opposition. The response of the state to this threatening situation has been to move to close off the resource-poor migrant from the Amazon planning agenda, consolidating from the outset the central role to be played by large-scale enterprises. It is in this sense that policy trends have signified an institutional "closing" of the Amazon frontier to the traditional Brazilian pioneer, the posseiro. The concrete impact of the closing of the frontier will be examined using the case study material which follows.

III. The New Frontier in São Felix do Xingu

São Felix do Xingu provides a focal point from which it is possible to trace the impact of the major structural changes currently underway in Amazonia. It is an area rich in exploitable resources which have been the focus of shifting government policy priorities. Its history follows the traditional pattern of Amazonia, but it has been recently swept into the frontier process due to its contiguity with the southern Pará frontier area. Located near the confluence of the Xingu and Fresco rivers in south-central Pará, São Felix will soon be connected to the Belém-Brasília highway by a new state road.

Until the recent past, the history of the municipality of São Felix do Xingu was largely a product of sequential cycles of exploitation of extractive goods for the export market. The area's earliest inhabitants were Indians from a variety of groups which splintered off from the Cayapó tribe, moving into the Xingu region from the direction of the Araguaia River probably around the turn of the 19th century (Vidal 1977). Near the end of that century, Brazilian rubber gatherers first entered the Middle Xingu, finding both seringa and caucho rubber trees. During the first decade of the twentieth century, a rubber trading post was set up by a former National Guard Colonel, Tancredo Martins Jorge, on the island of Ilhota near present-day São Felix. After a flood in 1914 wiped out the ^{X São Felix do Xingu} post, the settlement was moved to São Felix which provided better access to the mule trail along which rubber was transported to Conceição do Araguaia. The settlement took its name from the image of Saint Felix brought by Coronel Tancredo to his new barracão,^X Until after World War I ^{barracão}

when world rubber prices plummeted, São Felix was the scene of brisk rubber traffic in rubber and goods, regulated by a complex credit and labor system (aviamento) under the monopoly control of Coronel Tancredo.

With the decline of rubber, productive activities were diversified, as in other parts of Pará (Weinstein 1980:14). Brazil nut extraction began to be important in about 1928, and nuts are still collected by São Felix residents although production by the trees has fallen off recently. During the Second World War, when Asian sources of natural latex were cut off, there was a renewed demand for rubber, and many of the old seringais were again exploited. Hunting of wild animal skins also began in the post-war period, and flourished in the 1960's when the demand for rare pelts made it a very profitable business. Since the skin trade was outlawed in 1970, it has ceased to play an important economic role in the area. Finally, residents have typically combined these varied activities with hunting, fishing, and small plots of food crops,
X nearly always less than one hectare in size. Despite the area's endowment with relatively good soils, agricultural production has been minimal and restricted to subsistence crops of rice, beans, manioc and corn, and some fruits (bananas and citrus).

São Felix do Xingu began to attract the attention of regional planners during the most volatile period of policy directions, and the shifts are evident in the evolution of planning for the area. A preliminary
X Integrated Development Report on São Felix in 1970 recommended research on the area's resource potential, and infrastructural investments which would link the municipality to Marabá and Conceição do Araguaia. As it became evident that the area offered rich potential for the exploitation of mineral, lumber, and soil resources, interest in investment there quickly

began to build. Research carried out from 1970 on has revealed known deposits of gold, silver, lead, zinc, diamonds, copper, manganese, nickel, and cassiterite (from which tin is made). Part of the mineral complex associated with the rich Serra do Carajás is located in the municipality of São Felix. As early as 1975 hundreds of requests for mineral research permits had been filed with the National Mineral Research Department for São Felix. Several national and multinational firms had set up temporary operations in the town and hired local residents to help them carry out their research.

Similarly, the area's soils appeared fertile by Amazon standards from 1974 RADAM photographs, and began to interest planners and investors. Approximately 10% of the municipality's soils are fertile terra roxa, although these soils are discontinuous and partly undulating. Fully half of the one and a half million hectares are suitable for cultivation of perennial or annual crops, and an additional 200,000 hectares could be used for pastures or reforestation (SUDAM 1976). By 1973 more than 2,000 land requests had been filed with state agencies and would-be owners were beginning to stake their claims by marking off and occupying land in the area. Thus, even before government planning for São Felix was formulated, "although still imprecisely, a new pioneer front of Amazonia was beginning to take shape" (Pinto 1980:194-5).

With the Polamazonia program, published mid-decade, the first concrete plans for São Felix emerged. The municipality was not initially included in any of the 10 designated development poles, but later the limits of the Polo Carajás were extended to include it. The object was to break the município's isolation and backwardness by linking it to projected road networks, and to take advantage of the area's resource poten-

tial. Nearly 150 million cruzeiros were allocated to projects in São Felix, including a new airport, land demarcation, an urban development plan, a colonization feasibility study, and the construction of the PA-279 to link São Felix to the frontier road network of Marabá and Conceição do Araguaia.

The road was the key stimulus to a renewed "rush" to occupy São Felix by competing groups. Construction actually began in 1976, although a series of delays kept the road paralyzed for two years. During this period, the promise of improved transportation attracted potential investors and created a market for land. Whereas in 1972 one hectare of land cost slightly more than one dollar (\$US), five years later the official asking price was nearly \$25 (Pinto 1980:197). Signs erected in nearby frontier towns by land surveyors invited investors to "Visit São Felix do Xingu, the best land in the Amazon." A number of large enterprises began to stake their claim to São Felix lands.

A more visible and immediate impact of the road was the attraction of thousands of migrants in search of land to till. At the junction of the new road with the PA-150 (linking Marabá and Conceição do Araguaia), a new community of approximately 8,000 people had sprung up by 1978 where none had existed in 1976 (Godfrey 1979). The community was first referred to simply as "Entroncamento" (or "Junction") and became well-known in the previous frontiers such as Maranhão and Mato Grosso (Godfrey 1979; Lisansky 1980). Migrants were attracted to the town, which was later named Xinguara (from Xingu and Araguaia) by the promise of an official colonization project announced by the state which, however, never materialized. Since 1977, the Xinguara area has been the region of most intense migratory movements in the state of Pará, as well as one of the

PA 150

 ↓
 Entroncamento
 ↓
 Xinguara

areas of most tension and conflict (Pinto 1980:187). By 1980 there were an estimated 30,000 migrants in Xinguara and the surrounding area, the vast majority waiting for some opportunity to claim their own farming land. A sizeable proportion of these migrants had come from Goiás and Mato Grosso or from other areas of southern Pará, where small farmers had virtually lost all possibility of gaining or retaining access to land. In these areas, the frontier cycle had run its course with the consolidation of large cattle ranches, and residents who remained were those who no longer held out hope for having their own land (Lisansky 1980). Those who still pursued this dream had moved on to the new "front" to try their luck, in this case in Xinguara and along the road which would go to São Felix.

In São Felix itself, squatters began to penetrate into the municipality on foot from the Araguaia area, and others paid exorbitant prices to transport themselves and their possessions by private plane from the frontiers several hundred kilometers distant. These pioneers were hoping to clear and hold onto a small agricultural plot by staking their claim before the completion of the road. In 1978, when the new road was still less than one-third complete, the town boasted a new neighborhood of approximately 50 households composed of such migrants. In 1980, with still nearly 200 km. of road to be built, a second new neighborhood of 179 houses had been opened, and 80-some new houses had been built there.

The pioneers represented by the group of migrant families who have entered São Felix since 1975 are distinct from the town's earlier residents, because of their specific relation to the frontier process in southern Pará and northern Mato Grosso, where would-be small farmers have

been pushed out, and many have moved directly to the next "front," in this case São Felix. These pioneers have complex migratory histories, especially in the recent past.⁴ The single largest sending area is the adjacent frontier area, soon to be directly joined by the road, including the towns of Conceição do Araguaia, Redenção, Rio Maria, and Xinguara (see Figure 1).

Many São Felix pioneers are from earlier frontier areas where there is no land for small farmers, and are a self-selected group who have chosen not to give up on the hope of securing access to a plot of land of their own. Nearly one-third of the recent migrants in São Felix specifically gave the desire for land as their reason for leaving their last place of residence, and for choosing São Felix as a destination (Table 1). Furthermore, many have lost no time in staking out claims in the municipal government's agricultural "colony" which was formed in the mid-1970's, but which still has ambiguous legal status. Located along a narrow strip of land between the Rio Fresco and the Xingu, in 1980 this "colony" consisted of between 100 and 200 colonists located within a 30 km. zone along the municipality's one road.⁵ The most accessible lots were owned and leased by local elites (merchants and municipal employees).

In 1978, subsistence plots were cultivated by approximately half of São Felix's households--either newly-arrived migrants in the "colony" or earlier residents who had plots in riverside locations near the town. Most planted the staple crops of manioc, corn, rice, beans, and fruits. Plots planted by more recent migrant families differed from this traditional picture in that nearly one-quarter had planted pasture, and two-thirds had planted crops other than the staples and fruit crops

*Source de
Jornais*

FIGURE 1

Southern Pará Study Area

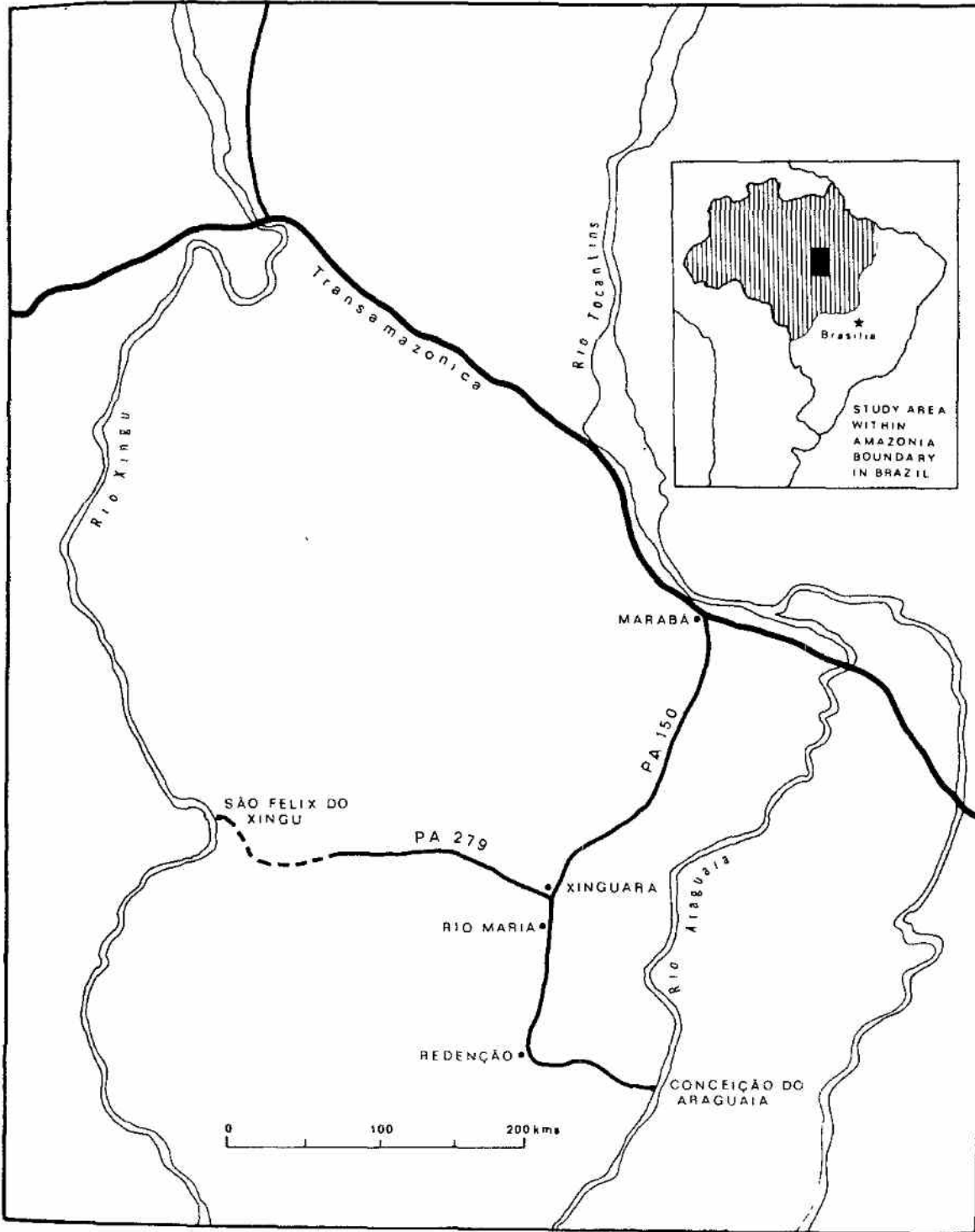


Table 1

Motivation for Migration

	Reason for Leaving Last Place of Residence			Reason for Choosing São Felix		
	Earlier Residents	Recent ¹ Migrants	Total	Earlier Residents	Recent Migrants	Total
Work	26.7	66.8	54.6	23.6	39.5	35.0
Desire for Land	13.3	30.8	25.5	11.8	30.2	25.0
Loss of Land	6.7	7.7	7.3	-	-	-
Lack Job Opportunities	-	12.9	8.1	-	-	-
Self-Employment Aspiration	6.7	7.7	7.3	5.9	2.3	3.0
Prospecting Opportunities	-	5.1	3.6	5.9	4.7	5.0
Drought	-	2.6	1.8	-	-	-
Prospects for Improvement ("Melhorar")	6.7	17.9	14.5	11.8	16.3	15.0
Better Health, Education, Infrastructure	6.7	7.7	7.2	11.8	7.0	8.3
Contacts in São Felix	26.7	7.7	12.7	41.2	34.9	36.7
Family	20.0	7.7	10.9	23.5	20.9	21.7
Mayor	6.7	-	1.8	11.8	2.3	5.0
Acquaintances	-	-	-	5.9	7.0	6.7
Other	33.3	-	10.9	11.8	2.3	5.0
TOTAL (N)	100.1 (15)	100.1 (39)	99.9 (55)	100.2 (17)	100.0 (43)	100.0 (60)

¹Arrived in São Felix since 1975.

Source: Original Survey Data, 1978

(Table 2). A much higher proportion of newcomers had plots beyond a 10 km. radius of the town, and the plots themselves tended to be somewhat larger, although still well below the established minimum of 100 hectares for the Amazon region. Furthermore, recent migrants were more likely to have "purchased" their lots, a term referring to some monetary transaction in the absence of definitive legal title. The recent migrants thus showed a greater commitment to small-scale surplus agriculture, and to securing rights to land. The in-migration of small farmer migrants, the beginnings of a subsistence-and-surplus agriculture, and the first indications of the development of a market in land and labor all demonstrate that by 1978 São Felix had moved from the first to the second stage of frontier expansion.

The recent group of migrants who are the principal agents of this change had systematically lower levels of resources when compared even with the small, nearly homogeneously-poor population of earlier São Felix residents. The town's already precarious urban infrastructure has failed to keep pace with expanding occupation, so that new neighborhoods have virtually no access to electricity and piped water, and virtually all houses are constructed of mud walls, beaten earth floors, and thatch roofs. Thus, while housing quality has improved slightly for the town as a whole in recent years, conditions are worse than ever in the new neighborhoods. Moreover, while most of São Felix residents owned their own homes and residential lots, the proportion of homeowners is lower for recent migrants, and their homes have a lower declared market value; they are less likely to own other assets or to have supplementary monetary income aside from the earnings of household members (Schmink 1980). It is

Table 2

Characteristics of Subsistence Plots, Recent Migrants
and Earlier Residents, São Felix, 1978

	Earlier Residents	Recent Migrants	Total
<u>1. Distance from Residence:</u>			
0-10 km.	85.6	45.4	61.0
Over 10 km.	14.3	54.5	39.0
Total	99.9	99.9	100.0
(N)	(14)	(22)	(36)
<u>2. Size of Plot:</u>			
Less than 1 hectare	50.0	30.0	39.5
1-20 hectares	33.5	35.0	34.0
Over 20 hectares	16.8	35.0	26.2
Total	100.3	100.0	99.7
(N)	(18)	(20)	(38)
<u>3. How Plot Acquired:</u>			
Occupied	47.8	34.8	41.3
Purchased	21.5	43.5	32.6
↘ Ceded (By Others)	21.7	4.3	13.0
Ceded by Prefecture	8.6	8.7	8.7
Others	-	8.6	4.4
Total	99.6	99.9	100.0
(N)	(23)	(23)	(46)
<u>4. Subsistence Crops Planted (% Households with Subsistence Plots Planting Each):</u>			
Manioc	64.7	73.3	72.5
Corn	62.5	66.7	71.8
Rice	50.0	53.3	51.3
Beans	56.3	40.0	48.7
Fruits	64.7	73.3	24.8
Pasture	6.3	23.1	11.1
Other Crops	23.5	66.7	14.0

to be expected that more recent migrants are less connected into the community's exchange networks through which goods and services are transferred, although they are forced to constitute such support systems as rapidly as possible (Lisansky 1980). The generally poorer and less diverse diets of recent migrant families are due to their avoidance of purchased meats in favor of those they can acquire through local producers, and to relying even more heavily than other residents on consumption of grains and cereals (Schmink 1980).

Thus in 1978 São Felix was already receiving migrants who had been pushed out of earlier frontier areas in the eastern Amazon region. Desperately hoping to find a foothold in this latest front, they had been drawn to the area by the promise of official colonization projects which would offer them land. But as described above, they brought with them such minimal resources that even the traditionally poor São Felix population seemed relatively well-off by comparison. These findings contradict the statement that spontaneous colonization selects for those with a history of stable residence and previous ownership of land or durable goods (Dozier 1979 and Nelson, 1973, cited in Moran 1979). The term "spontaneous" is probably misleading when applied to Amazon frontier migrants who may have few other options besides repeated migrations (Foweraker 1981; Sawyer 1980).

Given the rapid influx of settlers into São Felix and the Xinguara area, by 1977 it was clear to any observer that "with the road, São Felix is going to explode" (Pinto 1980:193). Small farmer migrants, São Felix residents and officials, and would-be large investors were concerned about the impending deluge. At first, this concern was shared by planners who believed that the area's expanses of fertile soils made it an appro-

priate site for a colonization project for small farmers. Part of the original Polamazônia funds were allocated to a feasibility study, and the program went as far as the pre-proposal stage, but the complete proposal was never elaborated. The São Felix area represented an excellent chance to benefit from earlier experiences and outline a more rational colonization plan which might be able to succeed.

For the patterns of history of Amazonia, the government has a rare opportunity: to plan the occupation of an exceptionally well-endowed area, avoiding there the repetition of phenomena lamented and condemned in other regions. Although some fronts are rushing over São Felix do Xingu already, they are controllable and there is still time to define which economic activities can be developed, which modules are to be used and--a precious thing in our predatory days--establish a precise zoning of the soils, according to their aptitudes and in accordance with the best colonization project (Pinto 1980:202; translation mine).

As had happened at a national level, however, the enthusiasm for official small farmer colonization in São Felix was short-lived. A variety of factors impeded the colonization plan. First, the more detailed assessment of terra roxa provided a less optimistic picture of the potential for the project than had originally been estimated based on the aerial photography of Projeto Radam in 1974. Second, although the project was to be established, at least in part, on lands owned by the state of Pará, the state land agency ITERPA was more interested in selling this land to private investors. Finally, at a time when small farmer colonization was receding from Amazon development priorities, funds could not be guaranteed to establish the project. In the end the official plan was abandoned, although much of the municipality's land has since passed into the federal domain.

Other kinds of urgently needed programs have also not been forthcoming for São Felix. A preliminary urban plan commissioned in 1976

was carried out but never made public. The plan emphasized the need for stimulating local food production and marketing, and improving the urban, health, and educational infrastructure. Yet in 1980 the existing hospital was still closed for lack of a public doctor, water and electric systems were more precarious than ever, and the legal patrimony of the urban center and the agricultural "colony" were still in doubt. There were virtually no federal agencies present in the town, and whatever improvements were made had to be taken out of the municipal budget, which was only about 10 million cruzeiros (or about \$US200,000) in 1980.

Of the goals set in the mid-1970's for the Polamazônia program, by 1980 the new airport had been built, some land had been demarcated, and the road was moving ahead rapidly. All of these activities were crucial in serving the interests of big investors in the area. Over 500,000 hectares of land across the Xingu river from São Felix had been sold by the state in lots of up to 3,000 hectares to bidders evaluated mainly on the basis of the price offered and their ability to pay. Several groups had purchased multiple lots, and most buyers planned to install cattle ranches in the area. The federal colonization agency, INCRA, had supported the sale of 400,000 hectares to the Brazilian firm Construtora Andrade Gutierrez for the establishment of a private colonization project to settle 3,000 families on the municipality's largest continuous expanse of terra roxa. Winning final approval of their proposal cost the Construtora many months of intensive lobbying, as the purchase had to be approved by the national Senate. One of the nation's ten largest firms, Andrade-Gutierrez also won the contract to build the road to São Felix, which will go through their lands. The company is a member of the Association of

Amazon Entrepreneurs and has prepared an impressive, comprehensive proposal for the first private colonization project (Projeto Tucumã) to be approved in an Amazon area characterized by more dense forest and soils with better agricultural potential.

Like other private projects, the Projeto Tucumã will draw mainly on colonists selected on the basis of their proven management and accumulation capacity, and recruitment will be carried out in the southern regions of the country. A special effort will be made to recruit colonists from the state of Paraná whose land will be flooded by the Itaipu dam project; indemnization for one hectare of land there will buy 500 in the Xingu (Informe Amazônico 1:9 (April, 1981)). Some migrants already in the area may also fit the criteria for selection, and 10% of the project's 3,000 lots are reserved for colonists selected by INCRA using that institution's own criteria. These lots will be sold at a symbolic price, and their cost covered by the 90% of colonists who purchase their lots at prices closer to the land's market value. The company will assist in setting up cooperatives among colonists, and after seeing the project off will have received a good return on its investment if the process can be completed within six years. Clearly only a small proportion of the migrants already in São Felix or Xinguara hoping to gain access to their own land will be absorbed by the project. In 1980 the rural workers' union in Xinguara had registered more than 1,000 families who were there seeking land.

In the "new frontier" area surrounding São Felix and the road, there was little place for the typical small farmer migrant. About two-thirds of the município's lands have already been reserved for the big investors

described above. The município also contains two large indigenous reserves (Gorotire and Xikrin). Small farmers already in São Felix are concentrated in a small area between the two rivers, which officially belongs to a national forest reserve, hemmed in by a small mountain chain. Undoubtedly this reserve will become São Felix's colony, to accommodate about 200 families. The remaining lands surrounding São Felix are in hot dispute by dozens of active grileiros, or land-grabbers, who first buzzed around the lands later granted to the Projeto Tucumã. This lack of alternatives for small farmer migrants is the on-the-ground expression of the closing out of the small farmer migrant from the planning process.

The consequences of the frontier's closing can be expected to vary locally. The town of São Felix do Xingu itself will probably come to share characteristics of the town of Santa Terezinha in Mato Grosso, surrounded by large companies with links to national markets and systems of power but having little direct impact on the local scene (Lisansky 1980). Because of the closed nature of the São Felix area itself, the real impact of the frontier's closing will soon be felt in the adjacent frontier areas where private and spontaneous colonization continue, in Xinguara and along the road through the Projeto Tucumã. Whatever multiplier effect the colonization project may have will probably be minimal in São Felix itself. The project will have several urban centers of its own located on the new road and closer to the frontier nexus than São Felix, which will be at the "fim da picada" (end of the path). The presence of a large number of "middle-sized" cultivators (by Amazonia's polarized standards) may provide a stimulus for the diversification of the area's economy. Internal stratification of the project can be expected over the short and long term, as holdings are expanded, sold, or sub-divided,

and as more successful farmers and outsiders take over from the less fortunate.

Xinguara and Redenção are "spontaneous" frontier towns linked more directly to Marabá and Conceição do Araguaia which show potential for developing into local commercial/industrial centers, based on mining, lumbering, and cattle ranching activities. At least temporarily, many would-be farmers have found work in the "boom" of placer mining of cassiterite and gold in the rich mountain chains of the area. These operations will eventually be mechanized, thus displacing the prospector (garimpeiro). Cattle ranches similarly provide employment only during the initial land clearing phase. Long-term employment possibilities will be in construction, commerce, and services, and the wood processing industries which have already begun to expand in these two towns. Yet these activities will hardly absorb the thousands of migrants already in the area. With the closing of the frontier to the small farmer, the Amazon frontier can expect to witness a growing problem of hyperurbanization and underemployment (Mougeot 1980).

IV. The Closing Frontier

São Felix represents a case of the "closing" of the frontier to penetration by the small farmer migrant, and its analysis permits a better understanding of the structural changes which are implied by this concept. It has been argued that frontier expansion is a historical process which has played an important function as a "safety valve" for excess population movement in Brazil. The process typically moves through a series of stages culminating in the appropriation of small farmer plots

by capitalist enterprises, providing them with already-cleared land and at the same time freeing an unencumbered and mobile labor force to be absorbed partially by these enterprises at different moments. But the frontier cycle has also continually recreated a pioneering peasantry which moves to the next historically expanding frontier (Foweraker, 1981).

The Amazon frontier, however, represents a different context for decision-making, with implications for a distinct outcome of the frontier process. An expanded government role in building infrastructure and providing credit and other incentives has been successful in attracting investments on a scale large enough to make the appropriation of land cleared by peasants only marginal to profits (Pompermayer 1979). To the large enterprise, which has now consolidated a central role in Amazon development, the certainty of access to land is paramount. Particularly where conflicts are likely, it is therefore more rational to avoid conflict by excluding peasants from entering an area.⁶ São Felix is a good illustration of the attempt to create a "safe zone" for large-scale projects--avoiding the tensions existent in the adjacent frontier areas. Initial plans to settle resource-poor farmers in the area were scrapped in favor of a strategy permitting the prior appropriation of most available land for capitalist firms before the completion of the road.

The closing of the frontier alters the class relationships on the frontier, seeking to avoid the central conflict between posseiros and capitalists by eliminating the pioneering farmer from his historic role on the frontier. The closing of the frontier signifies its transformation to an essentially capitalistic one, with conflicts occurring between capitalist interests and extractive, speculative, or indigenous interests

in land. As the São Felix case illustrates, the option for pioneers of moving to the next frontier area to try their luck becomes less and less feasible. São Felix is not the last frontier, but Amazonia generally is, and that last frontier is currently being closed off to the resource-poor peasant migrant as a class. In the territory of Rondônia, the destination of the most massive migratory in-movements in recent years, government posts to control immigration have been maintained since 1975 (Mueller 1980:149).

The tensions associated with these conditions should not be underestimated; the Araguaia-Xingu area has been the site of escalating violence related to land conflicts for years. In 1980 the area suffered two massacres of white persons on Indian lands, murders of ranch employees, and the assassination of the opposition candidate to the presidency of the Rural Worker's Union, to cite only the most dramatic examples of what is standard fare. In February of that year, a new agency was created primarily to defuse tension by resolving the most persistent and threatening cases of land conflict in a 450,000 km² area. The Executive Group on Land in the Araguaia-Tocantins (GETAT) is a special commission connected directly to the Presidency and to the National Security Council of Brazil's military government. Its function is to carry out a sort of "crisis colonization" program which entails the expeditious settlement of migrants on legalized plots of land in areas currently under litigation. In its first four months of operations, GETAT had already handed out several hundred titles to small farmers (Schmink 1981).

Despite these localized solutions, it is hard to overestimate the magnitude of migration into Amazonia and of the potential problem it presents. In the area of Conceição do Araguaia alone there were some

5,000 families seeking land; an estimated 30,000 were seeking land in Rondônia (aside from those settled in the official colonization projects), and the figure of 2.7 million families was suggested as the target for settlement if the Amazon region was to effectively function as a "safety valve" for the nation's surplus rural population (Martine 1980). This mass of spontaneous migrants has been seen variously as a "predatory" and "disorderly" form of occupation, or as a heroic de facto land reform whose grass-roots success has been blocked by official colonization policies (Ianni 1979). Yet even if 10% of the Amazon's richest soils were set aside for small farmer settlement, it would only accommodate 350,000 families on 100-hectare lots (Skillings and Tcheyan 1979:87-8). Given the impossibility of finding in the Amazon region the solution to the settlement of this large migrant population, they are rapidly becoming invisible in planning for the region. They are highly visible in numbers, however, and in the potential social problem they represent.

With the support of the Catholic Church, Amazon migrant groups have successfully organized to demand attention to their plight, and the "crisis colonization" approach can be accurately viewed as a direct response to these demands. The degree to which such limited reforms can effectively defuse the most serious threats to frontier "order" is still to be tested. Certainly among a growing opposition movement, a broader class consciousness has begun to emerge which will not stop with the satisfaction of localized problems. The collapsing of the frontier process in such a way as to effectively close off the small farmer migrant from even the first stages of penetration has served to create a new cohort of migrants with a shared history of violent expulsion, and the knowledge that their options for survival are few. It is unlikely that these

groups will disappear from the arena of frontier drama as easily as they have been erased from the agenda of Amazon planning.

NOTES

¹Marianne Schmink is Executive Director of the Amazon Research and Training Program and a consultant to The Population Council, New York. The analysis contained here was supported by a post-doctoral grant from the Tinker Foundation, and draws on field work since 1976 in conjunction with CEDEPLAR (Centro de Desenvolvimento e Planejamento Regional), Federal University of Minas Gerais, and financed at different times by SUDAM, the International Development Research Centre, and the University of Florida. An earlier version of this paper was presented at the American Anthropological Association meeting December, 1980. Thanks to Steve Sanderson, Charles Wagley, and Charles Wood, who read and commented on earlier drafts.

²This framework is based primarily on Foweraker 1981.

³See special issue of the Boletim da Associação Brasileira de Reforma Agrária (ABRA) IX:6 (Nov./Dec.), 1979.

⁴The following data are taken from the fuller analysis in Schmink 1980.

⁵Based on figures from the Cooperative Fraternal Ajuda Cristã, São Felix do Xingu, July 1980.

⁶This analysis does not presume a conspiratorial approach to decision-making by the government agencies and representatives. As outlined in Sections I and II, the very structure of the Brazilian state predisposes the outcome of policy decisions and shifts.

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