

Cearense *Retirantes* in the province of Amazonas: colonization, work, and conflicts (1877-1879)

Retirantes cearenses na província do Amazonas: colonização, trabalho e conflitos (1877-1879)

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RESUMO

O artigo trata da migração de cearenses para a província do Amazonas em decorrência da grande seca que afetou o Ceará entre 1877 e 1879. Acompanhamos os esforços de rearticulação de colônias agrícolas, anteriormente planejadas para receber imigrantes europeus, as quais acabaram incorporando levas de retirantes que buscavam manter atividades similares às de seus locais de origem, com destaque para a agricultura. Destacamos ainda a segunda tentativa de construção da Ferrovia Madeira-Mamoré, frente de trabalho que, além de cearenses, incorporou também imigrantes norte-americanos, irlandeses e italianos. Questões ambientais, esgotamento financeiro, ações de resistência e desvios de recursos inviabilizaram tanto as colônias agrícolas como a ferrovia, causando o retorno dos trabalhadores estrangeiros e a insatisfação generalizada entre os nativos. As elites amazônicas passaram a direcionar as migrações para as afastadas regiões de extração de borracha, isolando e pulverizando novas aglomerações e insubordinações. Palavras-chave: colonização; trabalho; migrantes.

ABSTRACT

This article examines migration from Ceará to the province of Amazonas due to the heavy drought which afflicted Ceará between 1877 and 1879. Looked at will be efforts to reform agricultural colonies originally intended for European immigrants, which ended up incorporating waves of migrants (*retirantes*) who sought to maintain similar activities to those in their places of origin, notably agriculture. Also focused on is the second attempt to construct the Madeira-Mamoré Railway, where, as well as *Cearnses*, US, Irish, and Italians immigrants were also involved. Environmental questions, the exhaustion of money, resistance actions, and the misuse of funds undermined both the agricultural colonies and railway, causing the departure of foreign workers and generalized dissatisfaction among the natives. The Amazonian elites began to direct the migrations to the distant regions where rubber was extracted, isolating and pulverizing new agglomerations and insubordinations. Keywords: colonization; labor; migrants.

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The great drought which castigated the province of Ceará between 1877 and 1879 provoked intense waves of migration. These displacements caused generalized panic among the authorities. As well as economic failure following the death of large numbers cattle and the near extinction of agricultural production, sackings, munities, and demands for public assistance on the part of *roceiros* (small farmers) and artists without labor completely ruptured social control. More than 100,000 migrants, called *retirantes*, went to Fortaleza, the state capital, quadrupling the population, which had been 25,000 souls. Other coastal and *sertão* cities underwent similar situations, aggravated by the advance of conflicts and a smallpox epidemic (Neves, 2000).

State leaders, attempting to alleviate tension paid for passage and encouraged migration to other provinces as they tried to re-establish order. The provinces to the west of Ceará – Piauí, Maranhão, Pará, and Amazonas – received the majority of this migratory flow. At the arrival ports, workers were received and used as a labor force in public works, agricultural colonies, and rubber plantations. However, the constant arrivals and the misuse of public funds exhausted the assistance capacity of the provinces accepting the *retirantes* from Ceará. As a result the conflicts which had previously occurred in Ceará exploded again, causing panic in the population of the Amazon region and in the provincial capitals in Pará and Amazonas: Belém and Manaus.

The final migrant reception centre was the province of Amazonas, located in the far North of the Brazilian Empire, the largest unit in terms of territorial size, but with an extreme lack of workers for agricultural and extractive production. It can be noted that in the first wave of migrations from Ceara after 1877, the expectation was not necessarily the exploitation of rubber. Many *retirantes* sought opportunities in traditional activities, such as agricultural production or work in public construction projects. The isolation of the rubber plantations was one of the final choices, only resorted to when other possibilities were denied.

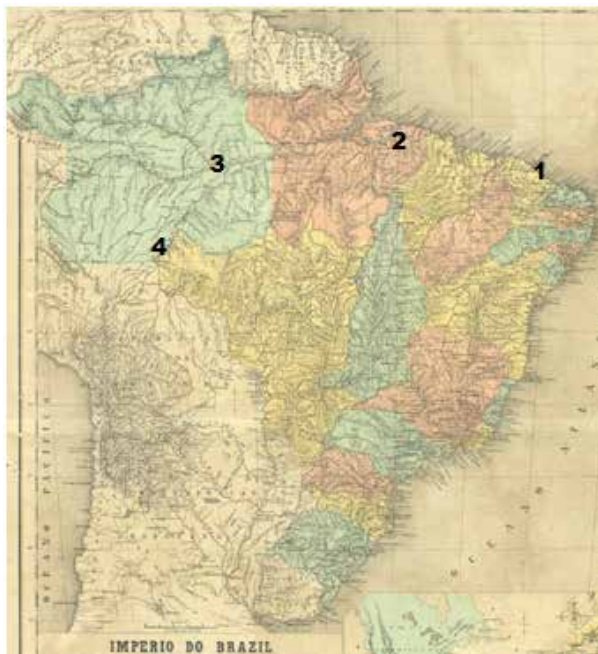


Figure 1 – Brazilian Empire – Nineteenth century

1. Fortaleza (CE); 2. Belém (PA); 3. Manaus (AM);
4. Santo Antônio do Rio Madeira (AM).

(Source: Almeida, 1868. Map II – Annexes. Edited by the author).

AGRICULTURAL COLONIES IN AMAZONAS

References to experiences of colonization in Amazonas are rare. Arthur Rees makes a quick mention: “In March 1879 ... more than six thousand *retirantes* from Ceara had entered Amazonas. The government, seeking to receive and place them as precious contributions to the progress of the province, created agricultural colonies, two of which were near Manaus.” In relation to the situation of agricultural production, he also states: “From 1860 until the Republic, what appeared was decadence, worsening on a daily basis. Coffee, which in 1830 accounted for 6200 arrobas, fell to 270 that year; tobacco, 5643 arrobas in 1830, fell to 2270”. Only the cocoa trade, “in many points in native hands, remained prosperous.” Some extractive products (rosin, cloves, burlap,

piçava, sarsaparilla, and Brazil nuts) were of importance, but “above them all was Rubber.”²

One of the motives highlighted for the decline of agriculture was the flight of labor to the rubber extraction regions, worsening rivalries between sectors of local elites. Provincial authorities wanted to overcome the impasse with projects to guarantee the inclusion of more workers in the Amazon. This was the scenario which the first waves of *Cearense retirantes* landing in Manaus found, when the new arrivals appeared to be the solution to the constant lamentations about the absence of labor.

In August 1878, in the ‘speech’ opening the provincial legislative assembly, the president of the province, Barão de Maracajú, announced the reactivation of the foundation of agricultural colonies with the aim of resolving the frequent food supply problems in the region:

In the road opened to the north of this city, a place chosen for the colonization commission for a foreigner colony, which was not founded, so the *Cearense* emigrants were settled there on already measured and demarcated lots of lands, which were not yet occupied. Another colony of *Cearense* emigrants was formed, with 647 people divided into 129 families... According to the wishes of those living there, it came to be called – Maracajú.

The official expectations was that *Cearense retirantes* would occupy the vacuum left by the lack of foreign immigrants. *Maracajú* colony, located on the periphery of Manaus, was the settlement which received the largest number of emigrants in Amazonas, and deserves a specific approach, not only due to quantity of inhabitants, but because, similarly to *Benevides* in Pará,³ it was planned by the Amazonian provincial administration as a center of agricultural production for the province, and to overcome the lack of food supplies in its capital. Both were stages of conflicts, while the proximity in relation to the capital also produced discomfort for the administrators.

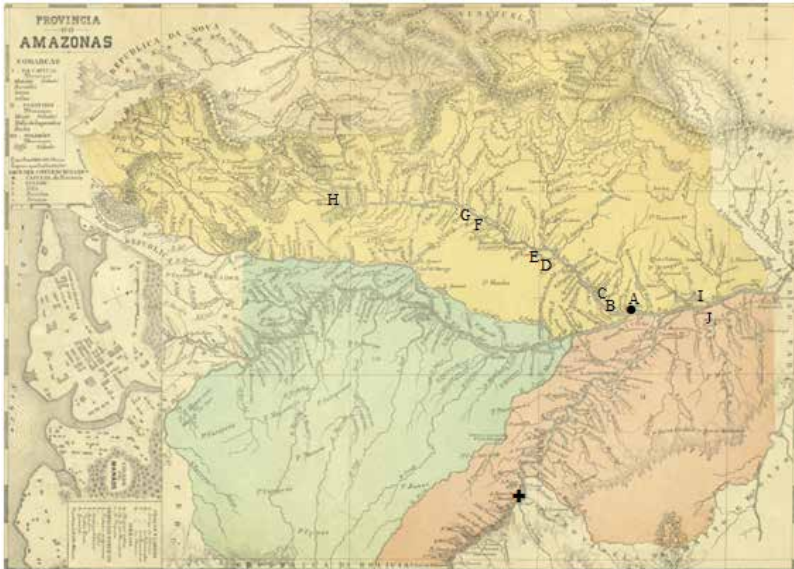


Figure 2 – Amazonas Province: Agricultural colonies and the Madeira-Mamoré Railway

- Manaus; + Madeira-Mamoré Railway (Santo Antônio do Rio Madeira);
 A – Maracajú; B – Santa Izabel; C – Tauapessassú; D – Moura;
 E – Carvoeiro; F – Moreira; G – Thomar; H – São Gabriel; I – Silves; J – Maués. (Source: ALMEIDA, 1868. Map III – Annexes. Edited by the author).

In Amazonas in 1877, another colony had been formed, called *Santa Izabel*, and located on the banks for the “Tarumã-miry River and two hours from the capital by steamboat.” Other settlements were established within the interior of the province:

Table 1 – Population of colonies and colonial groups in the province of Amazonas. 1877-1878 ⁴

Maracajú	647	Carvoeiro	122	Silves	45
Sta. Izabel	231	Moreira	50	Maués	58
Tauapessassú	89	Thomar	60	Other destinations	2688
Moura	137	S. Gabriel	9	Total:	4.136

Of the total listed above, 2781 were male and 1335 female, showing a heightened gender imbalance, which could have a direct relationship with the ‘other destinations’ heading above, for which probably embarked those going to collect rubber, an exercise generally practiced by single men, or married men migrating without their families. Considering the figures given by the previous administration, which registered the introduction of 827 *Cearense* emigrants, we have a “total number of emigrants coming to this province of 4963,” for the period 1 June 1877 – 20 August 1878.

Despite the assumption that the majority of ‘emigrants’ had gone to the rubber plantations in Amazonas, our analysis is focused on areas of colonization and public works, significant scenarios for understanding the field of possibilities which the province offered. In the *Santa Izabel* colony, for example, the provincial administration even constructed a school for boys, a right which the sons of the poorest *retirantes* would most probably not have possessed in their province of origin. When “some cases of smallpox,” emerged, the “inspector of Public Health” was designated to personally accompany the assistance provided to the ill. Apparently the provincial executive did not provide support for colonization plans.

However, the greatest challenge consisted of adapting forests and jungle regions to agricultural activities. In addition to the question of the areas subject to flooding, there were other threats to establishing regular agriculture, amongst which was the presence of ants: “*Santa Izabel* colony would be more developed and flourishing if its lands were not undermined by the ant called *sauba*, which has caused no small harm, destroying plantations in such a way that some emigrants have abandoned them.”

The assistance policy for *retirantes* was funded with ‘Public Aid’ funds, which allowed the opening of credit not stipulated in the provincial budget and for the transfer of funds through the Ministry of the Empire. Significant expenditure was made on the opening of a nursery for sick emigrants and a “hostel for *Cearense* emigrants in the old student establishment,” both in Manaus. The peak of the emission of credits for the province of Amazonas occurred between March 1878 and August 1879, a period when the province was administered by Rufino Eneas Gustavo Galvão, the Baron of Maracajú, a liberal politician who in a ‘speech’ in August 1878, stated that “he had received no complaints from any of the emigrants.”

While the Baron valorized his projects and accumulated political capital with the new inhabitants, the conservative newspaper *Jornal do Amazonas*, the voice of the opposition, published on 4 August 1878 a note entitled

“Organization of the Parish Table,” with accusations of private benefit, misuse of public funds, and the use of colonists in electoral disputes in the province: “Lieutenant Honorario, inspector for the municipal council, left yesterday for Maracajú colony in order to bring 200 *Cearense retirantes* here who found themselves colonized by the government, all armed with cudgels, to teach the conservatives liberal practices.” As well as the allies sent by *Colônia Maracajú*, another fifty had been sent from *Colônia Santa Izabel* with the same purpose.

Conflicts between liberals and conservatives and the involvement of *Cearense retirantes* were much in evidence. On 27 October 1878 *Jornal do Amazonas* published a controversial article criticizing actions related to the colonization policy. Seeing *Cearense* colonists as the principal allies of the provincial administration, it sought to disqualify the colony and the residents themselves. The article was entitled “Result of a Sunday walk in Maracaju colony” caused great repercussion among the colonists: “What rubbish! I never believed that I would be witness of such shameful scenes as I saw in Maracajú colony, although in the city it is said that this colony is a *brilliant future* for the province! God will that it will not be a tomb of shards!” In the report signed by ‘João Faribundo Mocó,’ the narrator is ‘horrified,’ describing the visit:

At the entrance to the colony I met a group of emigrants with a large number of empty bottles with their mouths stuck into the ground, and others full of *caxaça* hung on stakes. In the middle of this group there were four decks of cards and some copper coins. All gambling! ... Further on I met another group: this was making noise like a Carnival dance! ... In the middle of this group there was an old *cocho* who played *rabeca*, a kid with a guitar and some others with other instruments.

The jocular tone of the report sought to produce a continuous negative image of the migrants – they drank, and being fond of gambling and parties were not exactly the qualities expected from a settlement responsible for propelling agriculture. But what did *Faribundo Mocó* expect? His visit was on a Sunday, a day of leisure for the colonists; they were not in a monastery, but rather in an agglomeration of men and women in the middle of the forest, far from their families and places of origin. Nothing more legitimate than using the moment for their entertainment.

The practice of gambling as a form of leisure appeared to be rooted in various segments of society. According to Mary Del Priore: “Since colonial times, the presence of cards, chess, and backgammon tables in inventories and

wills confirms the desire to meet and entertain oneself with friends and acquaintances... in other words games were played, a lot of them. In fashion were: billiards, darts, backgammon, cards. Decks of cards with colored paintings became a fever” (Priore, 2013, p. 22).

What was the intention of criticizing such routine practices? The report published in the conservative Amazonas newspaper held this sociability in contempt and also produced useful arguments with the purpose of questioning the effective need for the use of public resources to feed those people: “I saw a large table with a hearty dinner, in which there was a magnificent roast pig, a quarter of a sheep, and well prepared ham with slices of lemon... roast chicken, stew and finally – the whole rigmarole!” After witnessing a “feast for Balthasar,” *Mocó* had returned to the “city vowing never to return to that hell, in which the fires are made from government safes!” In his discourse the only beneficiaries of the public assistance were the migrants, fed at the expense of the government. The director was unhappy, even rejecting the seeds he had received, “some for being rotten and others dry,” while the engineers were “indignant, because the treasury ordered that they pay for the meals they were given.” Suppliers criticized the regularity of payments. Finally, after listing his discontents, he cited the president of the province, his true target, as being responsible.

The impact of the report “Result of a Sunday walk in Maracaju colony” led to a climate of discontent between the residents of the colony and the conservative newspaper, provoking clashes, which could have been used by liberal politicians to attack their rivals.

Probably this is what occurred when the *Jornal do Amazonas* printing press was attacked. On the night of 29 October 1878 (two days after the publication of the ‘Walk’), at around seven or eight at night, some individuals who could not be identified destroyed “4 or 6 typesetting mounts, 2 broken trestles, and some boxes out of their places.” The information was transmitted to the Ministry of Justice by the president of Amazonas, who at the beginning of the correspondence, maintained a somewhat dubious protocol or made a mistake by affirming that he had “the honor to communicate” to the minister about the attack. Shortly afterwards, despite lamenting the “revolting fact,” he pointed to the profile of the conservative periodical: “the newspaper printed by this printing press has always offended certain people in its articles and it is very probably that in reprisal some of the people offended” had practiced the attack. After launching this hypothesis, he tried to free himself from the suspicions which connected him to the event: “the suspicion that this is the effect of

politics, appears gratuitous, because this newspaper was always in opposition to those in power, using inconvenient and disorderly language and only now did this fact occur.”⁵

Most offended, in the issues after the ‘attack,’ were the *Maracajú* colonists. The initial information given by the head of the provincial executive aimed suspicions at the *Cearense* emigrants. Two months later and without any advances in police investigations, the Baron complained about the position of *Jornal do Amazonas*, holding the newspaper responsible for the position of criminalization of colonists: “This newspaper insists on relating these facts to the correspondence under the epigraph – Result of a Sunday walk in Maracajú colony – published in issue no. 288.”⁶

The case of the attack on the conservative Amazonian newspaper is symptomatic of the representation of *Cearense retirantes* which the local political elites proposed, seen as a manipulated mass. Occasionally the invasion ended up being of use to the Baron of Maracajú and the liberal politicians, who managed to intimidate their opponents. In relation to the colonists, for whom not every day was Sunday, they had to return to their positions in public building works in the capital and to continue to prepare land for cultivation, even with the restrictions, of which the quality of the seeds offered worsened things.

In addition, the circulation of migrants between colonies and the capital, whether in public construction or electoral conflicts, was regarded with reservation by sectors of the local elite. The use of migrants as an instrument of pressure against adversaries was a dangerous operation, since knowing the roads and trails which linked the colonies and the capital and participating in the political scenario in a secondary role could be the first step for, at the least sign of instability, the migrants to formulate their specific agendas, unbeknownst to those in charge of public administration.

Furthermore, the colonists did not have direct ideological ties with liberals or conservatives, constantly negotiating for advantages. After much pressure, Baron Maracajú left his position in the province in August 1879, ordering the suspension of the aid: “I told the colonization commission not to make any more expenditures from 1 August onwards,” a measure which temporarily safeguarded the oldest colonies “Maracajú and Santa Izabel, since they did not have the resources to maintain themselves, and having lost their corn and bean harvests ruined by caterpillars, and not having the fishing resources of other colonies.”⁷ The following administration limited still further the policy of assistance for colonies.

In September 1879, the colonization commission was dissolved and the orders to restrict assistance continued, provoking the reaction of the residents of *Maracajú*, who even sent a petition to the Presidency. They asked for aid to continue until the following January, time of a new harvest, since what they had cultivated had been lost, due to the “low properties of the land for the plantations they had made, and because those they had made had been destroyed by caterpillars and insects.” At the same time that they made this request, they made threats, after all the continuity of aid sought to avoid

That badly advised by hunger or someone badly intentioned, some could decide to use violent means to obtain what they wanted and to which they believed they had... a right, as has already been manifested, thereby placing this presidency in difficulties to restrain them, since it does not have a public force. I must also declare to Your Excellency that along with the representation there is no day that similar requests are not verbally made individually.⁸

A generalized climate of discontent exploded in the colonies and settlements in Amazonas, similar to what had happened previously in the *abarracamentos* (shacks) of Ceará or the colonies in Maranhão and Pará. During 1879 in *Maracajú* only those who had been there less than a year continued to receive daily payments:

In the said colony and in Santa Izabel many of the colonists entirely lost their plantations, others have plantations but do not yet get subsistence from them; and others do not plant... now due to the suspension of the daily payments they can barely subsist. Many petitions have been sent to the presidency asking for aid, which the presidency cannot give them. Some want to repatriate themselves or go to Pará, or the interior of the province. I have ordered that they be given their passage and I think that the continuation of these expedient is convenient: because the *retirantes* are not hard working, and there is the principle of establishment, those who have fled.⁹

With the manifestation of discontent and demands on the part of the *Cearense retirantes*, the initial positive expectation produced to represent them was being replaced by the discourse of fear in relation to actions of transgression and threats to public and private powers. Provincial leaders perceived the need to remove them from the capital. But how or where to, since there were not enough funds to pay for all of them to leave and Amazonas was on the limits of the Imperial frontier?

ON THE TRACKS OF THE MADEIRA-MAMORÉ RAILWAY

While colonization plans entered into crisis, the principal public work designed for the province followed a similar trajectory. This was the project for the construction of the Madeira-Mamoré Railway, which passed through three moments. In 1872, the first attempt had gone bankrupt due to a lack of funds. We will look at the second phase, between 1878 and 1879, which as well as funding difficulties, it faced strikes and the resistance of US, Irish, Italian, and finally *Cearense* workers. The third carried out between 1907 and 1912, is the best known thanks to the research of Francisco Foot Hardman.¹⁰

The second attempt which has received little attention in historiographic production, was announced by Baron Maracajú, in his ‘speech’ to the provincial legislature, on 25 August 1878, with “great satisfaction,” proclaiming that “so important was the railway being constructed.” In the agreement between the Brazilian Empire and the Republic of Bolivia, funds were raised by English banks which guaranteed the hiring of the US company P.&T. Collins, from Philadelphia, responsible for overseeing the work.

Once the partnership between the Brazilian government and US entrepreneurs had been set up, the US steamship *Mercedita* left Philadelphia on 2 January 1878, heading to the north of Brazil. The occasion attracted “national interest, since for the first time in US history,” an expedition had left with its own material, “financed by our money and directed by our countrymen, to implement, abroad, a public work of great value.” Among its 227 passengers, were 54 engineers, “stockmen, overseers, and clerks. Old Irish foremen who had worked for a long time with the Collins brothers,” as well as “carpenters, mechanics, and a large number of woodsmen from the forests of Pennsylvania composed the rest of the human team” (Craig, 1947, pp. 74-76). The group was intended to plan the beginning of activities and was composed of qualified and experienced workers.

A second ship, the *Metropolis*, left for the United States at the end of January. Apparently everything went as planned. However, the ship sunk on 31 January with approximately 250 passengers on board, as well as 500 tons of tracks, most used for the building of the Madeira-Mamoré railway. The event interfered in the continuity of the venture, with its repercussion in the US press hindering the continuity of recruitment of men with prior knowledge of railway construction, a characteristic common to those who embarked on the *Mercedita* and *Metropolis*.

Faced with the opposition of experienced and qualified workers after the sinister accident with the *Metropolis*, the Collins Brothers resorted to large campaigns aimed at recruiting poor workers in the United States, including blacks and the unemployed without special qualifications:

AFRAID TO GO TO BRAZIL – RAILROAD CONTRACTORS TRYING TO GET COLORED LABORERS IN WASHINGTON AND VIRGINIA – THE MEN A LITTLE SHY. Washington, May 9. – Messrs. Collins & Co., the contractor for building the Madeira and Mamore Railroad in Brazil, have had an agent in Washington for several days, for the purpose of contracting with colored laborers to work upon that road: but although this city is full of colored people out of employment, very great difficulty has been found to induce any of them to leave the district ... offer good wages, contract employment for two years, and expenses to and from South America. Thus far they have succeeded in obtaining promise of only 125 laborers to go from this city, while they are desirous of securing 250. The principal obstacle seems to be fear among the colored people that after they reach South America they will be placed in bondage and compelled to remain there, even if they should not like the place and the work.¹¹

The permanence of African slaves and their descendants in Brazil was a concrete obstacle to attract the ‘colored population,’ who were afraid of being subjected to slavery in South America. Given the failed effort at recruiting Afro-American workers, the contractors turned to poor immigrants who at that moment landed in their thousands in US ports. On 14 February 1878, the steamship *City Of Richmond* left the US coast bound for Brazil with “447 passengers. In addition to a large quantity of baggage, provisions, and various supplies, the ship carried 620 tons of rails and 235 of coal” (Craig, 1947, p. 170).

Two months afterwards, on 11 April *Jornal do Amazonas* published a note entitled “Police Diligences,” in which the discontent of part of the workers is described, due to low pay, long working days, and the bad working conditions: “a growing number of these workers believe the wages for which they were hired to be insignificant, had gone on *strike* and demanded an increase in their wages, and on this occasion a revolver was fired without anyone being hurt by it.”

Reports from US engineers revealed a negative appreciation of the wave of workers transported by the *Richmond*: “The workers who arrived in the *Richmond* were much more inferior to those from *Mercedita*. The unfortunate sinking of the *Metropolis* cut off the enthusiasm of the workers who would best have adapted to the working conditions in South America.” Contractors had

to “gather labor in the poor neighborhoods of various of our large cities. The Italians ... since the beginning, have shown themselves to be a real bevy of vagabonds; various newspapers foresaw troubles... before the *Richmond* had passed the Delaware Capes.” In addition, the engineers also held the workers responsible, since in “Philadelphia they showed themselves willing to work for any wage... but, reaching Santo Antônio, they perceived that the skillful Americans and Irish earned much more, their discontent and indignation soon culminated in a revolt.” When they reached the building site, “the Italians has the task of carrying out the excavations necessary for the bed of the line in Santo Antônio, but almost immediately abandoned the work and demanded a pay increase, from one and a half dollars per day to two, including food” (Craig, 1947, p. 199).

With this dissatisfaction, many foreign workers began to abandon the railway, seeking to reach the capitals of Amazonas and Pará with the intention of returning to the United States. Given such adversities with foreign workers, the Collins brothers sought alternatives to meet the need for labor. Lack of progress and the circulation of accusations made by workers who returned were known to the London financiers. It was necessary to keep the work going to avoid any reprisals or even the desistence of banks and investors.

In this context, there emerged the proposal to mobilize Brazilian workers. For this purpose, “the businessman Thomaz Collins” made a contract “with the Brazilian citizen José Paulino won Hoonholtz for 600 workers from Ceará.” At the end of July 1878, a group of *retirante* workers left the port of Fortaleza, for Santo Antônio do Rio Madeira, recruited among the *abarracamentos* (shacks) of the capital of Ceará.

Conflicts were not slow in emerging, even appearing during the voyage: “As soon as they reached the port of Belém they had to deal with the lack of food, since there was neither ‘money nor credit’ – unlike what had been previously agreed – for the supply of foodstuffs in the capital of Pará.” Local traders “refused to let supplies be loaded on *Purus*, ‘this news causing a revolt’ among the *retirantes*. Hoonholtz was obliged, in an effort to impose discipline, to get rid of 115 of the *Cearenses*, leaving them behind in the port of Belém.” According to the contractor the “revolt was led by the infamous Inácio Azevedo Jacuana, well known in Ceará.” As if the supply problems were not enough, the slowness of the voyage caused more irritation among the *retirantes*. On “17 September they were still travelling, waiting for a new vessel in Manaus because the *Purus* could not ‘go upriver due to the ebbing’ of the river. When they finally arrived in Santo Antônio do Madeira on 30

October” (Barboza; Candido, 2012, p. 6), they disembarked exhausted and debilitated for the beginning of work.

When they reached Santo Antônio, the progress of the work was already compromised. Delays in sending funds provoked irregularity in the payments of workers, subcontractors, and suppliers, also causing rivalries between the Collins brothers and Hoonholtz. The person responsible for the contracts sent correspondence to the president of Ceará, lamenting what had happened, and complaining about lack of control in accounts and payments:

we arrived on 15 November, the day of the next payment, things were the same, if not worse, and these Americans are men of very bad faith, during this time, they worked by all means to put me outside the contract, falsifying current accounts, and ordering that these be shown to my overseers, saying that I did not have a balance and therefore did not receive money... that they would abandon me and having contracts with them, discovering this infamy, I did my accounts and found a discrepancy of 3011 dollars.... I have four accounts in my power, all four are falsely changed.¹²

At the end of November 1878, the loss of workers was already significant, since “the number of people who worked on the railway fell to 11 engineers, around 150 Americans and 325 *Cearenses*.” One of the engineers lamented about the natives: “we did not manage to get many of the *Cearenses* to return to work” (Craig, 1947, p. 376).

Diseases and mortality were not totally responsible for the reduction in the numbers of workers in Madeira-Mamoré. The trajectory of the organization and struggles waged by the foreign immigrants who had urban experiences, even perhaps belonging to workers’ movements, and the demands of the *retirantes* who had undergone a series of deprivations since leaving Fortaleza, and who had also been involved in mutinies, produced a new *zone of contact*,¹³ in which experiences, expectations, and projects were shared. After their arrival the *Cearenses* were alerted by Italians and Americans about the dynamics of the work and the irregularities in relation to the payment of wages:

According to the contract, the first payment for the work in September had to be made on 15 October, but this payment was made, and the workers were completely disheartened by what the Italian and American workers told them, that in seven months they had not received one *real*, and here they would have the same luck so it was better that they did not work, so they refused to continue in the work.¹⁴

With the subsequent sabotage and dissatisfaction of Brazilians and foreigners, the company which administered the construction of the railroad “began to struggle with serious embarrassments,” unable to “pay the salaries owed, which caused great discontent among the workers who began to seek to use all means to leave the service in Santo Antonio.” The report presented by the president of Amazonas in March 1880, indicated the destination of the *Cearenses*: “afterwards the contractor of the *Cearense* workers left... These workers stayed there, most of them sick and completely lacking funds, for which reason they had to be transported to this capital.”¹⁵

Before leaving, Hoonholtz tried to send some men for productive activities in Amazonas: “I arranged with the Bolivian D. Santos Macedo, to bring one hundred men to a place called Crato, and afterwards to look for others in the case that His Excellency Baron Maracajú does not take measures making them working the planting and extraction of natural products.”¹⁶ Among the ‘natural products’ extracted, rubber occupied a central role. The rubber plantations may have incorporated some of those who abandoned the Madeira-Mamoré construction.

In the capital of Amazonas, in February 1879, Baron Maracajú notified the Minister of the Empire of the arrival of “122 workers who were sick and lacking resources,” people who were part of those “contracted in the Province of Ceará by José Paulino won Hoonhotz for the works of the railway, who were collected in the building which served for the education of craftsmen, where they are treated in the best form possible.”¹⁷ After medical evaluation, some may have gone to the Amazonian colonies, where they must have shared the experiences accumulated in the construction of the railway with foreign immigrants.

Not by chance, in October 1879, the provincial executive notified the Ministry of Justice of a worrying scenario, highlighting that the suspension “of the daily payments to the *Cearense retirantes* has placed this capital in real danger, because we have absolutely no armed force to counter any movement... generated by hunger and by the vagabond habits acquired by a large part, when helped by the [state] coffers.” The reduction of the police contingent did not emerge as the only motive for discomfort, indeed the actual composition of the police increased the fears: “the troops in line are insufficient to garrison the frontiers and the police are diminutive for the detachments and those exclusively among the *retirantes*.” With significant presence of *Cearense retirantes* amongst the Provincial Police, it became difficult to comply with the orders of repression against the settlements.

Romualdo Paes d'Andrade also pointed to the particularities of the Amazonian capital: "Many not finding employment in this capital, where life is more difficult and expensive than any part of the Empire, have been asking for passage to the province of Pará."¹⁸ The transfer of the *retirantes* to Pará was limited by the capacity of the steamships and also by the costs of the trip and the opposition of the provincial administration there, which suffered pressure from the colonists of *Benevides* and those continuing to disembark in Belém, coming from Ceará, during 1879.

Since all the palliative proposed were unsuccessful, what was left was to resort to official violence to try and stop those whose threatened the "public tranquility" of Manaus. For this, the president of Pará was requested to send the "11th battalion of infantry," who were supposed to have gone to the capital of Amazonas months earlier. The response obtained from Pará was not favorable: "It is impossible to comply with your requisition, relative to the march of the right wing of the infantry battalion due to the circumstances of this capital with the *retirantes* established in the colonial settlement of Benevides."¹⁹

The constant threats and rumors that the *retirantes* would invade the offices of provincial governments in Belém and Manaus demonstrated the risks of maintaining settlement colonies with Brazilian workers close to urban centers. While proximity was initially thought of as positive, since it facilitated the flow of agricultural production to the Amazonian capitals, a few months later the administrations came to have another understanding. For the local elites, the greater the distance in relation to the insubordinate *retirantes*, the better.

Despite the supposedly liberal discourse arguing that only those who worked deserved pay – thereby avoiding the encouragement of idleness that might be created by free assistance –, holding the migrants responsible for the failure to construct the railroad or the experiences of agricultural colonization was the easiest way to avoid the prior responsibilities which should have been assured: supply of better quality seeds and studies related to soil conditions, not to mention the misuse of the funds by those put in charge by the provincial government.

END OF THE LINE?

We have analysed here how the *retirantes* did not submit to the orders of the provincial administrations. When their interests were at risk, they resorted without any ceremony to threats and conflicts which obliged the political leaders to temporarily maintain assistance; nevertheless, all the events of that year

of 1879 left marks on the memories of local elites, who came to fear the presence of *Cearense* migrants close to state capitals; perhaps due to the permanence of latent fear since the times of *cabanagem*, when the mass actions of Brazilian *mestiços* put at risk the hegemony of the white elite and the European tradition.

As well as impeding new agglomerations in the state, it was also important to neutralize the possible political weight of the new inhabitants who managed to establish themselves, so the 1881 electoral reform²⁰ was well received by the Amazonian political elites. By imposing new criteria for voter qualification of voters, the legislation reduced the number of voters and as a result limited the fragile loopholes for negotiation for support and interference in the electoral game which the *Cearense retirantes* found in those years of 1878 and 1879, a factor which reduced the bargaining power which poor free populations exercised.

Neither Belém, Manaus, nor Madeira-Mamoré was the end of the line for those migrants, since many of them continued to circulate along the riverbanks, looking for employment on the rubber plantation roads. Others began to circulate between the Amazonian capitals in search of employment, forming the periphery of the cities and new settlements. There were also those who tried to return to Ceará. Furthermore, in all these circumstances, *Cearense* migrants contributed to population growth and kept the custom of, with every new deception, continuing to move, propelled by the expectation of better living conditions

However, the permanence of *Cearenses* in urban centers in the Amazon region faced strong opposition, principally in the campaigns against 'idleness,' 'mendicancy,' and 'vagrancy,' which legitimated the position of only providing benefits to migrants who had work, even in degrading and unhealthy conditions.

In this way, the post-1877 context was fundamental for the consolidation, during the integration of Pará and Amazonas, of policies defending a supposed modernization which implied the supremacy of Eurocentric culture, blooming in a new society, ordered and free of conflict.²¹ This perspective had produced elitist representations since the end of the nineteenth century, when the protagonism of change was attributed to rubber and not to the workers themselves, amongst whom was the numerous groups of migrant *Cearenses*, who collected rubber in the middle of the forest, or implemented large works of urban ornamentation, such as the construction of theaters, walkways, and other public buildings.

With the limitation of assistance to the agricultural colonies and contracts in public works, many migrants sought alternatives for social insertion, amongst others, the incorporation of police forces. The conservative newspaper from Pará *A Constituição* reported, in an issue published on 7 February 1878, the landing in Belém of:

26 *Cearenses* coming from the last packet steamer from the south with the destination of the police guard of Amazonas and for this purpose their hiring was ordered by the respective presidency. All those contracted came with their families which considerably increased the expenditure on them by that province, which was responsible for the passage and food.

The reduced police force was a dilemma present in all the provinces of the Empire. According to the correspondence of *delegados* and *subdelegados*, the lack or insufficiency of *praças* (men) was the most common complaint; however, in Amazonas, as it was a younger province, lacking a bureaucratic structure and geographically isolated, the situation sounded most alarming. In addition to the logistical problems – practically undefined and extensive frontiers, and the lack of flotillas and boats to circulate among the rivers –, the great obstacle to the engagement of men was the lack of pay. The commander of the Police Guard of Amazonas, lamented in February 1878, “the miserly pay of one thousand mil *réis* per day,” arguing that it was “too small to arouse desire for affluence in volunteers the sons of other provinces.”²² Without any new economic stimuli or an extraordinary situation which stimulated the “sons of other provinces to” to go to Amazonas, the police force of that province would remain negligible. Luckily for the commander, with the closing of Piauí and Maranhão to the entrance of new migrants and the strangulation of the structure mounted by Pará during 1878, soon there was no lack of candidates to receive the ‘meager wages’ paid by the province of Amazonas.

In addition to the low wages offered to the guards, insufficient funds put at risk the guarantee of the so-called ‘public order.’ Police stations and jails, for example, were in rented houses in precarious conditions, which could not guarantee to accept prisoners or guards. Moreover, although the wages were low, the provincial budget was limited, restricting the possibility of new recruits.

Nevertheless, analyzing the police documentation, notes published in the press, and even official speeches, the volume of *Cearenses* in the police forces calls attention, many of whom were urban guards or members of the police.

Those who were supposed to repress the *retirantes* demonstrated a certain 'criminal tolerance.' Provincial guards also suffered from the impact of high levels of desertion, which could be indicative that the opportunity to enter the police forces was considered a temporary option, or only bearable in the absence of alternative means of entering the worlds of labor.

We understand the significant engagement in police forces as a further attempt of these men to continue occupying urban scenarios, although with the exception of the state capitals Belém and Manaus, and some commercial centers in the interior, many of the *delegacias* and *subdelegacias* were located in points of difficult access, far from the capital, which hindered the implementation of tasks such as the persecution of slaves and other fugitives. The application of the law in opposition to the wishes of local potentates also left the function very risky, all of which, added to the low pay, encouraged desertion, a situation which led provincial government to look for means to contract new guards.

Those who decided to follow the roads to the rubber plantations were marked by numerous adversities, despite the international valorization of the price of rubber. The end of the Empire and its more interventionist policy, evident in the constant changes of the central positions of the provincial administration, expanded the mechanisms of exploiting labor in the rubber plantations.

Furthermore, the federative pact guaranteed autonomy to the local elites, which neglected the efforts to maintain agricultural or settlement colonies, strengthened land speculation, and directed interests towards the expansion of rubber extraction, an activity basically led by sectors associated with state oligarchies. This was done by the incorporation of the liberal discourse in the republican period, which in turn, considered the intervention of the federal government as something unacceptable, which in practice threw thousands of workers in extractive activities into the claws of the system of commerce and land owners, responsible for the administration of the rubber plantations. A process in which in the last instance, guaranteed the accumulation wealth to state coffers and the owners of the rubber plantations, but left the rubber tappers to their own luck and to exploitation in the provision system.²³

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NOTES

¹ Doctorate in Social History (PUC-SP).

² REIS, 1989, pp. 220-225. In the case of the colonization initiatives in Pará, it is worth mentioning: CRUZ, 1958; PENTEADO, 1967; GUILHON, 1975; NUNES, 2008; LACERDA, 2006. In relation to the rivalry between agricultural and extractive sectors in the Amazon region: WEINSTEIN, 1993.

³ The Benevides colony was located around 30 kilometers from the state capital, on the side of the road which linked Belém and Bragança, an area known for being free from flooding, permitting agricultural production. Founded in 1875 to receive European immigrants, in 1877, with less than two hundred residents, it was about to become extinct, when the migrations of *Cearnenses* began, and its population reached 9000 in 1879.

⁴ AMAZONAS, *Falla com que abriu no dia 25 de agosto de 1878 a 1ª sessão da 14ª legislatura da Assembleia Legislativa Provincial do Amazonas o exm. Sr. Barão de Maracajú, Presidente da Provincia. Manáos: Typ. do Amazonas, 1878. pp. 43-46.*

⁵ ARQUIVO NACIONAL (RJ) – Série Justiça, Subsérie: IJ¹ 195 – Correspondência do Presidente da Província do Amazonas ao Ministério da Justiça, 1878. N^o 78, 1ª secção, *Ofício do Presidente Barão de Maracajú ao Ministro da Justiça, Conselheiro Lafaiette Rodrigues Pereria, Palacio da Presidencia do Amazonas, Manaus, 31/10/1878.*

⁶ ARQUIVO NACIONAL (RJ) – Série Justiça, Subsérie: IJ¹ 195 – Correspondência do Presidente da Província do Amazonas ao Ministério da Justiça, 1878. N^o 94, 1ª secção, *Ofício do Presidente Barão de Maracajú ao Ministro da Justiça, Conselheiro Lafaiette Rodrigues Pereira, Palacio da Presidencia do Amazonas, Manaus, 28/12/1878.*

⁷ AMAZONAS, *Exposição com que o Exmo. Sr. Barão de Maracajú Presidente da Provincia do Amazonas, entregou a administração em 26 de agosto de 1879 ao Exmo. Sr. Dr. Romualdo de Souza Paes d'Andrade. Manaus: Typografia do Amazonas, 1879. p. 10.*

⁸ ARQUIVO NACIONAL (RJ) – Série: Interior, Subsérie: IJJ⁹ *102: Correspondência do Presidente da Província do Amazonas ao Ministério do Império, 1879-1881. *S/N Ofício de Romualdo de Souza Paes d'Andrade, presidente do Amazonas, dirigido ao Conselheiro Francisco Maria Sodré Pereira, Ministro e secretário d'Estado dos negócios do Império. Manaus, 28/09/1879.*

⁹ AMAZONAS, *Exposição com que o Exmo. Sr. Dr. Romualdo de Souza Paes d'Andrade, 1º vice-presidente da provincia do Amazonas entregou a administração Ao Exmo. Sr. Tenente-Coronel José Clarindo de Queiroz, em 15 de novembro de 1879. Manaus: Typ. do Amazonas, 1879. p. 8.*

¹⁰ Hardman locates the 1878-1879 phase, but covers in detail only the 1907-1912 period (HARDMAN, 1991). There is also a publication produced by the Engineer

Neville Craig, published in Philadelphia in 1907. It collects memoirs and reports from US engineers who took part in the Madeira-Mamoré expedition at the end of the 1870s (CRAIG, 1947).

¹¹ *New York Tribune*, New York, May 10, 1878, “Afraid to go to Brazil”. p. 1. Cf. Library of Congress. Available at: <http://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/>.

¹² ARQUIVO PÚBLICO DO ESTADO DO CEARÁ. Fundo: Socorros Públicos, Caixa 7A. *Correspondência de João Paulino won Hoonholtz ao Presidente da Província do Ceará, José Julio de Albuquerque Barros, Santo Antonio, 12/12/1878*. Annexed to this document is a list describing name, age, nationality, and civil status of six hundred people contracted on 24/07/1878 in the Ceará capital.

¹³ Mary Pratt has developed an interesting approach to think about ethnic contacts in areas of colonial and post-colonial expansion. According to the Canadian write, the idea of *Zone of Contract* consists on “an attempt to invoke the joint spatial and temporal presence of subjects previously separated by historic and geographic discontinuities whose trajectories have now crossed... I seek to emphasize the interactive and improvised dimensions of colonial encounters, as easily ignored or suppressed in the reports spread by conquest and domination” (PRATT, 1999, p. 32).

¹⁴ ARQUIVO PÚBLICO DO ESTADO DO CEARÁ. Fundo: Socorros Públicos, Caixa 7A. *Correspondência de João Paulino won Hoonholtz ao Presidente da Província do Ceará, José Julio de Albuquerque Barros, Santo Antonio (Amazonas), 12/12/1878*.

¹⁵ AMAZONAS, *Relatório com que o exmo. Sr. tenente coronel José Clarindo de Queiroz, presidente da Província do Amazonas, abriu a 1ª sessão da 15ª legislatura da Assembleia legislativa provincial, 31 de Março de 1880*. Manaus: Typ. do Amazonas, 1880. pp. 19-20.

¹⁶ ARQUIVO PÚBLICO DO ESTADO DO CEARÁ. Fundo: Socorros Públicos, Caixa 7A. *Correspondência de João Paulino won Hoonholtz ao Presidente da Província do Ceará, José Julio de Albuquerque Barros, Santo Antonio (Amazonas), 12/12/1878*.

¹⁷ ARQUIVO NACIONAL (RJ) – Série: Interior, Subsérie: IJJ⁹ *101: Correspondência do Presidente da Província do Amazonas ao Ministério do Império, 1877-1879. N^o 4 *Ofício do Barão de Maracajú, presidente do Amazonas, dirigido ao Conselheiro Carlos Leoncio de Carvalho, Ministro e secretário d’Estado dos negócios do Império. Manaus, 08/02/1879*.

¹⁸ ARQUIVO NACIONAL (RJ) – Série: Interior, Subsérie: IJJ⁹ *102: Correspondência do Presidente da Província do Amazonas ao Ministério do Império, 1879-1881. S/N(Reservado) *Ofício de Romualdo de Souza Paes d’Andrade, presidente do Amazonas, dirigido ao Conselheiro Francisco Maria Sodré Pereira, Ministro e secretário d’Estado dos negócios do Império. Manaus, 08/10/1879*.

¹⁹ ARQUIVO NACIONAL (RJ) – Série: Interior, Subsérie: IJJ⁹ *102: Correspondência

do Presidente da Província do Amazonas ao Ministério do Império, 1879-1881. (*Cópia*) *Ofício do Presidente da Província do Pará, José Coelho da Gama e Abreu, dirigido ao 1º vice-presidente do Amazonas. Belém, 08/10/1879.*

²⁰ Amongst the modifications presented by the 1881 Electoral Law the one which caused the greatest impact was the prohibition of the vote of illiterates. The number of voters belonging to the free population was reduced from 15% to approximately 1% (CARVALHO, 2001, p. 39).

²¹ In the 1850s, rubber came to assume an important role in the economy of Pará and Amazonas, thanks to the growing interest in the nascent automobile industry; this process centralized Belém as a port for the outflow of production, allowing a continual accumulation of funds through the collection of export taxes. This allowed the local elites greater access to European products and customs, seen as modern and civilized, a movement which culminated in the approval of municipal codes in Belém and Manaus. The construction of urban equipment represented new standards of behavior and consumption, such as the example of going to the Paz Theater in Belém, opened in 1878, or the Amazonas Theater in Manaus, opened in 1896. “The transformation which Belém passed through, engendered by the rubber economy, signified the materialization of modernity expressed through the construction of works, urbanization, education of elites, in the construction of ‘an ideal model of modern society exempt from disturbance’” Cf. SARGES, 2002, p. 53. For a reading of the case of Manaus at the beginning of the republican period, see: DIAS, 1999.

²² ARQUIVO PÚBLICO DO ESTADO DO AMAZONAS. Livro 9 – Ofícios expedidos pela Guarda Policial. *Ofício do Major Comandante José Leonildo Guedes dirigido ao Vice-presidente Gabriel Antonio Ribeiro Guimarães, Manaus, 18/02/1878.*

²³ A model characterized by the advanced supply of merchandise for later payment. The ‘*seringa* (rubber) roads,’ trails within the forest which workers followed collecting the sap of the rubber tree, were located in regions of difficult access, often completely isolated and in flooded regions. In the rubber plantations the production of latex occurred around the *Barracão*, a place where the sap was deposited and the rubber produced. The owner of the *barracão*, called the *patrão* (boss), possessed a monopoly of food supply, imposing prices more than abusive on the *seringueiros* (rubber tappers), who ended up accumulating enormous debts with subsistence, and were coerced into continuing the extraction process in the forest until the ‘debts’ were paid. Although rubber was highly valued in world markets at that time, a large part of the profits were accumulated by the owners of the *barracões* and the commercial houses which exported it; the workers were left with tropical diseases and generally unpayable debts. In relation to this, see: CUNHA, 1999; MELLO, 1956; BENCHIMOL, 1977.

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