

The Colonial Nucleus of Barão de Antonina, São Paulo*

Pierre Monbeig
University of São Paulo
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Abstract

This article examines...

[These are parts of the original article]

The wave of immigration that invaded Brazil in the last decades of the nineteenth century contributed to the peopling of the southern states in distinctly different ways. In Paraná, Santa Catharina, and Rio Grande do Sul the new arrivals effected a true settlement of the country, in small, economically viable holdings. In São Paulo, on the other hand, the immigrants served mainly as laborers for the coffee fazendeiros; many of them were small Italian farmers who had exchanged for a lot unenviable enough, but in which they at least had their liberty, the position of agricultural proletariat in an environment often geographically and psychologically unfavorable. Before long, however, the state of São Paulo undertook the establishment of “centers of colonization.” Nova Odessa and Nova Europa are the best known of these official nucleus of settlement.¹ This method of settlement has been sustained by the state government, and there are now several nucleos, administered by the Department of Lands, Colonization, and Immigration of the Secretariat of Agriculture. Three are in the littoral zone to the south of Santos: Itanhaém on the shore, Alecrim at the foot of the Serra do Mar, and Juquiá on the densely forested slopes. Another “nucleus” in the early stages is on the plateau at São Miguel; but the most important is in the interior – the “núcleo colonial Barão de Antonina.” Not only does Barão de Antonina afford a good example of the modern ways of life in the state of São Paulo; it is also a concrete expression of the Brazilian policy of colonization.

(...)

*I thank to...

¹Pierre Denis’s classic work “Le Bresil au XXe siecle” (Denis, *Le Brésil*) gives an excellent description of these centers in about 1908.

The ethnic composition of the government colonies (see p. 260) varies according to geographical situation and age. In Itanhaém, Brazilians own 56.7 per cent of the land, and Portuguese and Spaniards, the most important foreign element, own 13.9 and 12.8 per cent respectively. In this low, humid area, where the banana is the staple crop, other immigrants have not adapted themselves to its cultivation. On the other hand, the site of Alecrim is favorable for rice and vegetables, and Japanese own 34.5 per cent of the area, Brazilians 51.9 per cent, and Portuguese, far behind in third place, only 6.2 per cent. In Juquiá, Brazilian colonists occupy 91.3 per cent of the land – understandably enough, for the colony is in the dense forest and it is the Brazilian who is the true pioneer. Only afterwards comes the foreigner. In the young “nucleus” of São Miguel, where campos are interspersed in the forest, the first colonists are indifferently Brazilians or foreigners. In the case of Barão de Antonina, as has been said, clearing was effected by the caboclos.

What is the attitude toward one another of elements so diverse? To what degree do they mix with one another and with the Brazilians? The normal play of affinities tends to unite the colonists of the same origin. The Lithuanians gather in the evenings to sing and dance at the home of one of their group. Also, normally the most advanced member of any group tends to play the part of moral and financial adviser; for instance, the Rumanians, almost all Bessarabians, are under the leadership of a former officer. This does not make for disharmony but tends to ease the process of acclimatization. Contacts with the Brazilian element are frequent enough, especially by means of the school. In most of the houses one finds foreign-language papers, especially Polish or German, almost exclusively agricultural, not political, in character. The children in the rural school, whatever their color and the nationality of their parents, become the educators of the parents, introducing into the home books and magazines in the Portuguese language. The shops of the sede facilitate the establishment of relations; so does the farm work. The organizers of the colony have shown themselves wise in the drawing up of plans: lots have been distributed so that the creation of ethnic islands is impossible. Brazilians and foreigners are mingled, and the foreigners themselves are mingled so far as possible. Some Japanese settled before 1930 remain grouped; but mingling with the other elements is more advanced than it is among Japanese farmers in the pioneer zones proper. Nearness makes for contacts, especially for new arrivals to the neighborhood who need aid in tools and labor for building their houses and clearing their land.

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One of the surest means of rooting is the prosperity of the small farmer. If the economic situation of the foreign colonists is compared with that of the Brazilian, the foreigners will be found to have acquired a small capital within a few years whereas the Brazilians are far from it. The files of the colonization services afford excellent documentation; they permit one to trace the fortunes of individual colonists. A Japanese who had emigrated to Brazil in 1919 and worked in fazendas until 1930 arrived at the colony without money and in debt

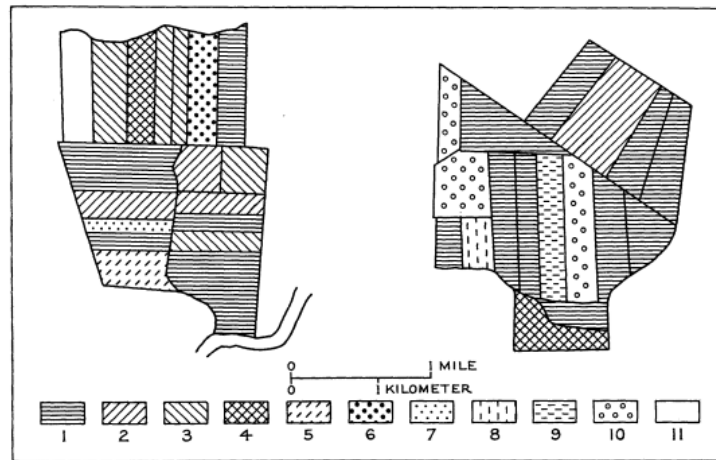


Figure 1: Illustrations of the mixture of nationalities at Barão de Antonina.

Source: Monbeig, "Colonial Nucleus," p. 268.

Note: Key: i, Brazilian; 2, Austrian; 3, German; 4, Estonian; 5, Czechoslovakian; 6, Italian; 7, Russian; 8, Hungarian; 9, Lithuanian; 10, Japanese; II, unsold lot.

and obtained a 78-hectare holding at a price of 90 mil-réis a hectare, payable in ten years: he now has 19 hectares under cultivation-sugar cane, cotton, coffee, maize, oranges, bananas, barley, soybeans, Brazilian beans (feijão), rice, and garlic-and a small cane-liquor still; he owns 12 horses, 20 sheep and goats, 46 pigs, 50 hens, and 70 hives of bees; and his property is valued at 30 contos. A Russian colonist, Romanoff by name, who left China in 1931 and arrived with 3 contos bought 90 hectares: 36 are now cleared; besides crops as varied as those of the Japanese he has a sawmill and a truck and the finest house in the colony, with a radio and a small electric plant; and his property is valued at 100 contos, of which 76 are in buildings, equipment, and the like.

A Lithuanian acquired 26 hectares in 1931 with an outlay of 200 mil-réis, with which he bought also a horse and two pigs: now half his land is in wheat, barley, oats, rye, rice, cotton, beans, manioc, potatoes, maize, and vegetables; he produces and sells eggs, milk, butter, and honey; his house is well furnished and is surrounded with a flower garden, and near by are a reservoir and a plow shed; his stock comprises 2 cows, 3 mules, and 40 head of poultry; and his property is valued at 30 contos. Two Brazilians arrived in 1932 with meager resources; one took 29 hectares, the other 48: they work 12 and 15 hectares respectively, in rice, cotton, beans, manioc, and maize; their stock is comparable with that of the foreigners (2 pigs, 4 cows, and 3 horses; 48 pigs, 2 horses, 150 poultry, and 3 cows); but their properties show few improvements and are valued at no more than 16 and 10 contos respectively. A visit to the colony confirms the evidence of the archives: in general the houses of the foreigners are more up-to-date and more comfortable than those of the Brazilian colonists; the goods and chattels



Figure 2: Wheat harvest in Barão de Antonina

of the colonists who carry the weight of the caboclo.

References

Denis, Pierre. *Le Brésil Au XX Siècle*. Armand Colin, 1909.