

“HEROES” OF THE *SERTÃO*: THE *BANDEIRANTES* AS A SYMBOLIC CATEGORY FOR THE STUDY OF BRAZILIAN WEST COLONIZATION¹

OS “HERÓIS” DO SERTÃO: O BANDEIRANTE COMO CATEGORIA SIMBÓLICA NA COLONIZAÇÃO DO OESTE BRASILEIRO

Sandro Dutra e Silva²

Endereço profissional: Universidade Estadual de Goiás - PPG RENAC

BR-153, 3105 - Fazenda Barreiro do Meio, Anápolis - GO, 75132-903.

E-mail: sandrodutra@unievangelica.edu.br

Abstract: This article analyzes the historical role of the *bandeirante* - a character redefined through the intellectual and government policy of *A Marcha para o Oeste*, which was adopted by the *Estado Novo* regime (1937-1945). The research was based on different sources such as speeches, literary narratives, Brazilian historiography, legislative decrees and other documents. Hence, we sought to identify the relationship between the image of the *bandeirante* as the hero of the *sertão* in the territorial conquest of the Brazilian frontier.

Keywords: Sertão; Wilderness; Bandeirante.

Resumo: Esse artigo tem por objetivo analisar as representações históricas do bandeirante, como personagem ressignificado a partir da política governamental da *Marcha para Oeste*, adotada pelo *Estado Novo* (1937-1945). A pesquisa fundamentou-se em diferentes fontes como discursos, narrativas literárias, textos clássicos da historiografia brasileira, decretos legislativos e outros documentos com a finalidade de identificar a relação entre a imagem do bandeirante como o herói do sertão na conquista territorial da fronteira.

Palavras-chave: Sertão; Bandeirante; Marcha para Oeste.

¹ Professor Sandro Dutra e Silva would like to thank the National Council for Scientific and Technological Development (CNPq) for their research grant.

² Doutorado em História Social pela Universidade de Brasília (2008). Pós-doutorado em História pela Universidade de Brasília (2014). Pesquisador Visitante na University of California, Los Angeles (2015-2016). Professor titular na Universidade Estadual de Goiás, atuando no Programa de Pós-Graduação em Recursos Naturais do Cerrado (Mestrado e Doutorado em Ciências Ambientais). Professor no Centro Universitário de Anápolis - UniEVANGÉLICA com atuação no Programa de Pós-Graduação em Sociedade, Tecnologia e Meio Ambiente (Mestrado em Ciências Ambientais). Bolsista de Produtividade em Pesquisa CNPq 2.

Introduction

This text describes and analyzes a set of federal frontier occupation policies in Brazil known as *A Marcha para Oeste* (The March towards the West). They occurred in Brazil between the 1930's and late 1940's. In addition to examining how the legitimacy of these policies was substantially linked to pre-existing images of the “*bandeirantes*” (17th century pathfinders, frontiersmen, or explorers). The *bandeirantes*' saga was a composite of several expeditionary and slave hunting explorations on Brazil's backlands in its early and mid-colonial period. Brazil is one of the few countries in the world which still has considerably extensive areas to be settled or to be used more intensively. The historical examination of some aspects of this effort in frontier settlement helps understand the past and present of Brazilian frontier dynamics and policies.

This article is based on the symbolic category of pioneering, in order to identify the ideological use of the *bandeirantes* as a historical actor that inspires migratory movements into the Brazilian West all the way up to the 20th century. Thus, the *bandeirantes* as a symbolic category goes beyond the discourse about their historical attributes. Their symbolic appropriation goes beyond the symbolic systems (social representations, discourses, codes, narratives, literature or any other form of expression of these historical characters) used to legitimize the 1937-1945 period of governmental settlement and migration projects affecting the Brazilian Midwest.

Brazilian frontiers and frontiersmen – distinctive traits

The occupation of the Brazilian West has some similarities with the territorial occupation of the United States frontiers.³ The most widely used term by the Brazilian social scientists and historians to refer to the country's backlands is *sertão*. This term has a connotation similar to the English term “wilderness”.⁴ The term described and still describes remote and unsettled lands, or lands that are sparsely settled by Europeans, neo-Brazilians or Brazilians. The term frontier (*fronteira* in Portuguese) was sporadically used in Brazil to designate something quite distinct – borders or barriers between established countries.⁵

Sertão was usually associated with uninhabitable or empty places with a hostile natural environment. In both the North-American concept of frontier and in the

3 TURNER, Frederick Jackson. *The frontier in American history*. Mineola, New York: Dover Publications, Inc, 2010; WEBB, Walter Prescott. *The great frontier*. Reno, Las Vegas: University of Nevada Press, 2003; CRONON, William. *Uncommon Ground: rethinking the human place in nature*. New York/London: W.W.Norton & Company, 1996.

4 FRANCO, José Luiz de Andrade e DRUMMOND, José Augusto. *Wilderness and the Brazilian Mind (I): Nation and Nature in Brazil from 1920s to the 1940s*, *Environmental History*, Oxford University Press, v. 13 (October 2008), p. 724-750, 2008.

5 HENNESSY, Alistair. *The Frontier in Latin American History*. London: Edward Arnold, 1978; McCreery, David. *Frontier Goiás, 1822-1889*. Stanford, Califórnia: Stanford University Press, 2006.

Brazilian concept of *sertão*, the relationship between nature and society was associated with the Turnerian notion that the “wilderness masters the colonist”.⁶ Nevertheless, in Turner’s thesis, the contact of Europeans with the wilderness was a basic trait of the North American identity as the society and the country strayed away from its European heritage. The Brazilian concept of *sertão*, in contrast, emphasized the negative aspect of the domination of nature over humans. The *sertão* represented a dualistic view, a rupture between the “civilized” people on the coast and the uncivilized, isolated people living in the harsh backlands. In this perspective, the *sertão* was a place dominated by the wilderness, which transformed its inhabitants into rudimentary or backward beings.⁷

Brazilian migration and colonization policies adopted between the late 1930’s and mid-1950’s started to use the term *Oeste* (West), instead of *sertão*, to designate their target areas. At the same time, Brazilian scholars began using the frontier as an interpretive category of their investigations about the backlands.⁸ The most encompassing of these policies was the *A Marcha para o Oeste*,⁹ broadcasted by the *Departamento de Imprensa e Propaganda* (Federal Department of Media and Propaganda) during Getúlio Vargas’ government (1930-1945). There was a rich intellectual and cultural production about this issue, especially the works by Cassiano Ricardo (1895-1974).

A Marcha para Oeste policies were disseminated by the journal *Cultura Política – Revista de Estudos Brasileiros*, published between 1941 and 1945.¹⁰ Contributors included a group of Brazilian intellectuals who wrote essays supporting federal policies.¹¹

As a result, the term *sertão*, once used by Brazilian social commentators, lost its strength and was followed by the ideological use of the term *Oeste*. The social actors who engaged in this 20th century migratory flow found a new symbolic reference in the character of the *bandeirantes*. The social discourse in favor of Midwest pioneers and of the westward movement in the first half of the 20th century were depicted with this

6 TURNER, Frederick Jackson. The frontier in American history. Op. cit., p. 4.

7 LIMA, Nísia Trindade. Um Sertão Chamado Brasil: Intelectuais e Representação Geográfica da Identidade Nacional. Rio de Janeiro: Revan/IUPERJ-UCAM, 1999; OLIVEIRA, Lucia Lippi. Americanos: representações da identidade nacional no Brasil e nos EUA. Belo Horizonte: Editora UFMG, 2000. DUTRA E SILVA, Sandro; TAVARES, Giovana Galvão; SÁ, Dominichi Miranda de; FRANCO, José Luiz de Andrade. A construção simbólica do Oeste brasileiro (1930-1940). In: DUTRA E SILVA, Sandro; SÁ, Dominichi Miranda de; SÁ, Magali Romero de. Vastos Sertões: História e Natureza na ciência e na literatura. Rio de Janeiro: Mauad X, 2015.

8 HOLANDA, Sérgio Buarque. O extremo oeste. São Paulo: Brasiliense: Secretaria de Estado da Cultura, 1986; HOLANDA, Sérgio Buarque. Monções. São Paulo: Brasiliense, 1990; HOLANDA, Sérgio Buarque. Caminhos e fronteiras. São Paulo: Companhia das Letras, 1994; MONBEIG, Pierre. Pioneiros e fazendeiros de São Paulo: Editora Hucitec; Editora Polis, 1984. MOOG, Viana. Bandeirantes e pioneiros. Rio de Janeiro: Civilização Brasileira, 1981; OLIVEIRA, Lucia Lippi. Americanos: representações da identidade nacional no Brasil e nos EUA. Op. cit.

9 ESTERCI, Neide. O mito da democracia no país das bandeiras: análise simbólica dos discursos sobre colonização e migração no Estado Novo. Dissertação (Mestrado em Antropologia) – Universidade Federal do Rio de Janeiro, Rio de Janeiro, 1972; LENHARO, Alcir. Sacralização da política. Campinas: Papyrus, 1986; RICARDO, Cassiano. Marcha para Oeste: a influência da bandeira na formação social e política do Brasil. Rio de Janeiro: J. Olympio, 1959; DUTRA E SILVA, Sandro. No Oeste a terra e o céu: a expansão da fronteira agrícola no Brasil Central. Rio de Janeiro: Mauad X, 2017.

10 The full collection of this journal is available at the Centro de Pesquisa e Documentação de História Contemporânea do Brasil (CPDOC - Fundação Getúlio Vargas), Rio de Janeiro.

11 OLIVEIRA, Lucia Lippi; VELLOSO, Mônica Pimenta; GOMES, Ângela Maria de Castro (Org.). Estado Novo: ideologia e poder. Rio de Janeiro: J. Zahar, 1982; LENHARO, Alcir. Sacralização da política. Op. cit.

arcane image of the original *bandeirantes*. This was done to bolster new forms of political propaganda in favor of government policies. These pathfinders/frontiersmen were constructed as the symbol of the new movement to the West.

The precise identity of the *bandeirantes* is relevant to our analysis. These characters have no exact parallel in the European conquest of other parts of the American continent. They are quite unlike the Spanish *conquistadores*, who sought to topple the highest ranks of centralized empires and permanently take over their lands and control tribute-paying peoples. They do not have a counterpart in the context of US frontier history either. The closest character in the history of US expansion to its West would be the fur trapper¹². Like the *bandeirantes*, fur trappers penetrated remote, sparsely populated areas and then moved out of them just as quickly, bringing pelts to be sold at a trading post or community on the edge of the frontier. They did not found European or Neo-Europeans communities along their trails. They strove to build networks of contacts with several indigenous peoples with whom they traded goods during their incursions, procured pelts collected by the indigenes themselves, or hired indigenous helpers to collect pelts on their own.

In contrast with the *bandeirantes*, fur trappers traveled in small groups and did not round up indigenous peoples to be sold as slaves. *Bandeirantes* can be correctly described as slave traders. They formed armed expeditions composed of dozens or even hundreds of Portuguese, neo-Brazilians and friendly indigenes. These expeditions could last many years and sought to capture native peoples to be sold to slave holders who lived mostly along the coast. They also sought to locate sources of mineral wealth, namely gold, silver and precious stones.

Although *bandeirantes* cross-crossed the Brazilian territory and opened important pathways, much like fur trappers, they were not community builders or settlers. Their slave-trading practice actually contributed to depopulate many areas. When they found gold and precious stones, mining communities sprang up along their trails, but most were temporary or boom-and-bust. Some of these mining encampments became durable towns, but many of them shriveled back into insignificance as gold and precious stones became scarce.

During the 16th and 17th centuries, *bandeirantes* were deeply involved in wars with the indigenes, capturing them and selling them to work as slaves in different activities of the colonial economy. Brazilian historiography built their image in an ambiguous manner. On the one hand, they were praised as pioneers who cut through enormous and remote territories, even conquering lands under Spanish rule which were eventually transferred to the Portuguese Crown and became part of the contemporary Brazilian territory. On the other hand, *bandeirantes* were associated with the conquest

12 CRONON, William. *Nature's Metropolis: Chicago and the Great West*. New York: W.W.Norton & Company, 1991.

of indigenous territory, enslaving local indigenes and attacking Jesuit missions.¹³

In agreement with Capistrano de Abreu (1853-1927), a ranking Brazilian historian specialized in the country's colonial period (1500-1822), the expeditions of the *bandeirantes*, called *bandeiras*, were characterized as unrelated groups of men who marched westward through the backlands with the mission of capturing and enslaving "indigenous gentiles". *Bandeirante* was actually the name given to the leader of each *bandeira*, but it encompassed also his followers. According to Abreu, "*Bandeiras* were a group of men or *bandeirantes* employed in capturing and enslaving indigenous heathens".¹⁴ The name for these expeditions came from the indigenous practice of raising a flag as a gesture of war. *Bandeira* in Portuguese means flag. These expeditions were private initiatives and more than one *bandeira* could be roaming simultaneously along the backlands, unrelated to each other. The leader was usually a Portuguese or neo-Brazilian male and a staunch Catholic; he was not necessarily a rich man, but he had good standing among his peers, recruited mostly in the area where all resided. Most *bandeiras* departed from the captaincy of São Paulo, corresponding roughly to the current state of São Paulo. Each expedition pulled together a variety of people: landowners and their relatives, adventurers, militiamen, *mamelucos*,¹⁵ friendly natives, chaplains, cooks, carpenters and blacksmiths. *Bandeiras* were mainly pedestrian expeditions; mules were used primarily to transport heavy cargo.¹⁶

Each *bandeira* had a specific hierarchy, very similar to that of a militia. At the top were the leading *bandeirantes*. Leaders and the regular members were mostly *mamelucos*, the sons of marriages between Europeans and natives. Chaplains were regular participants and were spiritually important, for the more staunchly Catholic participants did not want to spend months or even years in the backlands without having the chance for confessions. Some men alleged the absence of chaplains as a reason to not participate in *bandeiras*.¹⁷

A "second class" of *bandeirantes* were involved in basic logistics. Slaves (Africans and indigenes) were responsible for carrying baggage and equipment. *Carijós* indigenes were common participants, because many of them had been acquired by the *bandeirantes* in their raids against the Jesuit missions in present-day Southern Brazil, Paraguay and Argentina. *Carijós* natives, properly trained, made up the bulk of the fighting forces of the *bandeiras*, applying their warfare skills against other indigenous groups.¹⁸

Abreu noted that there are few sources and documents describing *bandeiras*.

13 ABREU, João Capistrano de. 1997. *Chapters of Brazil's Colonial History 1500-1800*. New York, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997.

14 Idem, p. 92.

15 Mameluco was the derogatory name used to classify the sons of indigenes with Europeans.

16 HOLANDA, Sérgio Buarque. *Caminhos e fronteiras*. Op. cit.

17 ABREU, João Capistrano de. *Capítulos de história colonial (1500-1800): Os caminhos antigos e o povoamento do Brasil*. Brasília: Editora Universidade de Brasília, 1963.

18 Idem.

Being a privately organized expeditions created by different groups of colonists, this is to be expected. The basic narrative about most *bandeiras* is monotonous. European men and their native allies wielded firearms, attacked native villages and set fire to their gardens and dwellings. These natives defended themselves with bows and arrows. The large death toll among attacked natives made the remnants lose hope and courage. Captives were put into chains and taken to the nearest village, where they were sold as slaves.

Abreu questioned if indeed *bandeirantes* were worthy of the historical glory awarded to them by 20th century writers as the great heroes, conquerors, explorers and settlers of the Brazilian territory.¹⁹ What disturbed Abreu most was the violence associated with their exploration and conquest. Abreu was appalled by the constant attacks against the “indigenous gentiles of the countryside” and by how *bandeirantes* also assaulted Jesuit missions, in which indigenous groups had been converted to Christianity, moved into communities controlled by the missionaries and transformed into peaceful agriculturalists. The missions, besides actually “rounding up” willing indigenous groups, welcomed other indigenous groups who fled *bandeirante* fury. They sought protection from Europeans and colonists in the Jesuit-controlled villages called *reduções* (reductions).

These *reduções* amounted to indigenous resettlements under clerical supervision. They grouped together tribes or villages that had previously lived dispersed in small groups in the vast interior. Jesuits gave natives a Catholic education and taught them different skills, from agriculture and basic letters to art. This made *reduções* a favorite target for *bandeirantes*. Their first attractive trait was the reunion of large numbers of natives in single areas. Successful attacks led to the capture of large numbers of slaves, as opposed to the few dozen slaves yielded by attacks made to small and dispersed villages. The second attractive feature was that the Jesuits had initiated the natives in European skills and cultural traits, such as large-scale agriculture, as many *reduções* produced surpluses taken to the market. These traits included the Portuguese or Spanish language and conversion to Christianity, which made natives more amenable to their own transformation into slaves. Abreu summarized the attractiveness of *reduções* to the *bandeirantes* in the following words: “one cannot imagine a more tempting prey for slave traders”.²⁰

Abreu cites an anonymous letter sent to the Portuguese King in the seventeenth century, asserting that he could make good use of the *bandeirantes*, bestowing them with honors and favors. According to the author of the letter, such honors would embolden them to face the dangers of the backlands. In addition, Abreu reported that this letter emphasized *bandeirantes* as the only colonists capable of travelling deep into

19 Idem.

20 Idem, p. 93.

the *sertão*. They conquered lands and survived on what the wilderness offered – beasts, snakes, lizards, wild fruits and the roots of different plants. The document asserted that no one could deny that the Brazilian backlands were being conquered by the bravery of the *bandeirantes*, who took them from the wild gentile.

Sua Majestade podia se valer dos homens de São Paulo, fazendo-lhes honras e mercês, que as honras e os interesses facilitam os homens todo o perigo, porque são homens capazes para penetrar todos os sertões, por onde andam continuamente sem mais sustento que caças do mato, bichos, cobras, lagartos, frutas bravas e raízes de vários paus, [...]. Ninguém lhes pode negar que o sertão todo que temos povoado neste Brasil eles o conquistaram do gentio bravo.²¹

This praise is typical of the heroic image of the *bandeirantes* construed by early Brazilian historians. They asserted the *bandeirantes*' role in the conquest of the territory, the control of the natives, and the taking of large stretches of Spanish lands for the King of Portugal.

The Estado Novo (1937-1945) and its colonization program

The first half of the 20th century witnessed a rebirth of the *bandeirante* as a symbol and myth of the westward expansion. In the late 1930's the Brazilian government initiated a new settlement policy of a part of the country's vast Western territories. During the period known politically as the *Estado Novo*, between 1937 and 1945, the Getúlio Vargas government adopted an openly nationalist, anti-democratic and authoritarian stance. It decided that the issues of territorial exploration and settlement should be guided by national policies. The *Marcha para o Oeste* was a major part of such policies. It was an overt and concrete part of a discourse of conquest and settlement. The *bandeirante* was used as a symbol and a myth of this discourse as we shall see further.²² The government chose to omit the image of the slave trader and use the image of his heroic deeds. Vargas' speeches created a strong nationalist identity for the *Marcha* and its actors, whom were construed as the new frontiersmen engaged in the conquest of the Brazilian West.

Repercussions of the *Marcha* policy went beyond symbols, debate and discourse. It brought into being tangible settlements, roads, cities, farms, and tens of thousands of migrants. It also linked itself intentionally to an effort to create an enhanced Brazilian nationality ("Brasilidade" = "Brazilianness"). Key words gained legitimacy – the term

²¹ Idem, p. 62.

²² ESTERCI, Neide. O mito da democracia no país das bandeiras. Op. cit.; LENHARO, Alcir. Sacralização da política. Op. cit.; RICARDO, Cassiano. *Marcha para Oeste*. Op. cit.

bandeirantes was associated with contemporary pathfinders/frontiersmen. They were also called *pioneiros* (pioneers), *desbravadores* (conqueror), *fazendeiros da vanguarda* (vanguard farmers), *soldados sem farda* (soldiers without uniform) and *heróis do sertão* (heroes of the wilderness). Individuals and institutional actors were charged with the mission of territorial appropriation, followed by the construction of the nationality and the nation. These influential and well-rooted expressions guaranteed that the *Marcha* was passed on to different federal and state governments.²³

Major studies about the mid-20th century colonization policies in Central Brazil emphasize the fundamental role of the dictatorial regime of the *Estado Novo*.²⁴ This is especially true for the studies that focus on the creation of the *Colônias Agrícolas Nacionais* (National Agricultural Colonies) created in the state of Goiás. The role of national political system is fundamental to the understanding of the process of settlement of the hinterland.

The *Estado Novo* ideology had a set of doctrinal components (elitist, authoritarian, hierarchical and nationalist) inherited from traditional national politics as well as from emerging European ideologies (Fascism, Nazism etc.). These components are highlighted in nationalism as the strongest influence in the political orientation of this period, which linked society's interests to national goals.²⁵

In the nationalist ideology of the *Estado Novo*, government appears as the institution responsible for sustaining the social order and managing conflicts between dissimilar components. Defenders of these principles thought that the nation held collective moral values and that these values were fulfilled by the State, seen as an actor that conducted an exceptionally controlled process of change, as Brazil was transitioning from a rural oligarchic order to an urban industrialized society.²⁶

As pointed out by Lenharo,²⁷ the *Estado Novo* ideology helped build Brazil's rural reality, and this is used to be to most unknown characteristic of this political regime. Many analyses have focused on the integration of social and urban-industrial labor policies, emphasizing its concern with urban issues. Lenharo innovates when he calls for an integrated examination and understanding of the relations between the *Estado Novo*'s rural and urban policies.²⁸ Actually, both types of policies were part of the same ideological program. This is attested by the fact that there is no evidence of friction between the colonization of the Western interior and social and labor policies directed at urban groups. Both represented an articulation of the State forces in the solution of

23 DUTRA E SILVA, Sandro. No Oeste a terra e o céu. Op. cit.

24 DAYRELL, Eliane Garcindo. Colônia Agrícola Nacional de Goiás: análise de uma política de colonização. Dissertação (Mestrado em Ciências Humanas e Letras) – Universidade Federal de Goiás, Goiânia, 1972; NEIVA, Ivany Câmara. O outro lado da colônia: contradições e formas de resistência popular na Colônia Agrícola Nacional de Goiás. Dissertação (Mestrado em Sociologia) – Universidade de Brasília, Brasília, 1984; PESSOA, Jadir de Moraes. A igreja da denúncia e o silêncio do fiel. Campinas: Alínea, 1999; DUTRA E SILVA, Sandro. No oeste a terra e o céu. Op. cit.

25 LENHARO, Alcir. Sacralização da política. Op. cit.

26 OLIVEIRA, Lúcia Lippi; VELLOSO, Mônica Pimenta; GOMES, Ângela Maria de Castro (Org.). Estado Novo. Op. cit.

27 LENHARO, Alcir. Sacralização da política. Op. cit.

28 Idem.

social matters, as was explicitly acknowledged in that period. On the one hand, migration to the vast interior was considered a solution to problems in the countryside, easing social tensions in settled places and promoting the orderly settlement of new areas by means of supervised colonization. On the other hand, the *Estado Novo* sought to regulate food supply to urban centers, by encouraging agricultural production in newly colonized areas.

The social programs created by the *Estado Novo* clustered around new laws, regulations and agencies concerning several matters, such as labor rules (minimum wages, weekly and daily workloads, paid vacations, and work contracts), labor courts, unionization, retirement and pensions. These innovations were developed and enhanced by a nationalistic and authoritarian political ideology and were used as matters for the propaganda for the *Estado Novo*.²⁹

In this period more than in any other, it is important to consider the power of the nationalistic discourse as an instrument to link official programs to collective interest goals. Two fundamental aspects help us understand the *Estado Novo*. First, the flexibility of the ideological politics expressed within its discourse, which managed to absorb topics linked to the demands and claims of the majority of the population. Second, the topics incorporated and transformed in the political agenda were materialized into legal regulations, which consolidated the ideological purpose and *Estado Novo's* position of power, sanctioning its intentions and proving its political project. Therefore, the *Estado Novo* assumed an authoritarian ideological stance similar to contemporary European authoritarian regimes. By adopting the nationalism, this ideology sought to ease the semblance of authoritarianism and, at the same time, it suggested collective participation in the construction of a new social order.³⁰

The *bandeirante* in the 20th century – a new hero of the hinterland

Colonization policies were not a “rural” initiative of the *Estado Novo* but were also linked to a wider national project. The nationalistic bias, in fact, was based on the main ideological instrument of the colonization program: the *A Marcha para o Oeste*. The discourse of the *Marcha* brought forth mythical elements, of which imaginary constructions were traceable evidence of romantic conservatism present in contemporary European authoritarian experiences. Besides that, the use of images, such as discursive instruments of propaganda, met the political goals and were very clear. The boosters of the regime themselves could not hide this fact.³¹

The discourse of the *Marcha* cultivated the image of a nation in movement. The

29 GOMES, Ângela Maria de Castro. O trabalhador brasileiro. In OLIVEIRA, Lúcia Lippi; VELLOSO, Mônica Pimenta; GOMES, Ângela Maria de Castro (Org.). *Estado Novo*. Op. cit., p. 151-166.

30 LENHARO, Alcir. Sacralização da política. Op. cit., p. 22.

31 Idem, p. 16.

westward movement of Brazilians represented the conquest of the national territory as an expanded and integrated frontier. The content of this discourse stimulated the meaning of belonging to a nation as a body in movement, in which everyone participated. The *Estado Novo* had closed many channels of collective participation and the *Marcha's* discourse sought to gather the people around a national agenda. Furthermore, the expansion and occupation of the frontiers were seen as a task of the workers, as it operated as an idea of conquest of physical space, so that everyone felt symbolically as if they were co-proprietors of the national territory.³² On December 31, 1937, Vargas delivered his New Year's Eve speech, which included his plan to conquer the *sertão*. He launched the campaign to make Brazilian march to the West.

Mais do que uma simples imagem, é uma realidade urgente e necessária galgar a montanha, transpor os planaltos e expandir-nos no sentido das latitudes. Retomando a trilha dos pioneiros que plantaram no coração do Continente, em vigorosa e épica arremetida, os marcos das fronteiras territoriais, precisamos de novo suprimir obstáculos, encurtar distâncias, abrir caminhos e estender as fronteiras econômicas, consolidando, definitivamente, os alicerces da Nação. [...] O verdadeiro sentido de brasilidade é a marcha para o Oeste. No século XVII, de lá jorrou a caudal de ouro que transbordou na Europa e fez da América o Continente das cobiças e tentativas aventureiras. E lá teremos de ir buscar: – dos vales férteis e vastos, o produto das culturas variadas e fartas; das entranhas da terra, o metal com que forjar os instrumentos da nossa defesa e do nosso progresso industrial.³³

The conquest of the *sertão* displayed the government's desire to expand the Brazilian demographic frontier, concentrated since the 16th century along the Atlantic coast (Figure 1). However, the new march would not be towards the *sertão*; it would head West. The West, at that moment, appears as a new symbolic category, full of meanings that reinforced the *bandeirantes* willingness to engage in the territorial conquest of the frontier. The *Marcha* had an ambiguous character, especially regarding history and nature. Its discourse reinforced the idea that the colonizer was mastered by the wilderness. The colonizer and the pioneer learned with the wilderness how to adapt to the hostile environment, but also understood the frontier as the land of abundance or the “promised land”.³⁴

32 Idem, p. 15.

33 VARGAS, Getúlio. No limiar do ano de 1938. Saudação aos brasileiros, pronunciada no Palácio Guanabara e irradiada para todo o país, à meia noite de 31 de dezembro de 1937. Presidência da República, Casa Civil, Secretaria de Administração, Diretoria de Gestão de Pessoas, Coordenação Geral de Documentos e Informação. Biblioteca da Presidência da República.

34 Boom in the Backlands. *Time*, p. 39, April 7, 1947.

Figure 1: *Time* magazine depicts Brazil's "March towards the West". Source: *Time*, April 7, 1947, p. 39



In 1939, with the beginning of the Second World War, the government started to adopt a policy of nationalization of migratory displacement. Later in the same year, in a speech given by the President on November 18, on occasion of the conclusion of the National Economy and Administration Conference, he urged the governors of the states to work together with the federal government on the issues of migration and colonization, identifying available public lands.

In 1940, President Vargas set forth the "Crusade of Brazilianness" ("Cruzada da Brasilidade"). He visited hinterland regions and gave speeches in defense of the sovereignty and security of the national territory. On his visit to Goiânia, the new capital of Goiás, in Central Brazil, on August 8, he spoke about territorial defense as a nationalistic trait, relating matters of demographics and colonization as signs of "Brazilianness", highlighting the image of *bandeirantes* as heroes of the wilderness, and conquerors of the *sertão*:

Deste modo, o programa de "Rumo ao Oeste" é o reatamento da campanha dos construtores da nacionalidade, dos bandeirantes e dos sertanistas, com a integração dos modernos processos de cultura.

Precisamos promover essa arrancada, sob todos os aspectos e com todos os métodos, a fim de suprimirmos os vácuos demográficos do nosso território e fazermos com que as fronteiras econômicas coincidam com as fronteiras políticas. Eis o nosso imperialismo. Não ambicionamos um palmo de território que não seja nosso, mas temos um expansionismo, que é o de crescermos dentro de nossas próprias fronteiras.³⁵

Vargas reinforced the idea of promoting migration towards the West in order to suppress demographic voids and expand the economic frontiers to fit the political borders of the Brazilian territory. His speech was filled with mythical elements of the West as a “promised land”. The territorial expansion in national geography accepted expansionist meanings since it stated the existence of a Brazilian form of imperialism. Even so, in a worldview where many nations were in conflict over territory, there regime justified the use of a Brazilian expansionist image and its relation with the march to the westward frontier, “to grow within our own frontiers”.³⁶

On February 14, 1941, the Federal Government published Decree number 3,059, which predicted the creation of National Agricultural Colonies³⁷ and defined the technical conditions for the creation of settlements in large areas in the countryside giving priority to the settlement of Brazilian citizens.³⁸

The Conqueror Frontiersmen in the propaganda of the *Estado Novo*

As mentioned previously, one of the major migration and colonization policies was the *A Marcha para o Oeste*. This program was responsible for defining federal regulations that defined the expansion of the agricultural frontier towards the Brazilian hinterland, based on colonization and migration. However, it was the publication of Cassiano Ricardo’s book, entitled *Marcha para Oeste*,³⁹ in 1940, that explicitly justified frontier expansion by means of the contact between the pioneer and the wilderness as a unique trace of the Brazilian identity. It was the most eloquent ideological statement about the *Marcha*.

Ricardo presents the *bandeiras* in a narrative built to characterize them as a Brazilian social/political model and, at the same time, to justify the settlement policies

35 VARGAS, Getúlio. Cruzada rumo ao Oeste. Improviso, Goiânia, a 8 de agosto de 1940, na inauguração de Associação Cívica "Cruzada Rumo ao Oeste". Presidência da República, Casa Civil, Secretaria de Administração, Diretoria de Gestão de Pessoas, Coordenação - Geral de Documentação e Informação Coordenação de Biblioteca. Biblioteca da Presidência da República, 1940, p. 32.

36 Idem, p. 32 (free translation by the author).

37 The National Agricultural Colonies were created at the Brazilian hinterland, in areas donated by the state governments, privileging the expansion of the demographic frontier in the states of Goiás, Amazonas, Maranhão, Pará, Paraná, Mato Grosso, Piauí and Minas Gerais. (See, DUTRA E SILVA, Sandro. No Oeste a terra e o céu. Op. cit.).

38 NEIVA, Artur Hehl. A imigração e a colonização no governo Vargas. Cultura Política: Revista Mensal de Estudos Brasileiros, ano 2, n. 21, p. 217-240, nov. 1942, p. 236. DUTRA E SILVA, Sandro. No Oeste a terra e o céu, Op. cit.

39 RICARDO, Cassiano. *Marcha para Oeste*. Op. cit. A free translation of the title of Ricardo’s book is "March toward the West: the influence of the frontier in Brazilian History".

implemented by the *Estado Novo*.⁴⁰ The author emphasizes that his book did not have a poetic or symbolic format. He stated that he used the scientific objectivity to discuss the influence of the *bandeira* and of its myths on Brazilian history.

Nowadays, J.F. Turner's thesis is widely criticized for his romantic view of the frontier⁴¹. In this same manner, Cassiano Ricardo has a romantic and ideological narrative, for his mythical vision of the *Marcha* and the conquest of the *sertão*. His book is not considered sufficiently scientific, as Ricardo stated. His narrative of the *Marcha* brings a dramatic meaning, characterizing the West as the Brazilian frontier and the *bandeirante* as the hero who conquered the West. However, the great value of his work lies in considering the West as a symbol and myth, which allows us to interpret his literature from the presuppositions presented by Henry Nash Smith.⁴² In literary terms, it highlights a distinctive narrative, but in terms of content, it does not distinguish itself from the ideological discourse of the *Estado Novo*. Notwithstanding, the significant attributes of the *Marcha* were used as symbolical and ideological resources to justify cultural displacement of Brazilian citizens to the countryside.

According to Velloso the political and the national literature can be used as an analytical category that reflected in a real and immediate manner the social reality.⁴³ During the *Estado Novo*, this phenomenon was easily noticed, especially in the attempts to redefine the function of literature, inserting it in the strategy of nationalistic propaganda. Its origin was in relating literature to acts of heroism, which would reinforce national identity, embedding it with the perfect image of nationality.⁴⁴ This remarkably nationalistic trait of Ricardo's text appears in the introduction of the third edition of *Marcha para Oeste*, written in 1959. The author emphasizes that his text was based on objective observations of the frontier in Brazilian history. To him, the frontier narrative was not a fable. He took care to avoid interference of magical and heroic residues on the concept of the pathfinders/frontiersmen.⁴⁵ Actually, the power of his narrative lies on its symbolical and mythical characteristics, that make his literature peculiar and as one of the major sources to understand the *Oeste* as a symbol and a myth.

According to Ricardo the *bandeirante* created new myths, replacing the old ones. The new myths related to natural resources, especially valuable minerals (gold, emeralds and diamonds), replaced the old ones. Ricardo argues that this new myths contributed to the geographical formation of the Brazilian territory. His intention was to use the image of the *bandeirante* as a mythical element, fundamental to the

40 Idem.

41 WORSTER, Donald. *Under Western Skies: Nature and History in the American West*. Nova York: Oxford University Press, 1992; HENNESSY, Alistair. *The Frontier in Latin American History*. Op. cit.

42 SMITH, Henry Nash. *Virgin Land: the American West as Symbol and Myth*. Cambridge, Massachusetts/Londres: Harvard University Press, 2009.

43 VELLOSO, Mônica Pimenta. *A literatura como espelho da nação*. Estudos Históricos, Rio de Janeiro: FGV, v. 1, n. 2, p. 239-263, 1988.

44 Idem.

45 RICARDO, Cassiano. *Marcha para Oeste*. Op. cit., p XXVI.

ideological discourse of the westward march in the 1940s. As one of the intellectual defenders of the Vargas regime, Ricardo's intentions were explicit in his book's narrative. The mythical character of the colonial frontiersman, recreated in the 20th century, sought to link this movement to the origins of the historical westward expansion.

The major topic in Ricardo's narrative was the association between the westward movement and the conqueror frontiersmen as a distinct form of Brazilian sociability, defined by him as a democracy of the *bandeira* ("*democracia da Bandeira*").⁴⁶ His reasoning starts from this premise, but directs its focus to a typology of the frontiersman, delineating his attributes and symbolic categories. The *Marcha*'s plot builds the traces of the ethos⁴⁷ of the pathfinders/frontiersmen. Chapter 13, entitled "*A função dos mitos na Bandeira*" (The role of myths in the *Bandeira*),⁴⁸ describes the psychological references produced by the *bandeiras* as a marching community. The *bandeira*, which can be looked upon as a group marching toward the frontier, was surrounded by a universe of fantasies and fables, of which legends and myths had a fundamental function in the migratory movements of the *bandeirante*. These frontiersmen recreated this universe of fables and legends as a motivating element for geographical expansion. At the same time, they became part of this fabled plot, reconstituting the myth of the movement on the historical frontier.

There are some similarities between Ricardo's argument and Turner's frontier thesis. As reported by Turner, the frontier had a fundamental role in American history, especially by relating territorial expansion to the continuous rebirth of the American identity. According to him, "American social development has been continually beginning over again on the frontier. This perennial rebirth, [...] furnish[es] the forces dominating American character".⁴⁹ In the same manner, Ricardo writes that the frontier fulfills the idea of the rebirth of the *bandeirante* spirit, his ethos, in the westward movement. In addition, both agreed that in the frontier, the pioneer, the settler, or the frontiersmen were mastered by the wilderness. The North American character and the *bandeirante* ethos were the results of the relationship between the frontiersman and the wilderness (or the *sertão*).

Even though both recognized the dynamic of national rebirth fueled by the occupation of frontiers, Ricardo's argument about myths assumes a special role in understanding the behavior of the frontiersman. The westward movement was treated as a heroic confrontation against the old myths of native folklore about the indomitable *sertão*. Their narratives treated the wilderness as an enemy of the colonist. The natural landscape and the indigenous spiritual entities, for example the *boitatá*, *curupira*,

46 ESTERCI, Neide. O mito da democracia no país das bandeiras. Op. cit.

47 The *bandeirante* ethos was based on the territorial mobility of the frontiersman in his struggling with the wilderness.

48 RICARDO, Cassiano. *Marcha para Oeste*. Op. cit.

49 TURNER, Frederick Jackson. *The frontier in American history*. Op. cit., p. 2-3.

caapora, and others, acted as barriers to the movements of European explorers and settlers. In order for the *bandeirantes* to enter this new land, they had to confront the old myths. However, these myths were not sufficiently powerful to prevent westward expansion. The enigmatic wild lands motivated the historical frontiersman movement, producing a vision of wealth and prosperity in the frontier (the Promised Land in the West).

In line with Ricardo, the new frontiersman of the 19th and 20th centuries symbolically represented the main aspects of nationalism, although in a distinct moment in which the bandeirante ethos persisted. Bandeirante typology was based on the general framework of Ricardo's nationalism. It identifies four distinct types of characters: the conqueror, the surveyor, the scientist and the pioneer. This typology incorporated the legacies of the historic bandeirante's symbology, transposed to the national sociocultural horizon. The bandeirante ethos constituted a standard behavior or generic ethic, common to all bandeirantes. While dealing with the dynamics of displacement, Ricardo evidenced the characteristics of the frontiersman. Ricardo's objective was to regard the historical role of the bandeirante in the 20th colonization movement toward the Brazilian West.

In Ricardo's typology, the conqueror dominated the narrative and he embodied the main honors of the bandeirante ethos. The author used the mythical element of the bandeira to refer to this type of trailblazing. Ricardo presented the conqueror as the one who confronts myths. The conqueror built an image of confrontation, transforming the activity of trailblazing into another myth. Attributes such as courage, faith and determination characterized the conqueror frontiersman. Another representation indicated that the conqueror was the one who confronted the wilderness. Besides courageously facing the allegorical fables and the myths of wilderness with courage, the conqueror frontiersman confronted the difficulties raised by the natural landscape. In Ricardo's words, the conqueror wins his glory in the struggle against geography, the forest, the rivers filled with waterfalls, the streams and the hidden waters of the Amazonian maze – and even against the Indians, diseases, beasts and monsters of the frontier.⁵⁰

Additionally, the conqueror frontiersman incorporated the “historical destiny” reserved for him as a mythical right. The author reinforces this mythical character of the conquerors arguing that they opened paths to the backlands and founded towns. Ricardo's observation was very similar to what was depicted in other writings about the conqueror frontiersman, highlighting territorial conquests.⁵¹ However, he stated that

50 RICARDO, Cassiano. *Marcha para Oeste*. Op. cit., p. 321.

51 OLIVEIRA, José de Alcântara Machado de. *Vida e morte do bandeirante*, São Paulo: Editora Revista dos Tribunais, 1929; ELLIS JUNIOR, Alfredo. *Os primeiros troncos paulistas e o cruzamento euro-americano*. Biblioteca Pedagógica Brasileira, Brasileira, volume 59, série V, sob direção de Fernando de Azevedo, São Paulo: Companhia Editora Nacional, 1936; TAUNAY, Afonso de Escragnoille. *História Geral das Bandeiras Paulistas: escripta à vista de avultada documentação inédita dos archivos brasileiros, hespanhoes e portuguezes*. Tomo terceiro (1641-1651), cyclo da caça ao índio – lutas com os hespanhoes e os jesuítas – o grande periblo raposioano, São Paulo: Typ. Ideal, Heitor I Canton, 1927; TAUNAY, Afonso de Escragnoille. *História das bandeiras paulistas*. São Paulo: Edições

this vast territory needed to be occupied. That is the reason to reinforce the image of the bandeirantes in de mid-20th century, when the federal policies supporting migration and colonization sought to reach the goal of occupation. Ricardo's *Marcha* forcefully classified as bandeirantes all Brazilians who answered the call to march toward the west:

Todo brasileiro que abre caminhos novos é, hoje, um bandeirante. [...] No menor ato brasileiro haverá sempre o “sentido bandeirante”. É uma condição para que a terra possua o homem e este a possua. Na grandeza que aí está – quase nove milhões de quilômetros quadrados – o papel da bandeira é, ainda, uma imposição da vida a que o brasileiro não poderá fugir [...] ⁵².

In Ricardo's concept, even with different forms of conquering territory, the ethos and the spirit of bandeirante characterize all those who, in explicitly or not, incorporate the fate of manifest displacement. Moreover, the conqueror represented the mythical act of trailblazing.

Conclusion

The *bandeirante* was a symbolic reference, which allowed the identification of collective persuasive elements and justified the displacement of 20th century Brazilians to the West. The conqueror frontiersman category is much more than a symbolic system.⁵³ Therefore, its symbolic force and legitimate power lie in the potential of the social actors to identify themselves as such. The new *bandeirantes*, or the modern frontiersmen, either peasants, farmers, ranchers, traders and all 20th century pioneers, went in search of new possibilities in the colonization projects. However, they basked in the glory of the conqueror frontiersman, as they incorporated his social role – the colonial heroes of the *sertão*. This incorporation justified displacement to the West, facing the wilderness to conquer the Brazilian territory. The symbolic power of the discourse of the *Marcha para o Oeste* lay in turning a discourse into a feeling of manifest destiny. More than peasants and more than settlers, migrants became “special” Brazilians, creating a distinct social category: 20th century pioneers of the West and the heroes of the wilderness. This categorization supported the historical task of giving meaning to this political process. The *Marcha* evidenced these categories, thus

Melhoramentos, 1951; ABREU, João Capistrano de. Capítulos de história colonial (1500-1800). Op. cit.; EVANS, Sterling; DUTRA E SILVA, Sandro. Crossing the Green Line. *Fronteiras: Journal of Social, Technological and Environmental Science*, v. 6, n. 1, p. 120-142, 2017.

52 RICARDO, Cassiano. *Marcha para Oeste*. Op. cit., p. 391.

53 BOURDIEU, Pierre. Efeitos de lugar. IN: BOURDIEU, Pierre (org.) *A miséria do mundo: com contribuição de A. Accado (et. al.)* Petrópolis, RJ: Vozes, 1997. BOURDIEU, Pierre. *O poder simbólico*. Rio de Janeiro: Bertrand Brasil, 1998; BOURDIEU, Pierre. *A economia das trocas simbólicas*. São Paulo: Perspectiva, 2003.

they cannot be underestimated in the act of understanding the meaning of Western colonization.

In Ricardo's writings, the trailblazing westward movement evidenced the symbolical categories of colonization. The historical *bandeiras* movement was associated in an ambiguous manner with frontier expansion in the first three centuries of Brazilian history. *Bandeirantes* were sometimes seen as heroes and sometimes as villains. Ricardo preferred to examine them as heroes and his narrative follows their movements, but the category of the conqueror frontiersman, assumes a mythical role. Ricardo's discussions are similar to the Turnerian vision of the frontier, a national historical identity built in the effort of expansion to the West – this is true “Brazilianness”. The author tried to write a holistic Brazilian history, emphasizing the *bandeirante* spirit and its ethos as a trace that belonged to all those who moved to the Western backlands. In his view, the true Brazilian identity resides in this behavior. This ethos was reborn every time it encountered the wilderness, the untamed *sertão*.

Recebido em 24 de abril de 2018.

Aprovado em 19 de junho de 2018.