

The Price of Peace: Itaipu and the Meanings of Land and
Opposition in Brazil, 1957-1984

By

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Note on orthography:

I use the word “Itaipu” to refer both to the dam itself and to the state enterprise (the Itaipu Binational Corporation) that oversaw its construction. This decision mirrors its usage by the historical actors studied herein.

Throughout this thesis, “farmers,” “families,” and “communities” are used interchangeably to describe the populations that mobilized against Itaipu. This mirrors the phrasing used by participants at the time. The most common terms for individuals were *colono* (settler) or *agricultor* (farmer), and “family” was the unit most commonly used to describe the number of people whose lands would be flooded.

Additionally, the category of “landless” (*sem terra*) covers a wide range of rural Brazilians who did not own the legal deed to the lands they worked. Among others, this includes squatters (*posseiros*), tenant-farmers (*arrendatários*), and day laborers (*empregados*).

Because the present narrative focuses almost exclusively on the Brazilian portion of Itaipu’s history, I have chosen to use the Portuguese spelling for all place names and proper nouns in the Triple Frontier area between Brazil, Paraguay, and Argentina.

Although Guaraní (accented “í”) is the spelling for the ethno-linguistic group common to southern Brazil and Paraguay, the specific community implicated at Itaipu is the Avá-Guarani, spelled with an unaccented “i.”

All translations are my own.

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List of Acronyms

ABA	Associação Brasileira de Antropologia (Brazilian Anthropological Association)
AESI	Assessoria Especial de Segurança e Informação (Special Committee of Security and Information)
AI-5	Ato Institucional No. 5 (Institutional Act No. 5)
ANAI	Assosiação Nacional de Ação Indigenista (National Indigenous Action Association)
ARENA	Aliança Renovadora Nacional (Alliance for National Renovation)
CEB	<i>Comunidades eclesiais de base</i> (Ecclesial Base Communities)
CIBPU	Comissão Interestadual da Bacia Paraná-Uruguai (Interstate Commission of the Paraná-Uruguay Basin)
CIMI	Conselho Indigenista Missionário (Indigenous Missionary Council)
CJP	Comissão Justiça e Paz (Justice and Peace Commission)
CNBB	Conferência Nacional dos Bispos do Brasil (National Conference of Brazilian Bishops)
CNV	Comissão Nacional da Verdade (National Truth Commission)
CONTAG	Confederação Nacional dos Trabalhadores na Agricultura (Confederation of Agricultural Workers)
CPT	Comissão Pastoral da Terra (Pastoral Land Commission)
CRAB	Comissão Regional dos Atingidos por Barragens (Regional Commission of People Affected by Dams)
CSN	Conselho Nacional de Segurança (National Security Council)
CSN	Conselho Nacional de Segurança (National Security Council)
CUT	Central Único de Trabalhadores (Unified Workers Central)
DSN	Doutrina de Segurança Nacional (Doctrine of National Security)
ET	Estatuto da Terra (Rural Land Statute)
FETAEP	Federação dos Trabalhadores na Agricultura do Estado Paraná (Paraná Federation of Agricultural Workers)
FUNAI	Fundação Nacional do Índio (National Foundation of Indigenous Affairs)
FUNRURAL	Fundo de Assistência Rural (Rural Assistance Fund)
IBR	Instituto de Bienestar Rural (Institute for Rural Wellbeing, Paraguay)
IBRA	Instituto Brasileiro de Reforma Agrária (Brazilian Institute for Agrarian Reform)
INCRA	Instituto Nacional de Colonização e Reforma Agrária (National Institute for Colonization and Agrarian Reform)
ITC	Instituto de Terras e Cartografia (Institute of Land and Cartography)
LSN	Lei da Segurança Nacional (National Security Act)
MAB,	Movimento dos Atingidos por Barragens (Movement of People Affected by Dams)
MASTER	Movimento dos Agricultores Sem Terra (Movement of Landless Farmers)
MASTRO	Movimento dos Trabalhadores Sem Terra de Oeste do Paraná (Landless Workers Movement of Western Paraná)
MDB	Movimento Democrático Brasileiro (Brazilian Democratic Movement)
MJT	Movimento Justiça e Terra (Justice and Land Movement)
MST	Movimento dos Trabalhadores Sem Terra (Landless Workers Movement)
PDS	Partido Democrático Social (Democratic Social Party)

PIN	Plano Nacional de Integração (National Integration Plan)
PMDB	Partido do Movimento Democrático do Brasil (Brazilian Democratic Movement Party)
PT	Partido dos Trabalhadores (Workers' Party)
PTB	Partido Trabalhista do Brasil (Brazilian Worker's Party)
SNI	Serviço Nacional de Informações (National Information Service)
SPI	Serviço de Proteção aos Índios (Indigenous Protection Service)
UNE	União Nacional dos Estudantes (National Union of Students)

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Introduction

Early in the morning of March 17, 1981 nearly 800 farmers descended on Foz do Iguaçu, a border town in Brazil's southern state of Paraná. After arriving on the outskirts of the city in a caravan of cars, trucks, and tractors, the group walked the final five kilometers on foot. Winding through the streets of Foz do Iguaçu, the crowd approached its destination: the construction site of the Itaipu hydroelectric complex.

Built jointly by the military dictatorships of Brazil and Paraguay, Itaipu sits at the Paraná River that forms their shared border. When completed in the late 1980s, it was the largest dam in the world. The Brazilian military regime saw Itaipu as its crown jewel of development—the touchstone of the nation's rise as a global power. Building 'the project of the century,' however, came at the expense of over forty thousand Brazilians whose homes would be flooded by the dam's reservoir basin.¹ The march on Foz do Iguaçu was the culminating moment of a grassroots campaign that began the previous decade. In a country ruled by a dictatorship that had disappeared, tortured, and imprisoned thousands of its own citizens, rural communities mobilized against Itaipu—and against the Brazilian state—under the banner of the Justice and Land Movement (MJT, Movimento Justiça e Terra).

¹ Although this dissertation focuses almost exclusively on Itaipu as it relates to Brazil, an equally important and at times overlapping history took place in Paraguay. The Itaipu flood covered 570 km² of Paraguayan lands (compared to 780 km² in Brazil) and displaced over 20,000 local Paraguayans. Much of the scholarship on Paraguay's history with Itaipu deals with the unfair economic stipulations of the dam's 1973 treaty that heavily favored Brazil. Major works include R. Andrew Nickson, "The Itaipu Hydro-Electric Project: The Paraguayan Perspective," *Bulletin of Latin American Research* Vol. 2, No. 1, 1982, 1-20; Ricardo Canese, *Itaipú: Dependencia o Desarrollo*, (Asunción: Editorial Araverá, 1985); Adrian Mora et al., *La Deuda De Itaipú*. (Asunción, Paraguay: F17, 2006); Juan Antonio Pozzo Moreno, *Itaipu: la apropiación indebida*. (Asunción, Paraguay: Editorial Gráfica Mercurio, 2010); Carlos Mateo Balmelli, *Itaipú: Una reflexión ético-política sobre el poder*, (Asunción: Aguilar, 2011).



MAP OF ITAIPU BINATIONAL DAM AND THE PARANÁ BORDERLANDS. Created using ArcGIS 10.3.

The MJT farmers approached the entrance gates seeking to negotiate with Itaipu's central leadership but over a hundred security forces wielding guns, a water cannon, and tear gas blocked their path. For almost five years, the farmers had mobilized to receive better prices for their soon-to-be-flooded lands. Led initially by progressive members of the Catholic Church, the farmers held study groups, organized general assemblies, and even staged a two-week protest in

front of Itaipu's regional office. Members of the MJT had previously considered marching on Foz do Iguaçu but only now, barely a year and a half before the dam's scheduled flooding did rural communities finally bring their fight to Itaipu's doorstep. A tense standoff ensued over the next hour, as farmers from throughout the western Paraná countryside stood face-to-face with representatives of a violent military regime. An army general told the crowd that his troopers would use physical force against any attempt to cross the gates. The farmers responded by chanting slogans for land and justice. One man even unbuttoned his shirt, bared his chest, and dared the police to shoot.

In different circumstances, this conflict could have ended in bloodshed. After seizing power in a 1964 coup, the Brazilian military ruled an authoritarian state that lasted until 1985. The most violent phase of the dictatorship began with the 1968 passage of Institutional Act No. 5 (AI-5), a law that cancelled many political freedoms and legalized the use of torture. AI-5 marked the beginning of the "years of lead" (*os anos de chumbo*) from 1968 to 1974 that accounted for the majority of state-sponsored deaths and disappearances. With the presidency of General Ernesto Geisel in March 1974—the dictatorship maintained a veneer of democracy through an indirect Electoral College—the regime initiated a "slow, gradual, and secure" liberalization "from within" known as *distensão* ("decompression").² As the government made gestures toward a less repressive society in the late 1970s, industrial workers, university students, and political dissidents reenergized an opposition movement in Brazil's urban centers. These campaigns chipped away at the regime's monopoly on power and helped accelerate the prospects of a return to civilian rule.

Yet the gradual reopening did not apply equally to all Brazilians. Although systemic

² Thomas E. Skidmore. *The Politics of Military Rule in Brazil, 1964-1985*. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990), 170.

human rights abuses had largely diminished by the early 1980s, repression persisted in the countryside. At a time when opposition groups forced the authoritarian haze to slowly, if inconsistently, lift in Brazil's major cities, government authorities continued to beat, imprison, and destroy the homes of rural communities. Far from the public eye and isolated from the country's political centers, rural workers, peasants, and indigenous communities lived in a climate of physical and social violence. To be sure, many urban Brazilians—especially those in the lower classes—suffered from the dictatorship's political and economic policies well into the official return of civilian rule in 1985.³ Repression in the countryside, however, long predated the 1964 coup and developed separately from mainstream society under the military regime. So when farmers in western Paraná stood at the gates of Itaipu in March of 1981, they did so against a threat of attack that no longer existed at the same level in urban areas.

At this moment in Brazilian history, the conflict at Itaipu represented more than just a response from rural families facing displacement. It was both a product and an emblem of Brazil's complex transition from dictatorship to democracy—a process rolled out cautiously, and subject to setbacks and even reversals, what James Green calls Brazil's "slow-motion return to democracy."⁴ In 1979 the new military president João Figueiredo inaugurated an official policy of *abertura*, or political opening. Historian Maria Helena Moreira Alves describes the *abertura* as "a series of planned stages of liberalization, carefully monitored by state political strategists ... [intended to] pacify the elite opposition."⁵ This approach included an amnesty law that allowed exiles to return home, the formation of new political parties, and the 1982 direct

³ A compelling account of urban poverty under military and civilian rule comes from Bryan McCann, *Hard Times in the Marvelous City: From Dictatorship to Democracy in the Favelas of Rio de Janeiro*, (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2014).

⁴ James Green, *We Cannot Remain Silent: Opposition to the Brazilian Military Dictatorship in the United States*. (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010), 321.

⁵ Maria Helena Moreira Alves, *State and Opposition in Military Brazil*, (Austin: the University of Texas Press, 1988), 173.

elections for all positions except the presidency.⁶ As we shall see, the *abertura*'s official rhetoric of elite reconciliation masked a simmering undercurrent of popular discontent. Because Brazilians of different class, ethnic, gender, and regional backgrounds experienced the dictatorship in particular ways, the transition to democracy involved a diverse collection of memories and visions for the future. Despite the appearance of a forward moving and controlled *abertura*, the path to civilian rule remained highly problematic. This tension existed both between military and civilian forces, and within the various groups that mobilized against the dictatorship.

The MJT's fight at Itaipu took place in the context of broader challenges to the structures and legitimacy of military rule. The global media spotlight cast on Itaipu—and the national attention brought by the farmers' movement over the previous years—made the situation unfolding in western Paraná all the more precarious. As both the dictatorship and its critics maneuvered for control of Brazil's political landscape, the meanings of the Itaipu dam reverberated at all levels of society.

Military leaders celebrated Itaipu as a project that would deliver an unprecedented source of energy and spark a new era of modernization. As recently as the early 1950s, Brazil's domestically produced energy came primarily from firewood, charcoal, and sugarcane byproducts.⁷ Over the next decade the government shifted its focus almost entirely to electric energy, with new projects centered in the more industrialized states of Minas Gerais and São

⁶ During military rule elections for senators and federal deputies were held in 1966, 1970, 1974, and 1978. In 1982 Brazilians directly elected state governors, a victory of the opposition's campaign within the *abertura*. For more, see David Fleischer, "The Constituent Assembly and the Transformation Strategy: Attempts to Shift Political Power in Brazil from the Presidency to Congress," in *The Political Economy of Brazil: Public Policies in an Era of Transition*, Lawrence S. Graham and Robert H. Wilson (Eds), (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1990), 210-258.

⁷ "Energy," in Rex A. Hudson, ed. *Brazil: A Country Study*. Washington: GPO for the Library of Congress, 1997.

Paulo.⁸ The governments of Juscelino Kubitschek (1956-1961), Jânio Quadros (1961), and João Goulart (1961-1964) oversaw Brazil's first wave of hydroelectric development, with over 200 big dams constructed in the 1950s and 1960s.⁹ These initiatives helped expand Brazil's electric capacity by a yearly average of roughly 10 percent between 1956 and 1965.¹⁰ Throughout this period of steady growth, Brazil's leaders looked to a potential dam on the Paraná River as a project that could fully unleash the country's untapped industrial potential.

After the military's 1964 coup, however, Brazil's energy needs became almost a secondary issue. For the dictatorship, Itaipu's importance extended far beyond hydroelectric production. Although the dam did provide a massive source of new energy, it also served as the physical embodiment of the military's geopolitical ambitions. The dictatorship saw Itaipu as the fulfilment of a long-standing manifest destiny known as *Brasil Grande*. This same ideology also inspired the military to expand the country's "internal frontiers" through projects like the Trans-Amazonian highway and the Carajas mining complex, the largest iron ore mine in the world.¹¹ For the hydroelectric development of the Paraná River, alternative designs showed that a dam one-third to one-half the size of Itaipu and built exclusively in Brazilian territory—rather than

⁸ Werner Baer, *The Brazilian Economy: Growth and Development*, 5th Ed, (Westport, Connecticut: Praeger, 2011), 273-274.

⁹ Sanjeev Khagram, *Dams and Development: Transnational Struggles for Water and Power*. (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2004), 142.

¹⁰ José Luiz Lima, *Políticas de governo e desenvolvimento do setor de energia elétrica: do Código de Águas à crise dos anos*, (Rio de Janeiro: Centro da Memória da Electricidade no Brasil, 1995), 80.

¹¹ For more on the Trans-Amazonian highway, see Seth Garfield, *In Search of the Amazon: Brazil, the United States and the Nature of a Region*. (Durham: Duke University Press, 2013), 211-215. For the Carajas mine in the northern state of Pará, see: Anthony L. Hall, *Developing Amazonia: Deforestation and Social Conflict in Brazil's Carajás Programme*. (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1991). Early in the twentieth century, previous governments also initiated a number of large-scale development projects intended to fulfill similar ideologies of modernization. See: Oliver J. Dinius, *Brazil's Steel City: Developmentalism, Strategic Power, and Industrial Relations In Volta Redonda, 1941-1964* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2011); Joel Wolfe, *Autos and Progress: The Brazilian Search for Modernity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010); and Todd A. Diacon, *Stringing Together a Nation: Cândido Mariano da Silva Rondon and the Construction of a Modern Brazil, 1906-1930* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2004). An innovative perspective on Brazilian development projects through the lens of literature comes from Sophia Beal, *Brazil Under Construction: Fiction and Public Works*, (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013).

jointly with Paraguay—could deliver 10,000 megawatt hours (Mwh), what some leading engineers considered more than enough to satisfy future consumption demands. Although these proposals were more logistically feasible and far more cost effective, the dictatorship's geopolitical goals ultimately determined the scale and location of the dam. Constructing the world's largest dam would project a sense of colossal strength, and Itaipu's strategic position on one of Latin America's largest river systems facilitated Brazil's rise as the Southern Cone's most powerful nation.

With the backing of the United States, Brazil's dictatorship opted for a massive binational project that brought Paraguay firmly under its sphere of influence while also marginalizing neighboring Argentina. Brazil's success in harnessing the hydroelectric potential of the Paraná River reoriented the geopolitical landscape of the entire region. In the first decade of military rule, Itaipu helped legitimize state power domestically and strengthened Brazil's prestige at a global scale. Especially after the worldwide oil crisis of 1973, military leaders pointed to Itaipu as a sign of their government's forward-thinking vision for modernization. For the dictatorship, the dam's material and symbolic importance became increasingly acute in the late 1970s and early 1980s—the exact period when local farmers staged their protests in western Paraná. In the context of *abertura*, the military considered Itaipu a monument to its rule that would endure even after a potential democratic transition. With the looming threat of a regime change, Itaipu stood as a permanent legacy to be protected at all costs.

Opposition groups, for their part, saw Itaipu as an overpriced example of authoritarian excess and denounced it as a shrine to the illegitimacy of the dictatorship. Especially after 1979 when the official policies of *abertura* enabled new political parties, opponents of the military sought to build a broad coalition to force the regime out of power. Local conflicts like the MJT

fight in western Paraná opened new spaces of dissent and popular support for democratization. As the direction of Brazil's transition toward civilian rule continued to fluctuate, opposition forces throughout the country elevated the farmers' fight at Itaipu into a referendum on the dictatorship itself.

While Itaipu functioned as a political tool for both the dictatorship and its opponents, it held far deeper ramifications for the rural families living directly in the dam's shadow. For the displaced communities, Itaipu signaled a complete social rupture. Once the floodgates opened in October 1982 their lands would disappear forever, lost and untilled at the bottom of a lake. In western Paraná as throughout most of the Latin American countryside, land existed as a pillar of local livelihoods. In defense of the region's soon-to-be-flooded lands, the farmers' movement resulted in the growth of a rural-based political consciousness. In oral histories, many participants remember that the conflict at Itaipu taught them how to fight and how to mobilize for political goals. As Itaipu became increasingly synonymous with the military regime, MJT members saw their struggle as part of a larger movement to win back rights for all Brazilians. This cycle of mobilization indicates that in rural regions of Brazil, political consciousness evolved not as the byproduct of ideas emanating outwards from urban centers, but rather in response to the realities of local livelihoods.

A Rural Perspective on Brazilian History

By tracing the layered contours of development, political opposition, and land struggles, this dissertation offers not only the first comprehensive study of the Itaipu dam, but a new perspective on the history of Brazil's military period. Above all, my goal is to show how the dictatorship was experienced in the countryside. Rather than focusing on people and events in

large urban centers, the lens of Itaipu raises questions that invert the conceptual and geographic narratives often used to study Brazil's era of authoritarian rule. How was development articulated by the military regime and how was Itaipu experienced on the ground? What did it mean for rural Brazilians to confront a dictatorship? And how did these struggles for land interact with broader themes of resistance, citizenship, and democracy? I argue that the history of Itaipu operated at two distinct levels: between the military regime and the displaced communities, and between the various groups that used the conflict at Itaipu to defend their particular livelihoods. The history of Itaipu illuminates how national development ideologies were experienced locally and how the context of military rule connected local land struggles to larger political movements.

This dissertation puts forward two main arguments. First, the question of land formed the core of Itaipu's history. For the dictatorship, Itaipu functioned as an experiment in rearranging rural landscapes by displacing farmers under the banner of national security and development. For local Brazilians, diverging relationships to land resulted in unique forms of social mobilization at specific stages of the protests against Itaipu. A diverse array of rural Brazilians inhabited the western Paraná borderlands. European-descendant smallholders, ethnically mixed landless peasants, and the Avá-Guarani indigenous group not only struggled against Itaipu and the Brazilian military; they simultaneously engaged one another in tense and often conflicting dialogue. Through their negotiations over appropriate strategies and demands, these communities defined their relationship to land and its role in their projected vision for the future of Brazil.

Second, Itaipu serves as an historical and conceptual hub for one of Brazil's most dynamic periods. As a project conceived by the military regime yet brought to completion after the 1985 return to civilian rule, Itaipu provided a physical link between dictatorship and

democracy. And for the ways in which popular movements confronted the dam and its supporters, Itaipu provided an arena where the very notions of dictatorship and democracy were fought over, negotiated, and put into practice.

The size of Itaipu and its centrality to the dictatorship made outright opposition to the dam dangerous and futile. The Justice and Land Movement never objected to the construction of the dam *per se*, but rather to how government authorities treated the displaced communities. The claimed injustice was not that the project would flood smallholders' homes, but that Itaipu's proposed compensation violated the farmers' legal rights. Brazil's Constitution of 1967 stipulated that expropriations done in the name of public interest be paid at "a fair price" and the MJT demanded that farmers receive the actual value of the flooded properties. The MJT fought for Itaipu to increase its compensation by an average of roughly US\$5,000 per family, a relatively small sum for a project with a budget that soared to nearly US\$20 billion. As we shall see, the logistics of financial compensation became also irrelevant. Rather, the dictatorship refused to meet the farmers' demands in order to protect the legacy of military rule against a wave of popular movements reemerging throughout the country. In the context of *abertura*, the farmers called attention to their mistreatment as a means to undermine the military's triumphalist narrative of development and progress. These competing visions of Itaipu functioned as a battle for public opinion over who held the legitimacy to determine Brazil's future.

The farmers never did march onto Itaipu's construction site. Blocked by state troopers and Itaipu's private security forces, the MJT leadership decided to set up an encampment on the periphery of the entrance gates. This protest camp lasted two months, occupied national headlines, and drew solidarity from politicians, labor unions, human rights groups, and civic organizations throughout Brazil. The MJT withstood a prolonged standoff with military

authorities and won a series of concessions, most notably a 62-percent increase in land prices. By forcing a powerful state enterprise to yield to the pressures of a popular struggle, the farmers showcased to the nation a form of rural resistance. Compared to the explicitly political goals of the paradigmatic *abertura* campaigns like the student and labor strikes in urban-industrial zones, the encampments resulted from the defense of lands and rural livelihoods. What had begun as a fight for land in a tucked away border region soon grew into a conflict through which rural communities formed their own stand against the dictatorship.

Although the MJT offered an example of rural-based opposition, it also exhibited forms of political and social exclusion that speak not only to the hierarchical nature of social movements but also to the failures of the *abertura* project more broadly. The movement's leadership—and its strongest support in the Catholic Church—was comprised of European-descendant men who had come to the region in the 1940s and 1950s from the southern states of Santa Catarina and Rio Grande do Sul. Almost all of these Brazilians legally owned their small tracts of land. But the hundreds of farmers who stood at Itaipu's entrance gates, and the thousands more who moved into the encampment, also included a wide array of landless workers, peasants, and rural laborers. Unlike their title-holding neighbors, the landless included many ethnically mixed farmers who had more recently migrated from other regions of Brazil. Yet because the MJT focused primarily on winning better land prices, the movement largely overlooked the demands of those without legal deeds. These landless families had neither the explicit benefit of owning property nor the implicit racial privilege given to southerners. As such, they did not fit neatly into the constructions of citizenship and social legitimacy being formed in the process of *abertura*.

A third group in western Paraná confronted an even deeper form of exclusion. The Avá-

Guarani lived 25 kilometers upstream in Itaipu's flood zone, yet the MJT never invited the indigenous community to join its movement. Compared to the neighboring farmers, the Avá-Guarani faced an additional set of legal and social constraints that forced them to defend their territorial rights as Indians and their political rights as Brazilian citizens. Moreover, many of the older, whiter farmers in the MJT had themselves encroached on indigenous lands during the first wave of immigrant settlement in western Paraná. In their fight against Itaipu, the Avá-Guarani confronted the entrenched prejudice of both the military government and the region's non-Indian rural workers.

This process of social silencing precluded any chance of building a movement that incorporated all groups impacted by Itaipu. It also denied landless peasants and indigenous communities the sort of political legitimacy won by certain sectors of the MJT. Despite the ethnic and regional diversity of the communities that mobilized against Itaipu, media outlets, sympathetic opposition politicians, and many MJT leaders depicted the Justice and Land Movement as a homogeneous group. This sanitized version portrayed an image of humble southern farmers protecting their right to a simple and dignified life of agriculture. For the average Brazilian following the events at Itaipu, the news showed protesters as ethnically European, mainly male, and respectful farmers—the latter point a reflection of the Church's insistence on peaceful tactics. This ignored the reality of how the struggle included people from a wide spectrum of regional and class backgrounds, of men and women, and of those who also sought to push more confrontational tactics to win long-lasting change. As the *abertura* amplified debates over citizenship and rights, the perpetuation of inequalities based on ethnicity, gender, class, and relationships to land meant that even a grassroots struggle of farmers only recognized and defended certain rural livelihoods. In order to understand the fight for democracy

in the countryside, we must examine the parallel forms of social and political exclusion that existed within popular mobilizations.

By the early 1980s the *abertura* had achieved a key series of legislative advances, namely the reform of political parties and the scheduling of direction elections in November 1982 for all positions except the presidency. But the experience of non-elite Brazilians in both the countryside and in cities revealed a disjointed path of democratization. The conflict at Itaipu stands as a striking example of this process. On the one hand, it showed that opposition forces had weakened the military's grip on power: farmers and their allies staged public protests and won numerous concessions, both material and symbolic. To the extent that the fight against Itaipu had become a referendum on the dictatorship, the success of the Justice and Land Movement pointed towards a more open and democratic Brazil. Yet the internal dynamics of the MJT and the repression suffered by many of its members suggested a far more complicated reality. The history of rural mobilization at Itaipu shows how constructions of race and ethnicity, as well as the contested politics of land and legitimacy were all fundamentally embedded in Brazilian society. These dynamics formed long before the start of Brazil's dictatorship and they continued after the return to democracy.

The title of this dissertation, "the price of peace," comes from a slogan that gave the MJT its name. At a land encampment outside Itaipu's regional office in July 1980—the farmers' largest action to-date—the protesters rallied behind the cry of "the Price of Peace: Justice and Land." For the the landed farmers who formed the camp's leadership, "the price of peace" presented the demand to receive fair compensation for their expropriated properties. This phrase implied that the government could only secure a resolution if authorities satisfied the farmers' notions of justice and land. The diversity of livelihoods within the MJT, however, meant that the

displaced did not share a common understanding of either “justice” or “land.” As such, people who stood to gain very little from a peaceful compromise with Itaipu made alternative proposals that included an invasion of Itaipu’s headquarters and an attempt to disrupt the dam’s construction. Hence, when the MJT leadership insisted on peaceful encampments, it drowned out the undercurrent of calls for more direct action. In the end, the MJT’s focus on a peaceful solution came at a steep price: the marginalization of many of its own members.

Theoretical Framework:

In order to fully explore the meanings of land and opposition at Itaipu, we must examine western Paraná as both a physical landscape that inspired the farmers’ movement and as a borderland located far from Brazil’s urban centers. From this approach, I propose two theoretical frameworks that will guide much of the analysis presented in this dissertation. The first is the dialectic of land and socio-political legitimacy, drawing out the impact that different conceptions of land have on the beliefs and actions of various rural communities. The second is the double-reality of *abertura*, through which I use the case of Itaipu and the Paraná borderlands to argue that distinct regions and social actors throughout Brazil experienced democratization across multiple competing realities. Like the inhabitants of western Paraná, many Brazilians during this period lived in a world of double *abertura*, the official one they understood to be dominant elsewhere and the one they experienced as their own reality or hope for the future. These two theories help explain why different sectors of the Paraná countryside mobilized against Itaipu in particular ways, and how local dynamics of dissent and repression complicate established narratives of Brazil’s dictatorship.

The dialectic of land and socio-political legitimacy is based on the diverging experiences

of the three main groups that mobilized against Itaipu. The title-owning small-farmers considered land to be a source of *individual property*, the landless workers (peasants, day-laborers, share-croppers, among other categories) saw land as the basis of their *collective rights*, and the Avá-Guarani conceived of land as a *way of life*. Seen together, these three perceptions of land provide a template for understanding the landscapes and livelihoods of the western Paraná countryside.

Although the landed farmers constituted a poor sector of Brazilian society, their legal claim to property gave them an advantage that the neighboring peasants and indigenous groups did not have. The idea of land ownership as legitimacy came from the personal histories of the families who for decades had sacrificed time and money to make the region one of Brazil's most fertile agricultural zones. These farmers held the most influence in the MJT and they successfully forced Itaipu to increase its compensation. But the almost singular focus on winning better prices neglected the region's landless inhabitants. After being marginalized within their own movement, the landless farmers formed an independent struggle called the Movement of Landless Workers of Western Paraná (MASTRO, Movimento dos Trabalhadores Sem Terra do Oeste do Paraná). Seeking to win 'land for those who work it,' MASTRO moved beyond the MJT's previous strategies of land *encampments* to instead lead a series of land *occupations*. Although they did not have any legal or financial claim to the lands they occupied, a sense of collective ownership and a desire for agrarian reform legitimized their actions. MASTRO also played a fundamental—and almost entirely overlooked—role in the 1984 formation of the Landless Workers Movement (MST) that has since become one of the largest social movements in the western hemisphere.

Compared to the neighboring farmers, land for the Avá-Guarani embodied a

fundamentally different set of meanings. Without romanticizing an indigenous community's connection with the surrounding natural world, the idea of land as a way of life underscores the Avá-Guarani's historical and cultural constructions of land. The Guarani word for land (*tekohá*) derives from the root *tekó*, meaning a socio-political space that expresses "a way of being, a system, a culture, a [set of] law and traditions."¹² Because these lands served as the foundation of Avá-Guarani life, the Itaipu flood represented a rupture far greater than that experienced by any of the surrounding communities. Government policies designed to assimilate indigenous groups into mainstream society facilitated this severing of lands and way of life. Only legally defined "Indians" had access to federally protected indigenous territory, and the label of "non-Indian" rendered a person invisible in the eyes of the law and removed all rights to land. As part of Itaipu's expropriation process, the government subjected the Avá-Guarani to a "Criteria of Indianness" that among other categories, measured an individual's skin pigment, language, clothing, and name. Authorities used this survey to claim that only a small handful of "genuine Indians" lived in Itaipu's flood zone. In response, the Avá-Guarani mobilized to have all members of their community acknowledged—both in a literal and ontological sense. Confronting policies intended to make them socially invisible, the Avá-Guarani reasserted their ethnic identity and their legitimacy as political actors. Being seen by mainstream society became a tool for protecting their lands and their way of life.

The concept of a double-reality of *abertura* posits that in regions like western Paraná, local experiences did not always match the chronology or rhetoric of Brazil's official democratization. Similar to 67 other municipalities across the country, Foz do Iguaçu's designation as a "national security zone" precluded its inhabitants from participating in local

¹² Bartomeu Meliá, "A experiência religiosa Guarani," in Manuel M. Marzal, *O rosto índio de Deus*, (Petrópolis: Vozes, 1989), 336.

elections that returned by the early 1980s.¹³ And while press censorship had largely diminished under the auspices of *distensão* and *abertura*, Foz do Iguaçu's military elite took repressive action against the journalist Juvêncio Mazzarollo at a time when such behavior was being phased out nationally. Mazzarollo saw his criticisms of Itaipu and his support of the MJT farmers as belonging to a broader return of media freedom and popular opposition. However, a group of local colonels, judges, and military politicians refused to allow these new spaces of dissent and they initiated a criminal trial in order to exercise their quickly fading power. Imprisoned for two years, Mazzarollo became infamous as "the last political prisoner" under military rule. The continued lack of political rights in western Paraná lays out starkly the doubling that occurred throughout Brazil: an individual's expectations for *abertura* often diverged from the realities of how democratization unfolded beyond the country's traditional political spheres.

Along with denying many Brazilians access to structural reforms like elections or freedom of the press, the double-reality of *abertura* exposes the deeper implications of how political consciousness formed within local communities. In interviews, many farmers recalled that Itaipu represented their first direct encounter with the military regime, often using the terms "Itaipu" and "government" interchangeably. As such, participation in the Justice and Land Movement had a distinct politicizing effect. Rather than mere receptors of the ideas being disseminated from the more frequently studied urban arenas of *abertura*, the conflict at Itaipu positioned the rural communities to expand on a regional identity to become active political agents in their own right. As we shall see, this evolution of political consciousness suggests an unintended consequence of mega projects like Itaipu. Although designed as instruments to affirm

¹³ Only in 1985 did mayoral elections return in the so-called national security zones. (Kurt von Mettenheim, *The Brazilian Voter: Mass Politics in Democratic Transition, 1974-1986*, (Pittsburgh, PA: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1995), 115-116.

state power, the insertion of development schemes in relatively remote areas helped cultivate a sense of political opposition that might not have existed otherwise.

And finally, the physical repression of landless farmers in western Paraná calls attention to the double-reality between rural and urban spaces. Although MASTRO emerged within the context of military rule, the movement's focus on agrarian reform placed it beyond the limits of any specific time period or system of government. Because the landless occupied private property and fought for the redistribution of land, they faced repression in ways that had largely disappeared in Brazilian cities. On occupations in 1983 and 1984 two men were killed by hired gunmen, dozens more were beaten or tortured by state police, and hundreds were forcefully expelled from their homes. These events in western Paraná reflected national patterns; in 1983 over 110 Brazilian peasants were killed in local land conflicts.¹⁴ As this violence unfolded in the countryside, urban centers witnessed some of the largest public demonstrations in Brazil's history. While millions of city-dwellers openly denounced the dictatorship with little fear of reprisal, the fight for agrarian reform took place under constant fear of attack.

Rural repression persisted because landless farmers—along with indigenous communities—represented a fundamentally different threat to the status quo. Whereas the *abertura* would dissipate once democracy returned, the struggle for land promised to continue regardless of whether Brazil was under military or civilian rule. The double-reality of *abertura* examines what, if anything, the dictatorship meant to communities that suffered violence and exclusion long before the 1964 military coup. In the context of *abertura*, mainstream opposition groups mobilized for political goals such as party reform, fair labor laws, and direct presidential elections. But even before the dictatorship, these freedoms rarely extended to rural communities.

¹⁴ “Trabalhadores rurais assassinados no ano de 83,” Encontro Nacional dos Sem Terra, January 1984, Cascavel, appendix 3. Courtesy of Davi Schreiner.

How much did it matter to landless peasants, say, if an amnesty law allowed political exiles to return? Or what did the end of state-sanctioned torture mean to the Avá-Guarani and other Indians who continued to suffer abuse from federal authorities? The gulf between the official purview of *abertura* and the long-term needs of rural communities helps explain why landless and indigenous groups in the 1980s focused primarily on land rights. Although these movements emerged in the climate of democratization, the realities of life in the Brazilian countryside positioned them beyond the contours of *abertura*.

Temporal and Conceptual Boundaries

The official timeframe of Brazil's dictatorship was from 1964 to 1985. However, I have chosen to begin my history of Itaipu in 1957, nearly a decade before the coup, and to end it in 1984, a year prior to the return of democratic rule. This draws out Itaipu's deeper social and geopolitical histories while also complicating the periodization of authoritarian regimes. The year 1957 witnessed the Revolta dos Posseiros (Squatters Rebellion), an uprising of landless farmers in western Paraná that epitomized the region's long history of agrarian radicalization. Many of the communities that later mobilized against Itaipu legitimized their actions around the memory of previous conflicts like the 1957 rebellion. The struggle for land long predated the 1964 military coup and it remained equally important in post-1985 Brazil. An examination of the inequalities that existed *before* dictatorship thus allows for a closer analysis of popular struggles both during and after military rule. For the impoverished rural Brazilians who mobilized against Itaipu, the dictatorship was less of a distinct change than it was a new iteration of an already unequal society. By looking past the formal temporal brackets of authoritarian governments, we are able to explore the roots and meanings of authoritarianism more broadly.

The chronological starting point of 1957 also highlights the role of Paraguay and the geopolitical importance of Itaipu. By the time of Brazil's military coup in 1964, the dictatorship of Paraguay's Alfredo Stroessner had already been in power for a full decade. In the late 1950s a conflict emerged between Brazil, Paraguay, and neighboring Argentina over which nation had the right—and the power—to develop the region's hydroelectric potential. I argue that Brazil's successful maneuvers for control of the Paraná River and the eventual Itaipu dam allowed it to play the dominant role in reshaping the geopolitical landscape of the Southern Cone.

The choice to end my history of the Itaipu dam in 1984 closely links with the decision to start it in 1957. Situating Itaipu's roots before the dictatorship helps explain why the return to democratic rule did not produce a more equal society. Scholars have shown that because the transition to civilian rule failed to remove many of the military's political and legal structures, Brazil's new democracy was never fully democratic.¹⁵ Whereas most of this scholarship looks at the post-1985 period, I highlight three events from 1984 to show the larger implications of development, political opposition, and land. In 1984, the Itaipu dam began producing energy, Juvêncio Mazzarollo was released from prison, and the Landless Workers Movement (MST) was officially created. The first two events—Itaipu becoming operational and Mazzarollo's freedom—indicated that the *abertura* might soon reach a successful conclusion. The former showcased the military's success in opening a new era of energy and prosperity, while the latter suggested the return of political rights after two decades of authoritarian rule. However, it would be misleading to reduce Brazilian society at this time to a dichotomy between dictatorship and

¹⁵ A recent and impressively thorough anthology of Brazil's democratic transition is Milton Pinheiro (ed.), *Ditadura: o que resta da transição*, (Rio de Janeiro: Boitempo Editorial, 2014). Earlier analyses also include Scott Mainwaring, *Rethinking Party Systems in the Third Wave of Democratization: the case of Brazil*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1999); and Peter R. Kingstone and Timothy J. Power. *Democratic Brazil: Actors, Institutions, and Processes*. (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2000).

democracy. Because the struggle for land had existed under democratic and military governments, the 1984 creation of the MST showed that rural Brazilians did not trust the *abertura* process to actually improve their livelihoods. By deemphasizing 1985, even if just by one year, we move our focus beyond the formal democratic transition to highlight instead the social inequalities that existed before, during, and after the official period of dictatorship.

The history of indigenous repression and resistance offers an especially illuminating perspective on the presumed chronology of dictatorships. The Avá-Guarani's marginalization at Itaipu resulted from broader forms of social and physical exclusion, a process that predated the military regime and continued after the official 1985 transition to democracy. In her study of Mapuche Indians in twentieth-century Chile, Florencia Mallon argues that the start of Augusto Pinochet's dictatorship in 1973 functioned "less as a fundamental rupture of the democratic order than a resumption of a previous status quo."¹⁶ Mallon's framework helps reframe struggle in the Latin American countryside—especially regarding indigenous groups—as a two-tiered landscape. Linked by historical context to specific political systems, the Avá-Guarani, the Mapuche, and countless other groups experienced periods of military rule in very tangible and immediate ways. Yet the persistence of indigenous and rural repression under civilian and military governments alike shows that although perhaps *amplified* during particular periods of authoritarian rule, abuses in the countryside resulted from deeply embedded realities of violence and inequality.

¹⁶ Florencia E. Mallon, *Courage Tastes of Blood: the Mapuche Community of Nicolás Ailio and the Chilean state, 1906-2001*. (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2005), 236.

Historiography

The history of Itaipu is uniquely positioned to contribute to three bodies of scholarship: development, political opposition, and land. More than just identifying an intersection of these different scholarly themes, the dissertation's theoretical framework draws out the overlapping and mutually constructed meanings between them. The concept of a double-reality of *abertura* invokes the spatial and geopolitical contingencies that made development and opposition a single conflictive arena of experience in the western Paraná borderlands. The dialectic of land and socio-political legitimacy helps explain the dynamics of rural life and social struggle that made development something more than empty abstraction, and opposition something more than the defense of narrow political interests. Because of its size, its centrality to the military dictatorship, its location in a rural borderland, and its capacity to condense many conflicts and experiences, the Itaipu dam is a particularly powerful analytical window on three of the most significant scholarly currents on the making of modern Brazil.

Development

The Itaipu dam was not merely a hydroelectric project. It was the development centerpiece of a military dictatorship and must be examined within its authoritarian context. In his pioneering work on development in Brazil, Peter Evans does not explicitly engage the authoritarian nature of the Brazilian state, thereby limiting a wider reflection on the connections between the financial “triple alliance” of development (state elites, local elites, and multinational corporations) and the underlying structures of repression.¹⁷ The same issue exists in Carmen

¹⁷ The only gesture that Evans makes to military rule is in describing how such governments help facilitate development not only because of the state's monopoly on violence, but because they are likely to be very nationalist, and “nationalism is useful both in promoting accumulation and in maintaining order.” (Peter B. Evans. *Dependent Development: the Alliance of Multinational, State, and Local Capital in Brazil*. (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton

Ferradás' research on the Yacyretá dam built by the dictatorships of Argentina and Paraguay at roughly the same time as Itaipu.¹⁸ In her assessment of existing literature on hydro development, Christine Folch observes that scholars have “yet to tackle the question of how dams themselves mete out state violence as part of [a military] security apparatus.”¹⁹ A useful comparison is Allen and Barbara Isaacman's treatment of the Cahora Bassa dam in Mozambique, a mega-project that the authors examine as an explicit attempt by colonial Portugal to maintain its African empire.²⁰ The framework enables one to see the destruction unleashed by Cahora Bassa—what the authors call “epistemic violence”—as an extension of colonialism itself.²¹ Initiatives like Cahora Bassa, Yacyretá, and Itaipu were highly repressive projects in both a physical sense (displacement, forced relocation, destruction of property) and for the social traumas that persisted for future generations. As such, we must see how this form of large-scale development extended from the violence ingrained in the fabric of authoritarian regimes.

The case of Itaipu contributes to comparative understandings of development and dictatorship throughout Latin America and across the Global South.²² Although governments built projects like Itaipu to assert geopolitical strength, these modernization schemes often had a paradoxical boomerang effect that actually eroded state legitimacy. In western Paraná, the region's peripheral nature meant that prior to the dam's construction local farmers had little

University Press, 1979), 49.

¹⁸ Although Ferradás provides an overview of previous military politics in both countries, there is little effort to differentiate the roots of Yacyretá from other projects. Carmen A. Ferradás, *Power in the Southern Cone borderlands: an anthropology of development practice*. (Westport, Conn: Bergin & Garvey, 1998).

¹⁹ Christine Folch, “Surveillance and State Violence in Stroessner's Paraguay: Itaipu Hydroelectric Dam, Archive of Terror,” *American Anthropologist* Vol. 115, No. 1, March 2013, 44-57.

²⁰ Allen F. and Barbara Isaacman. *Dams, Displacement, and the Delusion of Development: Cahora Bassa and its Legacies in Mozambique, 1965-2007*. (Athens, Ohio: Ohio University Press, 2013), 16.

²¹ For colonial Portugal, Cahora Bassa was integral to the military strategy employed against the Frelimo guerrilla forces that fought for an independent Mozambique from 1977 to 1992. The dam—and the colonial presence that its construction entailed—prevented the advancement of the Frelimo guerrillas. (Ibid., 60)

²² Among the large body of literature on global dams, the most exhaustive are Khagram, *Dams and Development*, 2004; and Thayer Scudder. *The Future of Large Dams: Dealing with Social, Environmental, Institutional and Political Costs*. (London: Earthscan, 2005).

contact with the military government. So when the MJT emerged to confront Itaipu, its members initially did so not to challenge the legitimacy of military rule but rather as a defense of their lands. But the struggle at Itaipu soon mapped onto the emerging spaces of *abertura* and helped connect the increasingly politicized rural demands to national issues of democratic rights. In this sense, the Itaipu dam created opposition to military rule in the very spaces the dictatorship saw as politically benign and thus ideal for its geopolitical ambitions.

In Brazil and across Latin America, this unintended consequence of development also resulted from non-infrastructure projects. Second only to the Itaipu dam in terms of cost, the initiative to use ethanol sugar for fuel instead of petroleum (the National Alcohol Program, Proalcohol) was the most expensive project undertaken by Brazil's military government.²³ The rapid expansion of sugar production, especially in northeastern Brazil, sparked labor strikes on sugarcane plantations in 1979 that helped reassert the countryside as a space of militancy and democratization.²⁴ Other examples of popular resistance sparked by development include Bolivia's Alliance for Progress-backed mining reforms in the early 1960s, land reform in Peru during the military regime of Juan Velasco Alvarado (1968-1975), and the introduction of unfettered capitalism and neoliberal policies under the Chilean dictatorship of Augusto Pinochet (1973-1989).²⁵ According to the political scientist Merilee Grindle, the rise of militant peasant

²³ Ben Ross Schneider, *Politics Within the State: Elite Bureaucrats and Industrial Policy in Authoritarian Brazil* (Pittsburgh, Pa: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1991), 18.

²⁴ For more on Proalcohol and the 1979 sugarcane strikes, see Kevin Rask, "The Social Costs of Ethanol Production in Brazil: 1978-1987," *Economic Development and Cultural Change*, Vol. 43, No. 3 (1995): 627-49; Anthony Pereira, *The End of Peasantry: the Rural Labor Movement in Northeast Brazil, 1961-1988*, (Pittsburgh, PA: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1997); and Thomas D. Rogers. *The Deepest Wounds: A Labor and Environmental History of Sugar in Northeast Brazil*. (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2010).

²⁵ For Bolivia, see Thomas C. Field Jr., *From Development to Dictatorship: Bolivia and the Alliance for Progress in the Kennedy Era*, (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2014). Analysis of land reform in Peru under Velasco include Arce Espinoza, Elmer. *Perú, 1969-1976: movimientos agrarios y campesinos*. (Lima, Perú: CEDEP), 2004; and Enrique Mayer, *Ugly Stories of the Peruvian Agrarian Reform*. (Durham: Duke University Press, 2009). Works on the politicizing effects of neoliberal economic policies in Chile include: Peter Winn (ed), *Victims of the Chilean Miracle: Workers and Neoliberalism in the Pinochet era, 1973-2002*. (Durham: Duke University Press, 2004); and

organizations in Brazil, Colombia, and Mexico from the 1950s through the 1970s corresponded to modernizing agrarian projects in their respective authoritarian states.²⁶ Although these government initiatives might have achieved many of their official financial goals, they often came at the cost of exposing the contradictions between the ideologies of state-directed development and democratic citizenship.

A striking twenty-first century example comes from China's Three Gorges Dam. With an installed capacity of 22,400 megawatt hours (Mwh), Three Gorges surpassed Itaipu (14,000 Mwh) as the world's largest hydroelectric dam. From 1994 through 2012, construction of the dam displaced over 1.2 million people living near the Yangtze River. In response, a global wave of activism brought unprecedented attention to the abuses of the modern Chinese state.²⁷ The transnational advocacy networks (TANs) established in the fight against Three Gorges continue to provide a template for activists, both in the struggle against new hydroelectric proposals and against the Chinese government more broadly. Whether in contemporary China, military Latin America, or colonial Africa, the fight against development catalyzed the growth of political consciousness and solidarity networks capable of slowly chipping away at the power of authoritarian regimes.²⁸ Military and colonial governments might eventually fall from power, but

Heidi Tinsman, *Buying into the Regime: Grapes and Consumption in Cold War Chile and the United States*, (Durham: Duke University Press, 2014).

²⁶ Merilee S. Grindle, *State and Countryside: Development Policy and Agrarian Politics in Latin America*. (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1986), 176-186.

²⁷ Analysis of the Three Gorges dam and transnational advocacy include: Lei Xie, "China's Environmental Activism in the Age of Globalization," *Asian Politics & Policy*, Vol. 3, No. 2 (2011): 207-224. Yuen-Ching Bellette Lee, "Global Capital, National Development and Transnational Environmental Activism: Conflict and the Three Gorges Dam," *Journal of Contemporary Asia*, Vol. 43, No. 1, (2013): 102-126; and Fengshi Wu, "Environmental Activism in Provincial China," *Journal of Environmental Policy & Planning*, Vol. 15, No. 1 (2013): 89-108.

²⁸ Although in different political contexts, we can also see this effect in the growth of anti-government environmental activism that formed against large hydroelectric complexes throughout the western and southwestern United States, most notably the Hetch Hetchy and Glen Canyon dams. The political and social history of the Hetch Hetchy dam is examined in Robert W. Righter, *The Battle over Hetch Hetchy: America's Most Controversial Dam and the Birth of Modern Environmentalism*. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006). For an academic history of the Glen Canyon Dam, see Jared Farmer, *Glen Canyon Dammed: Inventing Lake Powell and the Canyon Country*

the developmentalist projects they oversaw—and the popular forms of protest they provoked—endured and ultimately transcended their original context.

Political Opposition

My study of Itaipu helps re-imagine democratization not as the product of elite political conciliation, but as a process through which non-elite Brazilians challenged the regime and defended their visions of an alternative future. I do not claim that the movements at Itaipu directly brought about the end of dictatorship, but rather that they illuminate how Brazilians perceived their own role in living through and opposing military rule. The history of Itaipu redirects attention toward the countryside and asks how people far from urban centers understood and contested the dictatorship. The overwhelming majority of literature on the *abertura* looks at political parties, organized labor movements, and elite social networks.²⁹ Although a more recent trend has approached democratization from non-traditional perspectives like transnational solidarity, university movements and popular culture, even this newer scholarship focuses almost exclusively on Brazil's major urban centers of São Paulo, Rio de Janeiro, and Brasília.³⁰ While these cities and institutions were clearly major arenas of

(University of Arizona Press, 2004). A fictionalized account of opposition to Glen Canyon comes from Edward Abbey, *The Monkey Wrench Gang*. (Philadelphia: Lippincott, 1975).

²⁹ The two most thorough works on the broader *abertura* period are Moreira Alves (1985) and Skidmore (1988). For political parties as opposition, see Margaret E. Keck, *The Workers' Party and Democratization in Brazil* (Yale University Press, 1992); and Maria D'alva G. Kinzo, *Legal Opposition Politics Under Authoritarian Rule in Brazil: the Case of the MDB, 1966-79* (New York: St. Martins Press, 1988). For opposition and the church, see Kenneth P. Serbin, *Secret Dialogues: Church-State Relations, Torture, and Social Justice in Authoritarian Brazil*, (Pittsburgh, PA: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2000). For the Diretas Já campaign see Alberto Tosi Rodrigues, *Diretas Já: O grito preso na garganta*, (São Paulo: Editora Fundação Perseu Abramo, 2003).

³⁰ Examples of newer attempts to rethink the *abertura* include Christopher Dunn, *Brutality Garden: Tropicália and the Emergence of a Brazilian Counter Culture* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2000); Manu Pinheiro, *Cale-se: A MPB e a ditadura militar*, (Rio de Janeiro: Livros Ilimitados, 2010); Green (2010); Victoria Langland, *Speaking of Flowers: the Making and Remembering of 1968 in Military Brazil* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2013); Rebecca J. Atencio, *Memory's Turn: Reckoning with Dictatorship in Brazil*, (Madison: the University of Wisconsin Press, 2014), and Colin M. Snider, "An Incomplete Autonomy": Higher Education and State-Society Relations in Brazil, 1950s-1980s, *The Latin Americanist*, March 2016, Vol. 60, No 1, 139–159.

democratization, the implication is that events in urban zones reverberated outward at a similar—or slightly delayed—timescale across Brazil.

I challenge this established narrative by examining life under military rule as it originated in the countryside. Bernardo Kucinski has described the *abertura* as a controlled process that “reaffirmed the Brazilian political tradition of conciliation amongst elites.”³¹ Similarly, Elio Gaspari views the transition as an effort by forward-thinking generals like Ernesto Geisel and Golbery do Couto e Silva to reclaim Brazil from the “disorder” of the military hard-liners.³² To be sure, the actions of urban elites fundamentally advanced the transition. But seen from Itaipu, we must explore the deeply rooted social forces that played complementary—if not entirely independent—roles in bringing about the end of dictatorship. Although Brazilian elites passed laws to bring about democracy, their policies took shape in response to an environment of grassroots battles waged throughout the country. A full picture of the *abertura* must account for rural and other non-traditional forces once considered marginal or unconnected to the process of democratization.

Although important studies have already examined the militancy of rural workers during Brazil’s dictatorship, most scholars focus on wage-workers in formal rural unions, primarily those in the Confederation of Agricultural Workers (CONTAG).³³ The choice of study is not

³¹ Bernardo Kuckinski, *O Fim da Ditadura Militar: o Colapso do “Milagre Econômico,” a Volta aos Quartéis, a Luta pela Democracia*. (São Paulo: Contexto, 2001): 139.

³² Elio Gaspari, *A Ditadura Encurralada*. (São Paulo, Brazil: Companhia das Letras, 2004) 221. Some of the most renown non-Brazilian scholars echo this same view. Alfred Stepan describes the case of Brazil as “redemocratization initiated by ‘Military-as-Government,’” while Scott Mainwaring refers to this process as “liberalization from above.” (Alfred Stepan, “Paths toward Democratization: Theoretical and Comparative Considerations,” in *Transitions from Authoritarian Rule: Comparative Perspectives*, ed. Guillermo O’Donnell, (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1988), 78; and Scott Mainwaring, “The Transition to Democracy in Brazil.” In *Journal of Interamerican Studies and World Affairs*, Vol. 28, No. 1, Spring 1986, 149.

³³ Biorn Maybury-Lewis, *The Politics of the Possible: The Brazilian Rural Workers’ Trade Union Movement, 1964-1985*, (Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press, 1994); Pereira, 1997. Leonilde Servolo de Medeiros, “Trabalhadores do campo, luta pela terra e o regime civil-militar,” in Pinheiro (ed.), *Ditadura: o que resta da transição*.

without good reason: under military rule rural trade unions paradoxically grew by over nine million members, making it the largest category of workers in Brazil and one of the biggest labor groups in all of Latin America.³⁴ Anthony Pereira writes that these rural workers “formed one of the pillars of the revitalized Brazilian labor movement whose militancy helped to democratize politics in the 1980s.”³⁵ These studies ask the productive question of how such rapid, large-scale growth could occur under a dictatorship, yet their failure to look beyond organized labor provides a limited analysis of mobilizations in the Brazilian countryside. As will be shown in Chapter Six, the growth of unions like CONTAG relied in large measure on labor and social welfare laws created by the dictatorship itself, enabling a level of cooperation—and often co-optation—between the military regime and union leadership. Moreover, rural unions tended to promote a form of *trabalhismo* (laborism) that moved away from the *agrarismo* (ruralism) of earlier peasant movements to instead seek the sorts of financial gains won by urban workers.³⁶ In the case of Itaipu, various categories of rural Brazilians mobilized around competing relationships to land in order to challenge the legitimacy of the dictatorship. Exploring how rural resistance formed outside the structures of organized unions helps scholars understand the deeper meanings of land and opposition in Brazil.

The study of Itaipu also helps nuance how scholars have used ideas of memory and transitional justice in the study of democratization. Whereas many scholars of memory begin at the start of a particular dictatorship, the dynamics at Itaipu indicate that not all memory struggles under military regimes are the exclusive products of the period itself. The deeply rooted perceptions of land and popular struggle are the reasons why this dissertation focuses on 1957 to

³⁴ Maybury-Lewis, *The Politics of the Possible*, 12, 24.

³⁵ Pereira, *The End of the Peasantry*, 4.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 34.

1984, rather than the static parameters of military rule from 1964 to 1985. In Francesca Lessa's theory of "critical junctures," for example, the category of memory is conscribed solely within the contours and legacies of a given military period.³⁷ Additionally, in Kathryn Sikkink's concept of a "justice cascade," the hinge for understanding change over time is the process of transition, which emphasizes the *post*-regime, rather than the period of dictatorship, which requires analysis of the *pre*-regime.³⁸ The rural-based forms of political consciousness that evolved in the fight at Itaipu suggest that in the Brazilian countryside, social mobilizations were not defined by the context of dictatorship but were instead *amplified* by it. By tracing the preexisting foundations of communal struggle that coalesced under military rule, we can better understand the broader experiences of repression and resistance.

Rural Brazil

More than just a tale of displacement and despair, Itaipu is part of the larger history of rural Latin America: the negotiations that built communities, the ties and tensions that helped define them, and the importance of the lands that meant so much to so many different people. As such, my rural history of Itaipu intervenes in the field of environmental history. On the whole, the environmental histories of Latin America have been confined to studies of what Mark Carey has criticized as the three "C's": colonialism, capitalism, and conservation.³⁹ Crafted with environmentalist leanings, this scholarship is almost exclusively devoted to stories of forest

³⁷ For Lessa, "critical junctures" are the points of intersection between memory and transitional justice: the meeting points of memory studies literature (sites/dates) with transitional justice scholarship (truth commissions/trials/reparations). Francesca Lessa, *Memory and Transitional Justice in Argentina and Uruguay: Against Impunity*, (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2013, 22-23).

³⁸ Kathryn Sikkink. *The Justice Cascade: How Human Rights Prosecutions are Changing World Politics*. (New York: W. W. Norton & Co., 2011).

³⁹ Mark Carey. "Latin American Environmental History: Current Trends, Interdisciplinary Insights, and Future Directions." *Environmental History* 14, no. 2 (April 1, 2009): 221.

destruction, ecological colonialism, and modernized agriculture.⁴⁰ I seek to move beyond this declensionist narrative to instead craft an environmental history that examines how various categories of rural Brazilians conceptualized and enacted their own relationships to land. These diverging meanings of land resulted in unique socio-political actions in defense of rural landscapes. Here, I borrow from Thomas Rogers' concept that landscapes simultaneously exist as both "an idea—a panorama associated with particular meanings" and as an environment with specific material characteristics.⁴¹ Rather than an environmental history that explores the relationship between humans and nature, my study of Itaipu looks at the implications and consequences of how humans have *perceived* nature.

There exists a large body of scholarship on the struggle for land and agrarian reform in Brazil. This historiography, however, tends to focus solely on single categories of rural Brazilians: either landless peasants, indigenous communities, or farmers in organized labor unions. Because the process of displacement at Itaipu brought together a wide array of rural livelihoods, its study enables a more holistic and in-depth analysis of the Brazilian countryside. This dissertation intervenes in existing literature by exploring the tensions not only between rural Brazilians and broader social structures but, as important, between the various rural communities themselves.

The history of Itaipu calls attention to the relationship between landed and landless

⁴⁰ Examples of the dominant trends in Brazilian environmental history include: Warren Dean. *With Broadax and Firebrand: The Destruction of the Brazilian Atlantic Forest*. (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1997); Warren Dean, *Brazil and the Struggle for Rubber: a Study in Environmental History*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987); Barbara Weinstein, *The Amazon Rubber Boom, 1850-1920*. (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1983); Susan Hecht, and A. Cockburn. *The Fate of the Forest: Developers, Destroyers and Defenders of the Amazon*. (New York: Harper Perennial, 1990); Juan de Onis. *The Green Cathedral: Sustainable Development of Amazonia*. (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1992); Shawn W. Miller. *Fruitless Trees: Portuguese Conservation and Brazil's Colonial Timber*. (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2000). A notable and innovative exception is Rogers (2010).

⁴¹ Rogers. *The Deepest Wounds*, 6.

farmers and offers a new insight on the emergence of the Landless Workers Movement. The prevailing wisdom on the MST frames the organization as a reaction to private landholdings and the government's failure to enact agrarian reform. The formation of MASTRO in the aftermath of the fight at Itaipu, however, suggests that the experience of being marginalized *within* a rural movement sparked a parallel form of rural consciousness. All scholars of the MST discuss its 1984 founding conference in Cascavel, a city located barely 100 kilometers from the Itaipu dam. Yet almost none mention the lead organizing role played by MASTRO or attempt to situate the meeting in the context of Paraná's history of rural mobilization.⁴² Not only did the visibility of the fight at Itaipu magnify rural livelihoods at a national level, but the internal hierarchies reproduced within the farmers' movement accelerated the push from landless Brazilians to establish an independent campaign.

Existing literature has also treated rural social movements and indigenous histories as almost entirely distinct fields of study. In her capstone study of twentieth century rural struggles, for example, Leonilde Medeiros makes no mention of indigenous Brazilians.⁴³ Although scholarship on rural mobilization has dramatically increased in the past two decades—largely a response to the rise of the MST—there has been little effort to view the struggles of indigenous people as part of the wider history of collective action in the Brazilian countryside.⁴⁴ Similarly,

⁴² The history of Paraná is largely absent in the vast literature on agrarian movements. In fact, its most thorough treatment is a two-sentence overview of the encampments against Itaipu in Sue Branford & Jan Rocha, *Cutting the Wire: the Story of the Landless Movement in Brazil*. (London: Latin America Bureau, 2002, 150). A major work on the MST that omits MASTRO is Wendy Wolford. *This Land Is Ours Now: Social Mobilization and the Meanings of Land in Brazil*. (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010). An exception is the work of Gabriel Ondetti, who although makes no mention of MASTRO's role at the 1984 Cascavel meeting, does refer to the group as the largest landless group in Paraná. (Gabriel Ondetti, *Land, Protest, and Politics: The Landless Movement and the Struggle for Agrarian Reform in Brazil*, (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State Univ. Press, 2008), 74.

⁴³ Leonilde Sérvolo de Medeiros. *História dos movimentos sociais no campo*. (Rio de Janeiro: FASE, 1989).

⁴⁴ Only one study offers more than a casual reference to the role of indigenous communities in the radicalization of rural Brazil: Angus Lindsay Wright and Wendy Wolford. *To Inherit the Earth: the Landless Movement and the Struggle for a New Brazil*. (Oakland, Calif: Food First Books, 2003), 14-45, 115-116, 190-197; 327-328.

fine scholars of indigenous communities have tended to concentrate on questions of indigenous rights, territory, and legal relationships with the state.⁴⁵ These otherwise admirable works often fail to look at the micro-level interactions with nearby farming communities. As scholars continue to examine the dynamics of rural mobilization, it will be essential not only to include narratives of indigenous struggle but to also historicize them in relation to communities such as the neighboring farmers in western Paraná.

Sources

During fifteen months of fieldwork between 2013 and 2015, I gathered and analyzed over 3,000 primary documents from 35 archives and databases in Brazil, Paraguay, and the United States. These included large, well-organized government archives, dusty closets in union halls, the holdings of university libraries, Church parishes, and declassified digital collections, among others. I also received access to the personal files of nearly a dozen individuals who played various roles in Itaipu's history. In total, I collected over 1,000 news articles from local, national, and international press. Additionally, I conducted 45 interviews with former leaders and members of the rural struggles (including farmers, landless peasants, and indigenous communities), retired military personnel, politicians on both sides of the spectrum, diplomats, government officials, and many activists and labor leaders. By conducting research in Brazil and Paraguay—along with using digitized sources from the U.S. State Department—and by collecting both archival material and oral testimonies, I explore the full range of narratives that have the Itaipu dam as their thematic and historical anchor.

⁴⁵ Seth Garfield. *Indigenous Struggle at the Heart of Brazil: State Policy, Frontier Expansion, and the Xavante Indians, 1937-1988*. (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2001); Alcida Rita Ramos. *Indigenism: Ethnic Politics in Brazil*. (Madison: the University of Wisconsin Press, 1998).

The most compelling and original arguments of this project result from two particular elements of my research methodology. First, I gained extended access to the internal holdings of the Itaipu Binational Corporation—something no scholar has previously done. I spent almost two months with the files of Itaipu’s executive directory, its legal office, its public relations branch, its internal security structure, and its communication with politicians, government ministries, media outlets, private businesses, and community organizations. Itaipu’s security system was so meticulously embedded in the dictatorship’s own surveillance apparatus that the dam’s resulting archive contains confidential reports on seemingly every political event or social activity in the surrounding region. This includes folders devoted to political speeches, press releases, newspaper articles, and communication between Itaipu’s leadership, the military police, and the federal government.

The second element concerns the timing of my research. I conducted fieldwork in the immediate aftermath of Brazil’s National Truth Commission (released in December 2014) and the national trend toward public access for documents from the military regime. In particular, the *Memórias Reveladas* project through the National Archive offered a vast trove of primary material and this dissertation is likely the first study to incorporate the declassified documents relating to Itaipu and the farmers’ movement. This emphasis on government transparency also allowed greater access than might have otherwise been allowed at the archive of Itamaraty, the equivalent of Brazil’s State Department. The Itamaraty documents contain unparalleled insight on the geopolitical underpinnings of Itaipu. Above all, they provide detailed information on a previously unstudied secret military project called “Operation Sagarana” that shows the logistical framework for Brazil’s incursion into Paraguay’s contested frontier zone.

Chapter Overview

This dissertation consists of seven chapters. Chapter One explores the geopolitical standoff between Brazil and Paraguay that occurred as the military governments in both countries jockeyed to control the border region and the waters of the Paraná River. Along with exploring the historical roots of the Itaipu dam, this chapter argues that the border conflict was a catalyst for Brazil's rise to power. With the support of the United States, Brazil's military regime refused to recognize Paraguay's historical claim to the Paraná frontier and succeeded in extracting the maximum geopolitical and financial advantage from the eventual Itaipu project. During the infancy of Brazil's dictatorship, its leaders stood firm against the demands of both Paraguay and neighboring Argentina, allowing the Brazilian regime to bolster its weight throughout the Southern Cone while also legitimizing its right to rule domestically.

Chapter Two chronicles a subsequent escalation between a pair of more localized forces: Itaipu and the surrounding communities. The Brazilian government praised the dam as a beacon of national strength, yet its construction catalyzed a popular struggle that denounced the military's expropriation policies as unfair, illegal, and a violation of political freedoms. During Brazil's transition toward democratic rule, the fight against Itaipu became much more than a conflict between a rural population and a development project. Rather, it grew to symbolize the emerging struggle between grassroots opposition and the dictatorship.

Chapter Three focuses on the culminating events of the farmers' movement: multi-week land encampments in 1980 and 1981. These protests won significant price increases for the soon-to-be-flooded lands, received national media attention, and drew solidarity from politicians, labor unions, and human rights groups throughout Brazil. In the context of *abertura*, the confluence of opposition figures turned the fight at Itaipu into a referendum on the dictatorship itself. By

analyzing how rural Brazilians influenced political institutions—and not the other way around—this section explores the depth of how political consciousness can develop in the countryside. Although the contours of *abertura* never fully captured the many realities of life in the countryside, the case of Itaipu nonetheless exemplifies how Brazilians of all social and regional backgrounds could invoke, adapt, and lead their own fight for notions of democracy and political freedoms.

Chapter Four traces the history of the Avá-Guarani indigenous community that also lost its lands to Itaipu. This struggle overlapped at key moments with the adjacent farmers' movement but was predicated on a much longer history of repression and cultural exploitation. Although the Avá-Guarani participated in the struggles against Itaipu, the MJT made little effort to link the two movements. Rendered invisible by mainstream society and largely overlooked by opposition campaigns, indigenous groups like the Avá-Guarani fought to be seen as legitimate socio-political actors. By contrasting the parallel struggles of the farmers and the Avá-Guarani, this chapter helps distinguish the historical roots of indigenous exclusion in Brazil while also revealing the hierarchies that exist amongst rural communities.

Chapter Five takes a step back from the ongoing land struggles to demonstrate that along with meeting the energy and geopolitical ambitions of Brazil, the Itaipu dam also occupied an important sphere in the dictatorship's policies of agricultural colonization and territorial expansion. This manifested in two overlapping ways: the emergence of a mass migration movement of Brazilians into Paraguay (known as '*brasiguaios*') and the resettlement of the displaced Itaipu farmers in the far-away corners of Brazil. From this perspective we see how Itaipu became an engine of rural population shifts, with Brazil's reach now extending westward into Paraguay, and north and northeastward into its own 'backlands.'

Chapter Six details the history of the region's landless farmers and the formation of MASTRO. By asking how and why these landless farmers broke from the initial struggle against Itaipu, this chapter traces the meanings of landlessness, the history of agrarian struggles, and the persistence of rural violence throughout the second half of the twentieth century. Moreover, it highlights how competing notions of land and socio-political legitimacy expose the inequalities and diverging worldviews within social movements.

The seventh and final chapter relates the story of Juvêncio Mazzarollo, the journalist who became known as “the last political prisoner” when his support of the farmers’ movement landed him in prison from 1982 to 1984. Juvêncio won his freedom only when an international solidarity campaign—coupled with his two hunger strikes—forced the government to grant his release. For the local elite who felt removed from Brazil’s democratization process, Juvêncio’s repression emerged from an attempt to preserve their dwindling power. For the national government, the coverage of the farmers drew attention away from the triumphant narrative of Itaipu they hoped to leave as a legacy before the approaching return to democratic rule. And for opposition groups throughout the country, Juvêncio transcended his role as a dissident journalist to become a rallying point for democracy.

Finally, a conclusion will discuss the legacies and limits of democratization as seen in the rural mobilizations at Itaipu. The lingering examples of repression in the western Paraná borderlands indicate that the *abertura* never offered the sort of political and social reopening claimed by its supporters—at least not for all Brazilians. By studying farming communities whose livelihoods were equally ignored under civilian and military regimes, we gain new perspectives on why the *abertura* produced an incomplete democracy.

This dissertation seeks to re-imagine Itaipu as a site of conflict and opposition that

reshaped society by elevating rural livelihoods into national debates over development, dictatorship, and democracy. The focus on farmers during Brazil's dictatorship contributes to understandings of authoritarian governments more broadly, underscoring the strategic role of the countryside in challenging or legitimating such regimes. Through its exploration of the dynamics within the rural struggle against Itaipu, this history sheds new light on the realities of life in the Brazilian countryside. Itaipu's overlapping narratives of development, land, and political opposition break new ground in the history of modern Brazil.

Chapter One

From Conflict to Collaboration: Geopolitics, Dictatorships, and the Forgotten Roots of Itaipu, 1957-1973

In 1972 the Uruguayan writer Eduardo Galeano traveled through the Paraná frontier zone between Paraguay and Brazil. As he prepared to cross the Paraná River and make his way toward Brazil, he saw a message carved into a rock: “Paraguayans have lost their water—but water is not everything.” While looking out toward the majestic Guaíra waterfalls, Galeano reflected on what, in anything, could possibly be more important than the roaring waters in front of him: “Well then, the riverbank?”¹

Galeano’s observation highlights a paradox of how the Itaipu dam came into being. The waters of the Paraná River that eventually powered Itaipu’s turbines were initially far less significant than the lands that surrounded them. The conflict over this border dated back to the War of the Triple Alliance (1865-1872), a victory for Brazil and its allies that killed nearly 90 percent of Paraguay’s male population. By the middle of the twentieth century an emerging desire to develop the region pushed Brazil and Paraguay into a fifteen-year standoff for control of the river’s hydroelectric potential. This conflict centered on territorial sovereignty in the Guaíra region: what were the limits of the international border, how did it divide the waters of the Paraná River and its famous waterfalls, and who had the right to redraw its boundaries.² These issues had existed since the nineteenth century, but only in the late 1950s did questions of topography and geographic demarcation result in a prolonged geopolitical crisis. As Galeano

¹ Eduardo Galeano, *Crónicas latinoamericanas* (Montevideo, Uruguay: Editorial Girón. 1972), 139.

² The region is spelled Guaíra in Portuguese, and Guairá in Spanish; I will employ the former.

noted, the riverbank very much mattered, and with their sights set on building the largest dam in the world, the governments of both nations jockeyed for control of the border.

This chapter traces the geopolitical relationship between Brazil and Paraguay from the late 1950s through the 1973 Treaty of Itaipu. Among a litany of engineering and bureaucratic details, the binational agreement included stipulations that allowed Brazil to appropriate the overwhelming majority of the dam's future production. The treaty also determined that 1,300 square kilometers of land on both sides of the Paraná River would be flooded to create the dam's reservoir basin. This flood zone included the entire controversial frontier region in Guairá. After a century of geopolitical problems, Brazil and Paraguay finally found a way to make their border conflict literally disappear.

For nearly fifty years, Itaipu's supporters have championed a narrative that the dam helped overcome the historical enmity between Brazil and Paraguay to trigger unprecedented development in each country—a claim that in many ways holds true. But this triumphalist retelling often overlooks how Itaipu also solidified the uneven power relations on display throughout the preceding border crisis.

Although scholars agree that Brazil emerged in this period as the region's major power, they have yet to fully acknowledge the Guairá conflict's central role in Brazil's ascent. Given this historiographic oversight, we must ask how a territorial dispute in a long-ignored border region served to fundamentally change the geopolitical landscape of the Southern Cone. Along with exploring the historical roots of the Itaipu dam, this chapter argues that the Guairá border conflict helped catalyze Brazil's rise to power. With the backing of the United States, Brazil's military regime refused to recognize Paraguay's claim to the frontier zone. Although the Paraguayan government benefitted financially from entering Brazil's sphere of influence through

participation in a binational dam project, it did so only on the terms dictated by Brazil, one of its greatest historical rivals.

The Stroessner dictatorship had ruled Paraguay since 1954, and by the mid-1960s the government began to move the country away from its traditional alliance with Argentina (its neighbor to the west) in favor of Brazil (its neighbor to the east). Brazil, meanwhile, saw the overthrow of democratically elected João Goulart in April 1964. Determined to transform the country into a global power, the new military regime maneuvered to overtake its Latin American neighbors for regional and hemispheric dominance. The Argentine government, whose borders lay downstream on the same Paraná River, worried that a Brazil-Paraguay dam upstream would limit its own energy and commercial interests. This chapter will chronicle how Brazil's successful control of the waters and shorelines of the Paraná borderlands helped it surpass Argentina as the region's most powerful country.³

The context of the Cold War also shaped the Guaíra border crisis. Especially after the Cuban Revolution of 1959, Latin America served as an important battleground of the global Cold War and the United States initiated a number of programs intended to stem the tide of communism in the Western Hemisphere. These included public initiatives like the Alliance for Progress that incentivized moderate reforms and also covert plans to put in power leaders who would defend U.S. interests.⁴ The dictatorships of Brazil and Paraguay saw themselves as

³ Brazil's geopolitical overtaking of Argentina began in the 1930s and accelerated in the 1940s when the government of Getúlio Vargas aligned the country with the United States in World War II. In exchange for Brazil's war-time participation—its troops fought in Europe and the U.S. built military bases in the nation's northeastern regions—Washington then “extended loans and technical assistance for the national steel plant at Volta Redonda, [and] gave Brazil substantial Lend-Lease aid (three-fourths of the total to Latin America)[.]” Stanley E. Hilton, ‘The United States, Brazil, and the Cold War, 1945-1960: End of the Special Relationship,’ *The Journal of American History*, 198, 68(3): 600. For more on the changing relationships during this time between Brazil, Argentina, and the United States see also Stanley E. Hilton, ‘The Argentine Factor in Twentieth-Century Brazilian Foreign Policy Strategy,’ *Political Science Quarterly*, 1985 100(1): 27-51.

⁴ For more on the Alliance for Progress and modernization theory, see Jeffrey F. Taffet, *Foreign Aid as Foreign Policy: the Alliance for Progress in Latin America*, (New York: Routledge, 2007), and Michael Latham,

important Cold War allies of the United States: each government framed its political legitimacy on a rigid brand of anti-communism and both sent troops to support the U.S. invasion of the Dominican Republic in 1965—an action that Argentina never took. Although the U.S. government maintained a positive relationship with Paraguay, it considered Brazil its most important partner in Latin America and thus saw Brazil's growth as part of its own geopolitical vision. The Cold War discourse of development and modernization resonated strongly with Latin American dictatorships. In Brazil, the military's Doctrine of National Security focused heavily on industrial development, and Paraguay's General Stroessner sought to build an industrialized nation that could earn the approval of the United States and its global allies.

To fulfil these development goals, both military regimes looked to the disputed borderlands and the untapped hydroelectric potential of the Paraná River. In an exercise of geopolitical posturing, the Brazilian regime foresaw that despite its overwhelming political and economic strength it would have to allow its smaller neighbor to participate in a binational development project. Yet the Brazilian government concealed its willingness to collaborate and instead strong-armed Paraguay. This approach set the groundwork for a controversial treaty in the 1970s requiring Paraguay to sell its unused energy from Itaipu exclusively to Brazil at a below-market rate fixed for fifty years.⁵ In the 1960s, however, the Stroessner regime aimed to consolidate political legitimacy and become a stronger ally of the United States—even if it meant a rapprochement with Brazil. Paraguayan efforts to deflect internal opposition toward an outside force only partially succeeded, as popular dissent formed against both the Brazilian 'invasion' of the border and Stroessner's complicity in 'selling out' the Guaíra waterfalls. Even with this

Modernization as Ideology: American Social Science and "Nation Building" in the Kennedy Era, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2000). For more on covert U.S. actions see Stephen G. Rabe, *The Killing Zone: the United States Wages Cold War in Latin America*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012).

⁵ The 1973 Treaty of Itaipu will be discussed later in this chapter..

domestic tension, the government's nationalist rhetoric allowed Stroessner to claim the construction of a Paraná dam as a victory for the Paraguayan people.

The desire to make the Itaipu dam a reality embroiled Brazil and Paraguay in a geopolitical standoff that vacillated between conflict and collaboration. For over fifteen years this diplomatic and socio-political entanglement produced moments of extreme tension punctuated by celebrations of binational cooperation. This conflict included the mobilization of troops on opposite sides of the border, the arrest of government leaders, popular unrest in the streets, and a nonstop stream of diplomatic posturing. Despite the claims of inter-national unity that Itaipu's proponents have trumpeted for over half a century, the dam emerged from a partnership built not on trust or mutual respect, but on conflict. This chapter will use previously unexamined archival sources and interviews with surviving participants to reveal the depths of Itaipu's pre-history.

Revisiting the forgotten roots of Itaipu casts new light on the legacy of the dam itself. More than just a colossal feat of engineering genius, the dam must be understood as the apex of a geopolitical conflict through which Latin American governments jockeyed for regional and global power. Despite Itaipu's importance—both during its early years and in the decades since—its bellicose beginnings remain largely unknown. This oversight should not be surprising since Itaipu was and continues to be held up as a model of Latin American cooperation. This makes it all the more necessary to explore the tense and at times violent history that paved the way for 'the project of the century.'

One Border, Two Interpretations

To properly contextualize the actions and rhetoric that both governments would take in the lead-up to the Itaipu dam, one must first understand why Brazil and Paraguay had such radically diverging perceptions of their shared border. This difference of interpretation originated in the 1872 Treaty of Loizaga-Cotegipe that followed the War of the Triple Alliance. Signed by the government of Paraguay and the empire of Brazil—and against the desires of both Argentina and Uruguay—the treaty designated the Guaíra waterfalls as the dividing line between nations. Paraguay referred to them collectively as the Salto de Guairá, an understanding that all seven of the falls belonged to one singular body of water. Brazilians called these the Sete Quedas (“seven falls”), implying that each existed independently from the others.⁶ This distinction is critical because the Treaty of 1872 stipulated that the border between Brazil and Paraguay stretched from the Mbaracajú mountain range toward “the waterway or canal of the Paraná River... to the Great Fall of the Seven Falls.”⁷ Paraguay thus interpreted the treaty to mean that the border extended to the northern end of the waterfalls and encompassed all of them, while Brazil considered the frontier to bisect at the fifth fall—the tallest of the seven cascades.

⁶ Seeking a neutral position, the present article employs the term “Guaíra waterfalls,” combining both Paraguay’s title of Guaíra, and Brazil’s use of the plural cascades.

⁷ See: “Tratado de límites entre la República del Paraguay y el Império del Brasil,” 1872. Source: Archivo Histórico de la Cancillería de Paraguay. (Hereafter AHCP) A note to readers: the holdings of the AHCP are not categorically organized. As such, cited evidence contains only the identifying numbers of the original documents.

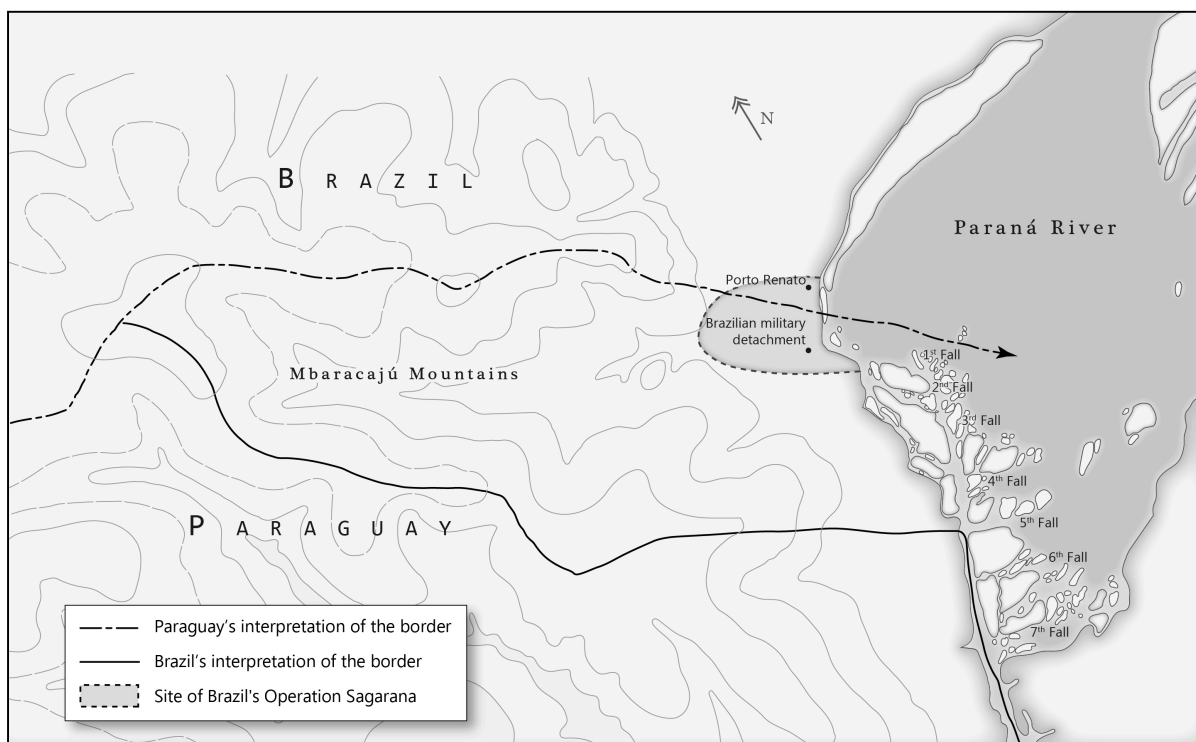


FIGURE 1.1: Map of the contested border and the Guairá waterfalls. Courtesy of the University of Wisconsin Cartography Lab.

In the context of Cold War ambitions to harness the untapped energy of the Paraná, Paraguay's understanding that the *waterfall* (singular) belonged to both countries protected its claim to participate in any development project that included any portion of the falls. For Brazil, however, the belief that the border bisected the *waterfalls* (plural) justified building a hydroelectric dam on its section of the river that would completely circumvent Paraguayan waters. In the 100 years since the War of the Triple Alliance, Paraguay consistently emphasized that the 1872 Treaty had left a 20km 'no man's land' east of the Guairá waterfalls. Brazil, in contrast, acknowledged no such ambiguity and refused to acknowledge Paraguay's claims.⁸

⁸ The Brazilian government cited international legal theory to argue that there was no need to outline those final 20kms since they were already legally implied in the Treaty of 1872's designation of the peak of the Mbaracajú hills and the tallest waterfall as "natural" frontier markers. Brazil cited the 1945 work of Stephen B. Jones who argued that "Unless the boundary is *clearly marked in nature* or is *uninhabited* or *inaccessible* country, it is desirable that monuments be *intervisible*." Stephen B Jones. *Boundary-making; a handbook for statesmen, treaty editors, and boundary commissioners*. (Washington: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, Division of International Law), 1945.

From 1872 through the early 1960s, dozens of binational meetings discussed unresolved border issues, many of which made reference to the 20kms of un-demarcated mountains along the Paraná River.⁹

A parallel controversy imbricated Argentina, a country with an equally important claim to the Paraná. Although the river originates in Brazilian territory, its downstream flow forms the border with both Paraguay and Argentina before finally emptying out into the Plate basin and the Atlantic Ocean. Throughout the twentieth century, Argentina encouraged river-use regulations based on the principle of ‘prior consultation’ in order to protect itself from any damages from upstream development—specifically targeting Brazil. In the first half of the century when Argentina’s regional superiority was more evident, Brazilian governments respected its proposals for river regulation.¹⁰ As Brazil’s influence grew, however, it rejected Argentina’s attachment to prior consultation and claimed that it had no obligation to share water with any downstream nations.¹¹ Argentina’s major backlash against what would become the Itaipu dam did not take place until the 1970s—when it repeatedly denounced Brazil in front of the United Nations—but the origins of this river-rivalry took shape in the preceding decades. Propelled by these competing visions for the Paraná River, the Guaíra border conflict helped Brazil supplant Argentina as the region’s major power.

A deeper legacy of the War of the Triple Alliance also motivated the Brazilian perception of these boundaries. Popular lore, especially in Paraguay, traditionally depicts Brazil as the aggressor of the war that nearly wiped out Paraguay’s population. Yet the conflict also resulted

⁹ Key meetings of the Joint Border Commission included the 2nd Conference of 7/29/1933; the 11th Conference of 8/21/1939; the 13th Conference of 5/5/1941; the 15th Conference of 5/29/1945; the 21st Conference of 12/21/1955; and the 25th Conference of 11/20/1961.

¹⁰ Maria Regina Soares de Lima. *The Political Economy of Brazilian Foreign Policy: Nuclear Energy, Trade and Itaipu*, (Brasília: Fundação Alexandre de Gusmão, 2013), 352-357.

¹¹ To counter Argentina downstream claims, Brazil cited the 1895 Harmon Doctrine—named for the former U.S. Attorney General. *Ibid.*, 347.

from the policies of the Argentine Republic and the interests of foreign capital (especially British merchants).¹² F.J. McLynn has argued that Brazil “fought a bloody war and expended enormous amounts of manpower and treasure for aims which in no sense worked toward its real national interest.”¹³ Seen from this perspective, the war not only produced a feeling of perpetual victimhood in Paraguay; it greatly frustrated Brazil’s leaders who felt unduly blamed for a costly and bloody war. As a result, the 1872 Treaty became a site of conflict on which all parties would continue to attach meaning for the next one hundred years.

Paraguayans saw the 1872 Treaty as the codification of its defeat. The Brazilian government, for its part, viewed the treaty as one of the few tangible benefits from its wartime efforts and the resulting stigma of being a victorious invader. The war, of course, had not only involved these two countries, and Argentina played an important role in the contentious post-war negotiations. As the main victors, Brazilian and Argentine officials had their own standoff over how to divide the geographic and financial spoils of war. Norman T. Strauss writes that, “In the 1870s the question of the adjustment of defeated Paraguay’s boundaries was to bring these countries into conflict again, and to the brink of war. Fortunately, the conflict remained a verbal one, a war of diplomats. Troops and war ships were deployed but no actual fighting occurred.”¹⁴

¹² Arguments for the importance of the policies of Mitre government in Argentina come from F.J. McLynn, “The Causes of the War of Triple Alliance: An Interpretation,” *Inter-American Economic Affairs*, 33:2 (Autumn 1979), 21-43. Those who cite British commercial interests as the main cause include León Pomer, *La Guerra del Paraguay: Gran negocio*. (Buenos Aires: Ediciones Caldén, 1968); E.J. Hobsbawm, *The Age of Capital: 1848-1875*, (New York: Scribener, 1975); and José Alfredo Fornos Peñalaba, “Draft Dodgers, War Resisters and Turbulent Gauchos: The War of the Triple Alliance against Paraguay,” *The Americas*, 38:4 (April 1982), 463-79.

¹³ McLynn, “The Causes of the War of Triple Alliance, 43. More recently, Thomas Whigam has argued that the War’s cause emerged “within a narrow realm of politics. Specifically, the war can be traced to political ambitions and how those ambitions expressed themselves in the construction of new nations.” (Thomas Whigam. *The Paraguayan War. Volume 1: Causes and Early Conduct*. (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2002).

¹⁴ Norman T. Strauss, “Brazil after the Paraguayan War: Six Years of Conflict, 1870-1876,” *Journal of Latin American Studies*, 10:1 (May 1978), 21-35. Brazil and Paraguay negotiated the 1872 Treaty that ended the war, yet Argentina saw this as a total violation of Treaty of Triple Alliance (May 1865) between Brazil, Argentina, and Uruguay in which it was agreed that no treaty could bring about the war’s end without the participation of all three allies. (Strauss, *Brazil after the Paraguayan War*, 21)

This border conflict in the 1870s served as an early precursor to the standoff that took place in the 1960s along the Brazil-Paraguay frontier.

Given the contentious history of these borderlands, the legacy of the War of the Triple Alliance stands as an ominous and steady presence in the geopolitical antecedents of the Itaipu dam.¹⁵ In the renewed border standoff, Paraguayan nationalists consistently invoked the specter of the nineteenth-century war, yet Brazilian officials rejected any notion that their country acted as an invader—either in the 1860s or again in the 1960s. By the time that military dictatorships ruled both nations in the 1960s, these diverging interpretations had become firmly ossified in the political imaginary of each country. A government surveillance report in Brazil's described Paraguay's beliefs as "entirely absurd, a perversion of legal-historical fact... by a pseudo-geographic worldview."¹⁶ Paraguayan leaders, on the other hand, considered their stance to be "completely solid" and ridiculed Brazil's assertions that the border had been "definitively and fully demarcated since 1872."¹⁷ In the context of these long-standing differences of interpretation, both nations began exploring the possibility of developing the Paraná's hydroelectric potential.

Turning a Vision into Reality

Interest in the hydroelectric potential of the Guáira waterfalls existed for most of the twentieth century. The first major discussion occurred at the VII Interamerican Conference of 1933 held in

¹⁵ It is worth noting the similar financial motivations of the border conflicts in both the 1870s and the 1960s. Strauss argues that Brazil and Argentina eventually resolved their differences over how to divide Paraguay's frontier zone because both parties did not want to further jeopardize trading and commerce along the Plate Basin and its tributaries. (Strauss, *Brazil after the Paraguayan War*, 22) This chapter will show that in a similar vein a century later, the energy and wealth of a potential hydroelectric dam on the Paraná River was the underlying reason for the end of the standoff on the Brazil-Paraguay.

¹⁶ Secret letter from João Baptista Figueiredo to President Emílio Médici, 12/1/1969. Exposição de Motivos No. 056/69, in: BR AN,BSB N8.0.PSN, EST.285, AN/BSB.

¹⁷ Paraguay citations come from DPI 712, 12/14/1965, Archivo Histórico AHCP; and "Suscita informacion sobre el diferendo paraguayo-brasileño relativo al salto del guaira." 3/15/66, AHCP.

Montevideo, where the nations of the River Plate Basin (Uruguay, Argentina, Paraguay, Bolivia, and Brazil) signed an agreement concerning the navigation, irrigation, and potential development of the various tributary waters of the basin. Although a non-binding treaty, this declaration did agree that prior to beginning a development project a country would have to obtain “prior consultation” (*consulta prévia*) from its neighbors.¹⁸ In Brazil, the 1933 declaration did not produce new policies until the 1951 creation of the Interstate Commission of the Paraná-Uruguay Basin (Comissão Interestadual da Bacia Paraná – Uruguai, CIBPU), a collaboration between the governments of the seven south and center-south states.¹⁹

In 1956 the Brazilian government of President Juscelino Kubitschek authorized CIBPU to map the energy potential of the border region and allotted the first-ever federal funds for such a survey. This led to the construction of Brazil’s first hydroelectric dam in the area: a small project built in 1961 near the town of Guairá.²⁰ During these years Paraguay also began similar hydroelectric surveys, but focused initially on the Tietê, the Grande and the Paranapanema Rivers in its southeastern region, far from its border with Brazil. These three projects would have produced a cumulative total of 22.85 million kilowatts and included the added benefit of being cost-efficient since their close proximity to the country’s population centers would have drastically reduced transmission costs.²¹ However, geopolitical strategy motivated the

¹⁸ Macedo de Mendonça, “A geopolítica e a política externa do Brasil,” 152. This concept of “previous consent” would be cited heavily by Argentina throughout its opposition to the development of Itaipu.

¹⁹ Cleonice Gardin describes CIBPU as a form of regional integration unprecedented in South America and modeled on foreign projects like the Tennessee Valley Authority. Cleonice Gardin. *CIBPU: A comissão interestadual da Bacia Paraná-Uruguai no planejamento regional brasileiro (1951-1972)*. (Dourados, MS: Editora UFGD, 2009), 19. CIBPU existed from 1951-1972, and helped oversee the construction of various river-based public works project in the states of São Paulo, Mato Grosso, Minas Gerais, Goiás, Paraná, Rio Grande do Sul, and Santa Catarina.

²⁰ Christian Guy Caubet. *As grandes obras de Itaipu: energia, diplomacia e direito na Bacia do Prata*. (São Paulo: Acadêmica, 1991), 48. Also in 1961, the government of Jânio Quadros hired the military engineer Pedro Henrique Rupp to draft a proposal for a large-scale dam. Rupp calculated that it would be possible to generate 25 million kilowatts of energy from the Paraná River—a goal that would have made it nearly twice the size of the largest dam in the world at that time. This project never amassed much support and fell out of favor once the Ferraz proposal was made the following year.

²¹ Osny Duarte Pereira. *Itaipu: pros e contras*. (Rio de Janeiro: Editora Paz e Terra, 1974), 53.

development goals of Paraguay's government as much as energy production or logistical efficiency. The Stroessner regime soon discarded these early proposals in order to redirect attention to the Brazil-Paraguay borderlands.

Although the legal jurisdiction of this frontier had been contested since the late nineteenth century, the geopolitics of the early 1960s elevated the debate into open hostilities. In March 1962 Brazil's government hired the engineer Otávio Marcondes Ferraz to conduct the first detailed survey of the large-scale hydroelectric potential of the area surrounding the Guaíra waterfalls.²² Ferraz proposed a dam built exclusively in Brazil's territory just to the north of the Guaíra waterfalls—a strategy that would preserve the majestic falls and completely avoid Paraguay's portion of the Paraná River. The proposed dam would include 21 turbines with a energy potential of 10 million kilowatts and an annual output of 67 million kilowatt hours (kWH), nearly three times the amount of Brazil's consumption in 1960.²³ If realized, Ferraz's proposal would have killed any hopes the Stroessner regime had of developing Paraguay's claim to the region.

Understandably concerned, Paraguay's Chancellor, Raul Sapena Pastor, wrote a letter to Francisco Dantas, Brazil's Minister of Foreign Relations, asserting Paraguay's legal domain to the waters of the Paraná. Sapena Pastor expressed his worries over Ferraz's project and insinuated that if Brazil moved forward with its plan to build a dam without Paraguay's consent and participation, it would “deteriorate the cordial and fraternal relations that unite our peoples

²² Ferraz had previously overseen the construction of the Paulo Afonso Dam on the São Francisco River in the northeastern state of Bahia, and in 1962 served on the board of the São Paulo-based electricity company, *Light*. After the military coup of 1964 he was nominated by President Castelo Branco to serve as president of ELETROBRAS, a position he held through the entire tenure of Branco's administration (1964-1967). Source: Verbete biográfico, Otávio Marcondes Ferraz. (Centro de Pesquisa e Documentação de História Contemporânea do Brasil/Fundação Getúlio Vargas, hereafter CPDOC/FGV). It should also be noted that the Ministry of Mines and Energy had only recently been created as an official government body in July of 1960.

²³ “Relatório preliminar sobre o aproveitamento do Salto de Sete Quedas (Guairá) Rio Paraná.” December 1962. Source: OMF 61.11.23, Pasta VII, CPDOC/FGV.

and our governments.”²⁴ Additionally, he mentioned the need to respect the ongoing work of the Joint Border Commission (Comissão Mixta Demarcadora dos Limites)—a group comprised of engineers and civil authorities from both countries. Since its creation in 1934 this commission had conducted dozens of border surveys, and in 1962 it undertook a lengthy project that mapped 10,000 geographical border points through the Mbaracaju mountains extending into the Paraná River a few kilometers above the Guaíra falls. Sapena Pastor argued that the border’s full demarcation had to occur before any hydroelectric development could take place. With this perspective, Paraguay immediately ratified the 1962 work of the Joint Border Commission; Brazil never did.²⁵

Six months after Sapena Pastor’s initial letter he received a reply from Afonso Arinos de Melo Franco, Brazil’s ambassador in Asunción. Franco stated that Paraguay had no legal basis for its claim that the 20kms of land east of the Paraná River remained un-demarcated, although he did state that the Goulart government was open to discussing the possibility of Paraguay taking part in a potential future project.²⁶ In response, Sapena Pastor declared that pending the demarcation of the border through the Mbaracaju hills, neither country could develop the energy of the Guaíra waterfalls. Doing so, he warned, “would seriously threaten the relationship” between Brazil and Paraguay.²⁷ In September, Brazilian president João Goulart dispatched his Minister of Mines of Energy, Oliveira Brito, to Asunción to deliberate with Paraguayan authorities. At this meeting Stroessner first used a phrase that he would frequently repeat in the years to come, telling Brito that, “we don’t want a single millimeter [of land] that is not ours, but

²⁴ MRB 94, 1962. Embajada de Paraguay en Rio de Janeiro in: BR AN, BSB N8.0.PSN, EST.286. (Arquivo Nacional, Brasília, hereafter AN-BSB).

²⁵ Although the Brazilian government was aware of the results of the Joint Border Commission’s efforts, it took no decisive action in response. Confidential Note No. 245, 930(42)(43), 7/17/1962. (Arquivo Histórico de Itamaraty, Brasília, hereafter AHI-BSB).

²⁶ AAA/DAM/SDF/DAJ/24/254.(43), 9/12/1962, in: BR AN, BSB N8.0.PSN, EST.286. Arquivo Nacional, BSB.

²⁷ MRB 115, 6/14/1963, Embajada de Paraguay en Rio de Janeiro. In: BR AN, BSB N8.0.PSN, EST.286. AN-BSB.

neither will we cede a single millimeter that belongs to us."²⁸ Both parties felt encouraged by the discussions and Brito even held a press conference in which he spoke lavishly of the Brazilian government's genuine openness to the mutual development of the Paraná River.²⁹

In this emerging climate of cooperation, Goulart and Stroessner met on January 19, 1964 on Goulart's Três Marias farm in Mato Grosso do Sul. The two presidents spoke for six hours in a mood Goulart described as "very cordial and very affectionate." Stroessner, for his part, called it "an historic meeting, with tremendous importance for the future relations of both nations."³⁰ A press release from the Brazilian government observed that, "the thinking of both men was perfectly aligned, with complete and mutual respect."³¹ Given the political context at the time, this meeting might have seemed impossible: Goulart a leftist social reformer, and Stroessner a military dictator at the head of a violent regime. Yet the mutual desire to harness the industrializing power of the river provided each leader with common ground.

Goulart's vision for a border dam differed drastically from that of the dictatorship that eventually made the project a reality. After his meeting with Stroessner, Goulart described Paraguay's participation as "a sincere, total, and absolute collaboration"—a concession that Brazil's dictatorship would only ever nominally make.³² Goulart also mentioned Argentina and Uruguay as consumers of the dam's energy, an indication that he saw a hydroelectric project as a means to strengthen the geopolitical unity of the Southern Cone.³³ As this chapter will reveal, Brazil's military government used Itaipu for the exact opposite purpose and instead saw a

²⁸ Note 358/254.(43), 9/11/1963. Brazilian embassy in Asunción. AHI-BSB.

²⁹ Juan Antontio Pozzo Morreno, "Un reconocimiento pendiente," *ABC Color*. 10/21/2012. <http://www.abc.com.py/edicion-impresa/suplementos/economico/un-reconocimiento-pendiente-467321.html>. Accessed 10/26/2014.

³⁰ Goulart quotation comes from "Stroessner faz acôrdo com Goulart: Sete Quedas." *Jornal do Brasil*, 1/21/1964, 1; Stroessner's from Telegram No. No. 53, DAM/254.(43), 2/27/1964. AHI-BSB.

³¹ "Encontro de Presidentes: Paraguai Apóia Construção de Sete Quedas." *Última Hora*, 1/21/1964, p 6.

³² "Encontro de Presidentes: Paraguai Apóia Construção de Sete Quedas." *Última Hora*, 1/21/1964, 6.

³³ "Stroessner faz acôrdo com Goulart: Sete Quedas." *Jornal do Brasil*, 1/21/1964, 1.

binational dam as a way to enhance its own power at the expense of neighbouring countries. Moreover, rumours suggested that Goulart would fund the dam with loans from the Soviet Union—surely incensing the anti-communist sectors in Brazil already plotting a regime change.³⁴

The United States also opposed Goulart. Although the U.S. government did not have a direct hand in the eventual Brazilian coup, it did systematically undermine Goulart's presidency—what one historian has called a “quiet intervention.”³⁵ Both the Kennedy (1960-63) and Johnson (1963-69) administrations saw Brazil as essential to winning the Cold War in Latin America. As noted in a 1963 State Department memo, “If U.S. policy fails in Brazil, it will become extremely difficult to achieve success elsewhere in Latin America.”³⁶ Yet Goulart remained a steady thorn in the side of U.S. interests as he renewed diplomatic relations with the Soviet Union and resisted Kennedy's efforts to isolate Cuba from the rest of the hemisphere.³⁷ Moreover, Goulart's brother-in-law Leonel Brizola, the governor of Rio Grande do Sul, nationalized the U.S. company International Telephone and Telegraph (ITT).³⁸ As Goulart continued to unveil increasingly progressive policies—including a vision for large-scale agrarian reform—the United States closely monitored the possibilities for military intervention. On the cusp of the 1964 coup, Secretary of State Dean Rusk informed Lincoln Gordon, the U.S.

³⁴ “7 Quedas: não há compromisso com USSR,” *O Jornal*, 1/5/1964, 1; “Goulart responderá à nota soviética, que não faz ofertas,” *Jornal do Brasil*, 1/5/1964, pp. 3.

³⁵ Phyllis R. Parker, *Brazil and the Quiet Intervention, 1964*, (Austin: the University of Texas Press, 1979).

³⁶ State Department paper, “Guidelines of U.S. Policy and Operations, Brazil,” 7 February 1963, Foreign Relations of the United States (hereafter FRUS), 1961-1963 Vol. 12: 487-90.

³⁷ Joseph Smith. *Brazil and the United States: Convergence and Divergence*. (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2010), 154-156.

³⁸ W. Michael Weis, *Cold Warriors & Coups d'Etat: Brazilian-American Relations, 1945-1964*, (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1993), 153.

ambassador in Brazil, of the commitment to seeing the overthrow of Goulart's "communist dominated dictatorship."³⁹

The 1965 Border Conflict and the Contentious Roots of Itaipu

Late in the night of March 31, 1964 a military coup overthrew Goulart and established a dictatorship that ruled Brazil for twenty-one years. Despite the fact that many of the newly installed military leaders had good relationships with Stroessner, the aftermath of the coup yielded no progress on a development project in the Paraná borderlands. The hesitation from Brazil's dictatorship likely stemmed from concern over the promises that Goulart had recently made to Stroessner. Unlike Goulart, Brazil's military had no desire to extend equal participation to Paraguay. The regime change in Brazil quickly diverted the diplomatic inroads made over the previous five years.

Almost exactly a year after Brazil's military seized power, actions from the Stroessner dictatorship set in motion a cascading series of events that engulfed both nations in a tense geopolitical standoff lasting fifteen months. On March 21, 1965 a group of nearly 100 Paraguayans gathered along the shores of the Paraná River. This contingent included high-ranking figures from the Stroessner regime, various government authorities, and a large group of school children. In the shadow of the Guaira waterfalls they proceeded to raise the Paraguayan flag, sing the national anthem, and give rousing speeches about the pride and sovereignty of their nation. In response, Brazil sent a detachment of soldiers to occupy the exact same spot and in late October arrested a group of Paraguayan officials. In a series of tense diplomatic exchanges

³⁹ Telegram from the Department of State to the Embassy in Brazil, 30 March 1964, FRUS 1964-1968 Vol. 31, Doc. 194.

and maneuvers over the next fifteen months, the Brazilian military negotiated a resolution that quelled the border conflict while also guaranteeing that the resulting development project would satisfy its geopolitical ambitions. On June 22, 1966 the foreign ministers of both countries signed the Act of Iguaçu, an agreement that marked the first official step toward what became the Itaipu Binational Dam.⁴⁰

More than just an essential component in the formation of Itaipu, the border conflict became an arena through which each country sought to redefine its place in the changing landscape of Latin America. For Paraguay, this conflict offered a chance to shed its image as a defeated nation. Most of the border debate extended back to the Loizaga-Cotegipe Treaty of 1872 that redrew the post-war boundaries in ways that heavily favored the victorious nations. The War of the Triple Alliance began in 1865 and exactly 100 years later, the dictatorship of Alfredo Stroessner resuscitated a debate over a treaty that had dismantled his country. Thus for Paraguay, challenging the border stipulations of the 1872 treaty became a way to challenge the legitimacy of the war itself and an opportunity to rewrite a century of its haunting legacy. The Stroessner regime also used the 1965 border conflict to rally domestic support against foreign aggression and to promise economic development in the form of an eventual hydroelectric project. For a military dictatorship that depended on a rhetoric of unbridled nationalism, the Guaíra standoff allowed Stroessner to preach about the rights of the Paraguayan people.

The Brazilian government, on the other hand, used the 1965 crisis to test the limits of its own power during the earliest phase of dictatorship. The military regime had governed Brazil for less than a year when Paraguay staged its flag-raising ceremony in Guaíra, and the ensuing conflict marked the regime's first real venture into foreign politics. During the infancy of its

⁴⁰ This was known as the Ata das Cataratas in Portuguese, and the Acta de Iguazú in Spanish.

dictatorship—and with the potential of a massive hydroelectric dam looming as motivation—the Brazilian regime saw the border conflict as a chance to assert its geopolitical and economic dominance. By strong-arming Paraguay and refusing to capitulate on its interpretation of the border, Brazil’s government succeeded in elevating its own status while diminishing that of its neighbors. Despite the language of equal cooperation with Paraguay, Brazilian leaders had always seen the dam through geopolitical lenses. In this context, all decisions connected to an underlying set of goals relating to the theory of “*Brasil Grande*”—an idea that for most of the twentieth century had envisioned the political and ideological ascension of Brazil as a global power. Brazil’s dictatorship saw its moment of greatness at hand, and winning the border conflict became a fundamental step forward.

The Border Takes Center Stage

General Alfredo Stroessner personally visited the border the day before the contingent of Paraguayans gathered near Guaíra on March 21, 1965. According to Paraguay’s Minister of the Interior, Stroessner wanted to “survey and measure the geopolitical potential of the area” and left instructions to assemble the local population in order to inform them of “our frontier divisions and our rights [in] the region.”⁴¹ The following day nearly one hundred Paraguayans gathered along the shores of the Paraná for a ceremony that included the raising of the Paraguayan flag, the singing of the national anthem, and a series of patriotic speeches.⁴² (Figure 1.2) According to evidence compiled by Brazil’s Operation Sagarana, one speaker declared that “Paraguay would recuperate this territory that was stolen from them after the War of the Triple Alliance.”⁴³ Three

⁴¹ Edgar Ynsfrán, *Un giro geopolítico: el milagro de una ciudad*, (Asunción: Instituto de Estudios Geopolíticos e Internacionales, 1990), 70.

⁴² Ibid.; and Brazilian Embassy Note 322, 11/8/1965, AHCP.

⁴³ ‘Operation Sagarana’, Secret report CTF/1, 254(43), paragraph 29. 6/22/1967. AHI.

Brazilian citizens who lived nearby witnessed these actions and one ran home to get a camera. Once the Paraguayans had left, all three Brazilians went to the nearest military office to hand over the film negatives and give official testimony to what they saw.⁴⁴



FIGURE 1.2: Paraguay's Flag-Raising Ceremony on March 21, 1965. Major Meza Guerrero addresses the crowd along the border. Photo courtesy of the Revista do Clube Militar, Rio de Janeiro.

A few weeks later, Coronel Octávio da Silva Tosta, as head of the National Security Council's Special Border Commission, visited the region to plan Brazil's response. Accompanied by a handful of engineers and a local guide, Tosta spent the afternoon surveying the region and in a move that reflected the back-and-forth gamesmanship at the heart of the border conflict, he conducted a small ceremony in the precise spot of Paraguay's recent actions.⁴⁵ On this visit Coronel Tosta began formulating what became known as Operation Sagarana, a

⁴⁴ "Hasteamento da bandeira paraguaia em Coronel Renato provocou a sua ocupação pelos militares brasileiros." *Jornal do Brasil*, 1/6/1966, 7. This article was second in a five-part series on the border conflict. This report and testimony were then passed along to General Alvaro Tavares do Carmo, Commander of the 5th Military Region. Source: Ministry of War No. 994/S-102-CIE. In BR.DFAN.BSB.Z4.SNA.CFR.0007. AN-BSB.

⁴⁵ Tosta was especially alarmed by Paraguay's well-developed border presence, noting the existence of a school, numerous churches, a hotel, a police station, and even an airstrip. This stood in stark contrast to Brazil's side, which Tosta described as "completely abandoned." Source: "Operation Sagarana," Secret report CTF/1, 254(43), paragraph 30. 6/22/1967. AHI-BSB.

secret collaboration between Itamaraty, the army, and various government ministries. Scholars have never before studied this project, and its examination here affords unprecedented insight into the logistics of how Brazil developed its presence along the border.⁴⁶

With the explicit goal of militarily occupying the region, Operation Sagarana sought to link the frontier zone to the adjacent Brazilian states of Paraná and Mato Grosso do Sul. Operation Sagarana's program of building military barracks and establishing new cities and agricultural colonies represented the first concerted effort by any Brazilian government to stake a physical claim to this stretch of border. Although the frontier zone held symbolic importance since the late nineteenth century, few initiatives had established any permanent physical authority along this stretch of frontier. After his initial field visit, Colonel Tosta returned to Rio de Janeiro and presented his report to the National Security Council. Tosta finalized the details of Operation Sagarana in meetings with General Artur da Costa e Silva, the Minister of War, and Vasco Leitão da Cunha, the Minister of Foreign Relations.⁴⁷ With the operation's framework in place, the government authorized the deployment of Brazilian troops to the exact location of the Paraguayan ceremony.⁴⁸

Two months later on June 17, a detachment of one sergeant and seven soldiers crossed the Paraná River and set up camp just south of a small outpost known as Porto Coronel Renato.⁴⁹ (Figure 1.3) For Paraguay's leaders, this "act of aggression" constituted a complete violation of

⁴⁶ The name "Sagarana" came from the title of a novel by the Brazilian writer and diplomat João Guimarães Rosa, a fictional account of Brazil's 19th-century empire. Tosta was a great admirer and close collaborator of Rosa: in 1962 Tosta received his job with Itamaraty thanks to a nomination from Rosa, who at the time was the head of the Foreign Ministry's Border Demarcation Service. Source: Ariel Macedo de Mendonça. "A geopolítica e a política externa do Brasil: interseção dos mundos militar e diplomático em um projeto de poder a Ata das Cataratas e o equilíbrio de forças no Cono Sul." Masters thesis, Universidade de Brasília (UnB), 2004. 157.

⁴⁷ "Operation Sagarana," Secret report CTF/1, 254(43), paragraphs 31-32, 38. 6/22/1967. AHI-BSB.

⁴⁸ Ministry of War No. 994/S-102-CIE. In BR.DFAN.BSB.Z4.SNA.CFR.0007. National Archive, Rio de Janeiro.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 4. It should be noted that the present article offers the first evidence of the exact date that Brazilian troops occupied the border. In all previous scholarship, it was only known that these soldiers arrived at some point in June.

territorial sovereignty.⁵⁰ The Brazilian regime, on the other hand, considered Porto Renato within its national boundaries and thus saw Paraguay's previous actions in March—and not its own movement in June—as the *actual* invasion. The Brazilian government declared that it sent the detachment only to protect against terrorism and contraband operations along the border.⁵¹ Over the course of the next year, Brazil routinely downplayed both the size and importance of these soldiers, referring to the group as nothing but “a tiny detachment” or describing their presence as merely “symbolic.”⁵² Internal documents, however, indicate that Brazil's dictatorship aimed explicitly to “counteract Paraguay's growing presence in the region.”⁵³ Moreover, the soldiers served as the initial base for a much larger military presence soon to follow.



FIGURE 1.3: Brazilian detachment in Porto Renato on June 18, 1965. Photo courtesy of the Revista do Clube Militar, Rio de Janeiro.

⁵⁰ “Antecedentes históricos del litigio Paraguay-Brasil.” 5/10/1966. AHCP.

⁵¹ Verbal note from Castello Branco to Stroessner, 9/1/65. AHCP.

⁵² References to the small size of the detachment come from Minutes of the National Security Council (CNS), 3/16/1966, in BR AN,BSB N8.0.PSN, EST.286; the symbolism of the troops was noted by Chancellor Juracy Magalhães in an interview on 4/5/1966, source: JM pi 66.04.05/1, CPDOC/FGV.

⁵³ Secret letter from João Baptista Figueiredo to President Emílio Médici, 12/1/1969. Exposição de Motivos No. 056/69, in: BR AN,BSB N8.0.PSN, EST.285, AN-BSB. Figueiredo wrote this letter as the head of the National Information Service (SNI); from 1979 to 1985 he served as the last president of the military regime.

News of Brazil's garrison near Porto Renato quickly made its way to Asunción and within days Paraguayan authorities began applying diplomatic pressure for the removal of the troops. Chancellor Raul Sapena Pastor met routinely with Jaime Souza Gomes, the Brazilian ambassador in Asunción, and even General Stroessner made personal appeals to his colleagues in Brazil. Having made little progress in Asunción, Pastor traveled to Brasília in early July to make his appeal directly to Foreign Minister Juracy Magalhães.⁵⁴ For nearly two months the Brazilian regime gave no response, nor did it officially acknowledge it had even sent troops across the Paraná River. On September 1 Brazil's president, General Humberto Castelo Branco, finally sent a letter to Stroessner in which he stated that the group in Porto Renato "cannot represent anything inconvenient or harmful for either country, and that its presence can by no means indicate a strategy of pressure, coercion or repression on the part of the Brazilian Government."⁵⁵ Nowhere in his note did Castelo Branco refer to the appeal to have the troops removed. The dismissive tone of this letter must have incensed Paraguay's leaders—one report noted that Stroessner felt "totally unsatisfied"—and the Ministry of Foreign Relations spent the next three weeks preparing a lengthy response.⁵⁶ This marked the beginning of a back-and-forth exchange between embassies and foreign ministries that one observer referred to as "a veritable paper war."⁵⁷ As this conflict unfolded in the sphere of diplomatic communication, it also began to materialize in tangible ways along the border itself.

⁵⁴ Minutes of the National Security Council (CNS), 3/16/1966, in BR AN,BSB N8.0.PSN, EST.286. National Archive, Brasilia

⁵⁵ Verbal note from Castelo Branco to Stroessner, 9/1/65. AHCP.

⁵⁶ Telegram 408, Brazil embassy in Asunción, 11/28/1965. DAM/DF/932.(42)(43). AHI-BSB.

⁵⁷ Ynsfrán, *Un giro geopolítico*, 73. In the following months six letters were exchanged between both foreign ministries on the following dates: 9/25, 10/22, 10/29, 11/8, 11/9, and 12/14. Source: AHI-BSB.

Jockeying for Control of the Border

In the middle of October, Paraguay's Foreign Ministry received reports of Brazilians constructing barracks, roads, and even an airstrip on the lands adjacent to Porto Renato—the early results of Operation Sagarana. On October 20 Chancellor Pastor asked Brazil's ambassador to confirm the increased presence along the border. Expressing his disappointment in how unresponsive Brazil had been over the previous month, Pastor indicated that he had just commissioned a group of important Paraguayan authorities to visit the “un-demarcated zone.”⁵⁸ On the morning of October 21, 1965, exactly seven months after Paraguay's previous trip to the border region, five men boarded a plane in Asunción and after landing on an empty road due to a lack of airstrips, drove in a jeep to the Brazilian detachment. This group consisted of Pedro Godinot de Villare, the Undersecretary of Foreign Relations; Carlos Saldivar, the Chancellor's legal advisor; Emilio Meza Guerrero, a former general and engineer with the National Border Commission; Conrado Pappalardo, Stroessner's Chief-of-Staff; and an accompanying photographer. The group arrived in Porto Renato in the early afternoon and began taking pictures of the newly constructed facilities along the eastern shore of the Paraná River. A truck carrying Brazilian soldiers quickly appeared and detained the group for several hours.

What happened next depends on the perspective of the story teller, as each government presented a version for the sake of their own geopolitical objectives. The importance of these actions, however, lies not in distilling the exact course of events; rather, it rests in how these competing stories became retold in each country. The Brazilian regime tried to downplay the events of October 21, framing the whole ordeal as a misunderstanding. This response attempted to deescalate the situation while also delegitimizing Paraguay's claims in the borderlands. In

⁵⁸ DPI 604, 10/22/1965. Source: AHCP.

contrast, outrage erupted in Paraguay. As Paraguayans commemorated the 100th anniversary of the start of the War of the Triple Alliance, this new Brazilian “invasion” signaled a modern call to arms.

The only two living members of the arrested Paraguayans, Carlos Saldivar and Conrado Pappalardo, offer their version of what took place. Both men recall that the Brazilian sergeant refused to provide a reason for their detainment. Saldivar remembers feeling particularly anxious because, to him, the previous months “had felt like a war... we knew what had happened [in the War of the Triple Alliance], and our arrest could have started another one.”⁵⁹ Above all, Pappalardo remembers when Meza Guerrero refused to surrender his gun. Trying to deflate the situation, Pappalardo told his compatriot, “Emilio, my dear friend, hand over your pistol to this sergeant, and tomorrow I’ll buy you five new ones back in Asunción.” At this point, according to Pappalardo, Brazilian reinforcements arrived in the form of an army major, a captain, two lieutenants, and a company of “heavily armed soldiers” who assumed “combat positions” and treated them with “total incivility.”⁶⁰ A Paraguayan press release emphasized these details, accusing Brazilian authorities of “mistreatment.”⁶¹ For the remainder of the afternoon, the Paraguayans sat outside—on tree stumps, according to Saldivar—until the Commander of Brazil’s southern army arrived and gave the authorization to release the five men.⁶²

In the Brazilian embassy’s recounting of these events, “the Paraguayan commission was never at any point arrested” and the matter simply involved needing to wait until the proper authorities arrived.⁶³ Brazil’s narrative claimed the following sequence of events. When initially

⁵⁹ Carlos Saldivar, interview by author. January 14, 2015. Asunción, Paraguay.

⁶⁰ Conrado Pappalardo, interview by author. January 5, 2015. Asunción, Paraguay.

⁶¹ “Press release from the Ministerio de Relaciones Exteriores,” 10/26/1965. Source: AHCP.

⁶² According to different versions of the story, the Paraguayans were detained between four and six hours.

⁶³ Brazilian Embassy Note 322, 11/8/1965. Source: AHCP.

approached by the Brazilian soldiers, the Paraguayan authorities declined to give their names, and when instructed to hand over their photography equipment, Meza Guerrero refused and acted in an increasingly threatening manner. The Brazilian sergeant told the photographer to stay put until the commanding officer, Capitan Gildon Pinto de Madeiras, arrived. Meza Guerrero asked if they were being arrested and the sergeant told him “no,” that only the photographer needed to wait in custody. According to one version disseminated in the newspaper *Jornal do Brasil*, at this moment the Paraguayan authorities voluntarily “turned themselves in” as an act of solidarity with their detained photographer.⁶⁴ When Captain Madeiras arrived, he instructed the Paraguayans that they could not take photographs of Brazil’s military presence and moreover, that they had intruded two kilometers into Brazilian territory. Outraged at the suggestion that this land belonged to Brazil, Meza Guerrero drew his gun and threatened to “send an armed squadron of Paraguayans to encircle the Brazilian soldiers.” The situation quickly deescalated once Meza Guerrero handed over his weapon. According to the *Jornal do Brasil*, “everything ended with a perfect understanding, with normal farewells” and Meza Guerrero even extended a cordial invitation to the Brazilian officers to spend the December holidays with their families in Asunción.

The Porto Renato incident raised the stakes of the border conflict by sparking new narratives of colonialism, national pride, and violence. And whereas the early months of this standoff mostly existed in the realm of inter-embassy communications, the events of October 21 attracted widespread media attention and inaugurated the battle for public opinion that played out over the following year. Paraguay in particular seized on this new theatre of conflict and routinely portrayed Brazil as the aggressor. According to Christine Folch, the Paraguayan public

⁶⁴ “Hasteamento da bandeira paraguaia em Coronel Renato provocou a sua ocupação pelos militares brasileiros.” *Jornal do Brasil*, 1/6/1966, 7.

saw Brazil's presence in Guaíra as “nothing less than a provocation to war and an affront to Paraguay's national sovereignty. Speeches and letters to the editor in repudiation of Brazilian aggression were an almost a daily feature in October and November 1965.”⁶⁵ News of the October 21 arrests circulated widely and sparked debate over the possibility of international mediation with Argentina, Uruguay, and even the United Nations as potential arbiters.⁶⁶



FIGURE 1.4: Headline of *La Libertad* newspaper, Asunción, Paraguay. October 1965. Image courtesy of the Revista do Clube Militar, Rio de Janeiro.

On November 24, Stroessner had two different meetings with foreign leaders to discuss the simmering border conflict. First, he spent the late morning with Dean Rusk, the U.S. Secretary of State returning from giving a speech in Rio de Janeiro. The transcript of this meeting reveals the depths of Stroessner's desire to be respected by world leaders: after emphasizing how well his soldiers had done in supporting the U.S. invasion of the Dominican Republic, Stroessner complained that Paraguay received far less economic aid than other Latin American countries. He then boasted that many foreign dignitaries, including French president Charles de Gaulle, “had assured him that he was a great president presiding over an exemplary

⁶⁵ Folch. “Surveillance and State Violence,” 47.

⁶⁶ This news comes from “Brasil propõe ao Paraguai arbitragem internacional” *Folha de São Paulo* 11/16/1965, 11; and “Brasil quer arbitragem em 7 Quedas,” *Jornal do Brasil* 11/18/1965, 17.

government.” Stroessner ended the meeting with an appeal that bordered on neediness, imploring Rusk to give Paraguay “more attention at the top and more favorable treatment in general.”⁶⁷ Despite the U.S.’s positive leanings toward Paraguay—Richard Nixon would later praise Paraguay “for opposing communism more strongly than any other nation in the world”⁶⁸—the meeting with Secretary Rusk left little doubt of Brazil’s status as the preferred partner of the United States.

In the afternoon Stroessner met with his former colleague, the Brazilian general Golbery do Couto e Silva, one of the most influential officials of Brazil’s military regime.⁶⁹ As the ideological architect of the dictatorship’s Doctrine of National Security (Doutrina de Segurança Nacional, DSN), Couto e Silva played a key role in mediating the border situation. Formed during his tenure at the Superior War College, Couto e Silva’s vision for the DSN included theories of war, of Brazil’s potential as a world superpower, and a development model that combined Keynesian economics and state capitalism.⁷⁰ A hydroelectric dam on the Paraná River promised to deliver new energy that could power the DSN’s vision for a new era of industrialization. Additionally, Couto e Silva surely saw the Guairá standoff as a perfect opportunity to fulfil the idea of ‘*fronteiras vivas*’ (living borders). This ideology linked Brazil’s global prowess to the development of its borders—both in the sense of physical fortification and also of Brazil’s ideological ascension beyond the boundaries of its nation-state.⁷¹ Under Couto e

⁶⁷ Memo of Conversation, State Department. FRUS, 1964–1968 Vol. 31, South and Central America; Mexico, Doc. 465.

⁶⁸ Dennis Hanratty and Sandra Meditz. *Paraguay: A Country Study*. (Washington, DC: Library of Congress, Federal Research Division, 1990), 46.

⁶⁹ ‘Diplomacia’ *Ultima Hora*, 11/25/1965, 6. Couto e Silva had been dispatched to Asunción at the personal request of President Castello Branco, largely because he and Stroessner knew each other well from their time together in the Brazilian Army Mission in Paraguay.

⁷⁰ Alves, *State and Opposition in Military Brazil*, 8.

⁷¹ Golbery do Couto e Silva. *Geopolítica do Brasil*. (Rio de Janeiro: Livraria J. Olympio, 1967).

Silva's guidance in the 1960s, these development ideologies eventually made the Itaipu dam the paragon of state development.

While politicians and military officials worked behind the scenes, popular forces began to mobilize their own responses. On November 27 the youth sections of the Febrista and Christian Democrats opposition parties organized a demonstration in Asunción. In defiance of Paraguay's Law 294 that outlawed almost all forms of public protest, the crowd wound its way through downtown, stopping only at targeted locations. Protesters burned a Brazilian flag in front of the Commerce Office of the Brazilian Embassy, threw Molotov cocktails through the windows of various Brazilian-owned business, lit smoke bombs across from the Center for Brazilian studies, and spread graffiti on the walls of the Brazilian Military Offices proclaiming: "*Paraguay sí, bandeirantes no: Fuera los mamelucos*" (Paraguay yes, invaders no: out with the bastards).⁷² The Paraguayan police descended on the protesters, violently dispersed the crowd and arrested 15 students.⁷³

Not only did this demonstration indicate the Paraguayan youth's willingness to defy a repressive dictatorship, it also belied the myth propagated by Stroessner that the entire country opposed Brazil. Over the following months, a specific narrative played on loop in the state-sponsored media, suggesting that for the first time since Stroessner took power in 1954 all

⁷² *Mameluco* is a Portuguese word that refers to the first generation offspring of a European and an Amerindian. Its use during the protests in Paraguay can be seen as a reference both to Brazil's alleged sense of superiority (for having descended from European culture), and the historical violation that Brazil wrought on native lands.

⁷³ Descriptions of the November 27 demonstration come from Centro de Documentación y Archivo para la Defensa de los Derechos Humanos (henceforth referred to as CDyA), 1F 0974-981; 9F 1829-1831; "Hasteamento da bandeira paraguaia em Coronel Renato provocou a sua ocupação pelos militares brasileiros." *Jornal do Brasil*, 1/6/1966, 7; Ricardo Caballero Aquino, interview by author, January 7, 2015, Asunción, Paraguay; and Note 949, Brazil embassy in Asunción, 12/2/1965. AHI-BSB.

political factions in Paraguay could unite around a common cause.⁷⁴ The opportunity to deflect criticism toward an external target allowed Stroessner to declare that,

All the sectors of public opinion in Paraguay have expressed their outrage at the occupation of the non-demarcated border zone by Brazilian forces. All of the centers, associations, clubs, students... the unions, [the] cultural, social, and political groups, the veterans of the Chaco War, the Army Reserves, everyone without exception has spontaneously denounced the hostile attitude [of Brazil].⁷⁵

Yet the November 27 protest provided evidence to the contrary, since it targeted both the Brazilian occupation *and* Stroessner's own complicity. As a high school student during the demonstration, Ricardo Caballero Aquino remembered a central rallying cry of the dictatorship having sold out the Paraguayan people in allowing Brazil to take over Guairá. Aquino recalls speeches from that day where student leaders spoke of how Stroessner had gone to military school in Rio de Janeiro in the 1940s and "has been in love with Brazil ever since."⁷⁶ Stroessner did, in fact, study in Brazil and maintained close ties with the Brazilian military. Keenly aware of this situation, Brazil's foreign ministry sought to exploit Stroessner's need to balance "his personal feelings with the official stance of the Paraguayan government."⁷⁷ Despite Stroessner's declarations of Paraguay's unity against the border occupation, he appeased Brazil at key moments. Less than a week after the anti-Brazil student protests, the Stroessner regime officially apologized to the Brazilian government and offered full compensation for the damages incurred.⁷⁸

⁷⁴ Examples of news articles discussing the unifying perception of opposition to Brazil include "El Partido R. Febrista se Pronuncia en Diferendo Fronterizo con Brasil," *El Pueblo* 1/6/1966; "Centro Paraguayo de Ingenieros al Condenar Actitud Inamistosa de Brasil se Solidariza con el Gobierno," *Patria* 1/14/1966.

⁷⁵ Stroessner speech to Paraguay's House of Representatives, 4/1/1966. Reproduced in L.R. Giménez, *Sobre el salto del Guairá al oído de América*. (Asunción: Anales del Paraguay, 1966), 6-13.

⁷⁶ Ricardo Caballero Aquino, interview by author. January 7, 2015, Asunción, Paraguay.

⁷⁷ Secret note 839. 930(42)(43), Brazil embassy in Asunción, 11/5/1965. AHI.

⁷⁸ "Paraguai vai indenizar o Brasil", *O Globo* 12/2/1965, 8.

Tensions continued to mount and according to Mario Gibson Barboza—the newly appointed ambassador in Asunción—1966 began in a climate of “enormous difficulty. Brazil found itself on the brink of war with Paraguay... The conflict was strong and violent, the impasse deep and insurmountable... and all over the great problem of sovereignty, that magical word for which people kill and are killed.”⁷⁹ Seeking to win the support of the international community, Paraguay’s Ministry of Foreign Relations began sending out copies of its previous communication with Brazil to embassies and foreign ministries all over the world.⁸⁰

In February, Pastor wrote to ambassador Barboza to express his “energetic protest” in light of news that Brazil had built roads along—and potentially across—the border and also that Brazil’s presence in the region now included a battalion of over 600 men.⁸¹ Comparing multiple versions of this letter offers a window into the minutia of the border conflict. Although Brazil eventually received a polished and fully edited copy of this letter, rough drafts can be found in the archive of Paraguay’s Ministry of Foreign Relations. In several instances the original draft referenced the waterfalls as “*los saltos*,” (the falls) only to have hand-written notes in the margins change the wording to “*el salto*” (the fall).⁸² This inconsistency suggests that even within the government, great attention was given to putting forth a unified message. With so much depending on each country’s ability to defend its particular view of the border, even the slightest mistake could prove disastrous.

With funding from the Ministry of War and Itamaraty, the early stages of Operation Sagarana built up Brazil’s presence along the border. After the detachment of troops in June

⁷⁹ Mario Gibson Barboza. *Na diplomacia, o traço todo da vida*. (Rio de Janeiro, Record, 1992), 85.

⁸⁰ The most widely distributed of these exchanges occurred in January of 1966, when Paraguay sent out copies of a lengthy letter (DPI No. 712) it had written to Brazil on December 14, 1965, sharing it with twenty different embassies throughout the world. Source: DPI notes 17-42, 1966. AHCP.

⁸¹ DPI 75, 2/9/1966. Source: AHCP.

⁸² DPI 75, 2/9/1966. Source: AHCP. This drafting error occurred on pages two and three.

fulfilled the first objective of occupying the region, Operation Sagarana moved on to its second phase and constructed multiple airstrips, a vast network of roads, multiple housing complexes, and electricity lines that connected Porto Renato to the city of Guaíra. Additionally, Coronel Tosta used his connections with the Brazilian Institute for Agrarian Reform (Instituto Brasileiro de Reforma Agraria, IBRA) to help secure land titles throughout the region. These holdings eventually accomplished the longer-term goals of building schools, hospitals, and residences to support an expanded military population.⁸³ While both governments jockeyed for political and diplomatic leverage in the ongoing border debate, Operation Sagarana steadily reinforced Brazil's physical claim to the area.

In early March, Brazil's National Security Council (Conselho Nacional de Segurança, CSN) convened at the Palácio Laranjeiras in Rio de Janeiro. Bringing together President Castelo Branco, his entire cabinet, and every high-ranking government minister, this CSN meeting focused exclusively on the border conflict with Paraguay.⁸⁴ In the lead-up to this gathering, the Serviço de Segurança Nacional—a branch of the military's secret police—had submitted a report about a Paraguayan plot to incite rebellion amongst the border population. The lead investigator, a Coronel Moreira, suggested that once the border communities rose up, Paraguayan-trained guerrilla soldiers would proceed to “infiltrate Brazilian lands and massacre the soldiers posted in Porto Renato in order to ‘cleanse their national honor.’”⁸⁵ No uprising ever occurred and Brazil's top leaders likely never saw Paraguay's army as a credible threat. But the unfolding situation represented more than just potential border violence. At one point President Branco observed

⁸³ 48 hours after meeting with Tosta, IBRA's Director of Land Resources, General Jaul Pires de Castro, signed a decree to expropriate lands in the border zone of Amambaí. “Operation Sagarana,” Secret report CTF/1, 254(43), paragraphs 38-44. 6/22/1967. AHI-BSB.

⁸⁴ Minutes of the CNS, 3/16/1966, in BR AN.BSB N8.0.PSN, EST.286. National Archive, Brasília.

⁸⁵ SSN/188/502.52, in BR.DFAN.BSB.Z4.SNA.CFR.0006, National Archive, Brasília.

that the Guaíra conflict held serious implications for all of South America, emphasizing above all that Paraguay played an essential role in limiting the hegemony of Argentina.⁸⁶

In the CSN debate over how best to handle the border conflict with Paraguay, the Minister for Mines and Energy, Mauro Thibau suggested that Brazil simply build a smaller-scale hydroelectric project exclusively within its own territory. Thibau saw the current proposal for a dam at the Guaíra falls as unnecessary, stating that a lower production of four or five million kilowatts would provide more than enough to satisfy the nation's energy needs. The Minister of Planning, Roberto de Oliveira Campos, immediately voiced his agreement and suggested a series of three interconnected small dams as another viable option.⁸⁷ After these statements, however, the idea of a scaled-down project received no further attention and the meeting returned to its goal of figuring out how to take advantage of the ongoing border conflict to build the most powerful hydroelectric dam possible. The two ministers in charge of Brazil's energy and engineering sectors clearly objected to the idea of what would become Itaipu, yet the commanding military leaders seemed indifferent to the exact details of Brazil's energy needs. Rather, they aimed to put into practice the ideology of *Brasil Grande*. Not only would a massive dam bring symbolic prestige on a global scale, but its inclusion of Paraguay as a geopolitical pawn would help redraw the boundaries of power relations in the Southern Cone.

The changing geopolitical landscape impacted all governments in the region. In Paraguay, the Stroessner regime sought to leverage its position between Brazil and Argentina—both geographically and politically—to increase its own economic standing. A report from the U.S. embassy in Asunción observed that “To bring pressure on Brazil ... Paraguay is now

⁸⁶ Minutes of the CNS, 3/16/1966, in BR AN.BSB N8.0.PSN, EST.286, 2. AN-BSB.

⁸⁷ Ibid., 24-26.

playing up improved relations with Argentina.”⁸⁸ This eventually led Stroessner to negotiate a deal with Argentina for a second binational dam on the same Paraná River, a project that resulted in the Yacyretá hydroelectric station some 500 kilometers downstream of the future Itaipu site. Paraguay thus played into the Brazil-Argentina rivalry to stake a claim to two different hydroelectric projects along its borders. For Argentina, competition over the Paraná River belonged to what the former Argentine diplomat Juan Archibaldo Lanus referred to as the “hydroelectric saga.”⁸⁹ Along with threatening its own energy projects further downstream, a Brazil-Paraguay dam would cut off Argentina’s shipping and commercial lines to São Paulo through the Paraná-Tietê river systems. More conspiratorially, Argentina would also claim that Brazil could use a dam as a “water bomb” weapon to flood Buenos Aires.⁹⁰ Despite its efforts, the Argentine government could not slow Brazil’s encroaching influence, either along the Paraná River or throughout the Southern Cone.

Support from the U.S. government helps explain Brazil’s willingness to antagonize neighboring countries. At an economic forum held in Buenos Aires, Paraguayan delegates approached Lincoln Gordon, the former ambassador to Brazil and current Assistant Secretary for Inter-American Affairs, to discuss the border conflict at Guaíra. Gordon acknowledged that he had indeed received all of the documents sent by Paraguay over the previous year—none of which received an official response—but indicated “that it would be very difficult for Brazil to remove its military forces.” Moreover, he voiced concerns about a “smear campaign” in the Paraguayan media against Brazil. Although Gordon suggested that his government sided with

⁸⁸ Department of State Airgram, No. A-167, 10/13/1963. Source: OAP, <https://repository.library.brown.edu/studio/item/bdr:355471/> accessed 1/28/2016.

⁸⁹ Juan Archibaldo Lanús. *De Chapultepec al Beagle: política exterior argentina, 1945-1980*. (Buenos Aires, Argentina: Emecé Editores, 1984), 294.

⁹⁰ MRE No. 18/73, 8/18/1973. AHCP.

Brazil in the border conflict, he did inform the Paraguayans of U.S. interests for the prospect of building a hydroelectric dam on the Paraná River.⁹¹

An analysis of U.S. financial support in the Southern Cone during the 1960s further reveals shifts in the region's geopolitical landscape. As the United States' strongest Cold War ally in Latin America, Brazil received the largest amount of Alliance for Progress funds in the western hemisphere.⁹² Paraguay, however, had been the first nation in Latin America to request aid from the Alliance for Progress and its package of \$80 million amounted to almost 25 percent of its entire gross domestic product (GDP).⁹³ Among other initiatives, U.S. economic aid helped construct a 200-mile highway connecting the Paraguayan capital of Asunción to the Brazilian border. This U.S.-funded road gave Paraguay a new commercial trade route to the Atlantic Ocean, further reorienting Paraguay's economic and political compass away from Argentina and toward Brazil. Frank Mora and Jerry Cooney write that the United States supported Stroessner's growing ties with Brazil largely because of the U.S. State Department's increasing suspicions of Argentina's civilian president Arturo Illia (1963-1966).⁹⁴ Illia had vowed to cancel all foreign oil contracts in Argentina, while also significantly increasing commercial ties to the Soviet Union.⁹⁵ Consequently, the U.S. economic aid to Argentina dropped from \$135 million in 1963 to \$21 million in 1964.⁹⁶ Fueled in part by foreign funding, Brazil soon surpassed Argentina as the major force in the Southern Cone.

⁹¹ DPI 192, 4/14/1966. AHCP.

⁹² Rabe, *The Killing Zone*, 108.

⁹³ Frank O. Mora and Jerry W. Cooney. *Paraguay and the United States*. (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2007), 167.

⁹⁴ Mora and Cooney, *Paraguay and the United States*, 180.

⁹⁵ José Paradiso. *Debates y trayectoria de la política exterior argentina*. (Buenos Aires, Argentina: Grupo Editor Latinoamericano, 1993), 150.

⁹⁶ Lester D. Langley. *America and the Americas: the United States in the Western Hemisphere*. (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1989).

Against the backdrop of these shifting geopolitical alliances, the impasse deepened between Brazil and Paraguay. In early April, Stroessner gave a lengthy speech to Paraguay's House of Representatives denouncing Brazil's invasion of Guaíra and its failure to honor the legal and moral codes of "panamericanism that serve as the foundation of cooperation, solidarity, and friendship amongst the peoples of this hemisphere." His description of Brazil as an imperialist nation juxtaposed his characterization of Paraguay as a "generous, welcoming, and heroic" country that harbored neither "a domineering spirit nor greed."⁹⁷ The rhetoric of this speech echoed almost daily in the pages of Paraguay's newspapers. *Patria*, the official print organ of Stroessner's Colorado Party, ran a month-long series of articles titled "Guairá in the spotlight of America."⁹⁸ Even opposition newspapers got swept up in wave of anti-Brazilian nationalism; *El Pueblo*, a paper connected to the Partido Febrista Revolucionario, changed its masthead to proclaim that, "The Guairá Falls are and always will be Paraguayan."⁹⁹ International media also provided coverage, including the New York Times and the Washington Post, and other large dailies in Mexico, Chile, Venezuela, Panama, and Argentina.¹⁰⁰

In Brazil, Juracy Magalhães consistently made brash and often belittling statements about Paraguay. In response to Paraguay's chancellor having called Brazil "aggressive and expansionist," Magalhães said that, "All of the Americas are well aware of the situation of our two governments and know which of the two must resort to fabricating artificial storylines."¹⁰¹ At a speech to the Chamber of Deputies in the middle of May, Magalhães spoke at great length

⁹⁷ Stroessner speech to Paraguay's House of Representatives, 4/1/1966. Reproduced in L.R. Giménez, *Sobre el salto del Guairá al oído de América*. (Asunción: Anales del Paraguay, 1966), 6-13.

⁹⁸ "Guaira al oído de America," *Patria*, April 1966.

⁹⁹ "Los Saltos del Guairá son y serán Siempre Paraguayos!" *El Pueblo*, 3/5/1966.

¹⁰⁰ Clippings of these international articles are included, respectively, in the following Itamaraty notes: No. 132 from 3/9/1966; No. 485 from 4/3/1966; No. 401 from 4/24/1966; No. 237 from 4/19/1966; No. 134 from 3/12/1966; No. 107 from 4/3/1966; and No. 244 from 3/19/1966. AHI-BSB.

¹⁰¹ "Juracy entrega ao julgamento da história a acusação paraguaia," *O Globo*, 4/27/1966, 17.

about the Treaty of 1872 and justified Brazil's subsequent actions by declaring "we have the duty to preserve the political legacy of our forefathers and the territory they left us." Despite the political posturing that consumed most of his remarks, Magalhães concluded by appealing directly to Paraguay and hinted at the underlying current of the border conflict that would soon take center stage: "We hope that the Paraguayan government trusts in the genuine sincerity of our offer to meet together for the wellbeing of both of our friendly nations, in hopes of jointly developing all of the resources offered by the Sete Quedas waterfalls."¹⁰²

In the ongoing maneuvers over a potential binational hydroelectric project, both parties aimed to strengthen their bargaining position. For Stroessner's government, this meant a continuation of its appeals to the international community and expanded efforts to legitimize its legal claim that the border region remained un-demarcated. Part of this strategy included hiring Gonzalo Facio Segrado as an outside consultant. The prominent Costa Rican lawyer was a former Chairman of the Council of the Organization of American States and during the Brazil-Paraguay border standoff, he served as Costa Rica's ambassador to the United States.¹⁰³ In Brazil, its leaders prepared for a forthcoming negotiation by seeking to pinpoint Paraguay's political weaknesses. After rumors emerged in May of a possible coup attempt against the Paraguayan dictator, an Itamaraty report expressed the position that "this situation can, at the moment, act in our benefit by creating a favorable environment for the meeting [with Paraguay] that is currently being planned."¹⁰⁴ Although Brazil's military regime considered Stroessner an important ally, it appears likely that the threat of a coup in Paraguay—or even just the veneer of

¹⁰² 'Diário do Congresso Nacional', 5/19/1966, p 61. Available at <http://imagem.camara.gov.br/Imagem/d/pdf/DCD19MAI1966.pdf#page=61>. Accessed 3/30/2015.

¹⁰³ "Operation Sagarana," Secret report CTF/1, 254(43), paragraph 69. 6/22/1967. AHI-BSB.

¹⁰⁴ Arquivo consolidado especial-SCR; incidente na fronteira, Tomo XII. AHI-BSB.

political instability—represented a powerful leverage point while negotiating the terms of a hydroelectric project.

The Act of Iguaçu and the Birth of Itaipu

The first official proposal for a binational meeting came in late April from Chancellor Sapena Pastor, with the caveat that Paraguay would only attend if Brazil's government agreed beforehand to withdraw its troops from Porto Renato.¹⁰⁵ Itamaraty agreed in principal to the idea of a border summit, but refused to meet Paraguay's conditions. On June 3 Sapena Pastor sent word to Brazil's embassy in Asunción that "after much reluctance" the Paraguayan government agreed to a meeting on the terms set out by Minister Magalhães. The two governments then agreed to meet two weeks later, with negotiations taking place in the Paraguayan city of Puerto Presidente Stroessner in the morning before moving across the river to Foz do Iguaçu for the afternoon session.¹⁰⁶ On June 21, representatives from both countries met in the border region for two intense days of negotiations that produced the Act of Iguaçu, a relatively short document laying the framework for a binational dam on the Paraná River.¹⁰⁷ Brazil's delegation consisted of 23 men from various ministries within the military regime. Paraguay's contingent counted 20 individuals of similar positions—including all four of the political figures that had been arrested by Brazilian troops the previous October.¹⁰⁸

¹⁰⁵ Sapena Pastor made this proposal directly to Brazil's ambassador, Jayme Souza Gomes, at a meeting in Asunción. Gomes then took the message back to Rio de Janeiro, at which point Foreign Minister Magalhães became Brazil's primary negotiator and contact for Itamaraty.

¹⁰⁶ Most of the descriptions of the Act of Iguaçu negotiations come from a confidential report written afterwards by Magalhães to President Castello Branco. Source: AAA/DAM/DF/G/SG/75/930.1(42)(43), in: JM 66.01.27/1(A) CMRE. CPDOC/FGV. Aspects of this account were confirmed and counter-balanced by a report from Paraguay's Special Border Commission, 9/16/1966. AHCP.

¹⁰⁷ The full document can be found at: "Diário Oficial da União," 8/8/1966, 9061-62. <http://www.jusbrasil.com.br/diarios/2934808/pg-43-secao-1-diario-oficial-da-uniao-dou-de-08-08-1966/pdfView>. Accessed on 3/30/2015.

¹⁰⁸ A full roster of the delegations can be found in CPDOC/FGV, JM pi 66.06.21, pasta III.

The meeting got off to a rocky start when Paraguay's delegation insisted on the creation of a neutral border zone and the 50-50 split of all energy eventually produced—the exact criteria Brazil had refused throughout the preceding months. Brazil argued that a neutral frontier would set a dangerous precedent by which any neighboring country, in theory, could then challenge its borders.¹⁰⁹ This stalemate carried into the afternoon and at one point Chancellor Sapena Pastor insinuated that both governments needed to reassess the Treaty of 1872. Magalhães replied that a treaty could only be renegotiated by another treaty or by a war; and since Brazil refused to discuss a new treaty, he asked if Paraguay was willing to start a war. Taken aback, Sapena Pastor asked if the Brazilian chancellor was threatening Paraguay. Magalhães said that he was simply trying to have a realistic conversation based on facts.¹¹⁰

At this peak of tension both parties agreed to call off the day's negotiations and reconvene the next morning. Privately, Magalhães commented that this impasse might prove insurmountable.¹¹¹ Before leaving, however, Sapena Pastor and Magalhães exchanged proposals from their respective delegations. Each group deliberated deep into the night and returned the following morning with nearly identical documents. The main differences concerned two items, and the entire second day focused on the phrasing of this pair of articles. The relative ease with which the second day progressed suggested that Magalhães' previous "threat" of war had simply been a negotiating strategy. Regardless, Brazil's posturing over these two days—and its geopolitical bullying in the preceding years—served to speed along the deliberations. At almost

¹⁰⁹ The Estado Maior das Forças Armadas (EMFA) made this argument on June 16 as part of the larger process of drafting Brazil's proposal for the eventual negotiations with Paraguay. Source: AAA/DAM/DF/G/SG/75/930.1(42)(43), in: JM 66.01.27/1(A) CMRE, Appendix 7. CPDOC/FGV.

¹¹⁰ Ibid., Appendix 21.

¹¹¹ Ibid., Appendix 16.

every step, the Brazilian delegation controlled the tone of the debate and in the end, it secured an agreement stacked in Brazil's favor.

At 7pm in the presence of both delegations and various reporters, Magalhães and Sapena Pastor signed the final document. It consisted of eight articles, with numbers three and four the critical pair that had demanded so much attention. Article three stated that Brazil and Paraguay agreed to jointly explore the hydroelectric potential of their shared waters; the Paraguayan delegation celebrated this recognition of equal domain to the Paraná River as its greatest accomplishment.¹¹² Article four was the most controversial part of the final agreement. Although it proclaimed that the energy produced would be “divided equally between both countries” it also stipulated that each nation maintained the right to buy the other's unused portion “at a fair price.” With a fraction of the population and energy needs of Brazil, Paraguay would never use its fifty-percent share. Paraguay initially suggested selling its leftover energy “at cost price” [*a precio de costo*] but gave in when Brazil threatened to end negotiations during the afternoon of the second day.¹¹³ As such, Brazil's insertion of the intentionally vague “fair price” clause guaranteed its ability to reap tremendous profits from the Itaipu Dam.¹¹⁴

The final text also included a single memorandum. This document declared that although Brazil remained firmly convinced of its territorial rights as granted by the Treaty of 1872, it would remove its troops from the border as a sign of goodwill. The very next paragraph states that Paraguay also maintained its interpretation of the Treaty of 1872 and asserted its own

¹¹² Paraguay's post-negotiation report celebrated Brazil reversing its position that the waterfalls and its potential energy belonged within Brazilian territory. Special Border Commission Report, 9/16/1966. Source: AHCP.

¹¹³ Source: AAA/DAM/DF/G/SG/75/930.1(42)(43), in: JM 66.01.27/1(A) CMRE, Appendix 22. CPDOC/FGV.

¹¹⁴ As will be shown, Appendix C, article eight of the treaty of the 1973 Treaty of Itaipu required Paraguay to sell all of its unused energy exclusively to Brazil at the set price of US\$300 dollars per gigawatt hour (GWh). More importantly, the non-negotiable price would stay fixed until 2023. (Ricardo Canese. *Itaipú: Dependencia o Desarrollo*. (Editorial Araverá, 1985), 16). These treaty terms were only renegotiated in 2009, under the leftist governments of Inácio “Lula” da Silva in Brazil and Fernando Lugo in Paraguay.

sovereign claim to the exact region occupied by Brazil's military. What appears to be a fundamental paradox—both countries using an alleged peace treaty to codify the exact reasons that nearly brought them to war—perfectly embodies the border conflict itself. Each government made public gestures of cooperation only because it facilitated the development of a hydroelectric project. Yet neither changed its ideological approach and in the end, the border conflict continued to fester for years.

The signing of the Act of Iguaçu invoked a sweeping discourse of modernization and unity. Magalhães proclaimed that the agreement dissolved the tensions that “sullied the longstanding friendship of Brazil and Paraguay” and honored the pan-American community by promoting “the peace and progress of our entire continent.” Sapena Pastor congratulated all involved for “finding solutions to the most difficult problems facing the relationship between Brazil and Paraguay in the 20th century.”¹¹⁵ Newspapers in both countries disseminated this triumphant narrative. In Asunción, *La Tribuna* celebrated the “positive and eloquent” results of the meeting, and Rio de Janeiro's *O Globo* remarked on the unprecedented exchange of peaceful negotiations that paved the way to construct the world's largest dam.¹¹⁶ The text of the Act of Iguaçu proclaimed that it represented a new era of a “growing and fraternal unity between Brazil and Paraguay.”¹¹⁷ Its symbolic achievements, however, would repeatedly be tested.

Less than a week later, *O Globo* reported that Brazil had honored its agreement by beginning to withdraw its soldiers from Porto Renato.¹¹⁸ If true, this would have indicated Brazil's genuine interest in building a new period of mutual prosperity. Yet the Brazilian regime

¹¹⁵ Both closing remarks reproduced in: JM 66.01.27/1(A) CMRE. CPDOC/FGV.

¹¹⁶ “Culminaron con Positivo y Elocuente Resultado Tratativas de Cancilleres de Paraguay y Brasil.” *La Tribuna*, 6/23/1966, 5; “Retirada da Fôrça de Guaíra em Troca da Aceitação da Fronteira.” *O Globo*, 6/23/1966, 11.

¹¹⁷ This quotation is from the 8th and final article of the Act of Iguaçu, which congratulates both Chancellors for their collaboration.

¹¹⁸ “Brasil Abandonou o Guaíra.” *O Globo*, 6/28/1966.

made no such efforts and the detachment remained firmly entrenched along the border. By September, Paraguay's government grew so frustrated that Sapena Pastor personally denounced Brazil at the General Assembly of the United Nations for renegeing on its promise. In response, Brazil said that although most of its troops had been removed, one sergeant and one corporal remained in order to guard the barracks and "dissuade contraband activities."¹¹⁹

Only in early December, nearly 18 months after its soldiers first arrived in Porto Renato, did Brazil finally withdraw its military forces. Even then, the removal of these troops became a political act that perpetuated the underlying causes of the border conflict. Brazil's military authorities decided to simply replace the soldiers with customs officials.¹²⁰ Brazilians continued to occupy the same buildings and housing units, only now with civilian border officials rather than military personnel.¹²¹ On December 3 a ceremony at Porto Renato commemorated the compound's rebranding as a customs outpost.¹²² Various military and civilian authorities gathered in the courtyard of Porto Renato's barracks and an opening speech declared that "even if the Brazilian government has agreed to remove this detachment, our nation's flag will remain here forever on this historic mast first raised by the soldiers of the 5th Border Company." The lieutenant in charge of the Porto Renato troops lowered the flag and handed it to the new head of the customs administration, who then re-hung the flag and raised it once again. (Figure 1.5) In his concluding remarks, Coronel Tosta thanked the troops for their service and declared that "from this moment onward, a different arm of the nation will be responsible for the daily raising

¹¹⁹ This information comes from a report marked "secret/urgent" written on 6/6/1967. Source: BR AN,BSB N8.0.PSN, EST.286 728-737. National Archive, Rio de Janeiro (hereafter AN-RJ).

¹²⁰ Authorization to install a customs outpost in the military offices at Porto Renato came on November 28 from General José Horácio da Cunha Garcia, the Commanding Officer of the 9th Military Region. "Operation Sagarana," Secret report CTF/1, 254(43), paragraph 98. 6/22/1967. AHI-BSB.

¹²¹ CEFF Info No. 00206, 8/29/1968, In BR AN,BSB N8.0.PSN, EST.286. AN-BSB.

¹²² Descriptions of the December 3 ceremony in "Operation Sagarana," Secret report CTF/1, 254(43), paragraphs 104-110. 6/22/1967. AHI-BSB.

of this flag so that Brazil's sovereign presence is always known in this corner of our territory."



FIGURE 1.5: Flag ceremony to inaugurate Porto Renato's transition from a military outpost to a customs office, December 3, 1966. Photo credit: Octávio Tosta, courtesy of the Revista do Clube Militar, Rio de Janeiro.

Brazil's government did not remove its troops before making one final deal it had sought for years: uninhibited access to the fertile agricultural lands of eastern Paraguay. In his analysis of the Paraná borderlands, Andrew Nickson writes that "In exchange for the withdrawal of Brazilian troops from the Falls, agreed in the Act of Iguazu, the Paraguayan Government removed existing restrictions on Brazilian colonization."¹²³ Specifically, the Stroessner regime repealed the 1940 Agrarian Statute that prohibited the sale of land to foreigners within 150 km of the border. Although this law had previously been circumvented—Brazilian farmers trickled across the border for decades—its abolition allowed the open sale of land. Brazilians began to flood *en masse* into Paraguay's eastern frontier, setting off a wave of agricultural migrants

¹²³ R. Andrew Nickson. "Brazilian Colonization of the Eastern Border Region of Paraguay." *Journal of Latin American Studies*. 1981, 13 (1): 121.

known as “*brasiguaios*”—a central narrative in Chapter Five of this dissertation. Brazil’s maneuvers during the border crisis therefore secured not only geopolitical prestige and access to unprecedented hydroelectric energy, but a monopoly on what became a thriving agricultural enclave. By refusing to remove its troops unless Stroessner granted unfettered access to new lands, the Brazilian government expanded its reach even deeper into Paraguayan territory.

With the border zone now demobilized, Brazil and Paraguay embarked on the precipitous task of actually building their dam. In February of 1967 the governments established a binational group called the Joint Technical Commission to oversee all engineering and logistical details of the project’s construction. Similar to the statements made after the signing of the Act of Iguaçu, the creation of the Joint Technical Commission elicited wide praise. Magalhães saw this as “the start of this great enterprise... It will initiate a plan of action and collaboration that, if done efficiently, will bring about the ultimate goal: the common good.”¹²⁴ These public celebrations again masked the actual state of affairs along the border.

The relationship between Brazil and Paraguay operated at two distinct levels. Publicly, both countries respected their binational agreements and the sovereignty of their neighbor, yet each nation continued to pursue its own territorial claims by building houses, roads, and other infrastructure along the border.¹²⁵ This contradiction produced various new moments of conflict. In July 1967 Paraguay’s ambassador brought allegations that a group of Brazilian soldiers had forcibly expelled local Guarani families. Not only did the troops allegedly displace an entire community, but they did so after having ventured into Paraguayan territory.¹²⁶ Actions such as

¹²⁴ Magalhães speech at the Conference of the Chancellors of the Plate Basin, February 27, 1967. Reproduced in Juracy Magalhães, *Minha experiência diplomática*, Rio de Janeiro: Loje, 1971), 90-92.

¹²⁵ Reports of Paraguay’s increased border presence come from “Operation Sagarana,” Secret report CTF/1, 254(43), paragraph 100. 6/22/1967. AHI-BSB; and Ministry of War report No. 259/69/S-102-CIE. 5/12/1969. In DFANBSB Z4 SNA CFR 0007. AN-BSB.

¹²⁶ Minutes of a meeting held in the Asunción office of Ambassador Gibson Barboza, July 1967. In BR AN,BSB N8.0.PSN, EST.286, p 772-773. AN-BSB.

these reinforced the belief amongst Paraguayans that Brazil remained an untrustworthy enemy. And in Brazil a rumor circulated that some Paraguayan nationalists planned to “recover” the border zone. According to a secret CSN report submitted in August 1968, this plot would take place in 1970 as a way to honor the 100th anniversary of the end of the War of the Triple Alliance.¹²⁷ Nothing along these lines ever occurred, but a climate of mutual distrust and deep animosity continued to permeate the Brazil-Paraguay border.

One of the most persistent and bizarre issues concerned an observation pillar overlooking the fifth waterfall. Originally erected by Brazil in the 1930s, the pillar was graffitied, knocked over, or removed completely throughout 1969. In each instance the Brazilian government restored it to its previous condition only to see it defaced once again.¹²⁸ (Figure 1.6)

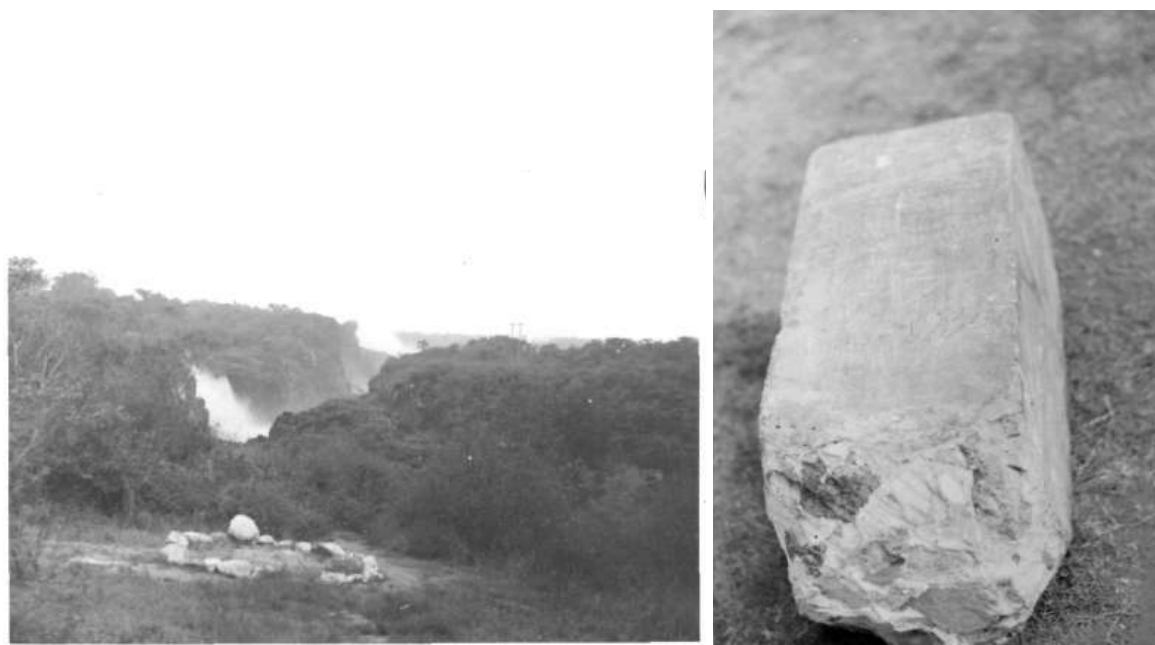


FIGURE 1.6. Left: The observation pillar’s location above the 5th waterfall. Right: the pillar after being uprooted. CSN report G/AAA/3/240.(43), 1/24/1970. In: BR AN,BSB N8.0.PSN, EST.285. AN-BSB.

¹²⁷ Report from the Conselho de Segurança Nacional, 8/29/1968, in BR AN,BSB N8.0.PSN, EST.286. AN-BSB.

¹²⁸ G/AAA/3/240.(43) Letter from Ambassador Mario Gibson Barboza to João Baptista Figueiredo, Secretary-General of the National Security Council, 1/24/1970. AHI-BSB.

The controversy over this otherwise meaningless concrete post revealed how each country continued to cling to its interpretation of the border. For the Brazilian government, the pillar symbolized how the border had definitively been outlined for nearly a century and in the words of one report, it functioned as “very visible proof of the imaginary line that defines the international border.”¹²⁹ The unknown perpetrators, for their part, most assuredly viewed the marker as an affront to Paraguay’s sovereignty. The Stroessner government shared this stance and in July 1969 Paraguayan officials announced the renewed possibility of international mediation.¹³⁰

The intransigence of the border conflict created a situation where geopolitics took final precedence. As an impasse threatened to derail the much-desired hydroelectric project, the construction of a dam held the potential to fulfill multiple objectives. The eventual project design reveals the geopolitical dynamics that formed the underlying core of Itaipu; as Brazil’s Foreign Minister wrote in a confidential report, the dam “should flood the entire disputed zone, and as such, would finally resolve this problem.”¹³¹

Before the Joint Technical Commission outlined the exact plans for Itaipu—including the official plan to flood the border region—there still remained a great deal of planning, negotiating, and political posturing. In April 1969, representatives from Brazil, Paraguay, Argentina, Uruguay, and Bolivia met in Brasília to sign the Tratado da Bacia do Prata (Treaty of the Plate Basin), a broad agreement to establish a multi-lateral basis for the “rational development and physical integration” of the rivers and tributaries that formed the greater Plate

¹²⁹ CSN report G/AAA/3/240.(43), 1/24/1970. In: BR AN,BSB N8.0.PSN, EST.285. AN-BSB.

¹³⁰ Telegram 1672, to the Brazilian embassy in Asunción, 7/30/1969. AHI-BSB.

¹³¹ Itamaraty report, 7/5/1967. BR AN,BSB N8.0.PSN, EST.286, 736. AN-RJ.

Basin.¹³² The Treaty also provided the framework for regional collaboration that helped facilitate the creation of the Itaipu Binational Corporation. A year later, the Joint Technical Commission oversaw the signing of a Cooperation Accord (Convênio de Cooperação) between Eletrobras and ANDE, the federal energy agencies for Brazil and Paraguay, respectively.¹³³ This Accord marked the first tangible step in the design and implementation of what became Itaipu. With a geopolitical conflict still lingering, the Commission hired two “neutral” engineering firms to conduct the initial surveys: International Engineering Co. (from the USA) and Interconsult-SPA (from Italy). This work began in February of 1971 with the collection of data, including all previous technical studies, and a new expanded survey of all possible designs to maximize the hydroelectric potential of the area. These measurements involved aerial photography, bathometric and topographic surveys, hydraulic and sedimentary readings, and a series of other specialized procedures. Four task forces also studied the difference in electrical frequencies between Brazil and Paraguay; the technical details of constructing large-scale turbines; the potential risks of building on particular portions of the Paraná River; and the ecological effects of the project. In October 1972 these results yielded fifty different design proposals for ten different locations. After debating between the fifty plans, the governments of Brazil and Paraguay officially chose the Itaipu proposal in January 1973.

With the details of Itaipu starting to take shape, opposition to the project also began to form throughout the region. Oscar Creydt, the leader of the Paraguayan Communist Party, denounced the Itaipu proposal in general and the Stroessner regime in particular for having “sold

¹³² This agreement emerged from two previous summits held in Buenos Aires in February of 1967, and Santa Cruz de la Sierra, Bolivia, in May of 1968. The full text of the Treaty of the Plate Basin can be found at: https://www.dpc.mar.mil.br/sites/default/files/ssta/legislacao/hidrovia/trat_bcprata.pdf A follow-up meeting held on June 3 1971, at the IV Conference of the Chancellors of the Plate Basin, saw representatives of the same five countries sign another agreement, the Declaração de Assunção Sobre o Aproveitamento de Rios Internacionais.

¹³³ Information on the Cooperation Accord and all subsequent details of the survey work come from Ministry of Mines and Energy report, MME No. 602.232/73, 4/9/1973. AN-BSB.

the Guairá waterfall” to Brazilian imperialism. Specifically, Creydt called Stroessner an “anti-nationalist” and called on people to resist Brazil’s occupation by overthrowing Paraguay’s dictatorship.¹³⁴ One of the loudest voices of protest during this period came from Argentina, as its government became increasingly worried that the Itaipu dam proposal would seriously jeopardize its own development goals, specifically the Corpus hydroelectric dam that it hoped to build on a lower portion of the Paraná River. Argentine politicians, nationalists, and engineers all joined the chorus of opposition by calling Brazil “hegemonic” and a “regional bully.”¹³⁵ On two occasions, Argentina took its case against Brazil to the United Nations.¹³⁶ The conflict between Brazil, Argentina, and Paraguay over these competing binational dams persisted throughout the decade. Although the 1979 Tripartite Agreement officially quelled the regional dispute, it came only after primary construction on Itaipu had already been completed.¹³⁷

The 1973 Treaty of Itaipu

After receiving the Itaipu proposal in January, the governments of Brazil and Paraguay began preparing a new treaty to inaugurate their collaboration.¹³⁸ The Joint Technical Commission had already worked out most of the engineering details, but various issues still remained. According to a National Security Council report, the most pressing questions dealt with the overall cost of

¹³⁴ “El Salto del Guairá ha sido vendido por el regimen military antinacional encabezado por Stroessner.” Collection of essays by Oscar Creydt. Personal holdings of Martin Almada.

¹³⁵ As referenced in Milton Cabral, speech to National Congress, 9/22/1972. Source: *Diário do Congresso Nacional*, Seção II, Ano XXVII, n. 96; and Arthur Fonseca speech to Chamber of Deputies, 10/20/1972, source: *Diário do Congresso Nacional*, Seção I, 1972.

¹³⁶ “A Argentina cria na ONU um problema para Itaipu.” *Jornal da Tarde*, 11/23/1973, 2. Source: Centro de Documentação de Itaipu Binacional (hereafter CDIB), R.6.139; and “Na ONU, a Argentina ganha do Brasil.” *Jornal da Tarde*, 12/13/1974. Source: CDIB R6.944.

¹³⁷ This agreement established rules and engineering parameters for how both the Itaipu and Corpus dams could simultaneously function on the same river. For more details on the Itaipu-Corpus conflict and the Tripartite Agreement, see: Schilling 1981; Caubet 1991; Almeida Mello 1997; and Nehring Belo 2011.

¹³⁸ The earliest outline of this agreement circulated four months beforehand, but only after the Itaipu proposal in January did the deliberations began in earnest “Anteprojeto de Tratado.” September 1972. AHI-BSB.

the project and how much each country would contribute; the energy output relative to the needs of both nations; the political ramifications for the entire Plate Basin; and the proposed timeline of construction deadlines.¹³⁹

The process of negotiation in the lead-up to the 1973 Treaty of Itaipu differed drastically from what occurred with the Act of Iguaçu in 1966. At that time, the preceding border conflict meant that the bulk of the actual negotiations took place over the two tense days of in-person meetings. By 1973, in contrast, almost all of the groundwork had already been laid, either by the initial 1966 Act, the various international summits, or through the work of the Joint Technical Commission. The official deliberations still remained, but for all intents and purposes the Treaty of Itaipu was firmly agreed upon long before Presidents Medici and Stroessner met in Brasília to sign it on April 26, 1973. The ease with which this Treaty came into being resulted from a deeply contentious fifteen-year process of border standoffs and geopolitical posturing. So although the final “negotiations” lacked the drama of its 1966 predecessor, the Treaty of Itaipu functioned as a more benign culmination of an earlier and highly controversial history.

Compared to the more concise Act of Iguaçu, the expansive 1973 Treaty of Itaipu consisted of twenty main articles complemented by three lengthy appendixes. Despite its size, the Treaty had two main objectives: to codify the engineering details proposed by the Joint Technical Commission the previous January and to establish the bureaucratic contours of the dam’s governing body, the Itaipu Binational Corporation. The 1973 Treaty stipulated that Itaipu Binational existed under the auspices of international public law, meaning that it functioned as an internationally protected entity that guaranteed equality between both member nations. It entailed a two-tier governing structure, with the Administrative Council handling all political and

¹³⁹ CSN Informação no. 018/la.SC/73, 3/8/1973. In 13AC-2, 782-784. AN-BSB.

bureaucratic components and the Executive Directory in charge of the technical and business side. Intended as a fully binational project, all departments within Itaipu had to count equal representation from both Brazil and Paraguay. This included the highest leadership positions, as two executive directors would jointly oversee Itaipu's major developments.

A few smaller items tucked into the final appendix held the greatest geopolitical significance. Section 3 of Appendix C outlines the financial details for Brazil and Paraguay would share Itaipu's energy.¹⁴⁰ Honoring the agreement made in the 1966 Act of Iguaçu, the 1973 Treaty maintained that both countries retained equal right to the energy. The 1973 document, however, stipulated that all unused energy be sold to the other member nation at a far-below market fixed price of \$US 300 per gigawatt hour.¹⁴¹ Shocking as it might seem, neither country could modify this price for fifty years, not even to account for inflation. Moreover, financial transactions would use "the currency available to the Binational," which in practice meant Brazilian cruzeiros. Paulo Schilling (an economist) and Ricardo Canese (an engineer) argue that the 1973 treaty served to entrench Paraguay's dependency on Brazil by pegging a substantial portion of its GDP to the Brazilian currency. The Treaty also effectively forced Paraguay to spend the money it received on Brazilian import products, the simplest way to spend the cruzeiros it received from the Binational Corporation.¹⁴²

The power that Brazil wielded over Paraguay throughout the preceding fifteen years paid huge dividends in both a geopolitical and financial manner. This begs the question as to why the Paraguayan government accepted Brazil's terms. The geographer J.M.G. Kleinpenning argues

¹⁴⁰ The full text in Portuguese can be found at http://www.aneel.gov.br/arquivos/PDF/dlg1973023_IATIPU.pdf. Accessed June 11, 2015.

¹⁴¹ The low cost stipulated for Itaipu (\$300/GWh) is evident when compared to the price allotted for the Yacyretá dam, when during this same period Argentina and Paraguay agreed to sell its energy at \$2,998/GWh.

¹⁴² Paulo R. Schilling and Ricardo Canese. *Itaipu: geopolítica e corrupção*. (São Paulo: Centro Ecumênico de Documentação e Informação. 1991), 29-31.

that Stroessner's acquiescence emerged from a keen awareness of Brazil's military, political, and economic power—a geopolitical dominance on display throughout this chapter.¹⁴³ Supporters of the treaty also contend that far from “exploiting” Paraguay, Itaipu represented a fair partition of energy and resources given the upfront contributions made by each nation. Because the Paraguayan government did not have sufficient capital in 1973, the Banco do Brasil loaned \$US50 million for the launching of Itaipu Binational.¹⁴⁴ Moreover, Paraguay would only ever use roughly five percent of the electricity generated by Itaipu.

Along with Stroessner's personal views of Brazil and the financial details of the dam's construction, Paraguay's participation in the Itaipu project promised unprecedented growth and prestige for the small, land-locked nation—no matter how uneven the conditions. One month after the Treaty's signing, for example, Sapena Pastor declared in a speech to the economics graduates of the National University:

Itaipu is not a business deal, neither for Brazil nor for Paraguay. It does not matter whether we obtain millions of dollars from it. Our objective is not its economic output, the objective is national development, the development of Brazil, the development of Paraguay. If it brings a flow of dollars into the national treasury, that is a secondary consideration, since what Itaipu is going to generate, first and foremost, is development.¹⁴⁵

As had become customary, politicians and the mainstream press praised the Treaty of Itaipu while a steady stream of criticism from below called attention to many of the document's more problematic aspects. The most negative responses came from Paraguay, where outrage to the Treaty focused on the financial repercussions. The Democratic Christian Party declared the 1973 Treaty even worse than the concessions made at the end of the War of the Triple Alliance,

¹⁴³ J.M.G. Kleinpenning. *Man and Land in Paraguay*. (Providence, RI: FORIS Publications, 1987), 180.

¹⁴⁴ Osny Duarte Pereira. *Itaipu: Pros e contras*. (Rio de Janeiro: Editora Paz e Terra, 1974, 227-232).

¹⁴⁵ R. Andrew Nickson, “Itaipú Hydro-Electric Paraguayan Perspective,” *Bulletin of Latin American Research*, Vol. 2, No. 1 (Oct., 1982), 7.

writing “We have just witnessed the most deafening failure of Paraguayan diplomacy in its history. In 1870, we were defeated after a heroic resistance, but at least we were able to negotiate with pride.” In contrast, they saw Itaipu as a shameful result of the Paraguayan government selling out its people: “the miniscule price at which we must sell our energy is absurd. The fifty years of this price fixing is nothing short of cowardly.”¹⁴⁶ Demonstrations in Asunción denounced Stroessner’s “betrayal” and Paraguayans living in Buenos Aires threw eggs and painted graffiti on the walls of the Brazilian Embassy.¹⁴⁷ In the continued stalemate over the Itaipu and Corpus dams, anger at the 1973 Treaty also emerged in Argentina. An editorial in the Argentine newspaper *Mayoria* compared the relationship between Brazil and Paraguay at Itaipu with that of Panama and the United States at the Panama Canal, asking “how true can a friendship be between a country with 3 million inhabitants and its neighbor with 80 million?”¹⁴⁸

Despite these nodes of opposition, the Treaty of Itaipu received mainstream admiration as a modern marvel of the twentieth century. Stroessner declared that “Itaipu is a sign of our sovereign and fraternal destiny,” and further offered that Itaipu would function as the “morale boost” to Paraguay to a new level of prosperity.¹⁴⁹ The headline in *Patria*, a major Paraguayan daily, stated that “Itaipu represents the superstructure of the future.”¹⁵⁰ Particularly in Brazil, the celebratory narrative focused on how Itaipu would benefit the entire hemisphere. In a speech to Congress, Deputy Adhemer de Barros noted that although signed only by Brazil and Paraguay,

¹⁴⁶ “Itaipu: la gran entrega.” Boletín DE-CE, Junta Nacional del Partido Demócrata Cristiano. August, 1973. Source: CDyA, 224F.2171.

¹⁴⁷ Ministry of Foreign Relations D.P.I No. 264, 9/12/1973. Source: AHCP.

¹⁴⁸ As referenced in Telegram 1141, DAM-1/AIG from the Brazilian Embassy in Buenos Aires, 5/4/1973. Source: AHI-BSB. Criticisms also came from within Brazil, although they tended to focus on the engineering components of the Treaty and argued that other alternatives could still be explored and developed. Along with the engineer Marcondes Ferraz, other critics included people like the former governor of São Paulo, Lucas Nogueira Garcez. (“Itaipu não é a univa alternativa.” *Folha de São Paulo*, 6/8/1973; “Marcondes Ferraz: Itaipu vai criar zona de atritos.” *Diário Popular*, 5/18/1973)

¹⁴⁹ “‘Itaipu es el simbolo de nuestra soberana cocacion fraternal’, dijo ayer Stroessner.” *ABC Color*, 4/26/1973, 7-9.

¹⁵⁰ “Itaipu representa la superestructura del porvenir.” *Patria*, 6/8/1973.

the winner of the treaty “will be all of Latin America [...] as it will produce a new force of civilization.”¹⁵¹ In another speech, Deputy Amaral de Souza elaborated that Brazil acted not out of hegemonic desires, but from a sincere goal of achieving progress for all Latin America. Above all, de Souza saw Itaipu as

The beginning of future initiatives that will bring together and unite the nations of a new Continent, it is the start of a new phase in the relations between Latin American peoples, defined by reality, without political or ideological prejudice, and devoted exclusively to the economic, social and cultural development of a vast and extensive region, whose population aspires to, and demands an exit from its unjustified underdevelopment.¹⁵²

Conclusion

Over the following years, popular forces and critics of the dictatorship repeatedly challenged Itaipu’s triumphalist narrative. Yet even in 1973, before any construction crews had begun their colossal tasks of building the Itaipu dam, a significant change had already taken place. For fifteen years, the dictatorships of Brazil and Paraguay jockeyed for control not only of the waters and lands that made up their shared border, but for the right to define the border itself. On paper, Itaipu’s importance lay in its status as the largest hydroelectric dam in the world, a feat of engineering brilliance that could produce enough energy to modernize two countries. Yet in practice, Itaipu also had profound impacts on the formation of Latin America’s current geopolitical landscape. From 1957 through 1973, the events and debates over what would become the Itaipu dam helped crystallize new and increasingly uneven power relations throughout the region.

During the infancy of Brazil’s dictatorship, its leaders stood firm against the demands of both Paraguay and Argentina, helping launch Brazil’s ascent as the Southern Cone’s major

¹⁵¹ Adhemer de Barros speech, 4/25/1973. *Diário do Congresso Nacional*, Seção 1, 978.

¹⁵² Amaral de Souza speech, 4/26/1973. *Diário do Congresso Nacional*, Seção 1, 1015-1016.

power. By seeking to fulfil the development ideologies of its Doctrine of National Security—and with the support of the U.S. government—the Brazilian dictatorship gained control of the waters of the Paraná River and the lands of eastern Paraguay. This process brought Paraguay into Brazil's sphere of power while simultaneously minimizing the influence of Argentina. And although marginalized by the stigma of being a secondary nation stuck in Brazil's shadow, the Paraguayan government's actions at Guáira guaranteed that it would benefit from unprecedented energy sources.

The same unflinching approach that Brazil's dictatorship relied on during the border crisis with Paraguay continued to guide its actions for years to come. The preceding geopolitical conflict helps contextualize the actions taken by the military government in the late 1970s and early 1980s against the farming communities that mobilized against Itaipu. Long before the dictatorship contended with the rural communities in western Paraná, it had to first deal with foreign leaders who also saw the borderlands as a key to their own nation's prosperity. The geopolitical standoff between Brazil and Paraguay thus served as a precursor to a new, more localized battle. Rather than confronting a neighboring military regime, the Brazilian dictatorship now confronted thousands of rural communities living in the shadow of Itaipu.

Chapter Two

Setting the Stage: the “Project of the Century” and the Formation of Community Resistance, 1973-1980

Following the 1973 Treaty of Itaipu, western Paraná witnessed the development of two processes that fundamentally altered the region’s physical and social landscape. As workers broke ground on the monumental task of building the world’s largest dam, so too began the expropriation procedures for tens of thousands of rural Brazilians whose lands would be flooded in October 1982. The dictatorship praised Itaipu’s construction as a beacon of national strength, yet the families facing displacement found little reason to celebrate. Along with knowing that their homes would soon disappear under water, farmers had to contend with expropriation policies they considered unfair and illegal. In response, an organized movement emerged to defend the rights and livelihoods of rural communities, eventually culminating in multi-week land encampments in 1980 and 1981.

This struggle initially formed as an effort by farmers to receive more money from Itaipu for their soon-to-be-flooded lands. Yet in the process of seeking better expropriation packages, the fight expanded to include broader demands for political rights. In the context of the *abertura*’s wayward return to democratic rule, the fight at Itaipu grew to symbolize the emerging struggle between grassroots opposition and the dictatorship. For the ways in which the farmers’ movement confronted the Itaipu and its supporters in the military regime, western Paraná became a testing ground for the the meanings of dictatorship and democracy.

This chapter traces the formation of the farmers’ movement as it confronted Itaipu’s expropriations and the agrarian policies of the military regime. Understanding how the Itaipu dam fit into the ideology and hierarchy of the dictatorship enables a thorough examination of the

wider implications of rural struggle. This chapter begins with a description of Itaipu's first director, the hardline General José Costa Cavalcanti, and of the military's security structures that helped oversee the dam's development. The dictatorship's presence at Itaipu became especially relevant when the farmers' movement tapped into opposition struggles taking root throughout the country. This chapter focuses on three distinct forces: rural mobilizations, the policies of Itaipu, and the evolving dynamics of Brazil's political landscape.

Nearly a decade's worth of internal documents offers an inside view into how Itaipu administered its expropriations. This previously unstudied evidence stands in stark contrast to the benign image put forth by Itaipu's public relations campaigns. When it came to protecting its interests, the Binational Corporation proved efficient and highly structured, directing propaganda blitzes and targeted expropriations with no apparent difficulties. Yet internal reports reveal pervasive disorganization in implementing policy and honoring the promises made to displaced families. Working within a massive corporation explains, in part, the mismanagement toward local communities. But as will be shown throughout this dissertation, the neglect—and outright abuse—of families in western Paraná resulted from the dictatorship's broader political agenda. Considering Itaipu's budget of US\$20 billion, the farmers' goal of receiving a few thousand dollars more for each family seems manageable. For the dictatorship, however, the question of financial compensation became almost irrelevant. Instead, it refused to meet the farmers' demands in order to protect its vision for both Itaipu and its own legacy. Given that so much of Itaipu's importance derived from the symbolism it projected within Brazil and abroad, the government sought to erase any outside influence that could potentially tarnish the dam's triumphalist image. And against a backdrop of *abertura*, the standoff with rural farmers became a way for the military regime to reassert its strength against a wave of popular mobilization

reemerging throughout the country.

In the 1970s western Paraná experienced a profound and swift transformation. The changes wrought by Itaipu forced local communities to either abandon the region or join together to defend their homes and their hopes for a more democratic Brazil. Those who opted to stay helped lay the groundwork for a struggle whose demands for land and justice resonated throughout the country.

Itaipu and the Logic of Brazil's Dictatorship

In 1974, the task of choosing Itaipu's first director fell to Brazil's newly elected president, General Ernesto Geisel. Upon taking office Geisel initiated a policy of political decompression known as *distensão* aimed to reintroduce certain democratic rights in a "slow, gradual, and secure" manner. Geisel's *distensão* implied that the military would eventually release its grip on power, meaning that his choice of Itaipu's director carried the added responsibility of protecting the dictatorship's long-term vision for the project. Because of the dam's location in Foz do Iguaçu, the political powers of Itaipu's director carried particularly weight. In 1968 the military designated Foz do Iguaçu as one of Brazil's 68 "national security zones," which cancelled all direct elections for local office and essentially created semi-autonomous legal districts.¹ This national security zone meant that the already powerful position of Itaipu's director included the added dynamic of working in a region legislatively separate from most of Brazil.

For the director of Itaipu, Geisel appointed General José Costa Cavalcanti, a career military officer and a principal conspirator in both the 1964 overthrow of President João Goulart

¹ The national security zones were established by Project Law No. 13, passed by Congress on 4/17/1968.

and the 1968 coup-within-a-coup that consolidated the dictatorship's repressive regime.² On December 13, 1968 Cavalcanti and 16 other military leaders signed into law Institutional Act No. 5 (AI-5), the draconian measure that legalized and regulated torture while also giving the president the power to close Congress and strip politicians of their mandates. In 1969 Cavalcanti helped secure the presidency of General Emílio Médici (1969-1974) who oversaw the most violent phase of Brazil's dictatorship—a period known as the *anos de chumbo* (“the years of lead”). Médici promoted Cavalcanti to Minister of the Interior where he oversaw major infrastructure projects like the Trans-Amazonian highway and also the persecution of numerous guerrilla and revolutionary groups.³ As a key member of the hardline faction within the dictatorship, Cavalcanti's background in policing the Brazilian countryside made him an especially appealing candidate for Itaipu's first director. In the context of *distensão* and the uncertainty it implied for the military's monopoly on power, Cavalcanti became responsible for constructing a dam that would secure the legacy of the dictatorship long after any potential return to democracy.

² Cavalcanti actively opposed the military's first post-coup president, General Castello Branco. As such, Cavalcanti helped orchestrate the successful 1967 candidacy of General Artur Costa e Silva, under whom he served as the Minister of Mines and Energy.

³ Biographical information on Cavalcanti comes from “Ato Institucional No. 5,” interactive e-document created by *Folha de São Paulo*. <http://www1.folha.uol.com.br/folha/treinamento/hotsites/ai5/personas/costaCavalcante.html> Accessed June 18, 2015. It should also be noted that less than a month after being named Itaipu's Director, Cavalcanti helped secure the nomination of Colonel Clovis Vianna as mayor of Foz do Iguaçu—a position that proved critical in the decade to come when Vianna was a central protagonist in the repression of the farmers displaced by Itaipu. (Source: Letter from Paraná Governor Emílio Hoffman Gomes to Justice Minister Dr. Armando Ribeiro Falcão, Ofício n. 257-G. 5/30/1974. Courtesy of Aluizio Palmar and the Center for Human Rights and Popular Memory, Foz do Iguaçu, Brazil (*Centro de Direitos Humanos e Memória Popular*, hereafter CDHMP). The links between Cavalcanti and Vianna are also discussed in Ribeiro, *Memórias do Concreto*, 54.



FIGURE 2.1: General Alfredo Stroessner (center) and the two Directors of Itaipu, the Paraguayan engineer Enzo Debernardi (left) and the Brazilian General José Costa Cavalcanti (right). 5/30/1980. Source: Relatório Anual, Itaipu Binacional, 1980.

Along with the leadership of Cavalcanti, the military regime maintained control over Itaipu through the Special Committee of Security and Information (AESI, *Assessoria Especial de Segurança e Informação*).⁴ Brazil's dictatorship relied heavily on similar committees (*assessorias*) to gather information on businesses, public enterprises, and above all, universities. Unlike most other *assessorias*, however, AESI not only conducted surveillance but also investigated and punished any potential crimes or threats. AESI maintained constant coordination with the National Information Service (SNI, *Serviço Nacional de Informações*), the government intelligence agency that Alfred Stepan has described as a primary conduit for Brazil's most concentrated period of repression.⁵ The eyes, ears, and arms of AESI provided the military regime with a local force that proved especially important in the coming years when the government contended with opposition groups and the growing profile of the farmers'

⁴ AESI's existence was not officially legislated in the founding documents of Itaipu Binacional, but a secret internal report from 1975 describes its chain-of-command and purview. AESI answered to Itaipu's Director, who could dispatch it wherever "necessary to satisfy the political, structural, or development needs of the country." (AN-BSB, CSN, Caixa 25 A2.)

⁵ Alfred C. Stepan. *Rethinking Military Politics: Brazil and the Southern Cone*. (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press. 1988)

movement.⁶ Whether by gathering information on local church leaders, infiltrating meetings, physically confronting protesters, or gathering evidence to falsely prosecute dissident journalists, AESI functioned as the dictatorship's de facto presence at Itaipu.

The military's authority in the region allowed it to oversee the development of Itaipu, to monitor contraband along the border, and to also keep tabs on any 'subversive' activity. This had the unintended consequence of raising the political consciousness of local communities in ways that might not have happened otherwise. In almost all interviews, participants of the farmers' movement remembered the mid-1970s as a period when, because of the military heavy presence, people had to communicate in coded messages and travel circuitous routes to avoid detection. One community leader recalls that by asking questions like "why do we have to meet in secret?" farmers began to form larger questions about why they did not have other freedoms and rights.⁷ Whereas certain rural communities had not previously come into direct contact with the military regime, the experience of confronting Itaipu helped project the realities of authoritarian rule into the Paraná countryside.

Building 'the Project of the Century'

The creation of the Itaipu Binational Corporation in May 1974 set in place the legal and administrative structures to begin the dam's construction. Building the largest dam on the planet

⁶ AESI also participated in Operation Condor, a secret system created in the 1970s by various South American military states in order to share information and persecute, torture, and kill political dissidents in one another's country. In her study of Itaipu and Latin American dictatorships, Jussaramar Silva concludes that "it is impossible to view the activities of AESI without connecting them to the actions of Operation Condor... and above all, without seeing the heavy hand of the State in the control of workers, local communities, and opposition groups in the region." (Jussaramar da Silva. "A ação das assessorias especiais de segurança e informações da usina binacional de Itaipu no contexto das atividades de cooperação extrajudiciais no Cone Sul." *Cordis. Revoluções, cultura e política na América Latina*, No. 11, July/Dec. 2013, p 244.) For more on Operation Condor, see: J. Patrice McSherry. *Operation Condor and Covert War in Latin America*. (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2005).

⁷ Carlos Grillman, interview with author. 10/2/2014, Foz do Iguaçu, Brazil.

demanded a workforce of unprecedented size: over 35,000 workers from both Brazil and Paraguay took part throughout the nearly twenty years of construction, with a peak of almost 31,000 workers employed in 1978 alone. The overwhelming mass of these workers migrated from outside the region, leading to massive growth on both sides of the border. In Brazil, western Paraná's population rose from 56,000 in 1974 to over 250,000 less than six years later. Likewise, the Paraguayan city of Puerto Presidente Stroessner (later renamed Ciudad del Este) boomed to over 100,000 inhabitants, making it the second largest city in the country.⁸ At its height, Itaipu poured an average of 300,000 cubic meters of concrete a day—enough to build a twenty-story building every 55 minutes. When primary construction ended in 1984, the Itaipu dam stretched nearly five miles across and contained enough iron and steel to build three hundred and eighty Eiffel Towers.⁹

Although the dictatorship cited these impressive statistics to bolster the prestige of both its own regime and that of the dam, communities in the surrounding region attached a very different set of meanings to the ongoing construction. Prior to the 1982 flood, the dam's construction had already begun to disrupt local markets, block trade routes, and reorient labor demographics.¹⁰ As a result of these changes and the early phases of displacement, the years leading up to the flood saw agricultural production in the eight impacted municipalities drop by 210,000 tons per year, with Foz de Iguaçu in particular seeing a 33-percent decrease. Even before the region disappeared under water, Itaipu caused significant financial challenges that helped motivate the farmer's struggle for fair expropriations.

⁸ Thomas G. Sanders *The Itaipu Hydroelectrical Project*. (UFSI Reports 1982/no. 35. Hanover, NH: Universities Field Staff International, 1982), 4.

⁹ Construction statistics come from John Howard White, "Itaipu: Gender, Community, and Work in the Alto Paraná Borderlands, Brazil and Paraguay, 1954-1989." (PhD Dissertation, University of New Mexico, 2010), 1; and Nilson Monteiro. *Itaipu, a Luz*. (Curitiba, PR: Itaipu Binacional, Assessoria de Comunicação Social, 1999), 94.

¹⁰ Maria de Fátima Bento Ribeiro. *Memórias do Concreto: Vozes na Construção de Itaipu*. (Cascavel, Brazil: Edunioeste, 2002), 28.



FIGURE 2.2: Left: The Paraná River in 1975 prior to construction. Right: Itaipu's progress in 1977. Source: Relatório Anual, Itaipu Binacional, 1975 and 1977, respectively.

The sudden decline of farming outputs in western Paraná marked the end of the region's short but successful status as a thriving agricultural center. Extensive farming in the Paraná borderlands began only in the 1950s. Triggered by an exhaustion of land under coffee cultivation in the neighboring state of São Paulo, thousands of farmers pushed westward and settled on some of the country's most fertile soils. For the most part these families descended from European immigrants who came to Brazil in the early decades of the twentieth century. A contemporary report described the influx of new settlers into the region: "In truth... none of them were born here. They are Brazilian, yes, but born in Rio Grande do Sul. They are gauchos. Their parents and grandparents, when they arrived in Brazil, came from Germany, Italy, or Poland."¹¹ As we shall see, the European background of this initial wave of settlers projected a sense of respectability and legitimacy that differentiated them from the ethnically mixed peasants and indigenous families that also inhabited the region.

¹¹ Comissão Pastoral da Terra - CPT. *O Mausoléu Do Faraó: A Usina De Itaipu Contra Os Lavradores Do Paraná*, (CPT: 1978), 2.

The early Euro-descendant settlers helped establish an agricultural sector in western Paraná that by the early 1970s accounted for 98 percent of the region's overall economic production.¹² Based primarily on the cultivation of soy, corn, wheat, and coffee, the area had become a booming farming zone within the span of only a few generations—a brief success story that dissipated in the presence of Itaipu.¹³ On the Brazilian side of the Paraná River, Itaipu flooded 780 km² (111,332 hectares) of land, or roughly 14 percent of the entire region.¹⁴ The majority (91 percent) of the inundated area was classified as “rural” with an average size of 15 hectares per property, hinting at the propensity toward small and medium-scale farming in the region. These statistics, however, only account for those with legal land titles. As will be shown, the flood also displaced thousands of landless peasants, squatters, day laborers, and indigenous people.¹⁵

In the end, the Itaipu dam displaced an estimated 42,000 Brazilians. This sum represented 12 percent of the region's total population. (Table 2.1)

Municipality	Total Population	Impacted Population	Impacted Population (%)	Area (in hectares)	Impacted Area	Area Impacted (%)	Number of Properties
Guairá	47,482	3,659	7.71	53,666	5,530	10.30	400
Terra Roxa	55,268	146	0.26	82,295	183	0.22	7
Marechal C. Rondon	63,458	10,600	16.70	141,010	25,075	17.78	1,257
Santa Helena	38,831	12,181	31.37	81,916	25,992	31.73	1,666
Matelândia	35,473	70	0.20	108,697	492	0.45	30
Medianeira	45,216	1,540	3.41	122,772	4,237	3.45	428
São Miguel do Iguaçu	36,436	8,639	23.71	122,188	26,253	21.49	1,778
Foz do Iguaçu	49,538	5,609	11.32	88,046	23,570	26.77	697
Total	371,702	42,444	11.42%	800,590	111,332	13.90%	6,263

TABLE 2.1: Estimated Demographics of Impacted Municipalities. Compiled from data included in: Guiomar Inez Germani. *Expropriados Terra e Água: o Conflito De Itaipu*. (Salvador de Bahia, Brazil: EDUFBA/ULBRA, 2003), 54-58. Germani's data extrapolated from 1970 and 1975 census information.

¹² Agricultural statistics come from Juvêncio Mazzarollo. *A Taipa da injustica: esbanjamento econômico, drama social e holocausto ecológico em Itaipu*. 2nd ed. (Curitiba, PR: CPT-PR, Comissão Pastoral da Terra do Paraná, 2003), 32.

¹³ Ribeiro. *Memórias do concreto*, 28.

¹⁴ The flood impacted an additional 570 km² of land on the Paraguayan side of the border.

¹⁵ In Chapter Six, footnote 47 offers a detailed estimation of as many as 9,500 landless displaced by Itaipu.

Between the signing of the 1973 Treaty of Itaipu and the reservoir flooding in October 1982, the question of land in the western Paraná borderlands pivoted around the dual processes of expropriation (the transfer of land ownership from individuals to Itaipu Binational) and indemnification (the actual payment for the properties). Brazil's Constitution of 1967 provided the main legal framework, as Article No. 157 required the government to pay "a fair price" for expropriations made in the name of public interest.¹⁶ At key moments in the evolution of the farmers' movement, certain groups—particularly the landless—pushed for the demand of "land for land" in which the government would relocate displaced communities on nearby lands rather than offering money.¹⁷ Such a strategy would have required the government to expropriate lands from large landholdings and redistribute them amongst the general population and thus represented a larger structural change. As such, Itaipu's leadership and its allies in the dictatorship consistently relied on the Constitution's financial definition of expropriation to dictate the terms and long-term consequences of their interactions with displaced farmers.

The Initial Phases of Expropriation

Toward the end of 1973 Itaipu undertook a preliminary census of the surrounding lands and determined that the flood would require 8,257 unique indemnification cases—6,658 in rural lands and 1,599 in urban areas. This represented 11 percent of the population in the affected municipalities and 45 percent of its active workforce.¹⁸ As news of the flood spread throughout

¹⁶ Constituição do Brasil, 1967. Article 157, section VI, paragraph 1. The 1973 Treaty of Itaipu also helped govern the expropriation process. Article XVII of the Treaty designated Itaipu Binational as the sole entity responsible, under the pretext of "ensuring the maximum public utility" of the dam. Additionally, it gave Itaipu's Board of Directors the final say as to which lands could be expropriated. Source: Institute for Latin American Integration, *Obras hidroeléctricas binacionales en América Latina*. (Buenos Aires, Argentina: Banco Interamericano de Desarrollo, Instituto para la Integración de América Latina, 1985), 329.

¹⁷ The theme of "land for land" will be discussed in greater detail in Chapters Three and Six.

¹⁸ Mazzarollo, *A taipa da injustica*, 49.

the region many farmers decided to leave Paraná altogether, marking the start of a mass exodus from what had become one of Brazil's most productive agricultural zones. A large portion of these farmers, known as "*brasiguaios*," chose to cross the border into Paraguay.¹⁹ Those who stayed in western Paraná confronted Itaipu's expropriations, a process handled very differently depending on the social demographics of particular regions.

The first wave of indemnifications took place from 1974 to 1976 and covered the "priority area" that included the construction site, the administrative buildings, and the workers' housing complexes. Most of the priority area was located in Alvorado do Iguaçu, one of the region's wealthiest municipalities. Residents of Alvorado do Iguaçu, for example, owned an average of 62 hectares per property, over four times the size of landholdings in the surrounding "reservoir area."²⁰ In dealing with this affluent community and in trying to create a favorable public image, Itaipu handled these early cases with almost no conflicts. Unlike the rampant disorganization that soon defined the expropriations of the nearby farmers, Itaipu established clear procedures for the priority area.²¹ In certain instances, Itaipu even advanced the payment packages for property owners in Alvorado do Iguaçu.²² And although regional land prices in the mid-1970s fluctuated between 25 and 30 thousand cruzeiros (Cr\$) per *alqueire*, residents of Alvorado do Iguaçu received substantially more.²³ In one case from 1974, Itaipu expropriated a single property for over 2.5 million cruzeiros.²⁴

Itaipu's perception of Alvorado do Iguaçu also reflected a hierarchy of race and social

¹⁹ Chapter Five discusses the history of *brasiguaios*.

²⁰ Area Prioritária — Relatório final da Comissão Mixta Brasil/Paraguai. September 1974. Microfilm 8000F.605-760, 146. Source: CDIB.

²¹ I/AJ/004/74, Memo from the Legal Directory, 10/17/74. Microfilm document 360F.349-351. CDIB.

²² RDE-157/76 – Resolution of the Executive Directory, 11/24/1976. CDIB.

²³ "Colonos querem maior indenização por suas terras junto a Itaipu," *O Globo*, 1/5/1974). An *alqueire* is a unit of land roughly equivalent to 2.5 hectares (25,000 square meters). The cruzeiro was Brazil's currency from 1942-1986.

²⁴ I/AJ/007/74. Memo from Legal Directory to General Director, 11/22/1974. Microfilm 360F.0356, CDIB.

composition. Of the initial 151 expropriation properties, 110 belonged to farmers who came from Brazil's largely European-descendant southern states. The respect given to these Brazilians differed from the treatment of the poorer and darker-skinned communities that mobilized against Itaipu later in the decade. In its own survey of the priority area, Itaipu noted that "the farmer from the South comes to this region with spirit, skill and courage to settle; while the majority of the rest (those from Minas Gerais and the North East) arrive here and almost always become day laborers or squatters."²⁵ This view of the non-white and non-wealthy farmers helps explain Itaipu's reluctance to meet their demands—or to even recognize them as a legitimate social force.

The efficiency of the Alvorado do Iguaçu expropriations did not, however, guarantee the long-term success of its inhabitants. A 1981 article provides the personal account of Clôvis Melo, a farmer from Alvorado do Iguaçu who was among the first to receive indemnification. According to the story, in 1975 Melo sold his eight *alqueires* of first-rate land to Itaipu for Cr\$48,000. The agreement allowed Melo to buy a modest house 15 kilometers outside of Foz do Iguaçu, but he could not keep up with his house payments and faced ongoing unemployment in his new urban surroundings.²⁶ Melo's account hints at one of the many problems confronting farmers in their interactions with Itaipu: even those compensated for their lands had to then decide where to relocate. Melo migrated to a growing urban center, but as construction on the Itaipu dam attracted unprecedented numbers of workers into Foz do Iguaçu, jobs became increasingly scarce. Later groups of indemnified farmers, having perhaps heard stories similar to Melo's, opted to stay in the countryside and for the most part fought to maintain their rural

²⁵ Area Prioritária — Relatório final da Comissão Mixta Brasil/Paraguai. September 1974. Microfilm 8000F.605-760, 95, CDIB.

²⁶ "Itaipu & desapropriados," *Nosso Tempo*, 9/30/1981, 11.

livelihoods.

The Importance of Public Opinion

Once Itaipu completed the initial phase for the priority area in early 1976, attention shifted to the reservoir area and the more problematic expropriations. With the flood scheduled for 1982, Itaipu's planned to finish all expropriations between 1978 and 1980. As part of this overly ambitious timeline—the deadline would consistently get pushed back—Itaipu embarked on a publicity campaign to win over public opinion and convince farmers to accept their proposals.²⁷ Acquiring lands in a timely manner would help deter any local resistance while also speeding along the construction project. Itaipu distributed posters throughout the region aimed to reassure local communities. One leaflet proclaimed “You, too will help build Itaipu, the world’s largest hydroelectric dam. Itaipu will acquire land for a fair price, which is to say that the payout will correspond not only to the value of the land itself, but also to the benefits that can be attached to the land.”²⁸ In contrast to these statements, Itaipu consistently offered below-market prices, a disparity that served as a major source of local frustration.

Other campaign materials appealed to the personal anxieties of those facing an uncertain future. One poster told farmers to “Stay calm. Work directly with our company men. Those with property can stay calm, whether you own a farm, some land or just a house. There is no need to worry.” Another presented Itaipu as the farmers’ key to a life of tranquility: “With this money saved you will never need to work again.”²⁹ Itaipu also hired celebrities like the singer Teixeira, the radio personality Zé Bétio, and the actor Lima Duarte to participate in the

²⁷ For a discussion of propaganda and official publicity campaigns during the dictatorship, see Nina Schneider, *Brazilian Propaganda: Legitimizing an Authoritarian Regime*, (Gainesville, FL: University of Florida Press, 2014).

²⁸ Germani. *Expropriados terra e agua*, 197.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 218.

publicity blitz. Moreover, interviews on local television showed farmers talking about how Itaipu paid them handsomely for their lands.³⁰ Elio Rusch, a state deputy and close collaborator of the military regime in the 1970s, recalls a memorable advertisement claiming that the ice used in just one hour to produce the concrete for Itaipu could chill all of the Brahma beer in Brazil.³¹



FIGURE 2.3: Examples of Itaipu propaganda posters. Saying, “Itaipu pays the fair price” (left), and “Stay Calm” (right). Source: Germani, *Expropriados Terra e Água*, 197.

As much as Itaipu’s propaganda campaign tried to glorify the expropriation process, problems simmered from the outset. As early as January 1975 newspapers reported that farmers already demanded more money for their lands.³² Additionally, a Foz do Iguaçu city councilman named Evandro Stelle Teixeira denounced Itaipu for evaluating lands within his city’s boundaries as “rural” rather than “urban,” a designation that limited expropriation prices. Teixeira placed these issues in the larger context of Brazilian politics by saying that, “At this moment when President Geisel sets an example to initiate open dialogue within the Executive Office, Itaipu Binational remains deaf and unmoving to the plight of those who seek nothing more than what is fair and just.”³³

³⁰ Edgard Raviche, interview with author. Toledo, Paraná. 11/4/2014.

³¹ Elio Rusch, interview with author. Marechal Cândido Rondon, Paraná. 11/21/20214.

³² “Colonos querem maior indenização por suas terras junto a Itaipu.” *O Globo*, 1/5/1975.

³³ Evandro Stelle Teixeira speech to the Câmara Municipal of Foz do Iguaçu, 3/26/1975. Source: microfilm 355F.1702-1705. CDIB.

Itaipu's strategy also included a process of targeted expropriations intended to isolate individuals and dissolve local communities. Miguel Islaor Sávio, a rural organizer in the 1980s, noted that "Itaipu unleashed a psychological war" stripping communities of their ability to collectively resist.³⁴ Pastor Werner Fuchs, the most prominent church leader in the fight against Itaipu, remembers that upon entering a new region the Binational would first indemnify markets, pharmacies, and schools, forcing its inhabitants to travel upwards of twenty kilometers for basic necessities.³⁵ This not only complicated the routines of daily life, it diminished a town's ability to organize a collective response. The removal of basic infrastructure also devalued the surrounding properties, an effect that allowed Itaipu to continue offering low land prices.³⁶ Especially during the early years before a protest movement took shape, rural inhabitants often had little recourse but to accept the offer made to them. One farmer offered his own rationale for agreeing to Itaipu's proposal:

I was forced to accept because, first off, everyone in the town had to leave so I was left alone with no resources and no markets to buy or sell; second, there was great pressure from the Itaipu representatives, who said that if we didn't accept, the case would be brought to court; third, those who didn't accept right away would only get another offer much later and price of the available lands for us to buy would have risen. For fear of going to court and of not being able to find good lands to buy later on made a lot of people sign unfair deals.³⁷

The dynamics of this expropriation process expose the realities behind Itaipu's publicity campaign. At almost every stage of its development, Itaipu's leaders consistently told the public of their commitment to indemnifying farmers in a "fair, just, and Christian" manner. Archival and anecdotal evidence show that Itaipu rarely adhered to these standards. As the injustices

³⁴ Miguel Isolar Sávio, interview with Davi Schreiner, São Miguel do Iguaçu, 10/15/1996. Transcript shared with author.

³⁵ Werner Fuchs, interview with author. Curitiba, Paraná, 7/13/2013.

³⁶ Ribeiro. *Memórias do concreto*, 23.

³⁷ Mazzarollo, *A taipa da injustica*, 53.

continued to mount, local communities began to respond.

The Progressive Church and the Formation of Rural Mobilizations

The earliest initiative to organize the expropriated farmers came from the Catholic Church. Beginning in the 1960s progressive sectors of the Catholic Church helped lead social movements throughout Latin America, offering a social justice-based form of Church participation to condemn underdevelopment and state violence. By the early 1970s this progressive social current culminated around the doctrine of Liberation Theology.³⁸ In Brazil, the Pastoral Land Commission (CPT, Comissão Pastoral da Terra) played a key role in rural campaigns across the countryside. Created in 1975, the CPT existed as a branch of the National Conference of Brazilian Bishops (CNBB), a Catholic organization, though many of its leaders in local struggles belonged to the Lutheran Igreja Evangélica de Confissão Luterana do Brasil (IECLB).

The CPT made the fight at Itaipu one of its central campaigns when it established a state office in Paraná in 1976. The following year, it opened a new headquarters in the town of Marechal Cândido Rondon—one of the areas slated for Itaipu's flood. Over the next five years, the CPT served as the most outspoken and consistent ally of the region's displaced farmers. Although the Church leadership's insistence on peaceful tactics at times conflicted with the demands of local communities, the initial formation of the fight against Itaipu resulted from the work of the CPT.

Similar to what progressive Church groups did throughout Brazil, the CPT began its involvement at Itaipu through the creation of Ecclesial Base Communities (CEBs, *Comunidades*

³⁸ The progressive social currents that eventually lead to the doctrine of Liberation Theology initially emerged during the Second Vatican Council (Vatican II) from 1962 to 1965 and arrived in Latin America at the 1968 general assembly of the Council of Latin American Bishops (CELAM) in Medellín, Columbia. For more on liberation theology, see Serbin. *Secret Dialogues*, 36-38, 115-16.

eclesiais de base), religious groups that sought to raise consciousness about political rights and agrarian issues. CEBs emerged in Brazil in the mid-1960s and led by priests, pastors, nuns, bishops, and lay people commissioned by the Church, helped establish a wide network of grassroots groups over the following decade. Scott Mainwaring argues that the CEBs in Brazil contributed some of the most innovative work of the progressive Church in all of Latin America, emphasizing in particular their role in encouraging opposition to the military regime.³⁹ In western Paraná the CEBs originally formed as bible study groups, but as the specter of Itaipu grew larger their focus shifted almost entirely to the farmers' standoff with the Binational. Father Edgard Raviche recalls that by the end of the 1970s, the CPT successfully organized almost 300 CEBs in Paraná.⁴⁰

At a time when the dictatorship co-opted sectors of the existing rural unions, the Church offered a key space of progressive mobilization in the countryside. In the 1970s many of Paraná's rural unions had been dismantled and rebuilt, often to support policies like the military's rural welfare program.⁴¹ According to Silvênio Kolling, these pro-government rural unions strongly disliked the farmers' movement, often belittling them with chants of "*pelegos*" (scabs, or strikebreakers).⁴² More than just filling a void of rural organizing, the Church also provided political cover for dissidents. Aluizio Palmar stands as a striking example. A former member of the MR-8 revolutionary group, the dictatorship imprisoned Palmar in the late 1960s and released him into exile in 1971 as part of an exchange for the kidnapped ambassador of

³⁹ Scott Mainwaring. "Grassroots Catholic Groups and Politics in Brazil, 1964-1985." Working Paper #98, August 1987. The Helen Kellogg Institute for International Studies, Notre Dame University, 2.

⁴⁰ Edgard Raviche, interview with author. Toledo, Paraná, 11/4/2014.

⁴¹ Clifford Welch acknowledges that although the FUNRURAL welfare program helped the growth of rural unions by providing tangible benefits like access to medical care, it nonetheless transformed organized labor into "a creature of the military regime" where corruption became a common trait amongst the co-opted leadership. (Clifford Welch. *The Seed was Planted: the São Paulo Roots of Brazil's Rural Labor Movement, 1924-1964*. (University Park, Pa: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1999), 359.

⁴² Silvênio Kolling, interview with author. Garuva, Santa Catarina, 2/28/2015.

Switzerland. When Palmar sneaked back into Brazil later in the decade, the CPT hired him as a community organizer, thus allowing him to operate politically in a way that would have been impossible otherwise.⁴³

As we shall see, the Church had a complex role in leading the movement against Itaipu. Its approach to rural communities often bordered on paternalism, and leaders like Bishop Olívio Fazza repeatedly attempted to silence calls for more direct action. Similar observations criticized the CPT for not having done more to organize the neighboring indigenous communities.⁴⁴ The CPT wielded tremendous influence in the articulation of the movement's direction and demands, and at key moments its commitment to peaceful protest stifled the potential for an escalation of tactics. Despite these limitations, the CPT proved indispensable in the emergence of an organized resistance movement. With the establishment of CEBs throughout the region, the CPT undertook its first survey of the surrounding communities in order to start articulating the best course of action. The results of this survey showed that almost no families knew when Itaipu would expropriate their lands or for how much money.⁴⁵

⁴³ Aluizio Palmar, interview with author. Foz do Iguaçu, Paraná, 8/6/2013.

⁴⁴ Gernote Kirinus, interview with author. Marechal Cândido Rondo, Paraná, 9/17/2014. Kirinus' observations on Olívio Fazza parallel the analysis in Germani, *Expropriados terra e agua*, 141.

⁴⁵ Memo No. 002431/78, 3/30/1978. Source: Archive of Comissão Pastoral da Terra (CPT), Goiânia.



FIGURE 2.4: Ecumenical service at the Santa Helena encampment, July 1980. Photo courtesy of Guiomar Germani.

This lack of information impacted not only the families facing displacement, but many local politicians as well. In 1976 the mayor of Marechal Cândido Rondon wrote to Itaipu asking for clarification on when expropriations would begin and if roads in the region would remain in operation throughout the expropriation process.⁴⁶ It appears that Itaipu refused to provide this information, since only a few years later the city's mayor again requested an explanation on the same set of issues.⁴⁷ Itaipu's silence forced local governments throughout the region to make similar appeals. The mayor of Paraíso do Norte asked the Binational's legal director, Paulo da Cunha, for a map and timeline of the expropriations, and wondered if there existed any forum for farmers to raise their concerns.⁴⁸ Many communities had no means to present their questions directly to Itaipu and a coalition of Paraná deputies sent a petition expressing concern that "the farmers have not yet received any concrete information about how and when they will receive compensation." Additionally, the deputies requested that Itaipu allow representatives of local

⁴⁶ Ofício No. 681/76, Prefeitura Municipal de Marechal Cândido Rondon, 3/6/1976. Microfilm 1316F.91, CDIB.

⁴⁷ Ofício No. 136/79, Prefeitura Municipal de Marechal Cândido Rondon, 9/9/1979. Microfilm 248F.873-874, CDIB.

⁴⁸ Ofício No. 051/79, Prefeitura Municipal de Paraíso do Norte, 6/5/1979. Microfilm 1316F.92, CDIB.

communities to participate in the evaluations of their own lands, “so that the farmers know that somebody is fighting for their rights and to guarantee that they are receiving fair prices for their lands.”⁴⁹

As the problems confronting farmers reached wider audiences and as Itaipu’s expropriation process continued to marginalize local communities, farmers held their first large-scale event. On March 31, 1978 a few hundred people gathered in Marechal Cândido Rondon. This assembly resulted in the formation of an initiative called the Noah’s Ark Project.⁵⁰ Seeking to save the farmers from the flood of Itaipu, the Project declared that,

Without calling into question the importance of an enterprise like Itaipu for the Nation, we concern ourselves with mankind. After 30 years of pouring sweat into these lands, the settlers, at great pain, succeeded in creating a commercial infrastructure; they succeeded in building their homes, in educating their children, in organizing themselves into religious and social communities. These settlers now confront having to leave for strange and distant lands to start all over again. They deserve our attention, our respect, our efforts.⁵¹

Formed initially by twenty groups from the neighboring municipalities of São Miguel do Iguaçu, Santa Helena, and Marechal Cândido Rondon, the Noah’s Ark Project provided a foundation around which the displaced communities began to organize. The religious and biblical imagery of Noah’s Ark clearly suggested that in the lead-up to the Itaipu flood, Church leaders wanted the movement to adopt a respectful and peaceful strategy.⁵² The Noah’s Ark project maintained that local farmers did not necessarily object to the construction of the dam, but rather to Itaipu’s expropriation policies. This approach helped counter statements from Itaipu’s supporters who claimed that the mobilized farmers did not care about the needs of their

⁴⁹ Letter from state deputy José Lázaro Dumont to José Cavalcanti, 5/31/1977. Source: Microfilm 356F.1574-1576, CDIB.

⁵⁰ Frank Antonio Mezzomo. *Memórias dos movimentos sociais no oeste do Paraná*. (Campo Mourão, PR: Editora da FECILCAM, 2009), 107.

⁵¹ Mazzarollo, *A Taipa da injustica*, 58.

⁵² Mezzomo. *Memórias dos Movimentos Sociais no Oeste do Paraná*, 33.

country. One conservative politician recalled that the farmers aimed to stop Itaipu from being built because they believed that “Brazil didn’t need the [dam’s] energy.”⁵³ In contrast, a local farmer remembered that “Nobody refused to give up their land... Everyone gave their land for the progress of Brazil because [the country] needed energy. The problem was the price.”⁵⁴ At a time of transition and uncertainty, both sides defended their positions with a rhetoric of patriotism and civic duty. The farmers presented their demands against as an extension of their hard work and sacrifice in the region. Marcelo Barth, one of the most visible and outspoken leaders of the budding movement, proclaimed at the 1978 meeting that,

The farmers are tired of being treated like animals in Brazilian society. We have tended these lands for many years. We confront an aggressive and hostile backlands full of beasts and poisonous snakes. There were no roads or bridges, no schools or businesses. There were no clubs or churches to pray to God, who made this earth for all men. We have all of this today thanks to our unbreakable will and the cost of our own sweat. If we could gather all the drops of the sweat that we shed, we would make a new lake, not Itaipu, but a salted lake, full of illusions of a dignified and humane future.⁵⁵

Stories such as Barth’s helped nudge public opinion away from Itaipu’s propaganda campaign. Itaipu invited twenty-four pastors and priests to visit the dam in May of 1978—the first official meeting between the Binational Corporation and representatives of rural communities.⁵⁶ After a tour of the construction zone, Itaipu employees showed the visitors a video about the dam’s progress and gave a presentation on the timeline and criteria for how expropriations would proceed in the years to come. The majority of the clergymen’s questions centered on why the early land payments had been so low. Others spoke about the farmers’ desire to receive new lands in nearby regions. In response, Itaipu’s representatives declared that

⁵³ Elio Rusch, interview with author. Marechal Cândido Rondon, Paraná. 11/21/20214.

⁵⁴ Albano Melz, interview with author. 11/17/2014, São Clemente, Paraná.

⁵⁵ Mazzarollo, *A taipa da injustica*, 58.

⁵⁶ Details on this meeting comes from “Relatório da visita das representantes das igreja Católica e protestante, da região do reservatório.” Microfilm 729F.1041-1042. CDIB.

local land markets made it almost impossible to relocate families within Paraná and emphasized instead the availability of cheaper lands in other states throughout Brazil.

This foreshadowed a looming dilemma. As farmers mobilized to remain in the region, Itaipu increasingly sought to deflect their efforts by arguing that relocation outside of Paraná remained the only viable solution. Itaipu claimed to explore every possibility of finding new lands nearby. As we shall see in Chapter Five, however, administrators worked behind the scenes as part of a larger national strategy of using private colonization companies to resettle farmers on new agricultural projects in the faraway corners of Brazil, especially in the Amazon.

In the meantime, the communities facing displacement continued to mobilize. The early phases of collective action attracted a wider audience and the mainstream press also began to cover the struggle against Itaipu. The São Paulo-based *Folha da Tarde* ran an article titled “Itaipu: a nightmare for farmers” and the *Folha de São Paulo*—Brazil’s largest daily paper—reported that 6,000 families still awaited indemnification.⁵⁷ As the farmers’ notoriety grew at the national level, the movement’s first milestone took place in the patio of a Catholic church in Santa Helena. On October 16, 1978 nearly 1,500 farmers gathered at the meeting and after a round of opening remarks, the attendees split into smaller groups to discuss the following questions: What are three or four problems relating to Itaipu that led you to come to this assembly?; How would you like these problems to be resolved?; and How can we proceed from these suggestions?⁵⁸ Aware of likely government surveillance, these break-off groups assembled by region in order to separate any unknown people. One farmer remembers that this security measure left nearly a dozen men standing alone, indicating the military’s intent to infiltrate the

⁵⁷ “Um pesadelo para os lavradores: Itaipu,” *Folha da Tarde*, 7/17/1978; “Pastoral da Terra acusa Itaipu,” *Folha de São Paulo*, 8/18/1978.

⁵⁸ “Programa da assembléia dos lavradores da área de Itaipu.” 10/16/1978. Doc. No. 1513, Centro de Documentação e Pesquisa Histórica (hereafter CDPH), Universidade Estadual de Londrina.

gathering.⁵⁹

After a few hours, the smaller groups reconvened and held a general assembly that debated and finally approved a document to send to Brazil's president, General Ernesto Geisel. Known as the Carta de Santa Helena, this letter served as a springboard for the growing mass movement.⁶⁰ The Carta de Santa Helena provided a list of fifteen demands that included a price increase to Cr\$100,000 per *alquiere* for all types of land; the resettlement of families in nearby areas; and the indemnification of all members of a community at the same time. Another item demanded that farmers without legal title to their property still receive a minimum of 50 percent of the land's value.⁶¹ Although the concern for landless farmers dissipated at key moments over the next three years, its inclusion in the Carta de Santa Helena reflects the broader demands of the movement's earliest phase. Along with crafting the Carta de Santa Helena, the assembly elected a commission of twenty-five farmers and three church leaders to try and meet with President Geisel. The commission traveled to Foz do Iguaçu but could not gain an audience. They farmers did, however, succeed in meeting with the Minister of Mines and Energy, Shigeki Ueki. Hoping to placate the farmers Ueki promised to open an office of INCRA (the National Institute for Colonization and Agrarian Reform) in Foz do Iguaçu—a promise the government never kept.⁶² While the Santa Helena assembly and its resulting document failed to bring about any immediate changes, it marked the start of a movement capable of collectively forming a list of wide-reaching demands. The ability to mobilize and gain meetings with government authorities also meant that those in power began to take the farmers more seriously.

⁵⁹ Silvéncio Kolling, interview with author. Garuva, Santa Catarina, 2/28/2015.

⁶⁰ Minutes of Santa Helena meeting, 10/16/1978. PR0547. Source: Archive of CPT, Goiânia. General Ernesto Geisel was scheduled to visit nearby Foz do Iguaçu four days later on October 20.

⁶¹ "Documento da situação e das reivindicações dos lavradores da área de Itaipu — aprovado na assembléia realizada a 16 de outubro de 1978 em Santa Helena-PR." Source: Archive of the Federation of Rural Workers of Paraná (hereafter FETAEP), Curitiba.

⁶² Mazzarollo, *A Taipa da injustica*, 64.

Transitions at the national level added to the importance of the Santa Helena actions. The first fissures of Brazil's dictatorship appeared in the mid-1970s, initiating a breakdown in political control that Maria Helena Moreira Alves views as the process through which "people began to lose their fear of the military government."⁶³ Some of the earliest opposition momentum coalesced around an amnesty campaign that sought the return of exiled dissidents and the reinstatement of those who had lost their jobs and political rights.⁶⁴ Grassroots mobilizations continued to pressure the dictatorship as student protests in 1977 and the reemergence of a strong union movement further motivated activists throughout Brazil. Beginning in 1978 a wave of militancy and labor strikes in São Paulo's industrial ABC region marked the arrival of Luis Inácio "Lula" da Silva as a national opposition figure and counted the participation of over four million workers. (Table 2.2) Across the country, Brazilians forged new and increasingly significant ways to challenge the dictatorship's legitimacy. The opening spaces of negotiations between popular and state forces helped condition the opposition actions taking place at Itaipu.

Year	Number of Strikes	Number of Strikers
1978	24	539,037
1979	113	3,207,994
1980	50	664,700

Table 2.2: Labor Strikes, 1978-1980. Source: Alves, *State and Opposition*, 197-208.

Despite these reemerging nodes of political dissent, the realities of life under dictatorship persisted. Especially in regions like western Paraná, the political freedoms that the *abertura*

⁶³ Maria Helena Moreira Alves. "Interclass Alliances in the Opposition to the Military in Brazil: Consequences for the Transition Period." in (*Power and Protest: Latin American Social Movements*. Ed. Susan Eckstein. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988), 295.

⁶⁴ For more on the amnesty movement, see Danyelle Nilin Gonçalves. *O Preço do passado: anistia e reparação de perseguidos políticos no Brasil*. (São Paulo: Editora Expressão Popular, 2009).

facilitated in cities like Rio de Janeiro and São Paulo often arrived much later, if at all. During this regionally uneven process, however, the farmers at Itaipu cultivated unique forms of political consciousness. This largely resulted from the initial mobilizations against Itaipu and the fact that the dictatorship maintained an extremely close watch over all grassroots actions. In the early years of the movement (1975-1980) repression and surveillance forced people to hold secret meetings, communicate in coded messages, and travel circuitous routes to avoid detection. A farmer named Silvênio Konning remembers it as a time when “we couldn’t have open meetings, because Institutional Act 5 was still in place and we couldn’t even park our cars near the place where we would gather.”⁶⁵ According to Pastor Fuchs, farmers constantly feared infiltration from the state police, the army, the SNI, and Itaipu’s security forces.⁶⁶ Documentary evidence reveals that all of the agencies mentioned by Fuchs did, in fact, keep close tabs on the movement. Because farming communities in the Paraná borderlands had little prior contact with the dictatorship, this surveillance had a profound and unintended consequence. Carlos Grillman recalls that by asking questions like “why do we have to meet in secret?” farmers began to form larger questions about why they did not have other freedoms and rights.⁶⁷ The experience of confronting Itaipu thus added a tangible awareness of life under dictatorship.

In the increasingly politicized fight against Itaipu, politicians also began to speak out in support of the farmers. In an address to the Paraná Legislative Assembly, the pastor and recently elected state deputy Gernote Kirinus declared that the rural communities “are making a patriotic sacrifice by shouldering the serious problems emanating from this pharaonic project. We must

⁶⁵ As quoted in Catiane Matiello. “Narrativas Tecnológicas, desenraizamento e cultura de resistência: história oral de vida de famílias desapropriadas pela construção da usina hidrelétrica de Itaipu.” MA thesis, Universidade Tecnológica Federal do Paraná (UTFP), 2011, 71.

⁶⁶ Ibid., 195.

⁶⁷ Carlos Grillman, interview with author. 10/2/2014. Foz do Iguaçu, Brazil.

turn our attention away from the outrageous megalomania that is feeding this source of national vanity, and concentrate instead on [...] the rights of our state's inhabitants."⁶⁸ The theme of "sacrifice" resonated strongly in the afflicted communities. According to a Congressional speech by Paulo Marques, representatives of Itaipu told a farmer that, "for this dam to be built, someone has to be sacrificed for the good of Brazil." Marques relayed to Congress the farmers' full testimony, which included the following narrative:

But why must we be sacrificed? We have been here for ten, twelve, twenty years digging, planting, sowing, paying taxes, contributing to the greatness of these lands, and now they tell us we must be sacrificed. As if our calloused hands were not enough, our curved spines, our wrinkled faces; as if it weren't enough that we had to watch our wives cry for lack of food, for lack of medicine... And now we must be sacrificed. They don't even have the guts to admit that farmers won't receive enough money to buy new lands and that we will be sent to INCRA's lands in god-knows-where. So after all that we've already gone through, we now wait for jungles, wild animals, mosquitoes, malaria, sickness, and perhaps death itself.⁶⁹

The progress made throughout 1978 in establishing the movement's ideological and tactical base yielded victories in the early months of 1979. In January, Itaipu agreed to a 40-percent price increase.⁷⁰ Paulo da Cunha attributed the raise not to popular pressure, but rather to an effort to remain consistent with changes in the land's market value. Da Cunha claimed that this allowed Itaipu to more efficiently administer 250 indemnification contracts per month to meet the goal of completing all compensation agreements by 1980.⁷¹ On the heels of Itaipu's first-ever price concession, the farmers held another general assembly on February 16 in Marechal Cândido Rondon. While recognizing the importance of the 40-percent increase,

⁶⁸ Depoimento do Pastor G.G. Kirinus, "CPI Desparanização." Curitiba, 4/19/1978. Source: Collection "Kirinus" No. 4, CEPEDAL, UNIOESTE-Marechal Cândido Rondon.

⁶⁹ Speech from Deputy Paulo Marques to the National Congress on 6/10/1978. Source: Diário do Congresso Nacional, Seção 1, 4740.

⁷⁰ Memo I/AJ.SCA/0377/78, 12/5/1978. Source: Microfilm 1681F.1104-1107. CDIB.

⁷¹ Mazzarollo, *A taipa da injustica*, 69.

attendees agreed that indemnifications should now adjust every month.⁷² Having lost their faith in the government's ability to act in the interests of rural communities and claiming that Paraná had many large estates suited for government expropriation, farmers demanded relocation nearby because "as free citizens, we have the right to choose where we want to live." According to Aluizio Palmar, participation at these meetings provided the foundation and energy to sustain the struggle: "all of the farmers went to these assemblies. It was a question of life and death."⁷³

In early March President Geisel signed into law a decree that marked the lands around Itaipu as belonging to the "public utility" and gave the Binational Corporation sole jurisdiction in the indemnification process.⁷⁴ Previously, government agencies like the Ministry of the Interior or INCRA (the National Institute for Colonization and Agrarian Reform) administered these policies, yet the conferring of total control to Itaipu Binational indicated how much the dictatorship valued the project.⁷⁵ For the farmers who already considered Itaipu to have abused its powers with the local population, this decree likely provoked even more anxiety. Motivated by these recent events, over 3,000 people gathered for an assembly in Santa Helena on April 7 in the movement's largest action yet. Journalists from *o Estado de São Paulo*, *Globo*, *Veja* (Brazil's largest weekly magazine), *o Jornal do Brasil*, and numerous local and state outlets attended the meeting.⁷⁶ After labor leaders and bishops gave opening speeches, over 50 farmers took the microphone to voice outrage and frustration. Stories included Itaipu paying unequal amounts for

⁷² Of. no. 0064/79-FETAEP. Source: Acervo Itaipu Binacional, files "1979, 1980, 1981," Public Archive of Paraná, Curitiba (hereafter APP). Nearly 1,000 farmers, representatives of the CPT, the Peace and Justice Commission, the Paraná Federation of Agricultural Workers, and the rural unions from seven different municipalities attended the meeting.

⁷³ Aluizio Palmar, interview with author. Foz do Iguaçu, Paraná, 8/6/2013.

⁷⁴ Presidential Decree No. 83.225, 3/1/1979. Source: Archive of FETAEP, Curitiba.

⁷⁵ Prior to INCRA's creation in 1970, the government agencies in charge of agrarian reform included the Superintendência de Reforma Agrária (SUPRA), the Instituto Brasileiro de Reforma Agrária (IBRA) and the Instituto Nacional de Desenvolvimento Agrário (INDA).

⁷⁶ Confidential AESI Informação No. 0514/79-E/AESI.G/, 5/7/1979, paragraph 7. In: AC.ACE.1798/79. AN-RJ.

identical plots of land; the Bank of Brazil taking illegal commissions on the land sale transactions; and an Itaipu employee asking one farmer to borrow his land deed in order to make a photocopy but then refusing to return it unless the farmer signed a sale contract.⁷⁷

Similar tales of mistreatment circulated throughout the region. One of the most extreme examples dealt with Itaipu officials setting a house on fire in order to get a family to vacate the property.⁷⁸ Whether or not the events actually occurred matters less than the meanings attached to them by local communities. Different forms of illicit expropriations also occurred, such as when Itaipu representatives verbally measured and evaluated the land without leaving any documents or appraisal reports.⁷⁹ Along with these in-person dealings, a more subtle form of abuse related to Itaipu's proposed timeline. One farmer remembered the frustration of being strung along:

The pattern was always the same: Itaipu would say that they were coming but never did! Every day of our lives, every night, during all those years it was the same torment. You can't make any plans because soon enough you'll get paid and will have to leave. That might seem easy, but after a year, and then after another year, all that waiting is so exhausting that eventually you're ready to leave everything behind and leave, just to free yourself of that torment.⁸⁰

In the late afternoon at the Santa Helena meeting, the assembled farmers discussed and voted on ten specific demands. The resulting statement called for Itaipu to immediately begin a expropriation process in accordance with the laws of public wellbeing; for a state-wide agrarian reform program that worked directly with local communities; for a minimum price for all land compensation of Cr\$100,000; and for the indemnified to receive a one-year grace period to pay

⁷⁷ Mazzarollo, *A taipa da injustica*, 70-73.

⁷⁸ As cited in Judite Veranisa Schmitt. "Os atingidos por Itaipu: História e memória. Oeste do Paraná, décadas de 1970 a 2000." Masters thesis, UNIOESTE-Marechal Cândido Rondon, 2008, 36.

⁷⁹ These examples come from Mazzarollo, *A Taipa da injustiça*, 51-54; and Werner Fuchs, interview with author. 7/13/2013, Curitiba, Paraná.

⁸⁰ Matiello, "Narrativas tecnológicas," 100.

off existing mortgages.⁸¹ The document framed these demands as a natural extension of their rights as Brazilians, citing the Constitution's guarantee of the "inviolable rights to life, liberty, property, and security."⁸² As people throughout the nation reasserted their vision for a new democratic society, farmers in western Paraná made a similar claim to their own rights as citizens of Brazil.

This evolving set of demands and its coverage in the national media elicited a response from Itaipu's director, General José Cavalcanti. Within a few days of the assembly Cavalcanti sent a lengthy note to various state deputies, newspapers, and the farmers' allies emphasizing that Itaipu was "doing everything possible to benefit the expropriated, giving them the humane and Christian treatment that they deserve."⁸³ Addressing the main demand of receiving more money, Cavalcanti claimed that Itaipu simply paid according to evaluations done by private companies the previous year—a claim that would be disproved in 1981 when a government agency determined that Itaipu paid far below market value.⁸⁴ Cavalcanti also side-stepped the farmers' desire to stay in Paraná by claiming that responsibility for resettlement lay solely with INCRA. He did note, however, that Itaipu had provided a list of seven private companies with available lands and encouraged farmers to choose freely amongst them.

Despite Cavalcanti's attempts to project a calm demeanor, internal documents suggest otherwise. A confidential AESI report observed that the Santa Helena meeting "was a political event carefully prepared to have national and international effects. The display of democratic freedoms provides a favorable climate for other opposition movements." The farmers' actions

⁸¹ "Terras no Paraná e indenização justa." Document produced at Santa Helena meeting, 4/7/1979. Source: Microfilm 1398F.1471-1480, CDIB.

⁸² This quotation comes from Article 153 of Brazil's Constitution.

⁸³ E/DG/0221/79, 4/11/1979. Source: Archive of FETAEP, Curitiba.

⁸⁴ This report was issued by the Institute of Land and Cartography (ITC, Instituto de Terra e Cartografia) in April of 1981 at the height of the Foz do Iguaçu land encampment. The details of the ITC report will be presented in Chapter Three of this thesis.

clearly began to reverberate beyond the immediate fight against Itaipu. As described in the AESI memo, the movement had “the possibility to negatively influence both the internal and external politics of Brazil.”⁸⁵

At the end of May Cavalcanti consented to give his first public interview when he met with the journalists Juvêncio Mazzarollo and João Adelino de Souza from the Foz do Iguaçu newspaper, *Hoje*. As we shall see in Chapter Seven, these were two of the three journalists that Cavalcanti helped imprison a year and a half later for their coverage of Itaipu’s standoff with the farmers.⁸⁶ In the middle of 1979, however, the government did not yet consider the writers a major threat and Cavalcanti engaged them in a wide range of topics, including Paraguay’s involvement with Itaipu, the status of the dam’s construction, and the legitimacy of the farmers’ demands.⁸⁷ When asked about the rural protests, Cavalcanti framed them as an unfortunate yet necessary reality: “Of course we feel bad seeing these farmers leave their lands, but Brazil needs this energy, it would not be possible for Brazil to survive the next decade without the energy of Itaipu.”⁸⁸ And when pressed on the allegations that Itaipu paid below market value for the lands, Cavalcanti claimed that the Binational simply could not afford to pay more: “We want to construct Itaipu as cheaply as possible and we cannot pay for the land at a price above what it’s worth.”⁸⁹

Coming from the director of a project with a budget that would stretch to nearly US\$20 billion, these statements likely rang hollow to families seeking an increase of less than US\$5,000 each.⁹⁰ Moreover, Cavalcanti’s public statements contradicted those he made privately. In 1978

⁸⁵ Confidential AESI Informação No. 0514/79-E/AESI.G/, 5/7/1979, paragraphs 9 and 12. In: AC.ACE.1798/79. AN-RJ.

⁸⁶ The imprisonment of Juvêncio Mazzarollo is the theme of Chapter Seven of this thesis.

⁸⁷ “Cara a Cara.” *Hoje*, 5/31/1979, 14-15.

⁸⁸ “Cara a Cara.” *Hoje*, 5/31/1979, 15.

⁸⁹ Ibid.

⁹⁰ The conversion rate between the Brazilian cruzeiro and the US dollar in 1979 was roughly 30:1. This means that

he noted in confidential settings that Itaipu already planned on paying up to Cr\$100,000 per *alquiere*.⁹¹ These facts raise the question of why Itaipu acted so disingenuously in forcing the farmers to struggle for price increases that the Binational was willing to concede all along. As discussed earlier, Itaipu's importance derived in great measure from the image of strength it projected for the government. This became increasingly true as opposition forces began to chip away at the dictatorship's monopoly on power. Whether increasing wages for industrial workers on strike or giving more money for flooded lands, the military regime likely saw any form of financial concession as an inherently political concession. To increase payments to farmers, therefor, would grant popular forces a semblance of political legitimacy. Although Itaipu had internally agreed to increase expropriation prices, its refusal to do so publicly reflected the dictatorship's determination to maintain an appearance of complete control.

The interview with Cavalcanti eventually pivoted to the dam's construction and Mazzarollo mentioned allegations of workers forced into grueling conditions with shifts of up to fifteen hours straight. Cavalcanti denied these accusations, stating that Itaipu always operated within the standards set by Brazilian labor law that allowed for eight-hour shifts and two hours of overtime. Despite Cavalcanti's statements, similar claims dogged Itaipu throughout its entire construction, punctuated by the fact that innumerable workers died while building the dam. While impossible to know the exact number of work-place fatalities—estimates range from Itaipu's official number of 149 to as high as 1,000—its symbolism within the local populations is

when the farmers demanded a price increase of around 25,000 cruzeiros per *alquiere*, it represented an average sum of US\$831. The average rural holding slated to be flooded by Itaipu was six *alqueires*; farmers thus sought an average indemnification for the equivalent of \$4,986. Over the next two years, the cruzeiro suffered from rampant inflation, and the farmers increased their price demands to keep pace with the resulting over-speculation of the land market. Even at the height of the farmers' movement in May of 1981 when they demanded an increase of almost 500,000 cruzeiros, with inflation (at that time Cr\$84:\$1), this still only amounted to the equivalent of roughly \$2,400 per *alquiere*. Source: http://www.gwu.edu/~ibi/database/Exchange_Rate_1954-present.pdf. Accessed June 23, 2015.

⁹¹ "Notas da reunião com a INCRA." 12/5/1978, Rio de Janeiro. Source: Microfilm 728F.1273-1285. CDIB.

clear.⁹² One article from 1981 described the construction site as a “concentration camp” and to this day people still remember the Itaipu as a dam “built with concrete and blood.”⁹³ Despite Cavalcanti’s efforts, the realities of what transpired in both the construction zone and the surrounding countryside provided a counterpoint to the public image that Itaipu sought to project.

Support for the farmers continued to increase over the next few months, highlighted by a speech in late June from Sérgio Spada, a Foz do Iguaçu city councilman.⁹⁴ Spada’s statements provoked a lengthy response from Itaipu. Paulo da Cunha, the Binational’s legal director, declared in a press release that “Itaipu is always there in defense of the farmers’ legitimate rights, in their treatment, and the search for viable and fair solutions, ... we strive for an expropriation policy defined by the Christian approach of always helping those around us.”⁹⁵ Such statements aimed to convince the public that Itaipu did everything within its powers to process the expropriations in a fair and timely manner. However, internal documents again depict Itaipu’s handling of the expropriations as highly disorganized and shrouded in secrecy.

Although da Cunha’s press release described Itaipu as “totally transparent” in its indemnification policies, the Binational prohibited its employees from divulging information regarding expropriations to anyone other than the individuals involved on a case-by-case basis.

⁹² A 2010 investigation on Itaipu quoted Aníbal Orué Pozzo, the communication director of Itaipu in Paraguay, as saying that although the official estimate of worker deaths had tended to be in the range of 130 to 150, it is likely that the actual number is closer to the total of 1,000 that many critics of the dam have alleged. Source: <http://www.parana-online.com.br/colunistas/sopa-brasiguai/76320/37+ANOS+DO+TRATADO+DE+ITAIPU> Accessed June 17, 2015.

⁹³ “Itaipu é campo de concentração.” *Nosso Tempo*, 3/4/1981, 8-12; “Dener,” interview with author. Assentamento Antonio Tavares, São Miguel do Iguaçu, Paraná, 11/3/2014. It should be noted that for the most part, the populations of dam workers and rural farmers rarely overlapped—although some of the expropriated farmers did seek employment in Itaipu’s construction site. Chapter Three of this thesis describes a period during the 1981 Foz do Iguaçu land encampment when dam workers attempted to send solidarity to the protesting farmers, only to have the Itaipu Binational intervene to keep the two sectors from interacting and organizing together.

⁹⁴ For more on the history of the MDB, see: Kinzo, 1998.

⁹⁵ “As Criticas de Sérgio Spada São Injustas,” *Hoje*, 6/28/1979, 8.

Even then, farmers could only learn the details of their particular case once it had been processed and approved by the Binational's regional headquarters and its local secretary.⁹⁶ More than just a lack of transparency, documents from Itaipu's legal office reveal an unclear chain of command, constantly shifting regulations, a mishandling of budget deficits, and rampant inefficiency in the actual processing and paying of land expropriations.⁹⁷ One report even spoke of a "troubling pattern" of land sale contracts ruined by coffee stains.⁹⁸ Even leaving aside the larger political explanations for the mistreatment of local communities, the level of internal disorganization meant that Itaipu's actions could likely never match its rhetoric.

In the unfolding battle for public opinion, Itaipu brought a group of state deputies to tour the construction site prior to the completion of the Paraná River's diversion canal. One of the visitors, Nelton Friedrich, noted that such an invitation never could have occurred earlier in the decade—a type of progress that he attributed to the increase in popular pressure during the early phases of Brazil's political reopening. Friedrich nonetheless saw the visit as gimmick to deflect criticism, stating that "Itaipu is using an old American trick of trying to convince people through their eyes, which is to say with grandeur, with numbers, trying to gloss over the vision of politicians."⁹⁹ Around this time Itaipu conceded to a new round of price adjustments by instituting a 17.8-percent raise to adjust the base value for "top quality" lands at around Cr\$100,000. In private, Itaipu described the update as necessary to "avoid the great discrepancies

⁹⁶ AJ/003/79. "Instrução ao setor de desapropriação." Memo from the Diretoria Jurídica, 6/1/1979. Source: Microfilm 2110F.0016. CDIB.

⁹⁷ Although Itaipu first established its guidelines for expropriations in the reservoir area in July of 1977, their bylaws shifted throughout the next several years. Only in April of 1979 did the Legal Office (Diretoria Jurídica) officially receive the mandate to process expropriations. Yet "a series of irregularities and errors" continued until a Central Expropriation Archive (Arquivo Central de Desapropriação), was created in March of 1980. Sources: Memo I/AJ.SCA/0377/78, 12/5/78; Microfilm 1681F.1104-1107; and Memo I/AJ.SEC/0003A/80, "Situação no arquivo central de desapropriação," 2/12/1980. Microfilm 2110F.431-433. Both sources from CDIB.

⁹⁸ I/AJ.SEC/006/80. "Montagem e tombamento de processos encerrados." Memo from the Diretoria Jurídica, 3/18/1980. Source: Microfilm 2100F.438-441.

⁹⁹ Untitled article. *Folha de Londrina*, 7/5/1979, 28.

that caused so many problems in the ongoing process of expropriations.”¹⁰⁰ Despite these changes, it appears that Itaipu still used various tactics to avoid paying the money as promised. An AESI memo from November 1979 reported of farmers complaining that Itaipu sent its employees to pressure families to sign contracts and of outright refusals to deliver compensation by the agreed upon deadlines.¹⁰¹

With each passing month, the specter of the planned 1982 flood drew ever closer and pressure increased to find a solution before the region disappeared under water. Toward the end of 1979 the idea of finding common ground seemed highly improbable. In fact, INCRA even warned Itaipu’s leadership that if they did not change its policies, it could “create a climate of revolt and social unrest” throughout the region.¹⁰² Itaipu ignored these words of caution and did little to adapt its actions to the evolving social and political landscape taking root in western Paraná and throughout the country.

The Start of *Abertura* and a new Era of Opposition in Brazil

As the impasse between Itaipu and the farmers’ movement moved toward its eventual tipping point at the 1980 Santa Helena encampment, opposition forces continued to develop at the national level. Popular mobilizations like the amnesty movement and the student and labor strikes of the late 1970s had already succeeded in advancing opposition to the dictatorship. Even before the new president General João Batista Figueiredo (1979-1985) inaugurated the *abertura* program, grassroots actions had injected opposition movements with the confidence to defend the goals of a democratic Brazil. As a result, these popular struggles helped pave the way for the

¹⁰⁰ Confidential memo, “Cálculo do índice para o 2 reajuste da tabela de preços do reservatório.” 6/27/1979. Source: Microfilm 1684F.1588-1593. CDIB.

¹⁰¹ Confidential AESI report No. E/AESI.G.IB.BR/0549/79. 11/20/1979. Source: AN-RJ.

¹⁰² Informação PJR/No.312/79. 9/24/1979. Source: Regional archive of INCRA, Cascavel, Paraná.

legal and legislative components of democratization unfolding in the official *abertura*.

At the end of Geisel's presidency in December 1978, the government allowed Institutional Act 5 to expire, thereby ending the law that had justified torture and the rampant suspension of political rights. AI-5 embodied the dictatorship's national security state and its repeal signaled an important step in Brazil's wayward return to democracy. General Figueiredo took office in March 1979 and initiated the official policy of *abertura* under the auspices of pacifying the elite opposition in order to guarantee that any transition away from military rule would occur "with greater stability and wider support."¹⁰³ During his first six months in office, Figueiredo oversaw the passage of two laws that suggested the beginning of a more democratic Brazil.

In August, the Amnesty Bill granted the return of Brazilian exiles and allowed suspended politicians to regain their rights. Although the law signaled an important step in the *abertura*, it remained a complicated and highly contested product of negotiations between opposition groups and hard-liners within the military regime. Exiles could return to Brazil and persecuted public employees regained their posts, but members of the military also received blanket pardons for any alleged participation in torture or repression. Then in October, the Party Reform Bill abolished the two state-created political parties, the Alliance for National Renovation (ARENA, the government party) and the Brazilian Democratic Movement (MDB, the "loyal" opposition party). The Party Reform Bill still placed obstacles in the path of opposition parties.¹⁰⁴ James Green argues that the bill formed as Figueiredo's response to a fear that the MDB might win a

¹⁰³ Alves, *State and Opposition*, 173.

¹⁰⁴ For example, the Party Reform Bill prohibited the use of terms in official party names that appealed to class or race, a stipulation targeting the nascent Worker's Party (Partido dos Trabalhadores, PT). The PT would not receive official recognition by the state until October of 1980 when it fulfilled the requirements of obtaining 20 percent of municipal representatives in at least 13 states. For more on the Party Reform Bill, see Alves, *State and Opposition*, 212-215.

majority in Congress and in key state legislatures: “it was a divide-and-conquer strategy directed toward splintering the legal opposition.”¹⁰⁵ Despite the limitations of both the Amnesty and Party Reform laws, they nonetheless created new tools for the exercise of political rights and facilitated the legal and legislative reopening of Brazilian society. Popular forces throughout the country sought to capitalize on these opening spaces of dissent and continued their more localized efforts to reclaim political freedoms.

At the end of 1979 the CPT produced a document that offers a clear window into how local social movements engaged with the emerging national rhetoric of *abertura*. Titled “You and Hydroelectrics” (*Você e as hidroelétricas*), the CPT publication served as a guide for its members in how to organize a planned series of community meetings. The first gatherings included bible study groups framed by questions intended to help participants infer religious lessons about collective struggle and injustice: “Who in our region is Goliath, and who is on the side of David?” and, “In your life, who could be a Moses figure and who plays the role of Pharaoh?”¹⁰⁶ After these initial meetings, the pamphlet instructed CPT members to begin a series of discussions about “Workers fighting for their rights” that gave an overview of the farmers’ movement against Itaipu. From there, the document launched into a full analysis of the ABC industrial strikes and asked farmers to consider “What lessons can we take from the example of the São Paulo workers?”

Over the arc of fifteen pages, this CPT guidebook connects stories from the Bible, the immediacy of the fight against Itaipu, and the larger meanings of national events like the ABC strikes. The document concludes by asking participants to reflect on the following ideas:

After seeing these examples, can you still say that farmers and workers are capable of

¹⁰⁵ Green. *We Cannot Remain Silent*, 349.

¹⁰⁶ All descriptions of this document come from: “Você e as hidroelétricas.” Secretariado da CPT Paraná, Marechal Cândido Rondon, 1979. Courtesy of Werner Fuchs.

nothing? It is now the time for us to prove that we are all like them. We also have these abilities, and together can be a great force. What are you doing to help build this great force, to be worthy of our rights and those of all workers?¹⁰⁷

In the early months of 1980 many of the tensions of the national *abertura* existed at the local level in western Paraná. While various opposition groups supported the farmers' movement, pro-military forces spoke out in favor of Itaipu. The Vice-President of the Paraná Legislative Assembly, an ARENA deputy named Tércio Albuquerque, vilified the rural protesters as "demagogic and futile."¹⁰⁸ In a personal letter, Albuquerque informed General Cavalcanti that "although he could not act as Itaipu's official spokesperson [in the state assembly] he vowed to always stand up against any antagonistic politicians."¹⁰⁹ Such statements suggest another example of the double-reality of *abertura*: despite the political and electoral reforms taking root nationally, supporters of the dictatorship continued to cite grassroots movements like those at Itaipu as evidence of the disorder plaguing Brazil. According to this logic, the disorder incited by the farmers in western Paraná proved that the country still required military rule to maintain order, especially in this region where a potential return to democracy would cripple the government's ability to deliver the economic promise of the world's largest hydroelectric dam. In the years to come, pro-military and pro-Itaipu forces invoked this narrative to push back against the farmers—and against the *abertura* in general.

By March, tensions on the ground grew to the point that INCRA again sent Itaipu the same warning from six months earlier: change your actions or risk creating "a climate of revolt and social unrest."¹¹⁰ At this moment the CPT invited a bishop named José Brandão on a speaking tour to share his recent experience with communities similarly displaced by the

¹⁰⁷ "Você e as hidroelétricas," 18-19.

¹⁰⁸ "Questão de Itaipu, Tércio quer diálogo." *O Paraná*, 5/6/1979, 1.

¹⁰⁹ Confidential Memo I/AC/0017/78, 1/31/1979. Source: Microfilm 1399F.1393-1394. CDIB.

¹¹⁰ Of.INCRA/P/No./74/80, 3/6/1980. Source: Microfilm 2136F.972-977. CDIB.

Sobradinho hydroelectric dam in the northern state of Bahia.¹¹¹ Brandão gave a speech about popular struggle in which he denounced the President of Brazil, criticized capitalism and the mainstream media, and urged the farmers to take a bold stand against Itaipu. As Pastor Fuchs later recalled: “With each phrase [from Bishop Brandão], the anxieties of people fell away little by little.”¹¹² Soon afterwards the farmers’ movement began discussing potential strategies for achieving their demands, including a march on Brasília and the construction of a roadblock on the highway that linked Foz do Iguaçu and Paraná’s capital city of Curitiba.¹¹³

Although these actions never took place, the farmers made it known that their patience had run out. In late June the MJT sent a statement to Itaipu and various government ministries declaring that rural communities were prepared to enact radical and even violent strategies as “a last resort” in response to Itaipu’s “refusal to solve these problems.”¹¹⁴ The letter noted that land values had soared to over Cr\$180,000 while Itaipu kept its prices below Cr\$120,000, and that 2,500 families still awaited expropriation. Considering that the Binational’s deadline for paying all of its indemnifications loomed less than six months away (it had recently been extended to December of 1981), this meant that a significant portion of the surrounding population faced the possibility of leaving their lands without receiving any financial compensation.

Conclusion

Confronted by this harsh reality and emboldened by the political developments taking place throughout Brazil, the farmers soon took decisive action. In the lead-up to the movement’s first

¹¹¹ “Comemoração dos 25 anos do Movimento Justiça e Terra.” Video recording from Santa Helena, 2007. Courtesy of Tarcísio Vanderlinde.

¹¹² Mezzomo. *Memórias dos movimentos sociais no oeste do Paraná*, 15.

¹¹³ “Colonos do Oeste ameaçam ir a Brasília se a Itaipu se recusar a indenizá-los,” *Correio de Notícias*, 5/8/1980, 11.

¹¹⁴ “Itaipu: a ameaça dos lavradores.” *Folha de São Paulo*, 6/25/1980, 33.

direct action—a land encampment in front of Itaipu’s regional office—a final effort attempted to peacefully engage Itaipu and the national government. Farmers sent a petition with over 1,200 signatures to General Cavalcanti and to various federal ministries. The document noted that although the movement had thus far been guided by the Church’s concern with “just and harmonious solutions for the rural class,” an emerging sentiment of “anguish and revolt [was now] readily found amongst the affected populations.”¹¹⁵ As had occurred over the previous five years, authorities ignored the farmers’ demands. This time, however, Itaipu’s obstinacy sparked a new phase of rural mobilization that culminated with a pair of land encampments in 1980 and 1981. This escalation of strategy put the farmers directly in the path of Itaipu’s forward progress and thrust the MJT struggle into the national spotlight.

In the years to come, the fight at Itaipu reflected Brazil’s complex path away from military rule, exemplifying the double-reality of *abertura*. By denouncing Itaipu’s expropriation policies, the farmers helped redirect public opinion away from the triumphalist image that the Brazilian government sought to project on a global scale. And in framing their demands as part of the broader struggle for democratic freedoms, the movement tapped into a surging grassroots opposition across Brazil. Yet as we shall see, even within the rural movement only certain sectors of the countryside could access the benefits—both material and ideological—of the official democratic transition. As the MJT helped turn the fight at Itaipu into a referendum on the dictatorship itself, the region’s landless and indigenous communities remained marginalized and overlooked. The following two chapters explore the diversity of experiences and rural livelihoods at stake in the growing standoff at Itaipu.

¹¹⁵ Letter from CPT leadership to Gen. Cavalcanti, 6/23/1980. Source: Microfilm 2135F.958-995. CDIB.

Chapter Three

Before the Flood: Itaipu and the Politics of *Abertura* in the Countryside, 1980-1982

In a little-known 1983 documentary “Os Desapropriados” (The Expropriated), Marcelo Barth describes the sense of despair that led him and his fellow farmers to escalate their fight against Itaipu in July of 1980. The decision to set up a land encampment outside the Binational’s regional office in Santa Helena marked the official beginning of the Justice and Land Movement (MJT, Movimento Justiça e Terra). In his interview with the filmmaker Frederico Fülgraf, Barth noted that:

The Justice and Land Movement was practically born out of desperation, it was a shout of anguish from people who had to leave but who received [no money] to actually do so... So some of us yelled ‘we are going to occupy these offices to see if they finally pay us.’ Because we saw that it just couldn’t go on any longer, it wasn’t enough to complain, have a few protests, go on marches. That wasn’t enough. We had to do something serious, we had to stay there with our agony on full display, because if we didn’t then we would never, ever solve anything.¹

The land encampment at Santa Helena lasted 15 days and served as a test for both the farmers’ resolve and for and how much dissent the dictatorship would allow. This initial protest brought scores of new members into the MJT and introduced their demands to a national audience. Eight months later the MJT staged a second encampment directly in front of the dam’s construction site in Foz do Iguaçu, at which point the escalating drama at Itaipu began to occupy headlines in Brazil’s largest newspapers. The increased attention helped catapult the lives of farmers in western Paraná into national debates over land, development, and democracy. This chapter traces the evolution and internal dynamics of the MJT, using the period between the

¹ Frederico Fülgraff, *Os Desapropriados*, 1983 documentary. Produced by Mutirão Produções Cine-Audio Visuais.

initial 1980 land encampment and the flooding of the Itaipu reservoir in 1982 to illuminate the overlapping history of agrarian struggles and political opposition at a critical moment in Brazil's transition away from dictatorship.



FIGURE 3.1: Farmers at Santa Helena encampment, July 1980. Photo courtesy of Guiomar Germani,

This chapter chronicles the three most important years of the Justice and Land Movement. Over the course of both land encampments, the movement won significant price increases for the soon-to-be-flooded lands; received national media attention; and drew solidarity from politicians, labor unions, human rights groups, and civic organizations throughout Brazil. Given the confluence of opposition figures who participated in the fight at Itaipu, the conflict functioned as a living theater of the *abertura* struggle against military rule. When Itaipu dispatched hundreds of heavily armed soldiers to block the farmers' encampment at Itaipu, journalists and politicians questioned the dictatorship's commitment to a democratic transition. In particular, protesters called attention to the symbolism of the all-powerful Itaipu repressing the

humble farmers of Paraná, an image popularized in the slogan, “Are Itaipu’s guns the symbol of the *abertura*?” With a global spotlight cast on the dam’s construction, opposition groups helped elevate the struggle at Itaipu into a public indictment of the military government.



FIGURE 3.2: Standoff with military police, March 16, 1981, Foz do Iguaçu. *Poeira* No. 15, April 1981, 7.

Yet the farmers’ standoff at Itaipu symbolized more than just a local expression of the political reawakening unfolding across Brazil. It took place in a region separated both geographically and politically from major urban centers. In interviews, many farmers used the terms ‘Itaipu’ and ‘government’ interchangeably, indicating that in a borderland that had received little attention from the Brazilian state, Itaipu became a stand-in for the dictatorship itself. Moreover, the region’s proximity to two neighboring countries also ruled by military regimes (Argentina and Paraguay) produced a steady trans-border flow of exiles and opposition forces. These dynamics led to what I theorize as an emerging landscape of dissent. This approach borrows from Thomas Rogers’ concept that landscapes simultaneously exist as “an idea—a panorama associated with particular meanings” and as an environment with specific material

characteristics.² Numerous farmers referred to the fight against Itaipu as a sort of ‘political classroom’ where rural communities learned to defend both their rights to land and their rights as citizens. So rather than serving as a passive setting on which the Brazilian state could imprint its grand development schemes, the peripheral nature of this border region cultivated a distinctive form of political consciousness.

These dynamics of the western Paraná countryside resulted in a wave of popular resistance that neither Itaipu nor its military backers could have predicted. With international attention on the dam’s construction and in the uncertain context of Brazil’s transition toward democratic rule, the MJT connected a localized defense of land with opposition forces throughout the country. The farmers’ struggle is emblematic of what I conceptualize as the double-reality of *abertura*, wherein different regions and social groups experienced the process of democratization across competing realities. Catalyzed by the presence of Itaipu and the absence of a meaningful *abertura* from above, members of the MJT mobilized around their own notions of political rights and justice. As a result, Itaipu structured a landscape of opposition, intimately linked yet also removed from Brazil’s central political spheres. Rather than mere receptors of the ideas disseminated from the more frequently studied loci of *abertura*, rural communities at Itaipu forged a nascent regional identity and turned into consequential political agents in their own right.

As we shall see, however, the internal dynamics of the MJT also reveal a contradiction between the movement’s egalitarian rhetoric and a hierarchy that existed in practice. This issue affected both the Avá-Guarani indigenous community and the region’s landless peasants, the histories of which will be discussed at great length in Chapters Four and Six, respectively. In this

² Rogers, *The Deepest Wounds*, 6.

chapter, an overview of these two groups begins to reveal the complexities of the MJT. The minutes of general assemblies, interviews with surviving participants, and the dictatorship's surveillance reports reconstruct the development of a heterogeneous and contradictory movement. This chapter also considers the role of the Church, especially how certain religious leaders helped stymie a growing demand of 'land-for-land' that envisioned a more radical approach to solving the long-term needs of rural communities. Although it presented itself as an egalitarian counterpoint to the injustices of the military regime, the Justice and Land Movement also exhibited traits that perpetuated localized forms of inequality.

Chapter Three concludes with an analysis of two seminal events that took place toward the end of 1982: the flooding of the Itaipu basin and Brazil's first direct elections under dictatorship. On October 13 a landscape of lush farmlands supporting thousands of families disappeared under 29 billion cubic meters of water. The dam's reservoir became a permanent legacy of the dictatorship, a dramatic physical marker that continued in democratic Brazil. National elections took place the following month. On November 15 all legally recognized parties put forth candidates for all offices except the presidency. Nearly 50 million Brazilians went to the polls and observers celebrated the election as a triumph of the *abertura*. However, because the dictatorship had designated the municipality around Itaipu as a 'national security zone,' Foz do Iguaçu could not hold local elections. The plight of the displaced farmers and the continued lack of political rights in the border region suggest that while many freedoms had been regained by the early 1980s, the *abertura* did not benefit all Brazilians.

The Santa Helena Encampment: "a Laboratory of Consciousness"

As shown at the end of Chapter Two, farmers had discussed directly confronting Itaipu throughout most of the preceding year. After weighing other options, the farmers' movement

planned a July 1980 protest in front of Itaipu's regional office in Santa Helena, a relatively small but centrally located town. On Friday July 11—three days before the encampment began—community leaders finalized plans and cautiously distributed information amongst the surrounding communities. The tactics planned for the encampment reflected the heavy influence of the movement's religious leaders: no alcohol or weapons would be in the camp and in the event of outside provocation the protest would remain non-violent.³ Over the weekend news of the encampment traveled by word of mouth, with organizers informing as many people as possible while hoping to avoid tipping off Itaipu and the police. Churches offered an especially efficient venue, as priests and pastors used their pulpits at Sunday mass to urge families to gather the following day in Santa Helena.⁴

Early in the morning of July 14 farmers began arriving from all over the region. People descended on Santa Helena on trucks and by foot and brought food, equipment, household cooking and cleaning supplies, tents, and banners. Local radio stations reported the news and word spread quickly throughout the surrounding area.⁵ Within a few hours almost 200 people had gathered directly in front of Itaipu's offices—a number that grew to nearly 1,000 by the early afternoon. Late in the morning, the camp's first general assembly opened with the singing of the national anthem and a speech from the farmer Marcelo Barth. Speaking from an improvised stage on an elevated truck bed, Barth declared that “The farmers are waking up and through the strength of unity assert the right to land, [and] the right to fair compensation when the government demands our land. We will show that we are an educated people, disciplined, full of love for peace and justice.” Barth called for the support of unions, the church, and civil and

³ Relatório Geral, Movimento Reivindicatório “Justiça e Terra,” Santa Helena, 31 de julho de 1980, 1. Source: Archive of the CPT, Londrina, Paraná (hereafter CPT-Londrina).

⁴ Marcelo Barth, interview with Catianne Matiello. Reproduced in Matiello, “Narrativas tecnológicas,” 102.

⁵ Mazarollo, *A Taipa da injustica*, 84-86.

military authorities, declaring “Politicians! You have a choice. We want to know who is with the people and who is against the people.”⁶

By calling out politicians and offering them a choice to join the movement, the MJT positioned itself within Brazil’s increasingly polarized political climate. Supporting the farmers meant supporting justice and the rights of average citizens. To stand with Itaipu, on the other hand, acted as an implicit endorsement of the authoritarian status quo. Following Barth’s speech, farmers read an open letter denouncing the government and Itaipu for subjecting rural families to “many years of psychological pressure.”⁷ The letter also outlined the initial six demands of the encampment, including a 1000-percent increase in compensation for land expropriations, additional price readjustments every 90 days, and distribution of new lands nearby in Paraná. Pastor Fuchs, a select group of farmers, and two state deputies then went inside the Itaipu building to deliver the complete list of demands to Paulo da Cunha, the Binational’s Legal Director.

For nearly four hours the committee of farmers made their appeal to Itaipu. Regarding the movement’s primary demand of a 100-percent price increase, da Cunha reportedly said that Itaipu had already allotted six percent of its total budget for land expropriations and if that number increased according to the farmers’ wishes, the added financial burden would slow the dam’s construction timeline.⁸ As such, da Cunha implied that the farmers’ demands, if met, could halt the progress of Itaipu, and by extension, of Brazil as a whole. In the battle for public opinion, both sides wanted to show their devotion to the country. Against claims that it did not care about the energy needs of Brazil, the MJT invoked the same patriotic rhetoric used by

⁶ As reproduced in Germani, *Expropriados terra e agua*, 216.

⁷ “Ao Povo, ao governo, e à Itaipu.” Included in Relatório Geral, Movimento Reivindicatório “Justiça e Terra,” Santa Helena, 31 de julho de 1980, 8. Source: CPT-Londrina.

⁸ “Queremos paz, justiça e terra.” *O Paraná*, 7/15/1980, 6.

Itaipu's supporters to present its own members, and not the government, as the true defenders of the country's wellbeing. This reveals another layer in the contested domain of what development meant at Itaipu. More than a conflict over which side supported or opposed the Itaipu dam—and by extension the nation—the larger implications derived from who had the legitimacy to defend their vision of progress.

As negotiations took place inside Itaipu's offices, hundreds of families continued to arrive outside. One farmer told a journalist that the gathering crowd “was ready to pour out every last drop of their blood to defend their right to land.” An older man also gave an emotional interview about his deep attachment to his lands—a family history that also hints at the tensions amongst the region's various rural communities. Choking back tears, the man shared that “It's sad to remember how we had to fight to settle these lands. First against the *indios*, then the squatters, and then with [the government]. I saw my dad lose his life having sacrificed for our right to work these lands... and now Itaipu appears and suddenly kicks everyone out.”⁹

The deliberations inside lasted through the early afternoon, at which point da Cunha declared that his office needed upwards of two weeks to prepare a thorough solution. The farmers and their allies informed the crowd outside of the stalled negotiations. Upset at the suggestion of waiting two weeks for a response, the assembly voted to set a deadline of the following afternoon for Itaipu to provide a definite plan to meet the farmers' needs.¹⁰ After the vote, the farmers began preparing to spend their first night in camp. According to Pastor Fuchs, only in the closing hours of that first evening did farmers begin to fully understand the scope of what lay ahead: “Itaipu promised us a response the next day, but we were left waiting. So we

⁹ “Queremos paz, justiça e terra.” *O Paraná*, 7/15/1980, 6.

¹⁰ Relatório Geral, Movimento Reivindicatório “Justiça e Terra,” Santa Helena, 31 de julho de 1980, 2. CPT-Londrina.

stayed there for fifteen days, and while waiting we learned how to make our encampment without having a [planned] idea of what it would look like.”¹¹



FIGURE 3.3: General assembly at Santa Helena encampment. Courtesy of Guiomar Germani.

The next morning, Brazilians in western Paraná and throughout the country awoke to news of Santa Helena. A state paper, *O Paraná*, had a front-page headline declaring “Farmers prepare for battle” and major national outlets like *O Globo* and *Jornal do Brasil* provided coverage of the protest at Itaipu.¹² These articles offered connections between Santa Helena and the political changes swirling throughout Brazil. A quotation from state deputy Nelton Friedrich, for example, placed the camp squarely within the national logic of *abertura*: “What is happening here is an example of the social injustices that are being committed throughout Brazil. The

¹¹ Werner Fuchs, interview with author. Garuva, Brazil. 2/28/2015.

¹² “Agricultores em pé-de-guerra,” *O Paraná*, 7/15/80, 1; “700 agricultores invadem os escritórios da Itaipu,” *O Globo*, 7/15/1980, 6; “Agricultores invadem escritório,” *Jornal do Brasil*, 7/15/1980, 8.

farmers want only that which is their right.”¹³

While waiting for the second day’s follow-up meeting with Itaipu, the camping farmers settled into what quickly became the normal routine during the fifteen days at Santa Helena. Events started at 10am with a minute of silence and the singing of the national anthem and an ecumenical service, followed by the day’s first general assembly. Every afternoon the camp split into study groups and in the early evening farmers discussed their problems during the day’s second general assembly.¹⁴ Different committees oversaw camp guidelines, finances, media outreach, food and provisions, sound equipment, and artistic activities. Security groups not only protected against outside agitation but also monitored the actions and morale of the campers, giving particular attention to keeping alcohol from entering the protest.¹⁵ The encampment’s sound system—dubbed “Justice Radio”—played news briefings, speeches, and a variety of musical and artistic performances.¹⁶ Although roughly two thousand people took part in the protest during the day, the number of those who actually camped out at night decreased to an average of about 200 each evening.¹⁷

¹³ “Queremos paz, justiça e terra.” *O Paraná*, 7/15/1980, 6.

¹⁴ “A ‘rádio justiça e terra’ divulga diariamente as notícias,” *Poeira*, No. 12, July/August 1980, 8.

¹⁵ Silvênio Kolling, interview with author, 2/28/2015, Garuva, Brazil.

¹⁶ Germani, *Expropriados terra e agua*, 118.

¹⁷ “Itaipu: inalterada a situação dos colonos.” *Diário Popular*, 7/20/1980, 6.



FIGURE 3.4: Signs at the Santa Helena camp stating “The tents of Itaipu’s slavery” and “Without promise of 100% we won’t leave.” Courtesy of Guiomar Germani.

On day two of the encampment, negotiations continued between farmers and representatives from Itaipu and the Paraná government. Claudio Pizzato, a local lawyer who acted as the MJT’s legal representative, described the atmosphere of the meeting and recalled “the fear of the [farmers] in negotiating against the power and the grandeur of Itaipu Binational... Imagine, four farmers in front of ten lawyers, in front of engineers, in front of government ministers; [Itaipu] negotiated from that position, and they could do whatever they wanted.”¹⁸ After nearly six hours of deliberations, da Cunha’s team agreed to concede on almost all of the demands. The lone exception, however, was the farmers’ most important item: a 100-percent price increase.¹⁹ Encouraged by the concessions yet still frustrated by the Binational’s

¹⁸ Claudio Pizzato, interview in “Os Desapropriados,” directed by Frederico Fülgraff, 1983.

¹⁹ The five demands that da Cunha conceded to in theory: to readjust land prices every 120 days; to pay within 15 days of the contract’s signing; to compensate for the farmers’ previous investment in electrical power and development; to survey the available lands in Paraná for possible resettlement; and that farmers be allowed to stay on their lands until May of 1982. (Source: Internal memo from Paulo da Cunha, 7/16/1980. CPT Doc No. 1762, Tombo 1828. CDPH.

unwillingness to bend on the demand for a 100-percent increase, the protesters voted that evening to maintain the encampment until Itaipu met all demands.²⁰

As the impasse began to solidify, each side took measures to strengthen its position. Da Cunha left Santa Helena to travel to São Paulo and Rio de Janeiro to debrief with the high administration of Itaipu.²¹ The MJT, for its part, maneuvered to increase public pressure on the Binational. Some farmers discussed the possibility of staging a hunger strike—a strategy that never took place, but that nonetheless attracted plenty of media attention.²² At the same time, the encampment voted to add new items to their list of demands, most notably that Itaipu fully compensate the landless for the value of the lands they worked.²³ Although the defense of landless farmers dissipated over time, its inclusion early on indicates that the encampment sought to construct as large of a coalition as possible.

The Santa Helena encampment saw a massive outpouring of solidarity from political and civic groups. By the protest's fifth day, representatives from 31 labor unions had personally moved into the encampment and the heads of 71 federations representing over 350,000 workers signed a document of solidarity.²⁴ Over the course of the camp's fifteen days, the farmers received letters of support from over 200 groups throughout the country and even from neighboring Paraguay.²⁵ These included some of Brazil's most prominent opposition groups: the Metallurgical Workers of São Bernardo (leaders of the ABC strikes), the National Union of Students, the Committee for Amnesty, the Brazilian Lawyers Association, and the Archdiocese

²⁰ Mazzarollo, *A taipa da injustiça*, 90.

²¹ Ibid.

²² "Expropriados pretendem iniciar greve de fome," *Folha de Londrina*, 7/17/1980; and "Agricultores ameaçam greve de fome em Itaipu," *Gazeta do Povo*, 7/17/1980, 40.

²³ "Exigências de 14 de julho de 1980," Movimento Justiça e Terra. Source: CDPH.

²⁴ "Manifesto de apoio e solidariedade dos sindicatos de trabalhadores rurais das micro-regiões 1, 2 e 3 do extremo oeste do Paraná." 7/18/1980. Source: archive of FETAEP, Curitiba.

²⁵ Itaipu: paraguaios aderem ao movimento." *Diário do Paraná*, 7/20/1980, 7.

of São Paulo.²⁶ One such declaration from Manaus proclaimed, “From the distant Amazon, we raise our voice of protest against the crimes of a dictatorial government against a defenseless people, and we send our total support to the cause of these people who, with full lungs, call for justice.”²⁷ Rather than naming Itaipu specifically, the letter from Manaus directed its call for justice against the national government, a refraction of the national *abertura* movement present in much of the solidarity given to the farmers.

Opposition politicians also vocalized their support. In a congressional speech, Paraná senator Leite Chaves declared that “all of the opposition groups in this country ... must denounce the injustices being committed by Itaipu Binational.” The state deputy Nelton Friedrich explicitly connected Santa Helena to the suffering of all Brazilians under dictatorship: “[The farmers] are being political, yes, in the highest sense of the word. But it is necessary to help us discuss and clarify for all involved the situation created by the Binational’s authoritarian leaders and by the technocrats [in the military regime] that aim to usurp all political legitimacy.”²⁸ This question of political legitimacy helps explain why the farmers’ movement became so significant. More than just a protest against a state-run corporation like Itaipu Binational, the MJT articulated a growing vision of land and democratic rights. The farmers’ struggle showed that even marginalized sectors of society could become an influential political force.

The year 1980 was both a turning point and a moment of uncertainty in the evolution of the *abertura*. As shown in Chapter Two, the “ABC” strikes of 1978-1980 had fundamentally

²⁶ “Apoio e solidariedade,” *Poeira*, No. 12, July/August 1980, 8. Although much of the support came from labor and political groups, the farmers received letters of solidarity from groups as diverse as the Lions Club of Santa Helena and the Housewives Association of Toledo. (Source: Germani, *Expropriados Terra e Agua*, 125.)

²⁷ Reproduced in Germani, *Expropriados Terra e Agua*, 125.

²⁸ Both quotations from “Solidariedade dá força política a expropriados,” *Gazeta do Povo*, 7/25/1980.

advanced labor militancy but an economic crisis cut into the recently won wage-gains and slowed the momentum of the radicalizing union movement.²⁹ And although the reform packages of 1979 had opened the door for structural changes to Brazil's political system, opposition parties still faced numerous obstacles and the return of political rights remained highly unclear. In this moment of transition, the protest at Itaipu had become a site where Brazilian citizens learned to put dissidence into practice.

At Santa Helena, the dictatorship closely monitored the farmers and the growing presence of opposition figures. Recently declassified documents show that the National Intelligence Service (SNI), the Ministry of War, the Federal Police, and Itaipu's own AESI forces maintained a close eye on the protest. These agencies reported on daily events and speeches from the encampment, compiled personnel files on the leadership, and noted the appearance of any union leader, politician, or other "radical elements."³⁰ It appears that the military regime did infiltrate the MJT, showing that the movement's modest security measures could not keep away the penetrating reach of the dictatorship. A telling example comes from an SNI report on a gathering at the house of Father Valentin dal Pozzo on July 22. The meeting, attended by high MJT leaders (Pastors Fuchs and Kirinus, the farmers Marcelo Barth and Ari Konrad, and state deputy Friedrich), focused on deciding which new strategy the encampment should adopt in its second week. Suggestions included a march on Foz do Iguaçu and an intimation that the movement "needs a martyr."³¹ Reports like these indicate that the dictatorship considered the MJT enough of a threat to warrant its infiltration.

²⁹ Scott Mainwaring shows that from 1980 to 1981, Brazil's GDP dropped nearly 10%, inflation was over 90%, and the external debt rose 33% to a total of \$US 72 billion. (Source: Scott P. Mainwaring, *Rethinking Party Systems in the Third Wave of Democratization: The Case of Brazil*. (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press. 1999), 90.

³⁰ Quotation from AESI Informe No. E/AESI.G/IB/BR/0034/80. In in: SNI ACE.967/81.01-02. Source: AN-RJ.

³¹ SNI telex, CT/189 AC 1451/117/ACT/80 28JUL/1130. In SNI ACE.967/81.01-02. Source: AN-RJ. Reports such as this pose the unanswerable question of which member of the MJT was the military's informant.

The formation of political consciousness in the Santa Helena camp offers evidence of the double-reality of *abertura*. Having experienced few of the tangible benefits of the official *abertura* promoted by elites, farmers in western Paraná linked their fight for land at Itaipu to some of the most prominent opposition campaigns of the time. Interviews suggest that the farmers viewed the Santa Helena camp as ‘our ABC.’ By regarding their fight against Itaipu as a refracted or analogous version of the broader struggle to end the dictatorship, many of the farmers felt as though they directly participated in the struggle for democratization. Marcelo Barth argued that the courage displayed by the farmers came both from the despair of their own circumstances and the political changes taking root throughout Brazil: “The ABC strikes had happened just a year before, and that gave us strength to confront the military.”³² By invoking the meanings of political legitimacy and resituating them in the western Paraná borderlands, farmers at Itaipu showed that rural communities in a tucked away corner of Brazil could lead their own charge against the dictatorship.

At times, such political views caused tension within the MJT. In particular, many of the religious leaders sought to keep the movement focused on the demands of land and justice. Pastor Fuchs recalls that whenever farmers mentioned “our ABC,” he would quickly correct them by saying that unlike the militancy of the ABC labor strikes, the protest at Santa Helena was not political: “We had to teach the farmers that [the camp] was not a strike, because they weren’t seizing a factory or anything. What we were doing was a movement, so we had to help them respect the Justice and Land Movement properly.”³³ Fuch’s statement suggests the political consciousness of the farmers surpassed the goals of the moderates within the MJT’s leadership. During the fifteen days of protest at Santa Helena and throughout the following year, the

³² Marcelo Barth, interview with Catianne Matiello. Reproduced in Matiello, “Narrativas tecnológicas,” 108.

³³ Werner Fuchs, interview with author. 7/13/2013, Curitiba, Brazil.

radicalizing demands of many farmers helped propel the MJT further into the struggle to shape the national *abertura*. But these competing views also exacerbated internal tensions between different sectors of the movement.

A diverse cross-section of rural Brazil participated in the Santa Helena camp, although media portrayals and participant memories often underrepresented this fact. Albano Melz, a land-owning farmer, recalled that only southerners (meaning white Brazilians) took part in the protest.³⁴ Adil Fochezatto, a farmer of Italian origin, made similar remarks and also noted that very few people in the protest did not have legal title to their lands—a selective omission of the camp’s landless workers.³⁵ In contrast to these observations, a tenant farmer of mixed indigenous and Afro-Brazilian origin named Itamar da Silva remembered clearly that Santa Helena drew “people from all over Brazil.”³⁶ Material evidence from the camp offers perspective on the diverging memories of its participants. A young graduate student named Guiomar Germani served as the camp’s secretary, setting up a tent in which she registered all participants.³⁷ According to Germani’s record-keeping, the encampment counted people from all over Brazil and brought together indigenous families, day-laborers, land-owners, and peasants:

This showed that in the region there weren’t just the descendants of Italians and Germans, but there were many [from the state of Minas Gerais] and people from the North-East, people who had previously migrated to Paraná and had worked on the larger farms, and that now had nowhere to hide from [Itaipu’s] waters. People even came secretly at night from Paraguay.³⁸

Photographs of the camp offer further proof of the racial diversity at Santa Helena.

[Figure 3.5] This serves as a counter-point to the dominant portrayal of the MJT. Under the

³⁴ Albano Melz, interview with author. 11/17/2014, São Clemente, Paraná, Brazil.

³⁵ Adil Fochezatto, interview with author, 11/14/2014. Santa Helena Velha, Paraná, Brazil.

³⁶ Itamar da Silva, interview with author. 11/16/2014, Santa Helena, Paraná, Brazil.

³⁷ At the time of the protest Guiomar Germani was a graduate student at the Federal University of Rio Grande do Sul and conducted research as a participant-observer that was published as a book in 2003.

³⁸ Guiomar Germani, as recorded in “Comemoração dos 25 anos do Movimento Justiça e Terra.” Video courtesy of Tarcísio Vanderlinde.

headline of “Above all, a love for land,” an article in the *Folha de São Paulo* described the farmers as a humble and hard-working immigrant enclave: “The majority of them descend from Europeans, and came up from Rio Grande do Sul and Santa Catarina in search of fertile lands, they still have heavy accents and a healthy appearance, they fight to maintain their lifestyle and are respectful of their heritage—characteristics that differentiate them from the other popular movements sprouting up in recent years throughout Brazil.”³⁹ The description of this “respectful” form of protest exposes another fragility of the *abertura*, wherein the Santa Helena protesters and sympathetic media outlets knew that to win over public opinion the farmers could not represent a threat to the established social order. Too much unruly protest, especially if led by ethnically diverse Brazilians, could undermine the prospects of a controlled democratization. As Brazilians throughout the country debated notions of citizenship and equality, the more moderate sectors of *abertura* presented the protesters on the frontlines against Itaipu Binational—and by extension the military regime—as humble, Euro-descendent people.⁴⁰

The distortion of the camp’s ethnic composition belonged to a longer history of how racial and regional power dynamics have developed in Brazil. In her study of race and nation in São Paulo—Paraná’s neighbor to the east and, historically, its greatest influence—Barbara Weinstein argues that regional identities functioned as a racialized category that “could be mobilized to legitimate narratives of modernity and backwardness.”⁴¹ By privileging the perceived whiteness of Brazil’s southern states, a “regional discourse formed the basis for a national project that implied a hierarchy of regions.”⁴² In the early twentieth-century process of

³⁹ “Acima de tudo, amor à terra,” *Folha de São Paulo*, 3/29/1981, 6.

⁴⁰ Chapter Seven of this dissertation will chronicle at great length the question of news coverage, government censorship, and the role of the media in the history of Itaipu.

⁴¹ Barbara Weinstein, *The Color of Modernity: São Paulo and the Making of Race and Nation in Brazil*. (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2015), 6.

⁴² *Ibid.* 9.

nation-building, this regional hierarchy entrenched a long-standing social and geographic divide through which whiteness became both a prerequisite and an implicit synonym for political legitimacy. During the *abertura* process in the early 1980s, Brazilian elites attempted to transition to a new political system without fundamentally changing the established social order. In this context, race and regionalism very much mattered and although exercises of renewed democratic rights were increasingly tolerated, threats to Brazil's deeply rooted social fabric were not.



FIGURE 3.5: Farmers at the Santa Helena camp. Courtesy of Guiomar Germani.

Similar patterns emerged in the representation of the camp's gender dynamics. Women actively participated in the Santa Helena protest yet the media only gestured to them as secondary members in charge of "keeping house" in the camp. In large part, this reflected the limited roles given to women by the MJT's all-male leadership. But similar to how notions of ideal citizenry were depicted as solely the realm of 'white' Brazilians, so too did citizenship function as a masculine construct. With so much media attention focused on the fight at Itaipu, the MJT camp reinforced traditional gender dynamics. Chapter Six will go into greater detail on the marginalization of women within these rural campaigns. Women played fundamental roles in the Santa Helena camp's ability to sustain itself for over two weeks. Wives, mothers, and sisters made the daily trek from the encampment back to their homes in order to tend the crops, feed animals, look after the children, and maintain the farms that the protesters fought to preserve.⁴³ Media portrayals, however, almost never included women.⁴⁴

For an average Brazilian following the events at Santa Helena encampment, the news depicted protesters as ethnically white, male, and respectful farmers. This portrayal—both from the media and within the MJT itself—ignored the reality of how the encampment counted people from a wide spectrum of ethnic and regional backgrounds, of both men and women, and of those who sought to make more confrontational and long-lasting change.

As the encampment stretched into its final week, the standoff with Itaipu centered almost exclusively over the price of land expropriations. Itaipu maintained that it could not pay more than 140,000 *cruzeiros* per *alqueire*—the equivalent of roughly \$US 2,600 at the time. The

⁴³ A particularly rich set of interviews concerning the role of women during the Santa Helena encampment is included in Matiello, "Narrativas tecnológicas."

⁴⁴ Even in rare exceptions, articles still reinforced the image of women as caretakers. A *Jornal do Brasil* article described one set of women as the literal nourishers of the Santa Helena camp: "A group of mothers brought their children, and during the afternoon, began to breast-feed them in hastily made tents set up next to trucks parked along the outskirts of the camp." ("Agricultores invadem escritório." *Jornal do Brasil*, 7/15/1980, 9).

farmers, on the other hand, claimed that inflation had pushed prices to as high as 240,000 *cruzeiros*, or about \$US 4,500.⁴⁵ Negotiations yielded very little progress and farmers became increasingly frustrated by Itaipu's refusal to raise the expropriation packages despite having a budget that would reach nearly \$US 20 billion. Documentary evidence from within Itaipu complicates the Binational's public statements concerning land prices. In a confidential letter to General Cavalcanti, Paulo da Cunha wrote on June 20 1980—a few weeks *before* the start of the Santa Helena camp—that Itaipu was already prepared to implement a new price adjustment in the coming months.⁴⁶ Additionally, once the encampment began Itaipu's Executive Office acknowledged privately that because “land prices in the region rose substantially” there was now a need to bring its offers within the range of 180-220 thousand *cruzeiros*.⁴⁷ Not surprisingly, Itaipu never publicized these internal admissions. Instead, the Binational continued saying that land prices could not increase. The MJT thus mobilized for something that Itaipu had already planned on conceding, suggesting that the authorities had nonfinancial reasons for refusing to meet the farmers' demands.

The heart of this disjuncture relates to the question of who could influence the public's perception of Itaipu and the dictatorship. As discussed in Chapter Two, the Binational's rejection of the MJT demands had less to do with the actual finances of the matter. Instead, it stemmed from the military regime's need to retain control—or at least the perception of control—in the process of *abertura*. By 1980, opposition forces had achieved certain political freedoms but the regime remained determined to maneuver the transition with as much authority as possible. As such, Itaipu existed as an arena of the struggle over power, political legitimacy, and the

⁴⁵ “Sindicatos apóiam expropriados de Itaipu.” *Folha de São Paulo*, 7/20/1980, 9-10.

⁴⁶ Letter from da Cunha to Cavalcanti, 6/20/1980. Register No. 0533/80, Office of the Director General. Included in the appendix of the 16th Meeting of Itaipu's Executive Council, 7/24/1980. Microfilm 23865F.0025-0554, CDIB.

⁴⁷ Minutes of the Meeting of the Director-General, 7/24/1980. Source: Microfilm 23865F.0063, item No. 4, CDIB.

consequences of the transition itself. In the context of the Santa Helena camp, this meant securing the long-term viability of the Itaipu dam while also protecting the dictatorship's public image. As national media outlets chronicled the standoff at Santa Helena, the Binational and its allies in the military likely felt compelled to take an even stronger stance against the MJT's fight for higher land prices. The question of whether Itaipu actually paid fair prices did not get settled until April 1981. At the height of the subsequent Foz do Iguaçu encampment, an independent government report stated definitively that the Binational paid far below market value.⁴⁸ Until then, however, the conflict remained a series of back-and-forth allegations.

Nearly two weeks into the encampment the MJT benefited from the July 25 celebration of Brazil's annual Day of the Farmer. Delegations from all over western Brazil converged in Santa Helena. The concentration of some 8,000 demonstrators brought widespread media attention.⁴⁹ With the nation's eyes on the encampment the pressure bore down on Itaipu. On July 26, Paulo da Cunha presented Itaipu's updated offer of a 65-percent price increase to a median price of 200,000 cruzeiros per *alqueire*—far less than the 100 percent demanded by the MJT. Farmers rejected the proposal that same night at the encampment's general assembly.⁵⁰ MJT members appeared steadfast in their refusal to make concessions, but unless they backed up their speeches with new actions, a continued stalemate seemed unavoidable.

Sensing the need to intensify the pressure on Itaipu, the MJT debated proposals to meet with the president of the Republic, to block the entrance to Itaipu's main construction zone, and to occupy all three of Itaipu's regional offices in Foz de Iguaçu, Santa Helena, and Marechal

⁴⁸ As will be shown later in this chapter, on April 14, 1981 the Institute for Lands and Cartography (ITC) released a report stating that Itaipu paid roughly 30% under the actual value of land in the region.

⁴⁹ "Ato contra a Itaipu reúne 5 mil colonos." *Folha de São Paulo*, 7/25/1980. Whereas national media outlets like the *Folha de São Paulo* reported that roughly 5,000 demonstrators participated in the Day of the Farmer events in Santa Helena, MJT leaders placed the number at between 8,000 and 10,000. (Relatório Geral, Movimento Reivindicatório "Justiça e Terra," Santa Helena, 31 de julho de 1980, 5. CPT-Londrina.)

⁵⁰ Mazzarollo, *A Taipa da injustica*, 95.

Cândido Rondon.⁵¹ In the end, the general assembly voted unanimously to march on Foz do Iguaçu.⁵² Once the movement alerted Itaipu of its plans to march on the city that was home to Itaipu's headquarters and primary construction zone, General Cavalcanti finally agreed to meet with the farmers' leadership. In his analysis of the Santa Helena camp, Juvêncio Mazzarollo believed that Cavalcanti feared the possibility of 30,000 Itaipu construction workers—many of whom objected to their own work-place conditions—mobilizing in solidarity with the Justice and Land Movement.⁵³ On the morning of the MJT leadership's scheduled meeting in Foz do Iguaçu, the encampment awoke to see that during the night Itaipu employees had covered the entire camp with thousands of leaflets titled "A Message from Itaipu to Farmers in the Surrounding Area." An attempt to stem the camp's rising momentum, the pamphlet urged farmers to "make a deal with Itaipu" and to "not get involved with agitation... Only you know how to best defend your [family's] personal interests." In response, the farmers collected all of the scattered papers and set them ablaze in a ceremonial bonfire.⁵⁴ Meanwhile, representatives of the MJT met with General Cavalcanti and numerous Itaipu administrators.⁵⁵

Late in the evening of July 28 Pastor Fuchs telephoned from Foz do Iguaçu announcing that the MJT secured numerous concessions, including an almost 85-percent price increase. At a general assembly the following morning, farmers voted to demobilize their encampment. MJT leaders framed the advances won during the Foz do Iguaçu meetings as a first step and scheduled another general assembly a month later.⁵⁶ The movement's leadership distributed a document

⁵¹ These details come from Mazzarollo, *A Taipa da injustica*, 93; and Relatório Geral, Movimento Reivindicatório "Justiça e Terra," Santa Helena, 31 de julho de 1980. Source: Archive of the CPT, Londrina, Paraná, 5-6.

⁵² "Itaipu: amanhã marcha até Foz." *O Estado do Paraná*. 7/27/1980.

⁵³ Mazzarollo, *A Taipa da injustica*, 96.

⁵⁴ Relatório Geral, Movimento Reivindicatório "Justiça e Terra," Santa Helena, 31 de julho de 1980, 6, 16. Source: CPT-Londrina.

⁵⁵ "Ata da reunião realizada em Itaipu em 27/7/80," included in Relatório Geral, Movimento Reivindicatório "Justiça e Terra," Santa Helena, 31 de julho de 1980, 17-18. Source: CPT-Londrina.

⁵⁶ Relatório Geral, Movimento Reivindicatório "Justiça e Terra," Santa Helena, 31 de julho de 1980, 6. Source:

justifying the end of the encampment. These victories included:

- Increase in the price of land between 80 and 85 percent depending on the quality of land;
- Guarantee that 80 percent of lands would be classified as “first rate” quality;
- Readjustment of prices every 90 days;
- Compensation for roads and electrical lines;
- Payment within 15 days of a contract’s signing;
- Ability to plant and harvest crops until April of 1982;
- Weekly report from Institute of Land and Cartography (ITC) on land sales in Paraná.⁵⁷

In a sign of the uneven representation of all the region’s farmers, the MJT made an additional “gentleman’s agreement” with Itaipu to compensate the landless farmers “at a fair price” for the properties they worked.⁵⁸ The MJT and Itaipu never formally signed this agreement and the unrealized progress of the landless farmers remained a lingering problem. Despite falling short of winning certain demands like a 100 percent price increase and having wheat mills and gasoline stations compensated, the MJT declared its 15-day occupation a major success. It forced Itaipu to make concessions to the farmers’ movement while also swaying public opinion. This development proved especially important the following year when the MJT staged its second encampment at Foz do Iguaçu.

In the days to come the MJT received hundreds of letters and phone calls from various organizations congratulating the farmers on their accomplishments.⁵⁹ Newspapers throughout Brazil reported on the end of the encampment with headlines observing that “Fearing a March [on Foz], Itaipu Backs Down” and “Farmers Decide to Accept Itaipu’s Proposal.”⁶⁰ Most media coverage seemed favorable to the MJT, although a number of articles outlined Itaipu’s rationale

CPT-Londrina.

⁵⁷ “Ata da reunião realizada em Itaipu em 27/7/80,” included in Relatório Geral, Movimento Reivindicatório “Justiça e Terra,” Santa Helena, 31 de julho de 1980, 17-18. Source: CPT-Londrina.

⁵⁸ “Posseiros também assegura direitos,” *Poeira*, No. 12, July/August 1980. 11.

⁵⁹ Relatório Geral, Movimento Reivindicatório “Justiça e Terra,” Santa Helena, 31 de julho de 1980, 6. Source: CPT-Londrina.

⁶⁰ The two headlines, respectively, are from “Temendo a “marcha” Itaipu recua,” *O Paraná*, 7/29/1980, 6; and “Os agricultores de Itaipu decidem aceitar proposta.” *O Estado de São Paulo*, 7/30/1980, 12.

for having made so many “concessions.” In one report, Itaipu claimed that the price increase had nothing to do with pressure from the MJT; rather, it stemmed from a normal adjustment to account for the previous year’s successful harvest.⁶¹ When asked about whether the encampment played any role in Itaipu’s price increase, General Cavalcanti said that the movement had no influence at all, adding “we were not concerned with anything other than the values [of land markets].”⁶² Within the Itaipu leadership, however, decisions had proven far more complicated. In an executive board meeting right before the final agreement, General Cavalcanti had cautioned that if Itaipu did not change its expropriation policies, the agitation could soon spread across the river to Paraguay.⁶³ Cavalcanti’s private statement and the wider perspective of what transpired at Santa Helena lead one to conclude that Itaipu’s concessions resulted almost entirely from the pressure organized by the MJT.

The Movement’s leadership sought to keep the farmers active in spite of the encampment’s demobilization by saying that the struggle would continue until the last person received fair compensation. In his assessment of the post-encampment state of the movement, Juvêncio Mazzarollo believed the most important victory had been a “takeover of consciousness, as the leaders of the movement told their participants, a people united is a people to be feared.”⁶⁴ A description of the final day of the Santa Helena camp conveys a dual sense of exhaustion and optimism:

And so, on the afternoon of July 29, the tents were taken down. The farmers’ faces were tired from days of no sleep, but they showed a happiness from a great victory won through the unity of all involved and from the solidarity they received. Everyone is hopeful that their suffering and their struggle will help other comrades, and above all, will show the authorities that they must always act justly

⁶¹ “Itaipu explica as suas razões.” *O Estado do Paraná*, 7/30/1980, 1.

⁶² “Itaipu anuncia reajuste nas desapropriações.” *Folha de Londrina*, 7/26/1980

⁶³ Minutes of the Meeting of the Director-General, 7/24/1980. Source: Microfilm 23865F.0063, item No. 8.1 (“assuntos gerais). CDIB.

⁶⁴ Mazzarollo, *A Taipa da injustica*, 98.

in all that they do.’’⁶⁵

How exactly should one interpret the Santa Helena encampment? It was not the first land encampment in Brazilian history, nor was it the longest or the most successful. The farmers also did not suffer physical repression like other land movements under the military regime. During the same period that the MJT staged its protest camps against Itaipu, a similar land occupation took place at Encrulizhada Natalino less than 500km to the southeast of Foz do Iguaçu. Unlike the relative ‘civility’ witnessed at the Santa Helena camp, Encrulizhada Natalino included constant physical confrontation. Angus Wright and Wendy Wolford describe the government’s attacks on the camp: “jailing people, administering beatings, stabbing people with bayonets, burning down shacks and threatening people with further violence and death.”⁶⁶ The comparison between these two land encampments sheds light on the specific dynamics of the Santa Helena protest, both in the sense of who the MJT targeted and what kinds of rural Brazilians led the movement.

Whereas Encrulizhada Natalino confronted private land estates, the Santa Helena camp formed in opposition to the Itaipu dam. For Brazil’s dictatorship, so much of Itaipu’s importance lay in its global image. The international attention that it garnered meant the military regime could not easily use violence against the farmers at Santa Helena. Hence, the government acted with a level of caution and feigned a respect never extended to other movements that took place away from the public gaze. In this sense, the MJT greatly benefited from its direct confrontation with such a significant appendage of the dictatorship. Moreover, the Encrulizhada Natalino encampment was comprised exclusively of landless peasants, day-laborers, and sharecroppers.

⁶⁵ No title, *Poeira*, No. 12, July/August 1980. 11.

⁶⁶ Wright & Wolford, *To Inherit the Earth*, 34. The Encruzilhada Natalino camp took place from December 1980 to February 1981.

Although these same demographics existed at the Santa Helena camp, the mainstream perception showed the MJT as a movement of property-owning small farmers who cared little about the type of structural agrarian reform in question at Encruzilhada Natalino.

Local communities learned a variety of lessons at the Santa Helena camp. Those who saw the need to push beyond the MJT's 'more respectable' strategies became frustrated by the protest's limited victories. This dissatisfaction continued to develop, both at the second MJT encampment a year later and the subsequent creation of an independent landless movement. But Santa Helena also marked a turning point in the formation of rural political consciousness. The former pastor and state deputy Gernote Kirinus believes that only at the encampment did local communities fully lose faith in Itaipu and the government; until that time, many people still waited to see if the authorities would honor their promises.⁶⁷ Prior to Santa Helena, the fight against a core element of the military regime remained somewhat abstract. As Silvênio Kolling noted, Santa Helena became "a laboratory of consciousness. [Before it] we didn't know the size of the monster."⁶⁸ The camp provided a fundamental experience in political participation that nourished a sense of collectivism in the region. In the words of one participant, the Santa Helena encampment served as "a big political classroom." He explained,

The fact that you brought so many people together when normally those sorts of gathering would be repressed and their leaders thrown in jail, and to actually have a movement that resisted, well that was the practice of democracy. Not a [form of] democracy that was permitted or authorized by the government, but a democracy that was won by the force of our own movement.⁶⁹

⁶⁷ Gernote Kirinus, interview with author, 9/17/2014, Marechal Cândido Rondon, Brazil.

⁶⁸ Silvênio Kolling, interview with author, 2/28/2015, Garuva, Brazil.

⁶⁹ Nelton Friedrich, interview with author, 10/9/2014, Foz do Iguaçu, Brazil.

“The Guns of Itaipu:” Repression and Politics at the Foz do Iguaçu Encampment

The relative calm after the Santa Helena camp lasted less than a month. On August 26, leaders of the MJT again met at Itaipu’s headquarters in Foz do Iguaçu to declare that Itaipu did not honor its agreements.⁷⁰ The farmers protested delays in payment and miscalculations of land quality. The Santa Helena camp secured 200,000 *cruzeiros* per *alqueire*, but only for “first-rate” lands. Farmers believed that Itaipu purposefully under-evaluated lands in order to keep prices down.⁷¹ Along with the issue of land prices, the main point of contention concerned resettlement within Paraná. Itaipu again deflected responsibility to INCRA (the National Institute for Colonization and Agrarian Reform) while encouraging farmers to relocate to projects in faraway states like Mato Grosso do Norte, Bahia, and Amapá.⁷² The only option within Paraná, an area called Arapoti, was not yet ready to receive settlers.⁷³ Although farmers like Marcelo Barth stressed the need to maintain pressure and to consider taking drastic action—proposing in one speech that the MJT occupy nearby lands—the movement staged no new actions through the remainder of the year.⁷⁴

Tensions resurfaced early in 1981. With the flood less than two years away, Itaipu had only processed 60 percent of the indemnification cases. Moreover, the price adjustments won at Santa Helena could not keep pace with Paraná’s soaring real estate prices. At the end of the Santa Helena protest, Itaipu agreed to pay an average of CR\$200,000 per *alqueire*. Soon thereafter, however, land in western Paraná cost anywhere between 500,000 and 700,000

⁷⁰ “Minutes of meeting on 8/26/1980. Office of Itaipu Binational, Foz do Iguaçu. Memo 967/81. In: SNI ACE.967/81.01-02, AN-RJ.

⁷¹ “Classificação das terras irita desapropriados.” *Hoje*, 8/3/1980.

⁷² “Letter from General Cavalcanti to the Commission of Farmers,” 10/10/1980. Memo E/DG/0758/80. Source: Microfilm R2134.1716, CDIB.

⁷³ “Meeting between Itaipu executive directory and Commission of the Expropriated,” 10/1/1980. Source: Microfilm 2135.0926-930. CDIB.

⁷⁴ A confidential AESI report noted Barth’s suggestion of occupying lands. Source: confidential AESI informe No. E/AESI.G/IB/BR/0052/80. In: SNI ACE.967/81.01-02. AN-RJ.

cruzeiros.⁷⁵ These land prices resulted in large measure from over-speculation. According to a *Nosso Tempo* exposé, the publicity from the Santa Helena encampment enabled land speculators to increase their own prices the moment that Itaipu announced a new agreement.⁷⁶ This made it nearly impossible for the farmers to stay in Paraná. With little regulation of the regional land market and with INCRA officially urging farmers to resettle in northern colonization projects, MJT farmers again found themselves in a precarious situation.

By March 1981 the feeling of victory from Santa Helena had dissipated almost completely. At a general assembly on March 16 in the town of Itacorá, farmers debated whether to march on Foz do Iguaçu to set up a second encampment inside the Itaipu construction site. Organizers told families to prepare for weeks or even months of protest and also discussed possible solidarity actions with construction workers. With over 1,500 people in attendance, the assembly voted by near unanimity to march on Foz do Iguaçu the next morning.⁷⁷ *Nosso Tempo* reported that once Itaipu found out about the farmers' decision, it immediately sent representatives to a few farmers with improved contracts to cover their claims of having paid fair prices since the Santa Helena encampment.⁷⁸ MJT leaders saw this as an attempt to bribe farmers into not marching on Foz do Iguaçu. Itaipu's efforts appeared to have little effect on the farmers' march on Foz do Iguaçu the following morning.

On the same day of the Itacorá meeting an article published in *Time* magazine cast an unprecedented and entirely negative spotlight on the Itaipu dam. Under the title "Big Profits in Big Bribery," the article reported detailed allegations of corruption in Latin America, Africa, and

⁷⁵ Mazzarollo, *A taipa da injustiça*, 98.

⁷⁶ "O preço de paz: justiça e terra." *Nosso Tempo*, 3/18/1981, 6-8.

⁷⁷ "Minutes of the Assembly of Farmers Expropriated by Itaipu Binacional," 3/16/1981, Itacorá. Source: Archives of FETAEP, Curitiba.

⁷⁸ "O preço de paz: justiça e terra." *Nosso Tempo*, 3/18/1981, 6-8.

the Middle East. The report claimed that European electric companies paid upwards of US\$140 million in kickbacks to win contracts for the construction of Itaipu.⁷⁹ This was not the first—or last—allegation of corruption at Itaipu. But given its origin in a prominent U.S. news outlet, the claim immediately launched a scandal in Brazil.⁸⁰ *O Estado de São Paulo* translated and published the article as the front-page headline the following morning.⁸¹ At a moment in Brazil's *abertura* when opposition forces looked for any chance to chip away at the military's power, they could point to bribery as further proof that the country needed a regime change.⁸² For those following the farmers' struggle in western Paraná, the *Time* article symbolized a parallel injustice: one headline declared "140 million dollars in bribes to Itaipu technocrats while 8 thousand families fight for fair compensation."⁸³

Whereas the MJT protests had gradually begun to turn Brazilian public opinion against Itaipu, the allegations of corruption in *Time* magazine now projected a negative image at a global level. Determined to protect the legacy of the project, Itaipu issued a press statement denouncing the allegations as completely baseless. General Cavalcanti personally wrote multiple letters to the editor of *Time* seeking to provide similar clarification—none of which were ever published.⁸⁴

⁷⁹ Christopher Byrns, Jonathan Beaty, and Gisela Bolte. "Big Profits in Big Bribery," *Time*, 3/16/1981, 60-65.

⁸⁰ Allegations of scandal dogged Itaipu since the original 1973 treaty. Throughout the 1970s, many reports claimed that Stroessner accepted over US\$100 million from the Brazilian government for his approval of the "uneven" 1973 treaty. (Source: 10-part series published in 1996 in *ABC Color* titled "Corrupción en Itaipú). Even before the 1981 *Time* article, questions of corruption at Itaipu had been covered in the U.S. media. In 1979, *Harper's* carried a story on similar claims over Brazil's 1973 bribes to Stroessner. (Penny Lernoux, "Behind Closed Doors," *Harper's*, February 1979, 20-29.

⁸¹ "No Brasil, "matéria de sedução." *O Estado de São Paulo*, 3/17/1981, 1.

⁸² For example, the bribery scandal was denounced in "Speech from Iram Saraiva," Câmara dos Deputados, 3/23/1981, requerimento de informações No. 148, 1-4; and "Speech from Brabo de Carvalho," Câmara dos Deputados, 4/2/1981. (Source: Microfilm 2682.1440-1443, CDIB)

⁸³ "140 milhões de dólares para subornar os tecnocratas de Itaipu enquanto 8 mil famílias lutam por indenizações justas." *O Estado do Paraná*, 4/26/1981, 1.

⁸⁴ Copies of Cavalcanti's letters to the editor of *Time* are included in a dossier that presented to the Comissão de Relações Exteriores da Câmara dos Deputados on 9/13/1983. Source: Microfilm 4146.1287-1302, CDIB. Although *Time* never published Cavalcanti's letters, it did eventually send him a reply, thanking him for the submissions, but informing him that "We do not intend to publish any more letters on the March 16 Economy and Business story on the Itaipu Dam project." (Source: *ibid.*)

As news of the article rippled across Brazil, the assembly at Itacorá voted to march on Itaipu itself. Although discussed over the preceding years, this strategy had never crystalized into action. On the eve of the march a sense had arisen among protesters that something profound awaited. As noted by one observer: “Itaipu’s behavior will inevitably change, and its image will never again be the same. Itaipu never could have imagined that it would have experienced this disgrace. Brazil and the whole world will now see [Itaipu] for what it really is.”⁸⁵

Early the following morning nearly 800 people left Itacorá to make the 100-km trip to Foz do Iguaçu, traveling in a caravan of cars, trucks, and tractors. At around 9am the farmers gathered on the outskirts of the city and walked the remaining five kilometers on foot.⁸⁶ As they approached the entrance gates the crowd saw their path blocked by a sizeable police force. Marcelo Barth later recalled that, “from a distance, we saw soldiers, with guns pointing at us, and they even had a water cannon [and tear gas]. But we showed up ready to defend what was ours.”⁸⁷ Over the next hour, a tense standoff ensued between farmers wanting to march on the construction site and security forces determined to turn the crowd away completely. This series of shouting matches and threats ultimately resulted in the farmers setting up their encampment on the edge of the entrance to Itaipu.

With the late morning sun bearing down—temperatures that day surpassed 100°F—the crowd approached the gates chanting “justice, justice, justice.” Speaking through a megaphone, the army General Junot Rebello Guimarães demanded the farmers leave the premises and relocate to a nearby church.⁸⁸ Behind Guimarães stood dozens of state troopers and nearly 100

⁸⁵ “O preço de paz: justiça e terra.” *Nosso Tempo*, 3/18/1981, 6-8.

⁸⁶ “Colonos iniciam marcha para Foz,” *O Estado do Paraná*, 3/17/1981.

⁸⁷ Marcelo Barth, interview in “Os desapropriados,” (Fülgraff 1983).

⁸⁸ In the late 1960s Guimarães had been the State Secretary of Public Security, where he put down a series of protests from farming and peasant communities. Prior to being named Itaipu’s Chief of Security, he also worked as the head of intelligence and security for Petrobras at the Araucária oil refinery in southeastern Paraná. (source: “Questões de Terra “Lopei.” Folder No. 003491, APP.

agents of Itaipu's private security force. Less than ten meters from the entrance gates and roughly 500 meters from the Binational's central offices, the farmers demanded safe passage and a meeting with the Itaipu's executive committee. Guimarães replied that any attempt to cross the gates would result in physical force.⁸⁹ Tensions continued to mount and as recounted by one journalist, a farmer at the front of the crowd unbuttoned his shirt, bared his chest to the soldiers, and dared them to shoot.⁹⁰ Shocked at the display of repressive force before them, the protesters shouted statements like "how can you have armed police like this? It's a shame for Itaipu and for the whole country;"⁹¹ and "we are the ones that feed these people, and this is how we are received, with bayonets and machine guns?"⁹²



FIGURE 3.6: "Itaipu Resists with Guns," *Nosso Tempo* 3/18/1981, 1.

⁸⁹ This was not an idle threat as according to one news article, the state secretary for Public Security had authorized the soldiers to physically suppress the farmers if necessary ("Baionetas e fuzis contra os colonos," *Hoje*, 3/27/1981).

⁹⁰ João Adelino de Souza, interview with author. 10/6/2014, Foz do Iguaçu. De Souza was as a reporting journalist for the Foz do Iguaçu-based weekly *Nosso Tempo*.

⁹¹ "Itaipu aponta baionetas contra agricultores," *Nosso Tempo*, 3/18/1981, 20.

⁹² Ibid.

After nearly thirty minutes of back-and-forth exchanges the MJT leadership decided to forego its plan to march on the construction site and instead set up an encampment along the adjacent fork in the road. This location became known as the Field of Shame (*Trevo da Vergonha*), an area in front of the entrance gates that placed the protest in full view of anyone visiting the hydroelectric project. Situated along highway BR-277 (the regional access point to the Transamerican Highway), the encampment was also visible to drivers going to Paraguay, tourist buses, and commercial vehicles.

Similar to the media coverage at the start of the Santa Helena camp, newspapers quickly announced the events unfolding in Foz do Iguaçu. In this instance, however, the press focused largely on the specter of violence. One headline wrote in capital letters that “ITAIPU RESISTS WITH GUNS,” while another reproduced an increasingly popular phrase among the farmers and their allies: “Are the guns of Itaipu the symbol of the abertura?”⁹³

While setting up the Foz do Iguaçu encampment, farmers distributed leaflets with the demands made at the Itacorá meeting. The document included a call to set land prices at between 500,000 and 600,000 *cruzeiros* per *alqueire* and to receive far more efficient involvement from INCRA. In a gesture to the widening scope of the movement, the leaflets also declared support for the various communities facing displacement. The MJT demanded an immediate solution to the plight of the landless communities and also made gestures of solidarity to both the nearby indigenous community and to the families impacted by Itaipu on the Paraguayan side of the river.⁹⁴ At the start of such an important protest, this document reflected the MJT’s need to appeal to a broad support base. As was the case at Santa Helena, however, this concern faded

⁹³ “Itaipu Resists with Guns,” *Nosso Tempo* 3/18/1981, 1; “Os fuzis de Itaipu são o símbolo da abertura?” *Hoje*, 3/28/1981, 1.

⁹⁴ “Documento de reivindicações aprovado na Assembléia de Agricultores em Itacorá,” 3/16/1981. Included as annex of “Ata da 180a Reunião,” Itaipu Executive Committee. Source: Microfilm 2823.591-592, CDIB.

away over the course of the protest.

In the ongoing battle for public opinion Itaipu evidently felt that its previous show of force allowed the farmers to win over too much sympathy. When protesters awoke on the second day they noticed that the police patrolling the entrance gates no longer had any guns or bayonets.⁹⁵ Despite this veneer of decreased security, the farmers employed the same measures developed at Santa Helena. The camp again held daily meetings to identify potential undercover agents and even created a chain of command in case the dictatorship disappeared any MJT leaders.⁹⁶ The farmers also developed a network of committees to organize all aspects of camp life. In light of the extreme heat, the delivery of fresh water became an especially important task. Early in the encampment, Foz do Iguaçu's mayor, Coronel Clovis Vianna, ordered soldiers to cut off the farmers' water supply. Aluizio Palmar remembers the politicizing effect of these actions: "When the camp's water was shut off, the farmers knew that it was the dictatorship that was cutting them off."⁹⁷ Other responsibilities included food preparation, sanitation, and the shuttling of families back-and-forth from their farms.

Media coverage offered admiring accounts of the camp's organization. Headlines called readers' attention to how farmers created "a mini-city" and "an evolved society."⁹⁸ In one particularly striking example, the largest newspaper in the state, *O Estado do Paraná*, mimicked Itaipu's triumphalist slogan—"the project of the century"—to call the Foz do Iguaçu protest the "the encampment of the century."⁹⁹

⁹⁵ "Costa Cavalcanti chega a Foz, mas colonos recusam proposta de Itaipu." *Folha de Londrina*, 3/19/1981, 7.

⁹⁶ Lauro Rocini, interview with author, 12/26/2014. Itaipulândia, Paraná.

⁹⁷ Aluizio Palmar, interview with author, 8/8/2013, Foz do Iguaçu, Brazil.

⁹⁸ Headline quotations come respectively from "Desapropriados formam uma mini-cidade," *O Mensageiro*, April 1981, 13-14; and "Uma sociedade evoluída em torno de um acampamento de colonos." *Folha de Londrina*, 3/29/1981, 32.

⁹⁹ "O acampamento do século," *O Estado do Paraná*, 3/29/1981, 14.



FIGURE 3.7: Daily life in the Foz encampment. Source: *Nosso Tempo*, 3/18/1981, 13.

Four days into the encampment, General Cavalcanti invited five representatives of the MJT to a meeting in the Binational's central office. Cavalcanti presented Itaipu's offer of an 80-percent price increase that would bring the average compensation package to around 380,000 *cruzeiros*—roughly 200,000 less than the farmers' demand.¹⁰⁰ Speaking to reporters afterwards, Cavalcanti declared that Itaipu would not increase its current offer and that the Binational had “no desire to negotiate with the farmers; we simply wanted to present our position.”¹⁰¹ A general assembly that evening rejected Itaipu's proposal. After the vote, the MJT issued a press release chastising Itaipu for refusing to hold open and honest dialogue and called on “the authorities and the Brazilian nation as a whole for support in the defense of our rights.”¹⁰²

That same afternoon, two other events underscored the encampment's expanding influence. First, Leonel Brizola, the former governor and head of the Brazilian Worker's Party (PTB, Partido Trabalhista do Brasil), visited the camp. One of the most visible and outspoken

¹⁰⁰ “Itaipu aumenta as indenizações, mas os desapropriados rejeitam.” *O Estado de São Paulo*, 3/21/1981, 12.

¹⁰¹ “Cavalcanti não aceita reunião e renega Movimento Justiça e Terra.” *Folha de Londrina*, 3/21/1981.

¹⁰² “Resposta ao Comunicado da Itaipu Binacional.” 3/21/1981. Source: CDPH.

critics of the dictatorship, Brizola had recently returned from exile. *O Estado de São Paulo* reported that Brizola delivered “an impassioned speech” at the encampment and that the farmers gave him a series of standing ovations. In his remarks, Brizola promised to intercede on behalf of the farmers by discussing their situation the following week with the Minister of Justice.¹⁰³ The second event of note took place in Brasília where leaders of the Indigenous Missionary Council (CIMI, Conselho Indigenista Missionário) held a press conference “accusing the federal government of committing a crime against the Guarani” families that were facing displacement at Itaipu.¹⁰⁴ The MJT never prioritized the defense of the Avá-Guarani; one of the movement’s leaders admitted that some farmers did not even know that indigenous communities lived nearby.¹⁰⁵ Despite the status of indigenous invisibility perpetuated by both the military regime and social movements like the MJT, CIMI’s press conference shows how pro-indigenous groups capitalized on the momentum generated by the Foz do Iguaçu camp to also call attention to their own parallel demands.

During the opening weeks of the camp more than a dozen politicians, primarily from the opposition Brazilian Democratic Movement Party (PMDB, Partido do Movimento Democrático do Brasil), gave speeches in federal Congress and in the Senate. A particularly revealing speech came two days after the initial standoff at the entrance gates, when Paulo Marques addressed the Chamber of Deputies in Brasília and vilified Itaipu for sending machine guns and crowd-dispersing water tanks to confront farmers whose calloused hands produced the nation’s food supplies. Marques noted that perhaps this violent show of force was the actual symbol of the *abertura* and declared that it only served as further “proof of the government’s false intentions”

¹⁰³ “Brizola vai a Abi-Ackel pedir justiça a colonos.” *O Paraná*, 3/22/1981, 1.

¹⁰⁴ “Itaipu aumenta as indenizações, mas os desapropriados rejeitam.” *O Estado de São Paulo*, 3/21/1981, 12.

¹⁰⁵ Carlos Grillmann, interview with author, 10/22/2014, Foz do Iguaçu.

in the alleged opening of democracy.¹⁰⁶ The outpouring of criticism quickly sparked counter-responses from supporters of the military regime.¹⁰⁷ Whether from anti-dictatorship forces seeking to call attention to an example of injustice or from supporters of the military determined to slow down the process of *abertura*, the events at Foz do Iguaçu became a topic of national debate.

At the state level, Paraná governor Ney Braga announced that his office would officially act as a mediator between the MJT and Itaipu. Citing the need to keep as many farmers as possible within the state, Braga declared that he would speak directly with General Cavalcanti—a close friend from their days in the military. More important, Braga also announced he would commission the Institute for Lands and Cartography (ITC, Instituto de Terras e Cartografia) to conduct an independent report on land prices in western Paraná.¹⁰⁸ Although Braga did not formally take the side of the farmers, his intervention signaled a significant change. As a decorated major in the armed forces and a prominent member of the earlier pro-regime ARENA party (Aliança Renovadora Nacional), Braga's support for a grassroots struggle, even if minimal, stood as a sign of the *abertura*'s advancing progress. Rather than viewing all of the government as an enemy, the MJT now saw certain sectors as potential allies. This level of confidence in Brazil's political structures had not existed in previous years.

Similar to the gestures of solidarity at Santa Helena, the Foz do Iguaçu encampment received a steady influx of visitors, letters, and calls to action from groups across Brazil. Various factions of the Church, rural and urban unions, student organizations, civic groups, and trade associations all sent their support. Almost all of the letters referenced the standoff at the entrance

¹⁰⁶ Paulo Marques congressional speech, 3/19/1981. Source: *Diário do Congresso Nacional*, Seção 1, 778-779.

¹⁰⁷ Examples of pro-Itaipu responses include "Jorge Abrange speech to Câmara dos Deputados," 3/31/1981. Source: microfilm 2682.1427-1429, CDIB.

¹⁰⁸ "Ney fará gestões." *O Estado do Paraná*, 3/27/1981, 11.

gates as an example of the government's violent disregard for the rights of average citizens. In a published statement, the Archbishop of Curitiba reflected on how people throughout Brazil supported the MJT: "The Justice and Land Movement is a legitimate and peaceful response to the problems caused by [this regime.] But as shown in the declarations of solidarity from all over the country, this regional mobilization is helping the Brazilian people raise consciousness and organize themselves to fight back against the evils of our current system."¹⁰⁹

The Double-Reality of Politics in a Borderland

The MJT illustrated how popular struggles tapped into a national wave of political dissent to put forth local visions for democratization. Because of its location in a borderland, the movement offers a new and important case study for understanding how politics and political consciousness developed outside of major urban areas. Distant geographically, politically, and socially, regions like western Paraná developed in ways that often diverged from mainstream Brazil. The Justice and Land Movement thus provides compelling evidence for how Brazilians of different backgrounds experienced the *abertura* in multiple competing realities. More than just an example of political resistance in the countryside, the MJT calls attention to the particular dynamics of the region from which it emerged.

Located far from Brazil's established political, the Paraná borderlands also shared a frontier with two other countries ruled by military regimes. Many exiles returned to Brazil through this border region and the immediate proximity to Paraguay and Argentina enabled the formation of international solidarity organizations. In August of 1979 Paraná played host to the first-ever meeting of Latin American Opposition, a gathering of dissident political leaders from

¹⁰⁹ "Declaração," Dom Pedro Fedalto and Dom Olívio Fazzia, 4/1/1981. Source: SNI ACE.841/81, AN-RJ.

Brazil, Paraguay, Argentina, Peru, Chile, and Mexico. Key speeches were delivered by Paraguay's Domingo Laino (the main critic of the Stroessner regime), two eventual presidents of Brazil (Fernando Henrique Cardoso and Luis Inácio "Lula" da Silva), and on behalf of Hugo Blanco, a leader of the Peruvian peasant movement. According to one report, the meeting sought to put forward a collective approach to "the question of democracy, which is today the central political problem of the continent as it is being suffocated by military dictatorships."¹¹⁰ Such an event likely could never have taken place at this time in cities like São Paulo or Rio de Janeiro. It is doubtful whether so many of Latin America's top opposition figures would have been able—or even willing—to assemble so close to the heart of a military regime.

The political momentum generated in the region by this initial meeting continued in subsequent years.¹¹¹ A telling example comes from the Foz do Iguaçu re-founding congress of the Brazilian Workers' Party (PTB) headed by Leonel Brizola. Along with denouncing the military regime, the PTB rooted its appeals in the region's political and social landscapes. In his closing speech, Brizola referred to the lack of local elections in Foz do Iguaçu as emblematic of the political injustices suffered throughout the country. And when he spoke about the future of a democratic Brazil, he celebrated the local farming communities and emphasized that "only agriculture can save our country."¹¹² Brizola's speech embodies what I previously referred to as an emerging landscape of dissent. The area was both a place where rural people earned their livelihoods and a porous borderland where politics easily became internationalized. And

¹¹⁰ Details on the 1979 meeting are compiled from various reports included in "Encontro Latino Americano de Oposições," folder No. 01431, APP.

¹¹¹ "Carta das oposições, Brasil/Paraguai." 6/1/1980, Source: "Kirinus" collection, Núcleo de Pesquisa e Documentação sobre o Oeste do Paraná, Universidade Estadual do Oeste do Paraná, Marechal Cândido Rondon (hereafter CEPEDAL).

¹¹² "Carta de Foz do Iguaçu," Partido trabalhista brasileiro (PTB), 2/22/1980. Source: microfilm 2134.238-241, CDIB. Further details on the PTB meeting come from an AESI report titled "Reunião do Leonel Brizola," source: microfilm 2134.235-237, CDIB.

although the dictatorship saw the region as a source of untapped natural and geopolitical power, it also became a space where opposition movements saw an opportunity to build democracy.

As a region geographically and historically removed from Brazil's political centers, and sharing a frontier with other Latin American nations in the throes of authoritarianism, western Paraná became a unique political nexus. In this borderland, farmers connected their fight against Itaipu to the advances of the *abertura* that they understood to be taking place elsewhere. Brazilian elites at the time—and many scholars since—often described Brazil's return to democracy as an urban process pushed forward by mainstream politicians and established social movements. Yet the specific circumstances of this borderland helped incubate an anti-dictatorship movement rooted in localized struggles for land. In seeking to understand Brazil's era of military rule, scholars must begin to widen their lens, not only to groups like the MJT but also to the various regions that conditioned the emergence of new political actors.¹¹³

In western Paraná, politicians looked to the farmers' standoff at Itaipu as both a new example of political participation and as a mass cluster of potential votes. Although the "national security zone" for Foz do Iguaçu precluded local elections for mayor, by 1980 elections returned for regional positions like city council and state assembly. For opposition parties, grassroots movements like the MJT could translate into a local electorate to help rebuild a national presence. This was especially the case with the PMDB. Barely two weeks after the Santa Helena encampment, the party distributed leaflets outlining the efforts of various senators and deputies who had given speeches, marched in the streets, and defended the rights of farmers. The document stated that the PMDB "has always fought against the exploitation and injustice of

¹¹³ It should be noted that the region's unique political dynamics continued even after the end of the fight at Itaipu. In 1983, as Brazil was in the final stages of securing the return of democratic rule, the governors of eight states gathered in Foz do Iguaçu in order to chart "a new strategy for the opposition." (Source: "Encontro de Foz deve marcar nova estratégia das oposições," 10/16/1983, *Folha de Londrina*, 3).

Itaipu. [The party] was there from the very beginning.”¹¹⁴ Many of Itaipu’s supporters claimed that the PMDB selfishly used the struggle in western Paraná to further its own political agendas. A confidential SNI report observed that opposition politicians become increasingly active in the farmers’ movement in order “to elevate their names in the media and to secure political debts for eventual electoral campaigns.”¹¹⁵ Similarly, the executive committee of Itaipu Binational referred to PMDB politicians as “professional agitators.”¹¹⁶

While Itaipu administrators and their allies in the dictatorship likely used these labels as a means to undermine the political legitimacy of the MJT, even members of the farmers’ movement noticed the opportunism of certain supporters. One farmer recalled that “politicians had their interests, they wanted our votes, so that’s why they fought with us.”¹¹⁷ The returned political exile, Aluizio Palmar, and a clergyman, father Edgard Raviche, similarly expressed that many politicians only got involved with the MJT in order to earn credibility and votes.¹¹⁸ These political undertones also extended into the realm of national politics as both Itaipu’s president, General José Cavalcanti, and Paraná governor Nay Braga were considered potential presidential candidates. With their sights set on the presidency, each man had to approach the standoff at Itaipu cautiously. They had to avoid alienating potential future voters while also not upsetting the established political elite. As observed in the *Folha de São Paulo*, “it will not be because of two thousand farmers suffering through the drama of expropriation that Cavalcanti and Braga fall out of favor [for the presidency].”¹¹⁹ Under the spotlight cast by events at Itaipu, political

¹¹⁴ “O PMDB e a luta dos agricultores de Itaipu.” 10/8/1980. Source: DOPS, folder 62999. APP.

¹¹⁵ “Political Panorama of Foz do Iguaçu,” 11/30/1981. E/AESI.G/IB/BR/056/81, 4, item 6. Courtesy of Aluizio Palmar.

¹¹⁶ “Minutes of Itaipu Binational’s Executive Committee,” 5/28/1981. Source: microfilm 2823.1245. Both documents from the CDIB.

¹¹⁷ Itamar da Silva, interview with author. 11/16/2014, Santa Helena, Brazil.

¹¹⁸ Aluizio Palmar, interview with author. 8/8/2013, Foz do Iguaçu; Edgard Raviche, interview with author. 11/4/2014, Toledo, Paraná, Brazil.

¹¹⁹ “Expropriados de Itaipu dão mostras de desespero,” *Folha de São Paulo*, 3/25/1981, 9.

stakeholders at the local and national level approached the farmers' conflict with an eye toward advancing their own goals.

At the end of March, employees from the Institute of Lands and Cartography (ITC) conducted the survey previously requested by Governor Braga. The start of this project amplified the demands of farmers who wanted to be given access to new lands rather than receive money from Itaipu. Because the Brazilian Constitution stipulated that all expropriations had to be done monetarily, the notion of 'land-for-land' knowingly advocated a far more structural change than the dominant platform of the MJT leadership. If implemented, land-for-land would require the Brazilian government to change both its federal expropriation policy and its entire approach to agrarian reform. Not only would the Constitution no longer serve as the primary legislative conduit, the state would also have to appropriate large landholdings to redistribute amongst the lower classes. This constituted a direct challenge to notions of private property and to Brazil's existing system of land tenure. As such, the members of the MJT who demanded land-for-land positioned themselves beyond the movement's more immediate and moderate goals of increased financial compensation. Comprised almost exclusively of landless farmers, this sector of the MJT fought against Itaipu while also advocating a broader vision of agrarian reform.

At this point in the Foz do Iguaçu encampment, INCRA had obtained lands for resettlement projects at Arapoti within Paraná, and at Bom Jesus da Lapa in the northeastern state of Bahia. The *Folha de São Paulo* reported that when the ITC team began its work, the MJT declared that farmers would not accept lands of inferior quality and rejected the notion of being transferred to either Arapoti or Bom Jesus da Lapa.¹²⁰ A participant in the movement, Lauro Rocini, remembers that the MJT voted down the idea of land-for-land precisely because of the

¹²⁰ "Esperança a expropriados de Itaipu," *Folha de São Paulo*, 3/30/1981.

notion of land “inferiority.”¹²¹ As will be detailed in Chapter Five, the areas deemed inferior by the MJT (Arapoti and Bom Jesus da Lapa) were the exact locations where many of the landless farmers would be resettled in the aftermath of the Foz encampment.

Given the pressing time frame of the fight at Itaipu—most interviewees recalled the anxiety of knowing that the flood always loomed on the horizon—it should not come as a surprise that the landed farmers in the MJT leadership bypassed land-for-land and opted instead to focus on financial compensation. As code for agrarian reform, land-for-land was a powerful demand that would be resisted and politically costly. Nearly three decades after the fight at Itaipu, Marcelo Barth described this moment with a sense of regret: “We lacked strength and courage... We were tired from all the lies, all the deceit, all the things Itaipu refused us. It still makes me so sad that we couldn’t keep fighting for land-for-land.”¹²² The failure to adopt land-for-land as a long-term strategy reflected more than just the financial priorities of the MJT; it was also a byproduct of the Church’s influence. Aiming for more structural change implied a radical approach that clashed with the Church’s insistence on moderate and peaceful goals. Pastor Gernote Kirinus remembers the landless peasants at Itaipu as the most forward-thinking, but that the movement “abandoned” them once the landed farmers and Church leaders decided to focus only on winning a “fair price.” Early in the farmers’ movement, Kirinus had been encouraged by the support given to the landless. But looking back, he now thinks that the shift from land-for-land to a fair price constituted “the great sin” of the Church’s role at Itaipu.¹²³

¹²¹ Lauro Rocini, interview with author, 12/26/2014, Itaipulândia, Paraná, Brazil.

¹²² Marcelo Barth, interview with Catianne Matiello. Reproduced in Matiello, “Narrativas tecnológicas,” 107.

¹²³ Gernote Kirinus, interview with author, 9/17/2014, Marechal Cândido Rondon, Paraná, Brazil.

The ITC Report and the De-escalation of the Justice and Land Movement

The ITC released its report nearly a month into the Foz do Iguaçu encampment. Its findings stated definitively that Itaipu paid roughly 30 percent below the market value of land. Not only did this provide the MJT with proof that Itaipu underpaid farmers, but the sense of victory that it gave to the land-owning farmers fundamentally shifted the direction of the movement. Prior to the ITC report, the encampment saw increasing calls for more radical approaches like land-for-land, yet the news that Itaipu might have to pay higher prices deescalated this momentum. As a result, the movement focused even more on financial compensation, leaving its landless members with even less support.

Land Classification	Price (in <i>cruzeiros</i>)		
	Itaipu, March 1981	ITC suggestion	Demands of MJT
1 st Rate	360,000	491,183	600,000
2 nd Rate	315,000	427,542	n/a
3 rd Rate	252,000	273,897	n/a
4 th Rate	109,000	112,901	500,000

Table 3.1: Estimates of land values given by Itaipu, the ITC, and the MJT. Source: AESI informação E/AESI.G/IB/BR/021/81, 4/10/1981, in SNI ACE.892/81, AN-RJ.

The ITC report included 132 surveys of land plots, 268 interviews, and 143 smaller compilations of market data. It identified Itaipu's expropriation policies as the primary cause of rising land prices, but also noted the effect of a robust agricultural harvest and the devaluation of Brazil's currency. The ITC recommended that Paraná's government acquire large plots of land "that can serve not only for the resettlement of the displaced, but also as a means to regularize the regional real estate market."¹²⁴ The Foz de Iguaçu encampment celebrated the ITC findings, yet Itaipu offered no indication it would make any of the suggested changes. President Calvacanti addressed the report in a press conference:

Itaipu resolves its problems on its own. Governor Ney Braga, a friend of mine for over forty years, warned me that he had requested [the ITC] study so that he

¹²⁴ Instituto de Terras e Cartografia, avaliação Abril 1981. Source: SNI ACE.841/81, AN-RJ.

personally could have an idea about this problem. Without a doubt, ITC's charts can serve more as a parameter for adjusting future prices. We will not, in the meantime, meet with any farmers.¹²⁵

Only a few weeks earlier, the MJT had conducted a tent-by-tent survey of the camp, asking what the movement should do if Itaipu and the government continued to ignore the farmers' demands. Responses included suggestions to block all entrances to the dam with tractors, to have women and children lead an invasion of Itaipu's headquarters, to send a delegation to meet with Paraguay's dictator, Alfredo Stroessner, and perhaps even to halt construction altogether.¹²⁶ Itaipu's security forces closely monitored this radicalizing groundswell. One report noted that "so far the Justice and Land Movement has, despite its opposition to the government, presented a peaceful character, but has recently changed its behavior [and now presents] possibilities of aggressive behavior if its demands are not met." In particular, security forces worried about backlash against the ITC report.¹²⁷ Contrary to Itaipu's anxieties, the ITC report had the opposite effect: in the aftermath of its release, the growing momentum in the camp actually *diminished* and the mood within the MJT shifted accordingly.

From the earliest days of the struggle against Itaipu, farmers had sought the type of state support and validation evident in the ITC data. For the first time, the movement could now base its demands on findings of a government agency. Supporters celebrated this a victory for both the Justice and Land Movement and for the emerging power of grassroots struggles in the twilight of Brazil's dictatorship. Paradoxically, it also marked the beginning of the encampment's end. In the most immediate sense, the ITC report was just that, a report. It gave little in the way of policy

¹²⁵ "Itaipu não receberá agricultores," *Nosso Tempo*, 4/15/81, 18.

¹²⁶ "Roteiro para reuniões por barraca," included in Confidential AESI informação E/AESI.G/IB/BR/021/81, 3. File: SNI ACE.892/81 Source: AN-RJ. The results of this intra-camp survey were made public and covered in many news outlets, ex: "Agricultores de Itaipu divulgam novas táticas," *Diário do Paraná*, 4/9/1981, 4; and "Expropriados querem falar com Stroessner," *Folha de Londrina*, 4/9/1981, 7.

¹²⁷ "Roteiro para reuniões por barraca," included in Confidential AESI informação E/AESI.G/IB/BR/021/81, 15. File: SNI ACE.892/81 Source: AN-RJ.

recommendations and offered no strategies for improving government oversight of land expropriations. It simply stated that Itaipu paid far below fair value for land. Even if fully implemented, then, the ITC report could only mediate the present situation and offered few measures to prevent future conflicts. For the land-owning farmers who comprised the movement's leadership, the ITC data confirmed that Itaipu should substantially raise its compensation. Sensing that they would finally receive more money, the landed farmers began to ease up.

In light of the ITC report, the MJT leadership shifted its attention to raising public criticism of Itaipu—a tactic intended to bolster its negotiation power. In response to Cavalcanti's refusal to adopt the ITC's recommendations, the MJT issued a press release claiming that Itaipu “opposes any form of compromise, whether from the farmers, from government mediation, or any outside entity.”¹²⁸ The farmers also openly called for the resignation of President Cavalcanti and Paulo da Cunha.¹²⁹ MJT leaders also appealed directly to both the President of Brazil, General João Figueiredo, and General Golbery do Couto e Silva, one of the most influential military leaders of the previous two decades.¹³⁰ The willingness to reach out to Brazil's highest political leaders shows how the fight at Itaipu resonated beyond western Paraná. Moreover, it indicated that the MJT saw public appeals to national figures as an important way to galvanize popular support for its cause.

After nearly six weeks of silence Itaipu offered the first indication it would negotiate with the MJT. On April 28—43 days into the encampment—Paulo da Cunha invited five farmers, their lawyer, and the president of the Justice and Peace Commission to meet in Curitiba.

¹²⁸ “Nota da Itaipu irrita colonos torna difíceis as desapropriações” *O Estado de São Paulo*, 4/15/1981. 9.

¹²⁹ “Colonos exigem demissão do presidente de Itaipu,” *Folha de São Paulo*, 4/15/1981, 5.

¹³⁰ “Itaipu: um apelo a Golbery,” *Zero Hora*, 4/15/1981; and “Expropriados de Itaipu agora estão apelando ao Presidente,” *Gazeta do Povo*, 4/16/1981.

Although they failed to reach an agreement, da Cunha did present Itaipu's offer of a 30-percent price increase and a commitment to meet again on May 8.¹³¹

At this juncture it is necessary to examine the movement's de-escalation and to ask why *this* was the moment when more radical action was voted down.

The successes of both encampments had largely resulted from farmers embracing direct action. In Santa Helena, the threat of a march on Foz do Iguaçu compelled Itaipu to meet with the farmers for the first time, and the second encampment occurred only when that initial threat actually occurred. So why is it that as the encampment approached its third month, and when its leaders finally negotiated directly with Itaipu, did the proposal to escalate the struggle gain so little traction? The findings of the ITC report suggested that Itaipu would soon increase its compensation and the landed farmers did not want to risk losing this opportunity. Over the previous years, MJT leaders had maintained a noticeable, albeit uneven, level of support for the landless peasants in their ranks, including occasional demands that workers receive compensation even if they had no legal deed. Yet as discussed, these gestures of inclusion often derived from efforts to expand the movement's base and increase public pressure on Itaipu.

The aftermath of the ITC report underscores the personal motives of the MJT leadership. With a small window for winning their financial demands and with the threat of the flood hanging overhead, the landed farmers pushed the movement toward a compromise agreement. Left out, however, were those who stood to gain nothing from a victory based on the premise of established legal property. By opting to negotiate on the terms set by the ITC, the MJT leadership foreclosed on the possibility of defending the landless farmers.

¹³¹ "Em fim, Itaipu negociará com agricultores," *Nosso Tempo*, 5/6/1981, 5.



FIGURE 3.8: Negotiations between Itaipu (far side of table) and farmers. Source: *Cadernos de Justiça e Paz*, No. 5, Feb. 1983, 65

Although the MJT leadership moved toward a more moderate approach, calls for direct action still persisted. At the encampment's ensuing general assembly, a group of farmers presented a motion to preempt Itaipu's May 8 timeline by invading the construction site on May 1.¹³² The persistence of this more radical approach shows that many in the camp still hoped to force Itaipu's hand. According to a *Jornal do Brasil* article, the MJT leadership at this time struggled to maintain a sense of calm amongst the frustrated farmers.¹³³ That same week, *Nosso Tempo* published an editorial declaring that "Itaipu and the Government must know that whatever act of violence on behalf of the farmers... will be perfectly deserved and completely justified."¹³⁴ Despite this lingering undercurrent, the proposal to invade Itaipu's headquarters never gained a majority in the general assembly and the momentum behind it receded in the following days.

Almost two months after the encampment began, it appeared as though the MJT's

¹³² Mazzarollo, *A Taipa da injustiça*, 114.

¹³³ "Itaipu eleva preço de terras em 30% e colonos aceitam," *Jornal do Brasil*, 4/29/1981.

¹³⁴ "Quando a violência se justifica," *Nosso Tempo*, 5/6/81, 2.

strategy of peaceful protests and attempts at negotiation had reached its limits. Moreover, over 30 percent of the region's expropriations remained unfulfilled.¹³⁵ In a climate of anxiety and uncertainty the stakes were very high for the May 8 meeting. Although the movement's leaders hoped to personally meet with Paulo da Cunha, Itaipu's legal department instead presented them with a prepared statement outlining a set of conditions almost identical to those given ten days earlier in Curitiba.¹³⁶ Itaipu again offered a 30 percent increase for first-rate lands. The MJT leadership returned to the encampment to decide its next move. The leaders stressed that while the movement could not claim to have completely forced Itaipu's hand, over the course of the 54-day encampment it had won nearly 80 percent of its demands and the farmers' situation "was significantly better than it had been at the start of the encampment."¹³⁷

The following morning the farmers held a seven-hour general assembly to discuss whether or not to accept Itaipu's proposal. In the end, 24 groups (each representing a different region or community) voted to approve the offer and end the encampment, with only three arguing for the need to maintain the protest.¹³⁸ Farmers agreed to demobilize the camp the next day. Before ending the assembly, the MJT crafted one final document. Along with chronicling the history of the 54-day encampment, it included a list of twelve victories highlighted by Itaipu's concession of a 62-percent price increase. Itaipu also promised that land indemnifications would proceed immediately, with priority being given to those who had participated in the encampment. The document ended with a declaration that,

This was one step. We will always be ready to repeat our protests, whether against Itaipu or the government... The Justice and Land Movement continues. It will

¹³⁵ "Em fim, Itaipu negociará com agricultores," *Nosso Tempo*, 5/6/1981, 5.

¹³⁶ Mazzarollo, *A Taipa da injustiça*, 114.

¹³⁷ Germani, *Expropriados terra e água*, 167.

¹³⁸ "Agricultores aceitam proposta da Itaipu," *Gazeta do Povo*, 5/10/1981, 39. The evidence does not clarify whether the farmers who opposed the proposal to end the encampment were landed or landless. Based on context and the evolution of the movement over the previous weeks, it is fair to suggest that they were most likely landless.

only end when the last farmer is indemnified. Farmers united will never be defeated. The Price of Peace: Justice and Land.¹³⁹

Press coverage proved very favorable to the farmers. Revealing the extent to which public opinion had sided with the MJT, newspapers reported on the final agreement with such headlines as “Making the Leviathan fold” and “At Itaipu, unity was strength.”¹⁴⁰ Organizations that lent support throughout the farmers’ struggle also celebrated the MJT’s victories. The Paraná Federation of Rural Workers (FETAEP) issued a statement declaring that “This mobilization of united and organized workers, together with unions and other opposition groups, offered concrete proof ... that only the mobilization of all [Brazilians] can secure social justice.”¹⁴¹ Despite this public praise, the farmers’ movement had a far more complicated impact amongst those involved in the protest. In the aftermath of the final general assembly, *Nosso Tempo* collected declarations that reflected a wide range of perceptions on the encampment’s outcome.

- Claudio Pizzato, the MJT’s lawyer: “It was a partial success. We won 70 to 80 percent of what we sought when we decided to camp. The people showed that they know how to fight for their rights. [Do the victories justify the demobilization?] Yes, because we exhausted all the peaceful means. To go beyond what we won, perhaps we would need to veer into violence, which is not the position that we take.
- Fidelcino Tolentino, state deputy from Cascavel, PMDB: “It showed that Itaipu responded to its problems with military and para-military actions... For them, everything is war, where the dangerous element is a mobilized people.”
- Werner Fuchs, evangelical pastor and CPT leader: “In the circumstances in which we fight, victories are very telling. Itaipu was [backed by] the Government, while the workers did not receive such protection. The movement served as a school for other movements that will follow.”
- Osvino Murfp, farmer and member of the camp’s negotiation team: “It was not time to return home, no. We needed to endure for another six months. A majority decided to leave and I will not stay here alone. But I do not feel very good leaving right now.”¹⁴²

¹³⁹ The final document was reproduced in full in *Nosso Tempo*, 5/13/81, 6.

¹⁴⁰ “Dobrando o Leviathan,” *O Estado do Paraná*, 5/12/1981; “Em Itaipu, a união faz a força,” *Gazeta do Povo*

¹⁴¹ “Mensagem aos agricultores expropriados pela hideoelétrica Itaipu.” 5/8/1981. Source: archive of FETAEP, Curitiba, Brazil.

¹⁴² All quotations from “O documento final,” *Nosso Tempo*, 5/13/1981, 7.

These opinions expose the multi-layered and often contradictory realities of what transpired in the Justice and Land Movement. As evidenced in the first three quotations, the movement won a substantial portion of its official demands and forced a powerful state enterprise to yield, at least partially, to the pressures of a popular struggle. The MJT attracted the support of opposition leaders and showcased local forms of resistance that expanded on broader ideas of democratization. The Justice and Land Movement also confronted Brazil's armed forces and emerged relatively unscathed from a 54-day standoff. In the early 1980s, proponents of the official *abertura* anticipated the successful conclusion of Brazil's controlled political transition. For non-elite Brazilians like those in western Paraná, however, the exact form that the *abertura* would take remained unclear. In their confrontation with an important branch of the dictatorship, the MJT farmers put forth an alternative vision of democratic rights.

Despite these broader implications, the comment by a disenchanted farmer that "I do not feel very good leaving right now" elicits a deeper examination of the struggle. When the movement voted to accept Itaipu's proposal and lift the encampment, many farmers and peasants were left wanting. For the landless who did not hold any legal claim to property, Itaipu's concession of increased compensation offered no tangible victory. While the landed farmers could celebrate their win and begin looking for new land to buy, their landless neighbors—aside from the politicizing experience of mass protest—had gained almost nothing.

The divisions between the landed and landless farmers highlight the internal tensions inherent to social movements and illuminates how popular struggles can reproduce some of the hierarchies they claim to challenge. Like all popular struggles, the MJT was a diverse coalition organized around the perception of common goals and a common 'enemy.' When the demands of only certain members were met, the bonds that held the coalition together began to dissolve. In

the end, the landed farmers and their allies controlled most of the campaign and succeeded in framing demands within the existing system of land tenure and property rights. This strategy precluded any serious gains for the landless farmers within their ranks. This does not suggest that the leadership betrayed the movement or that Itaipu or the government manipulated the movement. Quite to the contrary, since the desire for more profound change had never been embraced as a central demand. The landed farmers who held the most influence sought increased compensation for their flooded properties and, to their credit, achieved many of their goals.

That so many landless farmers even took part in a movement that rarely advocated on their behalf calls attention to the longer history of the struggle for agrarian reform in Brazil. For landless workers in Paraná, the MJT represented the best chance at that particular moment to overcome a particular set of inequalities. The property owning farmers never prioritized the needs of the landless because they never intended to fundamentally alter land relations in Brazil. For landless farmers unable to challenge the leadership, their experience in the Justice and Land Movement must have been vexing. The landless farmers who stayed in the region soon gathered the lessons of this frustration and formed an independent movement based solely on their own demands.¹⁴³ Chapter Six will chronicle the landless campaign that emerged from the fight at Itaipu and its implications for the broader meanings of land in Brazil.

From the perspective of how the MJT progressed over time and which strategies it did or did not implement, the fight at Itaipu also reflects how social movements are constantly shifting coalitions that can alienate their own members. After persevering under two decades of dictatorship, many in the MJT hoped to use more radical tactics to fight for a different political

¹⁴³ A portion of the landless participants in the MJT were immediately sent to resettlement camps by INCRA. Some remained within Paraná, at the Arapoti project, while most travelled over 2,000 kilometers to the northern states of Bahia and Acre. This topic is a central theme of Chapter Five.

and social reality. As opposition forces throughout the country mobilized around multiple visions for democratization, the contours of political participation and popular protest began to shift drastically. An article written by Juvêncio Mazzarollo in the aftermath of the Foz do Iguaçu encampment reflects these changes and foreshadows the more radical movement of landless workers that soon took shape:

In the name of peace, many advances were lost through the simple confusion between radicalization and violence. In the first place, it must be known that a movement like [the MJT] had very little pacifism. It was a true act of war, short of actually arming itself. Peace and non-violence do not end only in the moment when a punch is thrown or when blood begins to flow... A demonstration, an encampment, the energetic protests, these are all violent manifestations and nothing pacifist. So why only were more radical attitudes put in the category of violence?¹⁴⁴

Waters of Change: the Itaipu Flood and the 1982 Elections

Only a week after the Foz do Iguaçu encampment ended, INCRA loaded the first group of farmers from western Paraná on buses and sent them on a week-long journey to resettlement projects in Bahia. *O Estado do São Paulo* reported that all of the 69 families were sharecroppers and the majority originated from the northeast.¹⁴⁵ This meant that the landless, darker-skinned farmers were the first to be sent far away from their recently flooded homes. Over the following months, INCRA relocated hundreds of families throughout Brazil. The farmers who remained in the region confronted the reality that despite the claimed victories at the protest camp, very little had changed. Many of the same issues that had persisted for years resurfaced over the following months, including overdue payments and a refusal to compensate for electrical lines and other investments.¹⁴⁶ By the end of August, over 1,000 families (out of an original total of 6,000)

¹⁴⁴ “Pouca justiça e pouca terra,” *Nosso Tempo*, 5/20/1981, 18.

¹⁴⁵ “Itaipu: Inera inicia remoção dos colonos,” *O Estado do São Paulo*, 5/17/1981, 25.

¹⁴⁶ SNI Informe No. 0229/117/ACT/81, 7/21/1981. Source: AN-RJ.

found themselves still waiting to be paid. A few hundred farmers held a protest rally on the site of the original encampment in Santa Helena.¹⁴⁷

As had happened twice before, Itaipu pushed back the deadline for completing all expropriations, this time for an additional five months. This meant that Itaipu now allowed itself to process any remaining contracts as late as a few weeks before the flood. One of the farmers' most consistent allies, FETAEP, conducted a survey in late June of the families awaiting expropriation. The results indicate the type of farmer at the very bottom of Itaipu's priority list. According to FETAEP's survey, the average person still in the flood-zone was 40 years old, had lived in the region for less than five years, and lived on only 5 *alqueires* of land. Moreover, nearly 30 percent of those surveyed originally came from central and northern Brazil.¹⁴⁸ This data paints a clear picture of the region's landless farmers. A letter from three peasants to the state Secretary of Public Safety reflects the precarity of this situation. The three men wrote that "after innumerable broken promises, we are now threatened, to the point of potential death, if we do not leave our homes before the set deadline. If we haven't left our homes yet, it is simply because we have nowhere to go." The letter ended by imploring the Secretary to take action: "[W]e trust that [you] will help us and that you will not allow more blood to be spilled. [Please do not let] violence occur yet again in this twisted world."¹⁴⁹

With the flood looming ever closer, Itaipu sought to process the final expropriation cases with as little resistance as possible. This strategy included a public relations campaign. The headline for a *Gazeta do Povo* article in mid-August declared that "expropriation at Itaipu is complete" despite the fact that as late as October the cases of over 100 families remained

¹⁴⁷ "Expropriados de Itaipu fazem passeata de protesto," *Folha de Londrina*, 8/25/1981, 1.

¹⁴⁸ Survey of farmers awaiting expropriation, 6/28/1982. N=95. Source: Archive of FETAEP, Curitiba, Brazil.

¹⁴⁹ Letter to Coronel Haroldo Ferreira Dias, Secretário da Segurança Pública, from Adelino Schmengler, Silvino Odilo Kerber, and Odalio Francisco dos Santos, 6/22/1982. Source: microfilm 3359.1270-1271, CDIB.

pending.¹⁵⁰ Itaipu also aimed to strengthen its global image, as seen in an October article in *The New York Times*. Under the title of “Brazil Creates a Lake, With Care for Man and Beast,” the report celebrated the respectful treatment of local landscapes, writing, for example that “Itaipu planners have evacuated 42,000 people, [and even] relocated cemeteries coffin by coffin.”¹⁵¹ At an internal level, Itaipu employed several strategies to clear the region of any remaining farmers. When the Binational deployed extra security forces it purposefully sent men with “family in those cities, and a personal stake” in avoiding conflict.¹⁵² And in the final weeks before the flood, Itaipu proved willing to use direct force. A confidential SNI report described the case of an elderly peasant who alleged that an Itaipu employee and a member of the state police arrived on his land and destroyed his house, his barn, and tore open 200 sacks of flour.¹⁵³

As the final communities scrambled to figure out where they would go after the flood, the Sete Quedas waterfalls received a great deal of attention. Hoping to catch a final glimpse of the falls, 40,000 people visited Sete Quedas on its last day open to the public.¹⁵⁴ A grassroots environmental movement called “Adeus Sete Quedas” brought together artists, ecologists, and activists to highlight how Itaipu’s flood would destroy the habitats of thousands of different species of mammals, birds, insects, and fish, while also submerging over 200 archaeological sites dating back 8,000 years.¹⁵⁵ Carlos Drummond de Andrade, one of Brazil’s most celebrated poets of the twentieth century, wrote an elegy to the falls, the ending of which observed,

¹⁵⁰ “Desapropriação em Itaipu é concluída,” *Gazeta do Povo*, 8/17/1982, 14. Details on those still awaiting payment come from “Colonos ainda esperam indenização de Itaipu,” *O Estado do Paraná*, 10/2/1982, 9.

¹⁵¹ Warren Hoge, “Brazil Creates a Lake, With Care for Man and Beast,” *The New York Times*, 10/15/1982.

¹⁵² Memo from Bruno Castro da Graça, to the Supervisor of Human Resources, Memo I/AESI/ASF/058/82, 8/9/1982. Source: microfilm 9193.1385-1387, CDIB.

¹⁵³ “Denúncia contra a Itaipu Binacional,” SNI informe No. 08663/30/AC/82, 12/10/1982. Source: AN-RJ.

¹⁵⁴ “No último dia de visita a Sete Quedas, 40 mil pessoas formam fila de 1 km,” *O Globo*, 9/20/1982, 5.

¹⁵⁵ “Adeus Sete Quedas” poster, 1982. Source: CDPH, Universidade Estadual de Londrina. For a full history of Sete Quedas and the nearby city of Guaíra at this time, see: Simone de Souza Corrêa, “O sindicato dos trabalhadores rurais, a Comissão Pastoral da Terra e a luta dos expropriados da Itaipu em Guaíra/PR (1975-1990). 2013 TCC, UNIOESTE, Marechal Cândido Rondon.

Sete Quedas left us
and we didn't know, ah, we didn't know how to love it,
and all seven died,
and all seven lifted into the air,
seven ghosts, seven crimes
of the living who fight for a life
that will never be reborn.¹⁵⁶

In the final weeks before the flood, the remaining families finally received their expropriation money and left the area. What had recently been a lively agricultural hub was now desolate; abandoned gas stations, cemeteries, churches, and half-demolished buildings dotted the landscape. One journalist wrote that the region felt as though “it suffered an aerial bombing and all the people living in the small cities below were forced to evacuate in haste.”¹⁵⁷ (Figure 3.5) *O Estado de São Paulo* ran a five-page spread on “The Last and Sad Days of Itaipu,” describing the bleak region and the sorrows of those forced to leave.¹⁵⁸ The experience of displacement lingered long afterwards. When asked in 2014 about their memories of Itaipu, nearly all interviewees spoke about the deep emotional shock it inflicted. Udo Lopes, who refused three initial offers from Itaipu before finally getting a better price, remembered having to disperse quickly: “You didn’t know where your family had moved to, you didn’t know where any neighbors had gone.”¹⁵⁹ Thinking about her life before Itaipu, Dona Suita fought back tears while sharing that “All of my family lived in the same place, we had a beautiful property, near a river with a waterfall, really pretty, marvelous. Even today we feel like we died of sadness. But what can you do?”¹⁶⁰

¹⁵⁶ “Adeus Sete Quedas,” Carlos Drummond de Andrade, 1982. Originally published in *Jornal do Brasil*, Caderno B, 9/9/1982.

¹⁵⁷ “Os últimos a deixar a região devastada,” *O Globo*, 10/10/1982, 12.

¹⁵⁸ “Os últimos e tristes dias em Itaipu,” *O Estado de São Paulo*, 10/1/1982, 1-5.

¹⁵⁹ Udo Lopes, interview with author, 11/19/2014, Porto Mendes, Paraná, Brazil.

¹⁶⁰ Dona Suita, interview with author, 11/16/2014, Santa Helena, Paraná, Brazil.



FIGURE 3.9: Families leave their homes before the Itaipu flood. Source: *O Estado de São Paulo*, 10/1/1982, 4.

On October 13, 1982 the area surrounding the Itaipu Dam was flooded. Over fourteen days, 29 billion cubic meters of water formed a lake that covered 1,350 square kilometers of Brazilian and Paraguayan lands.¹⁶¹ In a span of two weeks, a landscape of lush farmlands supporting thousands of families disappeared under water. One journalist described the process:

The area was at the mercy of the waters, presenting a vast scene of ruin and desolation. Wandering along the almost 200 kilometers from Foz do Iguacu to Guaira, bordering the Rio Paraná, was a painful experience. It gave the impression of circulating among the rubble caused by a [natural] catastrophe.¹⁶²

A week after the flood, the governments of Brazil and Paraguay held an inauguration for ‘the project of the century.’ Over 500 journalists, including almost 200 foreign reporters, attended.¹⁶³ Many phases of construction still remained and the dam would not begin to yield energy until 1984, yet the reservoir flood indicated a significant achievement. Not only had Itaipu Binational produced the largest artificial lake on the planet, but in harnessing and rerouting a sizeable portion of the world’s seventh longest river it successfully completed the

¹⁶¹ Itaipu’s reservoir covered 780 km² in Brazil and 570 km² in Paraguay.

¹⁶² As quoted in Ribeiro, *Memórias do concreto*, 40.

¹⁶³ “Usina atrai imprensa do mundo desenvolvido,” *O Estado de São Paulo*, 11/6/1982, 14.

most challenging aspect of the dam's construction. Having overcome all manner of diplomatic, social, and environmental obstacles over the previous 20 years, the leaders of both countries could now celebrate. Brazilian President João Figueiredo proclaimed that the significance of Itaipu "transcends the sphere of our two countries to become a continental project. In the present atmosphere of crisis and pessimism... an event such as today reaffirms our confidence in humanity's strength." By gesturing to both the economic crisis plaguing most of the Southern Cone in the early 1980s and the political unrest unfolding domestically in Brazil, Figueiredo held up Itaipu as proof of his government's ability to lead the country. Paraguay's Alfredo Stroessner described Itaipu as "more than just the greatest producer of hydroelectric energy in the world, [more than] a giant monument of concrete and steel. It will serve as a marvelous moral fortress, forever a symbol of unity, cooperation, and fraternity."¹⁶⁴ Neither leader mentioned the sacrifices made by local populations. For many thousands of displaced families, the Itaipu lake represented little more than the watery grave of their previous lives.

One of the most important political milestones of the *abertura* occurred one month after the flood. On November 15, 1982 Brazil held its first direct elections for national positions since 1965.¹⁶⁵ All legally recognized parties could run candidates for city council, mayor, state assembly, governor, Congress, and Senate.¹⁶⁶ Although the election did not include the presidency, it still marked a pivotal phase in the eventual return to democratic rule. Over 48

¹⁶⁴ Both speeches reproduced in "Relatório de 1982," Itaipu Binational, 126-132. Source: CDIB.

¹⁶⁵ During military rule elections for senators and federal deputies had been held in 1966, 1970, 1974, and 1978. For a thorough account of the 1982 elections, see David Fleischer (ed.), *Da distensão à abertura: As eleições de 1982*, (Brasília: Editora UNB, 1998).

¹⁶⁶ Legally recognized parties needed to have formed directorates in 20 percent of municipalities.

million Brazilians went to the polls, a voter turnout of roughly 83 percent.¹⁶⁷ As important as the electoral turnout were the results themselves: the PMDB opposition party received 43 percent of the total vote. Arguably the most symbolic result came from Leonel Brizola's election as governor of Rio de Janeiro. Alfred Stepan writes that Brizola's victory "represented a new stage in the evolution of the opposition."¹⁶⁸ The morning after the election, an editorial in the *Folha de São Paulo* celebrated a "victorious democracy," writing that November 15 offered clear indication of "the construction of a democratic Brazil."¹⁶⁹ The history of Itaipu also resonated in the 1982 elections. With nearly 60 percent of the vote, the governorship of Paraná went to the PMDB candidate José Richa, an outspoken supporter of the farmers' movement who a week into the Foz do Iguaçu encampment had given a senate speech denouncing Itaipu and the military.¹⁷⁰ Moreover, Alvaro Dias, one of the MJT's most consistent political allies, won a Senate seat with over 59 percent of the vote, easily beating out the sitting governor Ney Braga.¹⁷¹

Conclusion

Seen together, the Itaipu flood and the 1982 elections display some of the contradictions underlining Brazil's official political transition. The celebration of Itaipu's construction effaced the severe hardships of local communities in their struggles against the pharaonic project. The elections of 1982 signaled an important step toward democratization, yet for many Brazilians the *abertura's* promise of a full return of democratic rights remained a distant notion. The military

¹⁶⁷ Vote total from Von Mettenheim, *The Brazilian Voter*, 111; turnout statistic from Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (IDEA), "Voter Turnout Data for Brazil." <http://www.idea.int/vt/countryview.cfm?id=30>, accessed August 26, 2016.

¹⁶⁸ Stepan, *Rethinking Military Politics*, 63.

¹⁶⁹ "A democracia vitoriosa," *Folha de São Paulo*, 11/16/1982, 2.

¹⁷⁰ José Richa senate speech, 3/26/1981. "Fuzis, a melhor maneira de calar os colonos do Paraná?" Source: Biblioteca do Senado Federal, Brasília.

¹⁷¹ Election results from Tribunal Regional Eleitoral do Paraná, <http://www.tre-pr.jus.br/>. Accessed 11/5/2015.

did not actually cede power until 1985 and even so, not until 1989 did Brazil have a democratically elected president.¹⁷² Like many regions across the country, western Paraná experienced a process of democratization defined not by elite policies, but rather by the various micro-histories within its population. Events in Foz do Iguaçu—an important border town and the home of the Itaipu dam—show how local realities often diverged from the alleged advances of the official *abertura*. The city's designation as a 'national security zone' precluded its inhabitants from electing local candidates in the 1982 elections. Scores of displaced farmers had relocated to Foz do Iguaçu, offering further proof of Brazil's limited transition: after suffering through the process of expropriation, many now lived in a city without the same political rights reemerging elsewhere in Brazil.

The flood and elections of 1982 provide a symbolic example of Brazil's uneven return to democracy. This chapter, however, has argued that the limitations of *abertura* stemmed not only from moments of overt political contradictory or exclusion, but also from the disjuncture between the official process of democratization and the experiences of non-elite Brazilians. Even before the 1964 military coup, farmers in the Paraná borderlands—similar to other marginalized communities across Brazil—had not necessarily accessed democratic rights like elections, freedom of the press, or freedom from state violence. As such, the dictatorship did not represent the same rupture that it did for more established social actors, many of whom lived in urban areas. These diverging histories meant that when the military regime initiated the official policy of *abertura*, non-elite Brazilians like those in the Justice and Land Movement experienced democratization across multiple competing realities.

¹⁷² As part of the military's negotiated transition out of power, Tancredo Neves was indirectly elected president in 1985. However, Neves died soon after his inauguration and was replaced by Vice President José Sarney. Fernando Collor de Mello in 1989 became Brazil's first president elected directly by the general population.

The fight at Itaipu positioned farmers to expand on a localized form of political consciousness and to connect their struggle for land to larger questions of justice and citizenship. Despite often invoking a growing national rhetoric of democratic rights, local communities sought above all to defend their homes and their livelihoods. Although linked by context and discourse to the broader campaign for democracy, the MJT focused on agrarian issues seemingly unrelated to the *abertura*'s official goals of elections, political rights, and a controlled transition to civilian rule. For farmers in western Paraná, the *abertura* was less of an end-goal than it was a vehicle for achieving a separate yet overlapping set of demands. The history of rural mobilization at Itaipu exemplifies how groups of Brazilians throughout the country lived in a double *abertura*, wherein local perceptions and hopes for democracy often conflicted with the realities of political change unfolding elsewhere.

Despite the advances of Brazil's official *abertura*, inequalities and the continuing presence of a dictatorship continued to mark the realities of daily life for many Brazilians. On the one hand, the conflict at Itaipu revealed the extent to which opposition forces had chipped away at the military's monopoly on power and political legitimacy. Farmers and their allies successfully staged public protests and won numerous concessions, both material and moral. To the extent that the fight against Itaipu Binational had become a referendum on the military regime, the experience of the Justice and Land Movement presaged a more open and democratic Brazil. Yet the internal dynamics of the MJT and the continued lack of political rights for many of its members suggest a far more complicated reality. The following chapter on the struggles of the Avá-Guarani indigenous community elaborates on how the alleged progress of the *abertura* often concealed a very different experience on the ground.

Chapter Four

***“Sem Tekohá não há Tekó:”* Avá-Guarani Lands and the Construction of Indigeneity**

The farmers and peasants in the Justice and Land Movement were not the only people whose lands were threatened by the impending flood. Upstream of the future Itaipu dam, the Avá-Guarani indigenous community lived in an area known as Jacutinga, or Barra do Ocoí.¹

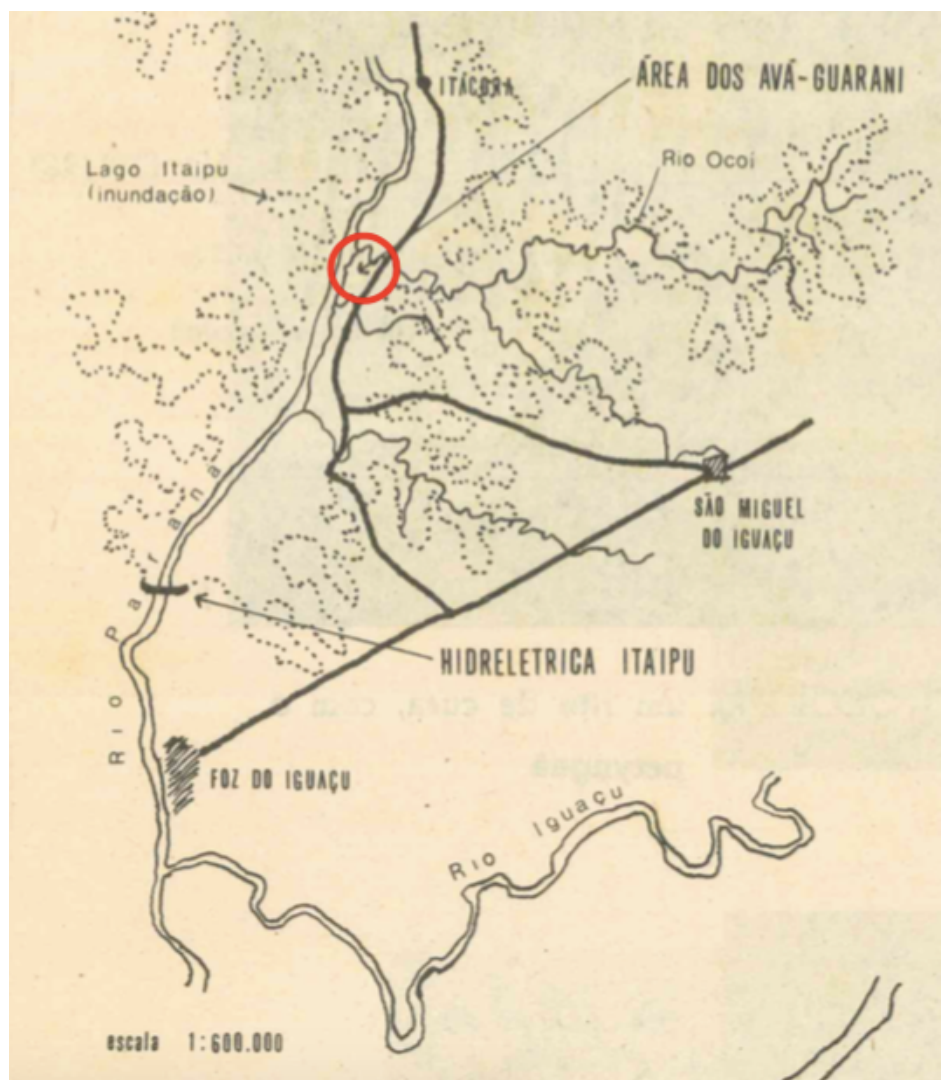


FIGURE 4.1: Map of Barra do Ocoí indigenous community. Edgard de Assis Carvalho, “Avá-Guarani do Ocoí-Jacutinga,” report for the Associação Brasileira de Antropologia, 1981, 8. “Sarah” collection, 9/20, CEPEDAL.

¹ The Avá-Guarani are also known as the the Avá-Chiripa, the Xiripá, or the Guarani Ñandeva.

The process of indigenous expropriation at Itaipu shared certain commonalities with the adjacent farmers' movement. Both groups confronted the Binational's evasive legal policies, slow government response, and the looming threat of displacement. But the indigenous struggle was predicated on a distinct history of exploitation and a separate set of legal and social constraints. Many of the neighboring farmers had themselves participated in the first wave of immigrant settlement that encroached on indigenous lands. The experience of the Avá-Guarani exemplifies how indigenous communities in many parts of Brazil faced a complex system of marginalization, not only from entities like Itaipu or the government but also from their non-Indian rural neighbors. By tracing how indigenous and other rural histories intersected in the fight at Itaipu, this chapter examines how constructions of race, indigeneity, and political legitimacy shaped the contours of life and popular mobilization in the Brazilian countryside.

The experiences of the Avá-Guarani and the nearby farmers were based on fundamentally different relationships to land. As discussed in previous chapters, the tension between the landed and the landless farmers reflected how the former viewed land as a source of *individual property*, with the latter instead perceiving land as a form of *collective rights*. The narrative of the Avá-Guarani, however, offers a third conception: land as *a way of life*. I collected interviews for this chapter on visits to the indigenous villages of Tekohã Iñetete and Itamarã—areas established in 1997 and 2007, respectively, because the original relocation site conceded by Itaipu in 1982 never met the Avá-Guarani demands for territorial and legal justice. In every conversation, I asked about the lands flooded by Itaipu and almost to a person, all members of the community mentioned the concept of “*sem tekohá não há tekó*”—without land there can be no Guarani. The centrality of land to Guarani society is further embedded linguistically: the word for land, *tekohá*, is composed around the root *tekó*, a socio-political space that describes “a way of being, a

system, a culture, a [set of] law and traditions.” Bartomeu Meliá observes that the dialectic between *tekó* and *tekohá* “simultaneously implies and produces economic and social relations and a political-religious organization essential to Guaraní life.”²

As explained by the current leader (*chomoy*) of Tekoha Itamarã, the Avá-Guarani fundamentally disagreed with Itaipu’s efforts to buy, expropriate, and control land: “there is only one owner, he made the trees, the forests, the fish, and he left everything for us. For the actual owner of this land, you never paid a cent.”³ These lands formed the core of Avá-Guarani life and their loss represented an ontological rupture far greater than that experienced by neighboring farmers. In an ethnography of the Avá-Guarani—one of the few extensive studies of the community—Maria Lucia Brant de Carvalho examines the community’s social structure, its conception of land tenure, and its previous experience with encroachment from state and private initiatives.⁴ Carvalho’s analysis shows that the conflict at Itaipu involved much more than just a physical landscape of indigenous territory. Rather, Barra do Ocoí became a space where notions of ethnicity and power were contested and given meaning.

Compared to the neighboring farmers’ movement and even to other indigenous struggles in Brazil, the size of the Avá-Guarani community chronicled in this chapter was quite small. By the time that Itaipu’s expropriations began in the late 1970s, some 20 families—around 75 Avá-Guarani—lived in the planned flood zone. The point of this chapter is not the scale of the indigenous fight against Itaipu, but rather the insight that it offers. By historicizing the

² Meliá, “A experiência religiosa Guaraní,” 336.

³ Onorio Benites, interview with author. 11/6/2014. Aldeia indígena Tekoha Itamarã, Paraná, Brazil.

⁴ While working for FUNAI in the early 2000s, Brant began a multi-year study of the community that later became a doctoral dissertation in geography. Maria Lucia Brant de Carvalho, “Das terras dos índios a índios sem terra o estado e os Guaraní do Oco’y: violência, silêncio e luta.” PhD dissertation, Universidade de São Paulo, 2013. An additional study of the Avá-Guarani is Evaldo Mendes da Silva, “Folhas ao vento: a micromobilidade de grupos Mbya e Nhandéva (Guaraní) na Tríplice Fronteira,” PhD dissertation, Universidade Federal do Rio de Janeiro, 2007.

differences between the Avá-Guarani and the nearby farmers, this chapter shows how and why certain sectors of the Brazilian countryside were excluded from Brazil's reemerging democratic polity. Although the community secured material and symbolic concessions, its overall situation saw little improvement in the aftermath of the Itaipu flood and the end of military rule. The case of the Avá-Guarani exemplifies how indigeneity and the contested politics of land and citizenship were all fundamentally embedded in both Brazilian society and the eventual transition to democracy.

The indigenous history at Itaipu was not simply one of repression. In challenging the actions and policies of the federal government, the community and its allies won a series of important concessions. Although Itaipu and the National Foundation of Indigenous Affairs (FUNAI, Fundação Nacional do Índio) attempted to move the Avá-Guarani to an existing Indian reserve, the community demanded their own lands of greater size and quality. They eventually secured 251 hectares along the shores of the Paraná River—an area over twice the size of what the government had initially offered. In their drive for better lands, the Avá-Guarani also forced the military regime to uphold its own laws, specifically the 1973 Indian Statute. FUNAI had tried to process the expropriation of indigenous lands as individual titles, but the Avá-Guarani invoked the Indian Statute to win the recognition of their land as communal property. So despite the Statute's status within federal policy intended to limit the lands and social cohesion of Brazil's tribes, the Avá-Guarani used it to strengthen their own demands.⁵ A law written by the dictatorship ultimately functioned as a tool of democratization: by refashioning the meanings of

⁵ Suzanne Williams. "Land Rights and the Manipulation of Identity: Official Indian Policy in Brazil," *the Journal of Latin American Studies*, Vol. 15, No. 1 (1983), 151. Another analysis of how the meanings of the Indian Statute were re-appropriated to advance indigenous struggles concerns the Xocó tribe in the northern state of Alagoas, Jan Hoffman French, *Legalizing Identities: Becoming Black or Indian in Brazil's Northeast*, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2009), esp. 43-76.

the 1973 Indian Statute in the climate of the *abertura*, the Avá-Guarani challenged both the legitimacy of government policy and the dominant perception of indigenous communities as passive groups with no stake in the political changes taking root throughout Brazil.

Initially, the community demanded that Itaipu and federal authorities respect the Indian Statute's definition of cultural and territorial rights. But with the impending flood and conditioned by the advancing *abertura*, the Avá-Guarani put forth an increasingly political critique. At a time when groups across Brazil found new ways to challenge military rule, the reassertion of indigenous culture and ethnic identity became a political act in its own right. In standing up to a central apparatus of the military regime, the Avá-Guarani defended their rights not only as an indigenous community, but as citizens of Brazil. This duality challenged the belief that indigenous groups did not belong to the Brazilian polity—what one scholar has called the position of being “internal outsiders.”⁶ Rather than an isolated “other,” the Avá-Guarani articulated a clear attachment to the Brazilian nation. This allowed the community to adapt what few legal rights they had under military rule toward the promise of a new democratic society.

The parallel emergence of the Justice and Land Movement (MJT, Movimento Justiça e Terra) complicated the Avá-Guarani's struggle. To be sure, the Avá-Guarani used the media spotlight given to the farmers to spark public criticism of the government's abusive indigenous policies. Yet the MJT's leadership almost completely overlooked the Avá-Guarani. This not only precluded any chance of forming a joint struggle, it denied indigenous groups the sort of political legitimacy won by certain groups of nearby farmers. Even sympathetic media outlets portrayed the Avá-Guarani as exotic and downtrodden “others” rather than as valid political actors.

Mainstream Brazilian society—both military and democratic regimes equally—had long ignored

⁶ Alcida Rita Ramos. *Indigenism: Ethnic Politics in Brazil*. (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1998), 95.

indigenous communities. The conclusion of this thesis will further discuss the theme of indigenous invisibility, both in its historical and contemporary forms. Because indigenous groups like the Avá-Guarani did not fit neatly into the broader standoff between democracy and dictatorship, their struggle in the early 1980s positioned them both within and beyond the *abertura*. For the Avá-Guarani, democratization was less of an end-goal than a vehicle to confront deeper inequalities rooted in ethnic identity and access to land.

Alcida Rita Ramos has shown that centuries worth of laws and customs have discursively and politically turned Brazil's indigenous people into "orphans."⁷ By defining "Indianness" as a temporary condition, Brazilian policy transformed individuals into wards of the state with the ultimate goal of assimilating Indians into Brazilian society. Maria Guadalupe Moog Rodrigues argues that although the association between Indians and orphans had been abandoned by the 1920s, the Indian Statute of 1973 re-codified the belief that like young orphans, Indians should remain under the tutelage of the government until they "came of age," meaning their full integration into mainstream society.⁸ This approach held serious implications for the control of indigenous lands, since only legally defined Indians could access federally protected indigenous territory. As such, an acculturated—or "emancipated"—Indian became a non-Indian in the eyes of the law and subsequently lost his or her legal rights.

Given that indigenous policy focuses largely on questions of land, Suzanne Williams contends that stripping indigenous groups of their legal identity functioned as a tool for freeing up indigenous lands for private and state enterprises.⁹ In the 1970s and 1980s, the government

⁷ Ramos. *Indigenism*, 17-19.

⁸ Maria Guadalupe Moog Rodrigues. "Indigenous Rights in Democratic Brazil," *Human Rights Quarterly*, 2002, 492.

⁹ Suzanne Williams, "Land Rights and the Manipulation of Identity: Official Indian Policy in Brazil," *the Journal of Latin American Studies*, 1983, 138.

branch charged with administering these policies was the notoriously prejudiced FUNAI. Seth Garfield contends that during this period FUNAI “embodied the federal government’s growing hegemony over the countryside and its efforts to foster capitalist growth and defuse social conflict through bureaucratic administration.”¹⁰ This approach was evident with the Avá-Guarani. Despite private memos discussing the indigenous community living in Barra do Ocoí, FUNAI maintained a public stance that it was unaware of the group. Only after persistent grassroots protest did FUNAI officially recognize the community. Hence, to defend their legal and territorial rights, the Avá-Guarani had to first struggle for the acknowledgement of their very existence.

Even then, the conflict extended to *how many* indigenous people lived in the region, as the authorities employed a survey intended to erase—both literally and ontologically—the status and number of Indians. Working toward the goal of diminishing the number of legally defined Indians, FUNAI used criteria with racist underpinnings to calculate the “Indianness” of those living in Itaipu’s flood zone. Among other categories, the test measured an individual’s skin pigment, language, clothing, and name. Scholars have called this a “perverse...ethnic litmus test” and a “true-false test for Indianness.”¹¹ The survey, conducted on a single day in 1981, counted only five indigenous families even though the actual number was closer to two dozen. As we shall see, the mechanisms for how FUNAI “counted” Indians reflected more than just the racist undertones of using physical and cultural traits to determine an individual’s ethnicity. Rather, it disregarded the fundamentals of Guarani society. Many families were absent from Barra do Ocoí on the day of FUNAI’s survey not because those lands were not theirs, but because they

¹⁰ Seth Garfield. *Indigenous Struggle at the Heart of Brazil: State Policy, Frontier Expansion, and the Xavante Indians, 1937-1988*. (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2001), 145.

¹¹ Garfield, *Indigenous Struggle at the Heart of Brazil*, 198; Rita Ramos, *Indigenism*, 249.

currently lived in other parts of the region. In the triple frontier zone of Brazil, Paraguay, and Argentina, the two main subgroups of Guarani, the Mbya and Nhandéva, lived spread out in over one hundred villages, with families often living in different locations for extended periods of time.¹² Mobility is central to the Guarani social identity. Their creation legend ties physical mobility to the essence of what makes the Guarani truly human: the Father (*Nhanderu*) carved wooden images (*yvyra*) similar to the deities and placed them “in front” (*-ovai*) and “standing” (*-ã*) in order to walk on Earth.¹³ Moreover, the community lived throughout the triple border region long before the establishment of national boundaries.

In order to process the expropriations quickly and in accordance with the federal construction of indigeneity, FUNAI and Itaipu needed to make the indigenous population seem as small as possible. With the help of allies in civil society—particularly within the progressive Catholic Church—the Avá-Guarani demanded that federal authorities recognize the true size of their community. The community’s fight at Itaipu also served as an attempt to reclaim the political and cultural power to define its own identity.

Before Itaipu: Colonial and Post-Colonial Legacies

Unlike the settler farmers who began migrating to the Paraná borderlands in the 1940s, Guarani indigenous groups lived throughout the region long before the arrival of Europeans. When Spanish explorers first encountered the Guarani in the 1530s, they observed an extensive population network in the areas between the Paraná, Uruguay, and Paraguay Rivers. By the early 1600s, members of the Jesuit order began to congregate the Guarani into missions and by the end of the seventeenth century the region’s indigenous communities lived on 30 missions spread

¹² Mendes da Silva, “Folhas ao vento,” 17.

¹³ This upright psychical position allows the Guarani to always maintain a connection to their deities. *Ibid.*, 79.

across a geographic realm comparable to the size of modern-day California and with a population of roughly 100,000.¹⁴ When the Portuguese and Spanish crowns expelled the Jesuits in 1759 and 1768, respectively, many of the Guarani dispersed back throughout the region and lived at the margins of the national societies that were beginning to form.

With the independence of Paraguay (1811), Argentina (1816), and Brazil (1822), conflicts arose over the territorial boundaries of the new nation-states, reaching a bloody crescendo in the War of the Triple Alliance (1864-1870). In his study of indigenous mobility, Evaldo Mendes da Silva notes that this war “caused a deep socio-spatial disorganization of the Guarani, not only because they had to leave their villages, but also because many men, including children, were forcibly recruited by local governments and died in combat.”¹⁵ Moreover, Milda Rivarola explains that participation in the war caused the spread of smallpox. Indigenous soldiers contracted the disease on the frontlines of battle, only to abandon their posts and flee home to their communities.¹⁶ By the start of the twentieth century, the previous three-hundred years of encroachment resulted in a geographically dispersed Guarani population barely a fraction of its original size.

A series of events in the early twentieth century greatly impacted the Guarani living primarily within the national territory of Brazil. First, settler farmers and landowners in the region fought in the Contestado War of 1912-1916, with the former receiving support from the Brazilian state and police. The following decade, the famous Prestes Column passed through western Paraná. In September 1924, the *tenentistas* Carlos Prestes and Miguel Costa conquered

¹⁴ Tamar Herzog, “Guarani and Jesuits: Bordering the Spanish and the Portuguese Empires,” *ReVista* Vol. XIV, No. 3, (Spring 2015), 50-51.

¹⁵ Evaldo Mendes da Silva, “Walking on the Bad Land: the Guarani Indians in the Triple Frontier,” in *Beyond Borderlands: New Histories of the Triple Frontier*, Jacob Blanc, Frederico Freitas (eds), submitted to University of Arizona Press, Latin American Landscapes Series.

¹⁶ Milda Rivarola, “The Total War in Indigenous Territories: The Impact of the Great War,” *ReVista* Vol. XIV, No. 3, (Spring 2015), 61-64.

the towns of Guaíra and Foz do Iguaçu, where for many months they relied on a guerrilla warfare to fend off the 12,000 federal troops led by General Cândido Rondon. This conflict destroyed the *obraje* textile factories that employed many Guarani. The violence brought by the Prestes Column also pushed Brazil's Guarani population across the Paraná River into Paraguay.

Beginning in the 1940s settler farmers began to arrive in the Paraná borderlands from both the southern state of Rio Grande do Sul and eastward from São Paulo, a process detailed in Chapter Two. These settlers seized and deforested many of the Guarani lands in order to introduce small- and medium-scale agriculture. The first forced relocation of the Avá-Guarani took place in 1953. The Indigenous Protection Service (SPI, Serviço de Proteção aos Índios), transferred part of the community to live with the Mbya-Guarani on the Rio das Cobras indigenous reserve. But the Avá-Guarani did not take to living with the Mbya and most of the relocated families returned to their previous homes in the area of Barra do Ocoí.¹⁷

Over the following decades, the Brazilian government increased its presence in the border region to develop new infrastructure plans. Once the military regime took power in 1964, it brought federal indigenous policy in line with its broader ideology of national security and development. The regime dismantled the SPI in 1967, restructured it as FUNAI, and placed it within the Ministry of the Interior. Seeking to centralize further the government's political and territorial power, the 1967 Constitution designated all indigenous lands as federal property.¹⁸ With a dictatorship bent on fortifying its frontier zones and a newly created office of FUNAI

¹⁷ "Itaipu & FUNAI x os Índios." Document produced by Conselho Indigenista Missionário (CIMI), February 1981. Source: Personal holdings of Werner Fuchs. The Mbya-Guarani belonged to the same larger Tupi-Guarani linguistic family as the Avá-Guarani. In addition to slight variations in linguistic expression and social rituals, the Mbya are differentiated from other Guarani sub-groups by the fact that, along with living in regions in the Paraná borderlands, the Mbya have also lived in regions closer to the Atlantic coast. (Maria Ines Ladeira, "Os índios Guarani/Mbya e o complex lagunar estuarino de Iguape – Paranaguá," Centro de Trabalho Indigenista, 1994). http://www.ambiente.sp.gov.br/wp-content/uploads/cea/Texto_iguape.pdf accessed 4/2/2016.

¹⁸ Garfield, *Indigenous Struggle at the Heart of Brazil*, 145-146.

acting as the guardian of Brazil's indigenous groups, the Avá-Guarani's homeland in the Paraná borderlands became a target of government attention.



FIGURE 4.2: Picture of forests and farming plots in Barra do Ocoí, May 1982. Photo credit: Maurício Simonetti, courtesy of Maria Lucia Brant de Carvalho.

Along with the Itaipu hydroelectric dam, the region also witnessed the expansion of the Iguaçu National Park. Originally established in 1939, the park functioned as an early tool for the nationalization and development of the border region. Especially after World War II, tourism accelerated in the park and the Brazilian government incorporated an additional 400,000 acres of land into the park's existing boundaries. In the early 1970s this required the removal of 447 families (roughly 2,500 people) of European-descendant farmers living inside the park since the 1950s. To accommodate the relocation of these white settlers, INCRA (the National Institute for Colonization and Agrarian Reform) chose an area along the confluence of the Paraná and Ocoí rivers to be called the Projeto Integrado de Colonização-Ocoí (PIC-OCOI). This decision proved

highly contentious as PIC-OCOI included the ancestral lands of the Avá-Guarani indigenous community. According to historian Frederico Freitas, INCRA knew of the existence of the indigenous tribe and applied enough pressure on the Guarani to convince some members to flee across the river to Paraguay or Argentina.¹⁹ Those determined to stay on their lands, however, resisted INCRA's advances and at the end of 1975 a violent conflict set in motion a decade worth of standoffs between the Avá-Guarani and state forces.

According to a report in the *Jornal do Brasil* and reiterated in oral testimonies, in late December 1975 a group of men—either the police, employees of INCRA, or hired thugs—arrived in Barra do Ocoí and set numerous houses on fire.²⁰ One inhabitant said that the community “had a Christmas full of fire and misery.”²¹ Another member recalled that:

INCRA shows up here, kicking people off their land, they scared us, threatening us, telling us to leave, setting our homes on fire, burning our crops, throwing our things onto the road, forcing us from here ... They threatened to shoot us in the leg, whoever didn't get up on [their] trucks. A lot of people escaped to the other village, also of Guarani, here in Paraná, [Rio das Cobras] ... Some went to villages in other states, in São Paulo, Rio de Janeiro ... some even went to Argentina and Paraguay. FUNAI wasn't here [to protect us] ... The bravest stayed behind.²²

Available documentary evidence does not prove that it was, in fact, INCRA employees who set fire to the houses. Yet in the memories of the Avá-Guarani, the blame for these actions always fell squarely on INCRA, consequently tarnishing all future interactions with the state agency. As indicated above, the fires forced many Guarani into hiding, and as many as 20 of the 27 families fled the village.²³ Although some families returned in the aftermath of the fires, many

¹⁹ Frederico Freitas, “The Guarani and the Iguaçu National Park: An Environmental History,” *ReVista* Vol. XIV, No. 3, (Spring 2015), 20.

²⁰ “Desapropriação de terras no Sul provoca clima de tensão,” *Jornal do Brasil*, 1/5/1976, pp. 7. Other examples of Avá-Guarani memories of the fire include “Itaipu & FUNAI x os Índios.” Document produced by Conselho Indigenista Missionário, Feb. 1981. Source: Personal holdings of Werner Fuchs.

²¹ “Desapropriação de terras no Sul provoca clima de tensão,” *Jornal do Brasil*, 1/5/1976, 7.

²² Brant de Carvalho, “Das terras dos índios a índios sem terra,” 366.

²³ “Desapropriação de terras no Sul provoca clima de tensão,” *Jornal do Brasil*, 1/5/1976, 7.

never did on a permanent basis. This helps explain why FUNAI could place the Avá-Guarani's population at such a low number. Government policies functioned as a two-stage process to render the Avá-Guarani literally, ontologically, and ethnically invisible. First, intimidation and potentially violent directives forced families from their lands. And second, the subsequent population loss then justified the claim that the community only included a handful of indigenous people. Under the rationale that only a few "genuine Indians" lived in the area's inhabitants, state authorities sought to process the expropriations on a person-by-person basis like they had done with the neighboring farmers. This individualized titling undermined the Avá-Guarani's conception of land, and the community persistently fought to have its territory recognized as shared communal property.

At the request of Itaipu Binational in March 1977, FUNAI began its first official study of the region's indigenous community. Called the Sub-Grupo de Trabalho XV, or GT for short, this commission was tasked with counting the indigenous people living within the dam's flood-zone.²⁴ Given 20 days to conduct its study, the GT visited three locations that might be home to indigenous tribes. The GT determined that the first two, Três Lagoas and PIC-OCOI, included no indigenous elements whatsoever.²⁵ At the third area, Barra do Ocoí, the study group counted a total of 11 families. The GT's final report described the community as "in the process of acculturation (the children attend nearby schools) and whose subsistence is based on fishing from the Paraná River and agricultural products sown on plots alongside their homes."²⁶ Although the GT's description of the Avá-Guarani consisted of only this one sentence, it included a more extensive suggestion for how to process the community's expropriation.

²⁴ "Subgrupo de trabalho 'XV': situação atual das áreas." Relatório final FUNAI-INCRA, Portaria No. 162, 3/23/1977. "Sarah" collection 20/2, CEPEDAL.

²⁵ Ibid., 3.

²⁶ Ibid., 5.

The report proposed two potential solutions to relocating the Avá-Guarani, either on a small island that would result from Itaipu's flood or along the banks of the Paraná River further upstream of where they currently resided. More importantly still, the report suggest resettling families nearby and in such a way as to "maintain the socio-cultural aspect that ties them to their land."²⁷ FUNAI's president wrote a letter to the director of Itaipu, General Cavalcanti, reiterating the importance of resettling the Avá-Guarani "along the shores of the [dam's] reservoir" to ensure the "survival of the socio-economic aspects that connects them to their land."²⁸ Cavalcanti agreed with this proposal and offered to begin processing the transfer of a 110-hectare island for the resettlement of the Avá-Guarani.²⁹

Although FUNAI and Itaipu soon abandoned this approach, it proves that both entities acknowledged the existence of nearly a dozen indigenous families—a claim the government would refute only a few years later. Moreover, the authorities agreed to relocate the families on nearby lands in immediate proximity to water as was their custom, and in a manner that preserved the community's social and cultural foundation. Given the history of indigenous repression in the region, the measured tone of this proposal might seem surprising. In the context of the adjacent farmers' movement, however, this initial approach to the Avá-Guarani becomes less of an anomaly. In early 1977, the Binational had only recently begun to expropriate the communities living in the future flood-zone and the seedlings of an organized resistance movement had barely taken root. Before local farmers challenged its expropriation policies on a mass scale, Itaipu Binational could contemplate a relatively respectful approach to the Avá-Guarani's relocation. At this early moment, Itaipu likely saw no cause for alarm in moving a

²⁷ "Subgrupo de trabalho 'XV': situação atual das áreas." Relatório final FUNAI-INCRA, Portaria No. 162, 3/23/1977. "Sarah" collection 20/2, CEPEDAL, 6.

²⁸ Letter from FUNAI to Itaipu, Ofício No. 046/GAB/P, 6/22/1977, 2-3. "Sarah" collection, 13/20 1, CEPEDAL.

²⁹ Letter from Itaipu to FUNAI, E/DG/0450/78, 9/4/1978, 4. "Sarah," collection, 13/20 1, CEPEDAL.

handful of indigenous families a bit upstream—from the perspective of official policy, these Indians were little more than orphans who posed no real threat.

Later, the rise of an increasingly politicized farmers' movement meant that any semblance of a fair expropriation could set a dangerous precedent for the entire region. If Itaipu showed any leniency to an indigenous community, what would keep MJT farmers from demanding the expansion of their legal and political rights? This issue became especially acute as the Avá-Guarani began their own mobilized response and put forth a growing challenge to the construction of their indigeneity as passive and apolitical. The farmers' success in building a mass coalition raised the stakes for Itaipu's expropriation policies. As a result, the Avá-Guarani had to work even harder to win the few concessions that the authorities appeared willing to give them from the very start.

The closing years of the 1970s saw Itaipu move toward a new plan for relocating the Avá-Guarani. Rather than use nearby lands, the Binational began transferring families to the existing Rio das Cobras indigenous reserve over 200 kilometers east of the Paraná River. In August 1979, FUNAI loaded a portion of the Avá-Guarani on a bus and brought them to Rio das Cobras. According to witnesses, when the bus first arrived to begin the transfer, one family immediately fled across the river to avoid the entire relocation.³⁰ Once in Rio das Cobras, many of the families found little reason to stay at the new reservation. One report observed that the Avá-Guarani did not enjoy being forced to co-habitat on lands that belonged to the Mbya-Guarani and soon afterwards only three families continued to live in Rio das Cobras.³¹ The remaining families either returned to Barra do Ocoi where they soon confronted Itaipu or they

³⁰ Célio Horst, "Laudo Antropológico. AGESP-FUNAI, It. No. 023/81, 8. In Brant de Carvalho, "Das terras dos índios," Anexo 7.

³¹ No title, *Luta Indígena*, March 1982, 4.

continued even further west and rejoined others living on the other side of the Paraná River.³²

Over the next year and a half, the Avá-Guarani and their allies—especially the Indigenous Missionary Council (CIMI, Conselho Indigenista Missionário)—mobilized against the planned relocation to Rio das Cobras.³³ Itaipu, however, showed no willingness to meet with the community. This dynamic only changed when the Land and Justice Movement reached its apex at the Foz do Iguaçu encampment. As shown in Chapter Three, the 54-day land encampment on the periphery of the dam’s construction site brought unprecedented attention to the issue of Itaipu’s expropriations, albeit in a racially sanitized manner. This served not only to cast a public spotlight on the region as a whole, but also provided an opportunity and platform for the Avá-Guarani to articulate their demands. During the first week of the Foz do Iguaçu encampment, CIMI issued a press statement denouncing the forced relocation to Rio das Cobras. CIMI considered Itaipu’s actions in “flagrant violation” of the Indian Statute, calling particular attention to the law’s article requiring resettlement lands of the same size and ecological conditions.³⁴ Although not the first public support of the Avá-Guarani, CIMI’s statement received traction in major media outlets. Alongside an article on the farmers’ Foz do Iguaçu encampment, the *Jornal do Brasil* reported CIMI’s statements under the headline of “Indians are also protesting Itaipu.”³⁵

³² Those who decided to cross back into Paraguayan territory might not have necessarily fared much better. Nearly 250 Avá-Chiripá lived on the western banks of the Paraná River, and with the help of the Asociación Indigenista del Paraguay (AIP), a campaign emerged to demand a fair relocation process. Above all, the Avá-Chiripá demanded the acquisition of new lands of similar size and quality, seeking 15,000 hectares spread across four distinct community settlements. “Situación de comunidades indígenas Avá-Chiripá cuya ocupación de tierras se va afectada por los trabajos de la Itaipú Binacional,” Report prepared for the “Equipe Nacional de Misiones de la Conferencia Episcopal del Paraguay,” 1981. “Sarah” collection, 9/20 1, CEPEDAL.

³³ Connected to the progressive wing of the Catholic Church, CIMI was created in 1972 and became one the largest groups under the dictatorship to support indigenous rights. For more on indigenous groups and the Church during military rule, see Garfield, *Indigenous Struggle at the Heart of Brazil*, 178-180.

³⁴ These portions of the Indian Statute, respectively, come from Article 20; Article 20 § 3; and Article 20 § 4. Estatuto do Indio, Lei 6002/73.

³⁵ “Índios também estão reclamando de Itaipu,” *Jornal do Brasil*, 3/21/1981.

Despite entering a heightened phase of struggle against Itaipu at this exact same time, the farmers and the Avá-Guarani remained almost entirely disconnected. The indigenous community had previously attempted to make common cause with the farmers' MJT campaign by sending members to the 1980 Santa Helena encampment. Yet aside from a few references of solidarity with indigenous communities around the time of the 1981 Foz do Iguaçu protest, the Avá-Guarani became virtually invisible to the MJT.³⁶ As one leader of the farmers' struggle later recalled, "at that time, our understanding of the indigenous question wasn't like it is today. There were people [in the movement] who didn't even know there were *índios* in the region."³⁷ The oversight of indigenous groups in Itaipu's flood-zone resulted from a sanitizing process that also demoted the priority and rendered invisible the ethnically mixed landless peasants within the MJT. Hence, even as the Avá-Guarani capitalized on the attention generated by the land encampments, they ended up excluded from the farmers' fight against Itaipu. Speaking in 2014, the Avá-Guarani leader Adriano Tupã Rokenji observed that in the community's attempt to make common cause with the MJT, "we were never even seen by the farmers."³⁸

Two days after CIMI's anti-Itaipu press release—and likely because of it—FUNAI invited three members of the Avá-Guarani and their allies to a meeting in Curitiba. According to *O Estado de São Paulo*, FUNAI's regional director, Henry Luis Telles, opened the gathering by claiming that he was "unaware of the existence of *Índios* in the region" and that FUNAI operated under the impression that the occupants of Barra do Ocoí were not, in fact, indigenous.³⁹ As previously discussed, FUNAI had explicitly discussed the indigenous group in the flood-zone as

³⁶ Within the documents related to the MJT, the only extensive reference to the parallel struggle of the Avá-Guarani is a 1981 article, "Itaipu e Funai x os índios," *Poeira*, No. 15, April 1981, 24-27.

³⁷ Carlos Grillmann, interview with author, 10/22/2014, Foz do Iguaçu.

³⁸ Adriano Tupã Rokenji, interview with author. Aldeia Indígena Tekoha Itamarã, 11/6/2014.

³⁹ "Índios vão exigir área de Itaipu," *O Estado de São Paulo*, 3/24/1981.

early as 1977. Four years later, however, public awareness of Itaipu's expropriations forced the government to change its stance, and Telles told the Avá-Guarani that he would speak with national administrators about conducting a population survey of Barra do Ocoí. An article in *O Globo* further reported that the Avá-Guarani informed FUNAI they did not want to receive indemnification like the neighboring farmers, citing their constitutional right to lands equal to those slated to be flooded.⁴⁰ The Avá-Guarani at once defined their conception of land in contrast to the experience of non-indigenous rural Brazilians and within a legal-rights discourse.

The day after the meeting, CIMI's regional director, Wilmar D'Angelis, sent Telles a follow-up report summarizing the community's demands against FUNAI and Itaipu. Above all, the letter declared that the Avá-Guarani sought the "pure and simple application of the [Indian Statute]."⁴¹ By grounding its claims in an existing law—one passed by the military regime in 1973—the community positioned itself as a legitimate political force. As Brazilians of all backgrounds contested the limitations of *abertura*, the Avá-Guarani sought to use a dictatorship-era law to justify their own claims to democratic rights. Concerned that the unequal treatment of indigenous communities would persist even under a new civilian government, CIMI also emphasized that the Avá-Guarani did not want to be resettled on lands belonging to other indigenous groups. D'Angelis concluded his letter by saying that forcing the community onto the Rio das Cobras reserve "represented [FUNAI's] practice of diminishing indigenous lands in the state, the region, and throughout the country." Staking their movement to an existing law while at the same time challenging the future implications of federal policy allowed the Avá-Guarani to focus on both the immediate fight at Itaipu and also the long-term need to navigate Brazil's

⁴⁰ "Funai debate indenização de terras indígenas em Itaipu," *O Globo*, 3/24/81, 5.

⁴¹ Letter from Wilmar D'Angelis (CIMI) to Harry L. Telles (FUNAI regional delegate), 3/24/1981. Courtesy of Werner Fuchs.

political transitions.

This strategy implied that the Avá-Guarani struggles went beyond the immediate parameters of military rule. Although the *abertura* provided indigenous groups with an opportunity to raise an emerging voice of protest, it also highlighted the reality that despite a broadening rhetoric of equality, Brazil's Indians were still excluded from the national polity. Demands for better lands and efforts to gain political legitimacy were thus framed against the abuses of military regime and within the contours of an eventual return to democracy.



FIGURE 4.3: Members of the Avá-Guarani along the highway outside of Barra do Ocoí, May 1982.
Photo credit: Maurício Simonetti, courtesy of Maria Lucia Brant de Carvalho.

Anthropological Surveys and the Politics of Counting Indians

In light of FUNAI's first public acknowledgment of the Avá-Guarani's existence, Telles held true to his word of initiating a survey of Barra do Ocoí. In late May, a FUNAI employee named Célio Horst visited the community to conduct an "anthropological assessment" (*laudo antropológico*). This survey, however, employed a controversial methodology that revealed FUNAI's underlying approach to dealing with the region's indigenous groups. Visiting Barra do

Ocoí for one day and using a metric based on “indicators of Indianness,” Horst concluded that only five indigenous families lived amongst the community. FUNAI then used these results to justify relocating the Avá-Guarani to the Rio das Cobras reserve. In response, allies of the Avá-Guarani invited a researcher from the Brazilian Anthropological Association (ABA) to administer its own survey. With a methodology focused on measuring the community’s own sense of ethnic and cultural identity, the ABA counted 23 families. The ABA results, however, carried far less political weight than the state-sponsored FUNAI project. As such, it took a year of grassroots mobilizations to force the government to officially renounce FUNAI’s data. Until then, however, the survey showed the practical consequences of defining indigeneity.

On the day that Célio Horst visited Barra do Ocoí he calculated a total of ten families (41 individuals) living in the community. Of the ten families, Horst determined that five were “indigenous,” two were “non-indigenous,” and three others were of indigenous descent but did not necessarily “self-identify as being indigenous.”⁴² Horst only surveyed males he considered to be the heads of families. Based on his measure of whether a given male was indigenous or not, Horst then extrapolated out the same assessment for all potential family members. Having begun with this myopic and gendered approach, Horst’s subsequent use of FUNAI’s indicators of Indianness further diminished the Avá-Guarani’s population size. For each respondent, Horst filled out a chart intended to calculate his “ethnic identification.” Points were assigned for fifteen different criteria, wherein zero points represented “no characteristics,” five showed “some characteristics,” and ten reflected “all of the characteristics.” The fifteen categories included, among others: cultural elements, pigment qualities, language, historical identity, tribal identity, personal identity, art, food, and name. Zero to 75 points was deemed “non-Indian,” and 76 to 150

⁴² Horst, “Laudo Antropológico.” Although Horst counted only nine families on the day of his visit, he later determined that a 10th family—of indigenous origin—lived in other parts of the region.

points was considered “Indian.” The nine men surveyed received an average total of 81, and no man “scored” higher than 145—meaning that even in its most generous assessment, FUNAI did not consider a single person in Barra do Ocoí completely indigenous.

The logic of FUNAI’s indicators implied that whoever “failed” the test was not actually indigenous and thus ineligible for government protection. Officially, the term for indigenous rights was *tutela* (tutelage), an invocation of guardianship that reinforced the notion of Indians as orphans. Removing the rights of *tutela* theoretically emancipated a person from the status of ward of the state. Technically, the person now enjoyed full citizenship, a supposed benefit predicated on the loss of indigenous rights. Alcida Rita Ramos observes that the process of emancipating indigenous “orphans” specifically targeted the right to land, since “only as civil minors are Indians entitled to the possession of their territories.”⁴³ By changing the legal identity of the Avá-Guarani, FUNAI’s policy attempted to annul the government’s responsibility to its indigenous “wards.” And most importantly for the immediate task of clearing Itaipu’s flood-zone, showing the existence of only five families of legal Indians greatly simplified the expropriation of land titles and the displacement of the entire community.

FUNAI had only begun using the indigenous indicators four months prior to Horst’s visit to Barra do Ocoí.⁴⁴ Along with the Avá-Guarani, FUNAI also used the criteria to measure the Wassu and Tingui tribes in the north-eastern state of Alagoas. Although the surveys sparked a backlash of criticism in all three instances, the Avá-Guarani’s conflict with Itaipu had the largest impact in national debates. In the aftermath of the Horst report, activists and academics denounced FUNAI’s methods as an attempt to diminish indigenous lands. In an interview that

⁴³ Ramos, *Indigenism*, 19.

⁴⁴ The criteria were devised in January 1981 by two retired air force colonels, João Carlos Nobre da Veiga, FUNAI’s president, and Ivan Zanoni Hausen, the director of FUNAI’s Community Planning Department. Ramos, *Indigenism*, 249.

made the front page of the *Folha de São Paulo*, the president of the Brazilian Anthropology Association (ABA), Eunice Durham, stated that FUNAI's indicators "don't hold up to any serious scientific analysis," and that some of the criteria were "dangerous, fascist and racist."⁴⁵ Durham, a professor at the University of São Paulo, elaborated that the government never consulted the scientific community and that none of the FUNAI employees who formulated the criteria had any qualifications for working with indigenous groups.⁴⁶ At a national meeting of indigenous organizations in September, a press release condemned the criteria as "a new attack from official indigenous policy seeking the compulsory emancipation ... [to deny Indians] their collective ownership of land."⁴⁷ In its November 1981 news bulletin, CIMI criticized FUNAI for allowing a maximum of only ten days to complete a survey and for not requiring its employees to justify the points given for each indicator.⁴⁸ Another anthropologist described the indicators as "political tools to suppress indigenous demands" that ultimately allowed FUNAI to "wash its hands" of actually doing its job of helping [the Avá-Guarani].⁴⁹ In the end, these responses eventually forced FUNAI to abandon its policy. In the fallout from this negative attention, FUNAI did not subject a single other community to the politically and socially disruptive indicators of Indianness.

In the interim, however, Horst's survey still stood as the government's official assessment. In an effort to counter FUNAI's measurements, CIMI contacted the ABA about having one of its anthropologists produce an alternative survey. A month after Horst's initial

⁴⁵ "Critério fascista" da Funai ameaça os índios," *Folha de São Paulo*, 10/4/1981, 1.

⁴⁶ Ibid., 10. Upon assuming FUNAI's presidency in 1979, Colonel João Nobre de Veiga purged the agency of anthropologists and replaced them with military personnel. (Marianne Schmink and Carles Wood, *Contested Frontiers in Amazonia*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1992, 75).

⁴⁷ "Entidades acusam FUNAI de ocultar estudos oficiais," *Folha de São Paulo*, 9/29/1981, 7.

⁴⁸ "Racismo: FUNAI estabelece 'critérios de indianidade'," *Luta Indígena*, No. 15, Nov. 1981, 4-7.

⁴⁹ "Parecer da antropóloga Rosane Cossich Furtado," Assunto: área indígena Ocoí (PR), 11/20/1986, 2. Brant de Carvalho, "Das terras dos índios," Anexo 10.

visit, the ABA sent Edgard de Assis Carvalho to conduct a study of the community's social conditions and the "cultural modalities through which they express a Guarani ethnic identity."⁵⁰ Carvalho's report observed a total of twenty-three Avá-Guarani families, all of whom, in contrast to FUNAI's claims, were indigenous. This research showed that although only nine families currently lived in Barra do Ocoí, fourteen other families also belonged to the community: along with the three families that stayed in Rio das Cobras after the initial 1979 transfer, two others lived in the Santa Teresinha region and nine more lived on the Paraguayan side of the Paraná River. The ABA report ended by urging the government to uphold the 1973 Indian Statute and at the very least, to respect the cultural history of indigenous groups and recognize their right to ethnic self-identification.⁵¹ In spite of the ABA research, FUNAI still showed little willingness to recalculate its position.

The government's ability to impose its own definition of indigeneity allowed FUNAI to pursue its agenda for relocating the Avá-Guarani. Maria Lucia Brant de Carvalho argues that FUNAI used the indicators of Indianness specifically to under-represent indigenous populations in order to more easily circumvent the federal Indian Statute.⁵² By sidestepping the Indian Statute, the government could avoid having to designate the land as official Indian territory. Instead, FUNAI could use the dictatorship's 1964 agrarian reform law, the Land Statute (ET, *Estatuto de Terra*). Because the Indian Statute required the Avá-Guarani lands to be expropriated as communal territory—one of their central demands—the government aimed to expropriate the five Barra do Ocoí families on an individual basis.⁵³ Célio Horst's findings also diverted

⁵⁰ Edgard de Assis Carvalho, "Avá-Guarani do Ocoí-Jacutinga," report prepared for the Associação Brasileira de Antropologia, 1981, 4. "Sarah" collection, 9/20 2 CEPEDAL.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 7.

⁵² Brant de Carvalho, "Das terras dos índios," 396.

⁵³ Two weeks after Horst's submitted his report, Harry Telles—the FUNAI delegate who had met the previous month with the Avá-Guarani in Curitiba—sent a letter to INCRA's regional director requesting the expropriation of the five families now "considered to be Indian." Doc. No. 260/81/4 DR, 6/19/1981. *Ibid.*, Anexo 9A.

attention away from two other violations of the Indian Statute: FUNAI's proposed transfer to Rio das Cobras did not have the legally mandated presidential decree, nor did it provide lands of equivalent size or ecological conditions. Finally, the survey criteria helped legitimize official responses to the rise of politicized rural movements in the region. As early as 1977, Itaipu and FUNAI had considered moving the Avá-Guarani to nearby lands along the Paraná River, but as rural communities fought for fair expropriations the government could not be seen as making any sort of concession. The results of Horst's survey provided important justification for this strategy. Writing to Itaipu's president in September 1981, the director of FUNAI declared that in light of the recent indigenous "identification" the government no longer needed to resettle the Avá-Guarani on nearby lands.⁵⁴ With survey results now showing only a handful of indigenous families in the flood zone, FUNAI and Itaipu seemed determined to process their expropriations as strategically and quietly as possible.

Over the remaining months of 1981, the Avá-Guarani and their allies continued a campaign to force Itaipu to acknowledge their full population and to implement policies that respected their legal rights. The Avá-Guarani repeatedly attempted to get clarification on the status of their expropriations; although the government internally decided to transfer the Avá-Guarani to Rio das Cobras, the community received no notice of this plan. In early December 1981, after six months of silence, Avá-Guarani leaders wrote a letter to the president of FUNAI defending the lands that had belonged to them "since time immemorial." The flood loomed some ten months away and the community felt anxious to receive an official proposal for where they would go.⁵⁵ After two more weeks with no response, three Avá-Guarani traveled to Brasília to

⁵⁴ Letter from Octávio Ferreira Lime to José Cavalcanti, 9/10/1981, Ofício No. 357/PRES. Microfilm 2683.1196-1197, CDIB.

⁵⁵ "Carta a FUNAI," written to Dr. Paulo Moreira Leal, 12/2/1981. Reproduced in *Luta Indígena*, March 1982, 9.

deliver the letter in person, where FUNAI's president, Coronel Paulo Leal, finally agreed to a meeting. On hearing the Avá-Guarani's demands, Leal said that FUNAI would conduct a survey of possible lands available and promised to send an official proposal within 30 days.⁵⁶ The meeting in Brasília also convinced Coronel Leal that contrary to the Horst report, the three people he spoke with were, in fact, indigenous. With this first-hand evidence, Leal mentioned a willingness to "revisit" the previous survey.⁵⁷

As FUNAI prepared its first official offer, media outlets throughout Brazil increased their coverage of the indigenous struggle. Regional newspapers offered extensive descriptions of the Avá-Guarani, painting a tragic picture of a helpless people facing the loss of their homes.⁵⁸ National media focused more on the implications for the progress of Itaipu, giving special attention to a potential lawsuit proposed by CIMI that threatened to halt construction on the dam.⁵⁹ In response, Itaipu's legal office issued a public statement clarifying that it had not made an offer to the Avá-Guarani because the Binational had to first wait for FUNAI to fulfill its responsibilities.⁶⁰ Having recently emerged from its standoff with the Justice and Land Movement, Itaipu's deflective language—and its willingness to pass blame to FUNAI—was surely a tactic to avoid further negative publicity.

In the midst of these battles for public opinion, Itaipu presented the community with its first official proposal. One day before FUNAI's self-imposed deadline, representatives from Itaipu called the Justice and Peace Commission and made a verbal offer of roughly 100 hectares

⁵⁶ "Carta a FUNAI," written to Dr. Paulo Moreira Leal, 12/2/1981. Reproduced in *Luta Indígena*, March 1982, 8.

⁵⁷ Meeting notes, 12/23/1981, written by Harry Avila Telles. Informação No. 16/81/4DR, Brant de Carvalho, "Das terras dos índios," Anexo 9M.

⁵⁸ "Índios e posseiros, o que ainda resta nos vastos domínios das águas de Itaipu," *Folha de Londrina*, 12/19/1981, 1-5; "Índios da região de Itaipu reivindicam lugar para morar," *Folha de Londrina*, 12/22/1981, 8; "Que farão Funai e Itaipu com os índios?" *Nosso Tempo*, 12/23/1981, 18-19.

⁵⁹ "Índio sem terra pode parar lago de Itaipu," *O Estado de São Paulo*, 1/15/1982, 10; "Guaranis querem área de Itaipu," *Jornal do Brasil*, 1/15/1982, 4.

⁶⁰ "Itaipu nega imposições aos guaranis," *O Estado de São Paulo*, 1/16/1982, 9.

of land. The plan called for Itaipu to expropriate 20 hectares of an adjacent farm and to allow the Avá-Guarani to use an additional 80 hectares of the so-called “security line” (*faixa de segurança*), the thin strip of land that would border the shores of Itaipu’s reservoir lake. Allies of the community saw this as an important first step, even if only because it proved that contrary to previous claims, Itaipu could find available lands nearby.⁶¹ Additionally, the offer indicated the government’s concession to the community’s refusal to live on the Rio das Cobras indigenous reserve. Yet according to the Avá-Guarani, the proposal still had many flaws. The security line was only 300 meters wide and because of planned flooding in the Itaipu reservoir, the Avá-Guarani could not plant crops or build homes on the 80 hectares of land.⁶² Moreover, the Avá-Guarani would not actually hold legal domain in the security line, as it would still technically belong to Itaipu Binational. The indigenous community would essentially rent their lands from Itaipu—one critique declared that territory “lent to the Indians today could be taken right back tomorrow.”⁶³ Itaipu’s offer represented another disjuncture between hegemonic and indigenous notions of land ownership. The issue remained, too, of how many community members FUNAI recognized as “indigenous” and hence entitled to take part in the relocation process. Despite Coronel Leal’s statements the previous month, FUNAI had still not reviewed its survey. Even if accepted, the 100-hectare proposal would only apply to the original five families that FUNAI had defined as indigenous.⁶⁴

After receiving Itaipu’s offer, a group of Avá-Guarani leaders went to see the proposed lands for themselves. The community rejected the offer and sent the presidents of Itaipu and FUNAI a detailed letter—signed with the thumbprints of six indigenous leaders—outlining why

⁶¹ “Itaipu oferece área para índios do Ocoí,” *O Estado do Paraná*, 1/14/1982, 9.

⁶² “Carta a FUNAI,” written to Dr. Paulo Moreira Leal, 12/2/1981. Reproduced in *Luta Indígena*, March 1982, 10.

⁶³ “Índios não aceitam ser confinados por Itaipu,” *Folha de Londrina*, 2/7/1982, 9.

⁶⁴ “Itaipu oferece área para índios do Ocoí,” *O Estado do Paraná*, 1/14/1982, 9.

they refused to live on the 100-hectare site. Having visited the proposed area, the Avá-Guarani remained convinced that the government still did not understand them or their culture, above all because the land had almost no trees. If transferred, the Avá-Guarani would need trees to build new houses. Moreover, a lack of trees meant a lack of firewood and some members worried that they might freeze to death on Itaipu's proposed lands.⁶⁵ In the letter, community leaders wrote that,

The Guarani cannot live in clearings, he loves forests where there are animals, and birds, and our way of life is that. The Guarani system is to live where there are trees ... This land of Itaipu is okay to plant, but it's not good for the Guarani, it has no forest, and it is very little land. You must keep searching for a forested place.⁶⁶

Newspapers quickly picked up the story of the Avá-Guarani's rejection. A regional paper, the *Folha de Londrina*, outlined the problem of having "only 20 functional hectares and 80 hectares that are useless" and even mentioned the allegations against FUNAI and the Military Police of having set fire to Avá-Guarani houses in the mid-1970s.⁶⁷ A week later, the national *Folha de São Paulo* ran a two-page spread explaining why the community refused to live in an "unknown and barren area."⁶⁸ The report exoticized the indigenous group, as the opening three paragraphs romantically described an Avá-Guarani religious ceremony and a picture caption read, "Threatened with losing their lands, the indigenous can now only look to their gods." (Figure 4.4) This characterization implied that the Avá-Guarani had no recourse other than their own spirituality and deprived the community of the material and political status needed to overcome an immediate challenge. Portraying the community as a helpless "other" denied it the

⁶⁵ *Luta Indígena*, March 1982, 13.

⁶⁶ Letter to Col. Paulo Leal and Gen. José Cavalcanti, from community leaders, Barra do Ocoí, 2/5/1982. "Sarah" collection, 2/20 1, CEPEDAL.

⁶⁷ "Índios não aceitam ser confinados por Itaipu," *Folha de Londrina*, 2/7/1982, 9.

⁶⁸ "Os Avá-Guarani resistem a Itaipu," *Folha de São Paulo*, 2/14/1982, 2-3.

political legitimacy recently extended to the neighboring landed farmers.

Otherwise well-intentioned allies also put forth this same romanticized image of a noble people fighting for the lands of their ancestors. *Nosso Tempo*, the Foz do Iguaçu-based newspaper and outspoken critic of Itaipu, gave voyeuristic exposés to help readers “learn about the lives of the Avá-Guarani.”⁶⁹ These portrayals emerged from a broader social pattern of depicting indigenous communities as passive and apolitical. As the progress of the *abertura* inched forward, it became exceedingly important who could shape the contours of a future democratic society. Seen as “relatively incapable” orphans for hundreds of years, even supporters had trouble viewing the community as legitimate political actors.⁷⁰ As such, the Avá-Guarani’s struggle at Itaipu operated as a defense of both their territorial rights as Indians and their political rights as citizens.



FIGURE 4.4: “Os Avá-Guarani resistem a Itaipu,” *Folha de São Paulo*, 2/14/1982, 2.

⁶⁹ “Saiba como vivem os índios Avá-Guarani,” *Nosso Tempo*, 6/15/1982, 1-4.

⁷⁰ Suzanne Williams argues that indigenous communities were further marginalized during the *abertura* process because as state governments reclaimed political control from the central military regime, indigenous lands were partitioned as part of a reemerging attempt at agrarian control, becoming “booty in regional party political battles.” (Williams, *Land Rights and the Manipulation of Identity*, 156).

In early 1982, Itaipu dispatched officers from its internal surveillance force to compile a confidential assessment of Barra do Ocoí. The report concluded that the indigenous community had 13 families totaling 71 people and acknowledged that at least another nine families currently lived in other parts of the region, including in Paraguay.⁷¹ This population count confirmed the ABA survey and the Avá-Guarani's own claims. In the ongoing battle over ethnic representation, this recognition—even if only made in private—showed that the Avá-Guarani started to create fissures in official constructions of indigeneity. The survey also called Itaipu's policies “socially traumatic” and observed that with the flood barely six months away, the conflict imposed “a considerable psychological pressure” on the community.⁷² Internally at least, it appears that Itaipu acknowledged its problematic approach to the Avá-Guarani. Despite this private recognition, Itaipu maintained a public position that sidestepped its role in the suffering of indigenous communities.

The growing awareness of the Avá-Guarani struggles, both in the realm of public debate and perhaps even from within Itaipu, resulted in a second proposal. The revised offer included 105 hectares with 62 hectares of forested land.⁷³ Like they had before, community representatives went to evaluate the area. Once again, the Avá-Guarani rejected Itaipu's offer. Whereas the previous reasoning focused on the land's logistical faults—too small and not forested—the second rejection criticized the government's ignorance of indigenous culture and its violation of federal law. In a letter to the president of FUNAI, eight leaders of the Avá-Guarani declared that,

It's as if Itaipu didn't understand our letter from February 5, where we explained

⁷¹ Informação No. E/AESI.G/IB/BR/005/0503/82. 3/10/1982, 3. AN-RJ.

⁷² Ibid., 6.

⁷³ *Luta Indígena*, March 1982, 13.

that we would only leave our land for another area that has conditions for us to continue our way of life. This land offered by Itaipu is much too small for the Guarani to live ... It's as if Itaipu doesn't know the law ... We know that FUNAI is responsible for helping indigenous communities, so we don't understand why it isn't defending our rights ... It's not our wish to leave here, but we are forced to by the [Itaipu] project of this government. It's this same government that made the law guaranteeing our rights as *índios*, and it created FUNAI to enforce that same law. So why, then, does FUNAI not uphold the law?⁷⁴

Previously, the Avá-Guarani had aimed their demands at either FUNAI, Itaipu, or INCRA. Although directly linked to the central state, these organizations stood only as branches of the military regime. This second rejection, in contrast, pointed directly at the government for building a project that would destroy their homes, for passing a law it failed to uphold, and for creating a federal agency that did not honor its mandate of protecting indigenous communities. Defending both their territorial rights as indigenous people and their legal rights as Brazilians became a means to reclaim political agency from an authoritarian government. Having seen their earlier claims to cultural rights make relatively little progress—and likely attuned to the growing political rhetoric of the *abertura*—the community now framed its struggle as a matter of democratic principles. These claims suggested that if the military regime truly deserved the right to govern Brazil, it had to respect the rights and aspirations of indigenous communities. Failing to do so, according to the Avá-Guarani, implied that perhaps the government had already lost its mandate to rule.

As it had done in February, the *Folha de São Paulo* ran an extensive report on the rejection of Itaipu's newest offer. Similar to its previous coverage, the article employed a romantic narrative describing the community as an “ancient, proud, and strong people.” The story included a picture of a stoic indigenous woman carrying her baby. Yet the report also

⁷⁴ Letter from Avá-Guarani to Col. Paulo Leal, 3/22/1982. “Sarah,” collection, 2/20 3, CEPEDAL.

reproduced verbatim the majority of the Avá-Guarani rejection letter.⁷⁵ The increasingly political tone of indigenous demands now reached readers of one of Brazil's largest daily papers. Through these public channels, Brazil's Indians broadcast their voice into the ongoing debates of *abertura*. Even if the media portrayed the Avá-Guarani in a romanticized manner, the escalating coverage nonetheless meant the community could project itself into public forums and bring attention to its cause.

The growing media coverage did not always provide a clear—or even accurate—image of the ongoing negotiations. When Itaipu met with eight community leaders in late April to present a third offer of 190 hectares, various newspapers incorrectly reported that the Avá-Guarani had accepted it.⁷⁶ Although encouraged by the updated proposal, it still did not meet their criteria and the Avá-Guarani issued a statement clarifying that they had not yet consented to any deal.⁷⁷ Several aspects of the new offer did come closer to meeting the community's demands: it contained almost twice the land of the second proposal, included nearly 160 hectares of forested lands, and bordered the shores of the Itaipu reservoir. Having won concessions from Itaipu regarding the parameters of the land itself, the Avá-Guarani now sought to reverse the government's attempts to process all land titles as individual holdings. The Guarani saw communal territory as both a pillar of their way of life and a legally protected right. Knowing that the flood would soon force them to abandon their homes, the Avá-Guarani fought to make sure that their new lands would at least belong to the community as a whole.

Five years after Itaipu first approached the subject of indigenous expropriation, and after

⁷⁵ The article emphasized the Avá-Guarani spirituality, citing a portion of the rejection letter that denounced Itaipu's offer for not having enough space for a cemetery: "How will we even bury our dead?" "Os ava-guaranis rejeitam a nova oferta de Itaipu," *Folha de São Paulo*, 4/4/1982, 8.

⁷⁶ "Índios aceitam última proposta de Itaipu," *O Estado do Paraná*, 4/29/1982, 9; "Os guarani aceitam as terras de Itaipu," *Folha de Londrina*, 5/7/1982, 7.

⁷⁷ "Garanis apelam a Itaipu," *O Estado de São Paulo*, 5/8/1982, 12.

nearly a year and a half of evasive public statements, it appeared that the Binational might finally come to terms with the Avá-Guarani. On the heels of its standoff with the farmers' Justice and Land Movement and with the opening of its floodgates triumphantly planned a few months later, Itaipu proved eager to resolve its indigenous problem. The *Folha de São Paulo* noted that an agreement with the Avá-Guarani would allow Itaipu to "escape from one of its greatest sources of criticism in recent years."⁷⁸ A series of meetings in early May finalized the details of the resettlement. First, a lengthy negotiation took place on May 7 at Itaipu's regional office in Curitiba, with representatives in attendance from Itaipu, INCRA, FUNAI, CIMI, the Justice and Peace Commission (CJP), and the National Indigenous Action Association (ANAI). Although no members of the community participated, their allies read a letter on their behalf reiterating why they refused the second proposal. The discussion revolved around the question of having all land recognized for "communal use" and the nullification of the five individual deeds from the original FUNAI survey.⁷⁹ The government met both of these demands: INCRA agreed that all relocation lands legally belonged to the entire community and FUNAI stated that it would disregard the 1981 Célio Hosrst findings. This concession further implied that the government would offer a larger area of land to accommodate the increased number of families.⁸⁰ This first deliberation did not produce a signed agreement, but Itaipu pledged to hold a follow-up meeting and bring a new offer directly to the community in Barra do Ocoí.

On May 12, four representatives from Itaipu and two each from FUNAI, the CJP, CIMI, and ANAI convened in Barra do Ocoí to meet with the Avá-Guarani. The new proposal called for 251 hectares of communally recognized land situated 25 kilometers away along the shores of

⁷⁸ "Avá-guaranis irão receber nova terra," *Folha de São Paulo*, 5/7/1982, 6.

⁷⁹ Agenda of "Meeting to deal with the Resettlement of the Ava-Guarani Indigenous Group." Itaipu office, Curitiba, Paraná. 5/7/1982. "Sarah" collection, 2/20 6, CEPEDAL.

⁸⁰ "Mais guaranis beneficiados," *Folha de São Paulo*, 5/8/1982, 6.

the future reservoir lake.⁸¹ Itaipu also agreed to pay 2.2 million cruzeiros in accordance with the Indian Statute's laws of expropriation. After hearing the details of this proposal, the community discussed it amongst themselves and their supporters. Although the Avá-Guarani did not reach a unanimous decision, the community chose to accept the offer.⁸² The lack of unanimity derived from some members still seeing the land as sufficient. Others worried about Itaipu distributing the compensation money through FUNAI rather than paying the community directly—ostensibly so the government could supply “the basic needs of the *índios*” such as food and agricultural tools. The community ultimately based its decision on the urgency of the impending flood and opted to accept the proposal so people could begin preparing the next harvest on their new lands.⁸³

Conclusion: a Reluctant Relocation

On June 7, a fleet of government trucks transported 19 families from Barra do Ocoí to the new lands 25 kilometers away. Teodoro Tupã Alves remembers the experience:

“It was like a tragedy because a peaceful community was destroyed, it was a psychological tragedy... So many people were born there and lived there, you know, and you never imagine that any of this would happen, without any hope. For us the future was never going to be this, it would be something else, always getting better, always having a more relaxed life. But the opposite happened. Losing our lands, losing our freedom.”⁸⁴

A series of issues continued to plague the community long after the relocation. During the flood in October 1982 the reservoir lake came higher than anticipated, making it nearly impossible to grow crops on the partially-inundated lands. Moreover, a government initiative to

⁸¹ Minutes of Meeting in Jacutinha-Ocoi, 5/12/1982. “Sarah” collection, 2/20 7, CEPEDAL. The community later called this site “Santa Rosa do Ocoí.”

⁸² “Itaipu decide indenizar os índios Avá-guarani,” *O Estado do Paraná*, 5/14/1982, 9.

⁸³ “Índios da região transformam-se em bóias-frias,” *Hoje*, 5/22/1982, 6.

⁸⁴ Teodoro Tupã Alves, interview with author. Aldeia Indígena Tekoha Itamarã, 11/6/2014.

increase the local fish population had outlawed all fishing activities in the Itaipu lake. A report later observed that the Avá-Guarani suffered from so much hunger they considered cutting down their trees to sell as timber in order to buy food.⁸⁵ In a sign of the community's desperation, it debated cutting down the same forested lands that served as the centerpiece of its earlier demands.

The Avá-Guarani never did cut down their trees, but in the long-run their livelihoods never drastically improved. In the aftermath of the 1982 resettlement, the community continued to pressure Itaipu and FUNAI for more resources and larger tracts of land. A rise in conflicts between indigenous communities and neighboring farmers exacerbated these problems, as did the contamination of indigenous farmlands via chemical runoff on nearby agricultural estates.⁸⁶ The situation worsened as the community increased in size, both by normal population growth and with the return of Guarani families living in other parts of the border region. After over a decade of lobbying, Itaipu conceded to creating a second area for the Avá-Guarani and in 1997 FUNAI transferred 32 families to a 1,700-hectare site known as Tekohã Iñetete. By 2007, however, nearly 130 families lived on the reserve, requiring the transfer of 28 families onto 240 hectares of adjacent land on a newly created third community called Itamarã.

The specter of Itaipu looms large in the collective memory of the Avá-Guarani. To this day community members still point to Itaipu as a source of their poverty. Yet many people also look back on the original fight in the late 1970s and early 1980s as a formative process for learning how to make themselves socially and politically visible in the public eye. A community

⁸⁵ "FUNAI não cumpre acordo e deixa índios com fome," *O Paraná*, 2/5/1983, 1.

⁸⁶ For more on the Avá-Guarani in the 1980s and 1990s, see: Brant de Carvalho, "Das terras dos índios, 408-478; Giseli Deprá, "O lago de Itaipu e a luta dos Avá-Guarani pela terra: Representações na imprensa do oeste do Paraná (1976-2000)," Masters Thesis, Universidade Federal da Grande Dourados, 2006, 71-128; and *Os ecos de Itaipu*, documentary film directed by Isabel Harari and Stefano Wroblewski, 2015.

leader, Adriano Tupã Rokenji, recalls that,

At first we didn't know anything about [Itaipu]... but we learned how to work with CIMI, we learned how to use the newspapers to get our rights. We found lawyers to explain what Itaipu was doing. We learned how to get our rights.⁸⁷



FIGURE 4.5: A member of the Avá-Guarani community in Tekohã Iñetete, 2014. Photo by author.

The name “Itaipu” actually comes from the Guaraní language. Meaning “the rock that sings,” Itaipu had long been the name given by Indians to a set of rocky outcrops in the middle of the Paraná River. For an overlapping series of geographic and geopolitical reasons, the governments of Brazil and Paraguay chose the portion of the river that the Guaraní called “Itaipu” as the site of the future hydroelectric complex. In a symbolic twist of linguistic appropriation, Itaipu’s 1982 flood destroyed the indigenous lands. Although the rising waters of Itaipu’s reservoir permanently engulfed “the rock that sings,” the legacy of indigenous struggle remained. These issues continued well after the transition to democratic rule, illuminating the

⁸⁷ Adriano Tupã Rokenji, interview with author. Aldeia Indígena Tekoha Itamarã, 11/6/2014.

contradictions of the *abertura* process and the extent to which constructions of ethnic exclusion exist deeply within the fabric of the Brazilian polity.

The Avá-Guarani's conflict at Itaipu was predicated on a much larger history of indigenous repression. Similar to other indigenous groups throughout Brazil—and across Latin America—the community had long confronted land encroachment, coercion from federal authorities, and a status of social invisibility. Only when placed in the cross-hairs of a massive development project, however, did the Avá-Guarani's conception of land and identity become an obstacle for the Brazilian state. In the context of national debates over the contours of democracy and citizenship, a small indigenous community accessed grassroots networks to amplify their demands. As groups like the Avá-Guarani embraced a growing sense of ethnic and political empowerment, the federal government sought to reinforce the *tutela* system of marginalization, only now with new mechanisms. FUNAI's survey functioned as a tool to reclaim the parameters and implications of indigeneity, as the criteria of Indianness sought to diminish the physical and symbolic presence of Brazil's Indians. The grassroots response to FUNAI, however, shows how racist, exclusionary practices like the criteria of Indianness actually served to energize indigenous movements in Brazil. In the controversy over “counting” Indians at Itaipu, the actions of the Avá-Guarani and their allies forced FUNAI to abandon the survey. Yet as shown throughout this chapter, the reversal of one exclusionary practice could not undo the deeply embedded politics of indigeneity in Brazil.

In an attempt to gain political legitimacy and strengthen their claims, the Avá-Guarani put forth an alternate vision of indigeneity that appealed to the government's own legal structures. Despite the context of *abertura*, the demands of land, cultural rights, and legal equality reflected a vision for indigenous life unmoored from whether a military or civilian

regime governed Brazil. As a movement that existed both within and beyond the immediate context of *abertura*, indigenous struggle in this period did not fit neatly into the dictatorship-democratization struggle. This helps explain why indigenous groups like the Avá-Guarani were excluded by both the authoritarian regime and by most mainstream opposition forces—with the notable exception of allies in the Church. By seeking to defend their rights as both indigenous people *and* citizens of Brazil, the Avá-Guarani challenged the contours of Brazil's democratic transition. Although often portrayed as apolitical actors in their fight at Itaipu, they refused to be cast aside as helpless and socially invisible “orphans.” And in the face of federal policy intended to erase their ethnic and literal presence, the Avá-Guarani won a series of concessions from branches of an authoritarian regime. In doing so, they challenged the embedded prejudice of both the government and the region's non-indigenous rural workers.

Throughout this process and in the decades that followed, the community was exoticized and set apart from the Brazilian polity. The persistent marginalization of the inhabitants of Barra do Ocoí further proves that the advances of *abertura* remained limited to only a certain sector of Brazil. While mainstream society witnessed the passage of amnesty and party reform laws, indigenous groups like the Avá-Guarani defended their lands and livelihoods from a variety of government and non-state threats. And as millions of Brazilians mobilized in the streets for the return of direct presidential elections, racist federal policies attempted to count and categorize “Indians” in a way that rendered them invisible. Despite these constraints, the Avá-Guarani articulated an ethnic identity based on a particular understanding of their relationship to land and the corresponding legal rights. Although this approach never fully achieved a sense of mainstream political legitimacy, it positioned them to directly confront, and to make inroads into overcoming, the dominant Brazilian construction of indigeneity.

Chapter Five

Men Without a Country: Brasiguaios, Agrarian Resettlement, and the Strategies of Frontier Colonization

We were all tricked with photographs, and with color images... I was tricked. They told us that here we'd have everything, cars, medicine, schools, all that. What happened? All that we got, with all their promises, was sickness, death, and despair in the middle of this jungle, and nothing else, nothing else.¹

The above quotation comes from a 1983 interview with a farmer who relocated to a government-sponsored agrarian colony in the Amazon after being displaced by the Itaipu dam. The man and his family joined the thousands of rural people from western Paraná who resettled on various colonization projects throughout Brazil. This process occurred while tens of thousands more followed a similar pattern across the border in Paraguay. His feelings of deceit and despair reflect a common narrative from those on the frontlines of the military's incursions into new "frontier zones"—both within Brazil and on foreign soil. This chapter takes a step back from the rural mobilizations to examine the Itaipu dam's importance for the dictatorship's policies of agricultural colonization and territorial expansion. This manifested in two overlapping ways: the emergence of a mass migration movement of Brazilians into Paraguay known as "Brasiguaios" and the resettlement of the displaced Itaipu farmers in the far-away corners of Brazil. From this perspective, Itaipu became a new engine of rural population shifts, with Brazil's reach now extending westward into Paraguay and north and northeastward into its own "internal" frontier zones. (Figure 5.1)

¹ "Os Desapropriados," documentary film directed by Frederico Fülgraff, 1983.

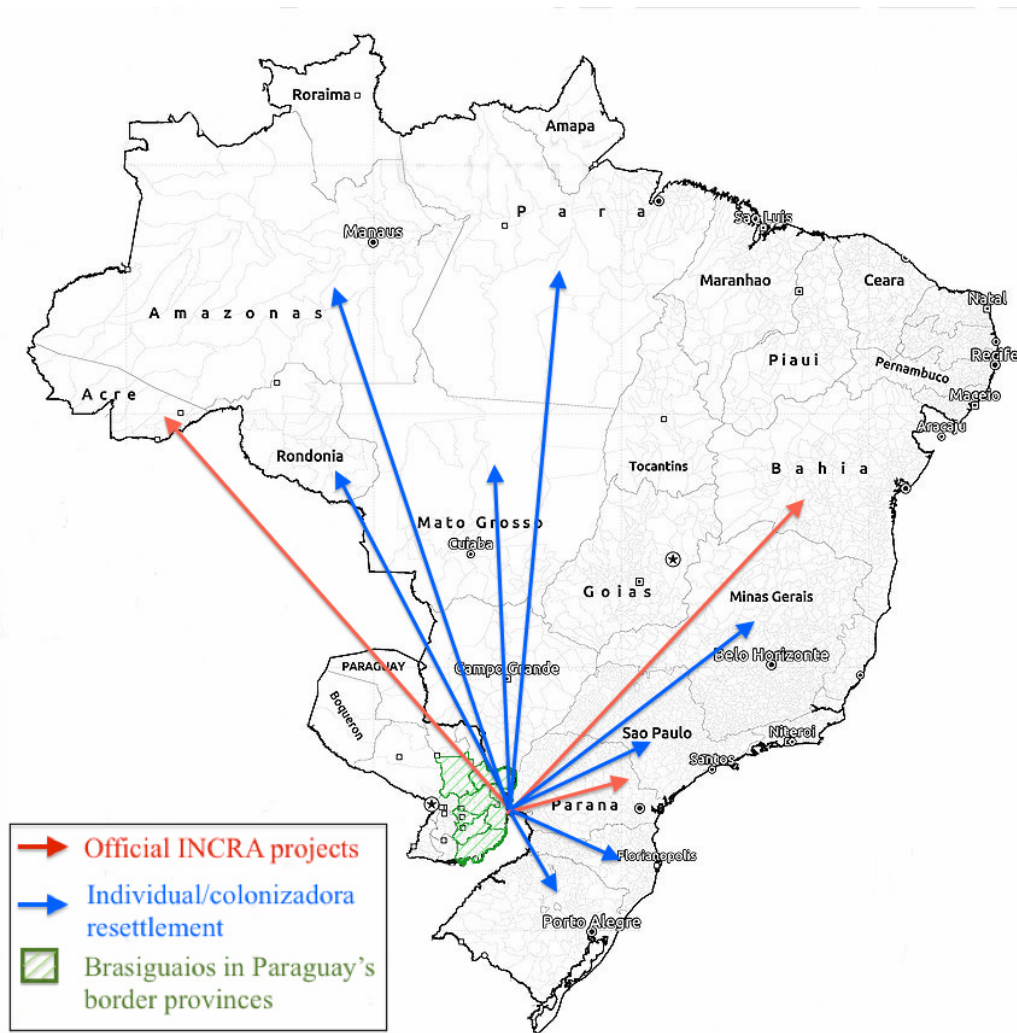


FIGURE 5.1: Map of relocation patterns in Brazil and eastern Paraguay after Itaipu displacement.
Source: modified from image at www.maphill.com.

For the Brazilian government, Itaipu provided a political entry point to Paraguay while creating a massive, physical presence directly on the border itself. As shown in Chapter One, the 1960s frontier conflict at Guaira not only secured Brazil near-unilateral control of the eventual hydroelectric project, it also forced the Paraguayan regime to fundamentally change its border policies. As part of the initial agreement to build Itaipu, Paraguay had to legalize the sale of land along its eastern border to foreigners. The dam became a floodgate for rural migration and in the early 1970s Brazilians began relocating *en masse* into Paraguay's eastern border region. With the

frontier now open, the Brazilian government urged its citizens to cross into Paraguay with the promise of cheap, available, and fertile lands. For the expansionist ideology of Brazil's dictatorship, Itaipu served the dual function of erasing border restrictions and creating a new wave of potential migrants; many of the Brazilian farmers displaced by Itaipu had little recourse but to relocate to nearby Paraguay. Brasiguaios enclaves thrived to the point that by the late 1990s an estimated 450,000 Brazilians lived in eastern Paraguay—representing sixty percent of the region's population and nearly ten percent of Paraguay's entire population.²

When Brazilian-run soy plantations began to thrive in Paraguay during the 1980s and 1990s, Brasiguaios became synonymous with wealthy and exploitative agriculture barons. Yet historically, the majority of Brazilian immigrants in Paraguay were small-scale farmers. Like many of their impoverished Paraguayan neighbors, these Brasiguaios faced constant marginalization. Triggered by the Itaipu dam, Brasiguaios functioned as agricultural shock troops for Brazil's dictatorship. They were pushed across the border to settle new lands only to be discarded once a new class of Brazilian elites established booming agro-businesses.

By reframing Brasiguao immigration within the logic of Itaipu, this chapter exposes the extent to which territorial expansion and a desire to incorporate new agricultural lands formed a distinct part of the military's development ideology. As previously discussed, Brazil's dictatorship relied on a Doctrine of National Security (DSN, *Doutrina de Segurança Nacional*) that combined developmentalism, anti-Communism, and a geopolitical vision of the country's ascension as a world power. The concept of *fronteiras vivas* (living borders) served as a

² Although difficult to establish the exact number of Brazilians living in Paraguay, most estimations fall between 400,000 and 500,000. A commonly cited number, 459,147, comes from a 2002 report by the Brazilian Ministry of Exterior Relations (cited in José Lindomar Albuquerque, *A Dinâmica das fronteiras: os brasiguaios na fronteira entre o Brasil e o Paraguai*. São Paulo, Brazil: Annablume, 2010, 59).

centerpiece of the DSN, envisioning Brazil's sphere of power to include any territory where its citizens lived. The question of borders especially concerned Latin American military regimes in the 1960s, as the specter of the Cuban Revolution made all rural zones seem susceptible to guerrilla insurgency. The DSN sought to increase the presence of the Brazilian state in these vulnerable regions while offering material benefits to dissuade local communities from potential radicalization.

Rural Brazilians acted as the primary conduits of the border expansion process. With government promises of land, infrastructure, and an improved livelihood, unprecedented numbers of farmers left for far-away agrarian projects. Many scholars discuss agriculture as a colonization tool *within* Brazil, above all in the Amazonian regions where the military regime incentivized the relocation of millions of farmers. Yet few have analyzed the similar processes that took place *beyond* the country's own borders. The case of Itaipu, however, shows how the strategy of frontier colonization developed as an internal and an external process. Borders, in this sense, served as both physical and ideological spaces that could fulfill the military's geopolitical ambitions. By reframing the narratives of Brasiguaios and northern resettlement as parallel components of the same history, we see how rural landscapes—and the importance of land more broadly—played a fundamental role in the development policies of Brazil's dictatorship.

The second narrative of this chapter relates to how the Brazilian government sought to relocate the displaced farmers on “colonization projects” in the country's northern regions. The Itaipu dam must be analyzed in the context of the military's 1964 Rural Land Statute that among other goals, aimed to uproot farmers in southern and northeastern Brazil and resettle them along the Center West borderlands and in the Amazon Basin.³ This policy sought to plug the country's

³ For the 1964 law's resettlement policies, see Wolford. *This Land Is Ours Now*, 45. Earlier state policies also attempted to transform the Brazilian “hinterlands.” Seth Garfield (2013) provides an insightful example of how the

vast frontiers considered “paths of penetration” vulnerable to foreign threats while simultaneously expanding modernized agriculture into new regions.⁴ The dictatorship’s agrarian technocrats and development planners viewed these farmers as an easily deployable source of agricultural labor. Much like how the government used Brasiguaios to shore up Brazilian influence across foreign borders, it also sent peasant farmers into Brazil’s faraway “backlands” to settle regions long considered internal frontier zones.

Despite statements that Itaipu tried to resettle the displaced farmers on nearby lands, documentary evidence shows a concerted program of sending the region’s more marginalized communities to northern agricultural colonies. This process was carried out jointly by Itaipu, private colonization companies, and INCRA (the National Institute for Colonization and Agrarian Reform). The government’s determination to relocate farmers in the north helps explain why despite having a budget that swelled to nearly US\$ 20 billion, Itaipu resisted increasing its expropriation prices. Chapters Two and Three argued that in part, the posturing over land prices resulted from the military regime’s attempt to navigate the *abertura* while retaining a maximum perception of power over opposition forces. This current chapter extends that interpretation by showing how the low prices also satisfied the dictatorship’s goals for agrarian colonization: offering below-market prices precluded many farmers from staying in western Paraná as rural families had few options but to accept a relocation in new agricultural colonies.

The peasants, day-laborers, and sharecroppers sent to INCRA’s relocation projects belonged to the poorest subset of the western Paraná countryside. With no legal property claim, the landless farmers remained the final people accounted for in Itaipu’s expropriation process. Moreover, they represented the region’s most recent wave of migration, having arrived in the

Amazon region became an ideological and material pillar of the *Estado Novo* (1937-1945).

⁴ Alves, *State and Opposition*, 25.

previous decade from the central and northern states of Minas Gerais and Bahia. This stood in contrast to most of the European-descendant farmers who came from southern states in the 1950s and 1960s. At Itaipu many of the white landed-farmers received financial indemnification and bought new properties throughout southern Brazil, often through private colonization companies (*colonizadoras*) approved by INCRA. The younger, darker-skinned peasants, however, had neither the explicit (financial) or implicit (racial) attributes that served as criteria for staying in southern Brazil. With the goal of frontier resettlement, the government saw a clear logic and justification in relocating these poor migrant families who relatively recently had left their original homes in the north. In the aftermath of Itaipu, all of the displaced families experienced varying degrees of trauma; even the farmers who found new lands nearby in Paraná still confronted material and personal hardships. Yet only landless communities had to relocate to government-sponsored projects thousands of kilometers away.

In the end, farmers uprooted by Itaipu went to three main resettlement colonies: one in the Amazonian region of Acre, one in the northeastern state of Bahia, and another within Paraná. The Brazilian government and Itaipu originally intended for a much higher rate of resettlement, but they ultimately sent less than 10 percent of the estimated 40,000 displaced people to these three projects. The relatively small percent of displaced farmers that wound up on agricultural colonies—at least compared to the number originally envisioned by authorities—resulted from the Justice and Land Movement (MJT) and its public pressure to receive lands nearby. But the success of the MJT did not cover all participants. The landless farmers sent to the colonies suffered tremendously as they confronted unfamiliar lands and often without the government services promised to them. Some settlers died from diseases and unsanitary conditions, most lacked adequate nutrition, and many others left the projects after only a few years.

The title of this chapter comes from how the term *Brasiguaios* first came into public usage. At a 1985 community meeting, a Brazilian peasant living in Paraguay told the Brazilian congressman Sérgio Cruz, “I mean to say that we don’t have rights as Paraguayans because we aren’t Paraguayan; we don’t have rights as Brazilians because we abandoned the country. But tell me something: in the end, who are we?” Cruz responded: “You are *Brasiguaios*, a mix of Brazilians with Paraguayans, men without a country.”⁵ The notion of existing as men without a country helps explain the history of these two groups of settler farmers. In both cases, the federal government deployed and essentially abandoned rural Brazilians in frontier zones. So although their bodies and labor helped consolidate a Brazilian presence in new territories, the farmers themselves never belonged to this expanding state. As described above, *Brasiguaios* felt excluded from both Brazil and Paraguay. The internal settlers, for their part, faced the added challenge of feeling rejected from the Brazilian society despite living within its national borders. The lack of promised infrastructure on frontier colonies suggested that the military regime saw these rural Brazilians not as citizens worthy of rights and protections, but as an easily discardable resource. As men without a country, the farmers confronted both the challenges of frontier life and the reality that they did so with almost no support from their own government.

This chapter links numerous processes that unfolded simultaneously, showing how the mobilizations of farmers against Itaipu overlapped with the development and agricultural goals of the Brazilian state. As farmers organized in western Paraná to defend their visions of land and justice, the military regime initiated policies to dissolve local land conflicts while deploying mass numbers of rural Brazilians across foreign and internal borders. For the government, the harsh conditions awaiting these settler farmers proved inconsequential compared to their role in

⁵ Carlos Wagner. *Brasiguaios: homens sem pátria*. (Petrópolis: Vozes, 1990), 11.

laying the groundwork for Brazil's expanding agricultural reach. Seen together, the dual narrative of Brasiguaios and northern colonization reveals Itaipu's role in the physical and conceptual construction of frontiers. At the nexus of state development and agrarian expansion, the Itaipu dam served as a central arc in the redefinition of the Brazilian countryside.

Brasiguaios and the 'Occupation' of Eastern Paraguay

The tense history of Brasiguao immigration and colonization has produced a body of literature that tends to align with the nationality of its authors. Beginning in the late 1970s, Paraguayan authors like Domingo Laino and Alfredo da Mota Menezes criticized the Stroessner regime for favoring Brazilian interests over the wellbeing of rural Paraguayans.⁶ The Anglophone economists Andrew Nickson and Beverly Nagel then traced the effects of mechanized agriculture in the eastern border region.⁷ By the late 1990s, Paraguayan scholar-activists like Ramón Fogel denounced the soybean industry and its Brazilian oligarchs as the cause of violence against rural communities.⁸ In response to these criticisms, a new wave of Brazilian scholars explored the historical construction of Brasiguao communities in order to nuance their image as invaders of Paraguayan lands.⁹ Although this recent literature correctly softens the dichotomy between nationalities, scholars have yet to fully connect the Brasiguao phenomenon to the ideological goals and development projects of Brazil's military regime.

While the overall path of Brasiguao settlement corresponded to state-directed

⁶ Domingo Laino, *Paraguay: fronteras y penetración brasileña*. (Asunción: Ediciones Cerro Cora, 1977); Alfredo da Mota Menezes, *La Herencia De Stroessner: Brasil-Paraguay, 1955-1980*. (Asunción, Paraguay: Carlos Schauman Editor, 1990).

⁷ Nickson, "Brazilian Colonization of the Eastern Border Region of Paraguay," (1981); Beverly Y. Nagel, "Socioeconomic Differentiation Among Small Cultivators on Paraguay's Eastern Frontier," *Latin American Research Review* 26, no. 2 (January 1, 1991): 103–132.

⁸ Ramón Fogel, *Los campesinos sin tierra en la frontera*. (Asunción, Paraguay: Ediciones Comité de Iglesias, 1990).

⁹ Ricardo Menegotto, *Migrações e fronteiras: os imigrantes brasileiros no Paraguai e a redefinição da fronteira*. (Santa Cruz do Sul: EDUNISC, 2004); Albuquerque, *A Dinâmica das fronteiras*.

development plans, the experience of hundreds of thousands of nameless immigrants indicate that the region's transformation did not generate prosperity for most workers who crossed the border. Many migrated to Paraguay in search of the cheap lands trumpeted by advertisements in Brazil, and others crossed during construction of the Itaipu dam and the subsequent inflation of land prices in western Paraná. Like the farmers displaced by Itaipu and sent to far-away resettlement projects, Brasiguaios functioned as a deployable agrarian tool for the expansion of Brazil's territorial influence. These migrant farmers rarely achieved the sort of success promised by government bulletins; one account from 1981 observed that many Brazilians in Paraguay "don't have any hope of acquiring land" and lived either as itinerant day-laborers (*boias-frias*), landless peasants, or farmers with miniscule tracts of land.¹⁰ Most Brasiguaios had to navigate illegal land contracts, a corrupt agrarian bureaucracy, and the threat of expulsion from their recently acquired lands—almost exclusively to make room for a new class of Brazilian soy magnates. Even on foreign soil, most Brasiguaios continued to face the same issues that led them to leave their home country in the first place.

As mentioned in Chapter One, the 1966 Act of Iguaçu catalyzed Brasiguao migration and allowed Brazil's dictatorship to take a two-pronged strategy for settling the border region. First, foreigners could now legally purchase Paraguayan frontier lands, leading to a steady stream of Brazilian settlements across the border. Second, the construction of the Itaipu dam in the 1970s left thousands of rural Brazilians with no land and very little money. Uprooted from their homes, many displaced Brazilians had little recourse but to resettle in Paraguay. One migrant recalled,

I came to Paraguay because my property along the Paraná River was flooded; when Itaipu was built all of our lands were flooded. And since we were a large family, we were left with very little since the price that they paid us was not

¹⁰ "A migração brasileira no Paraguai," *Cadernos Justiça e Paz*, No. 2, June 1981, 13.

equivalent to the real value of the land, but rather to their own estimations ... Since we had little money and the land [in Paraguay] was cheap and had lots of timber, we decided to leave for Paraguay.¹¹

With Paraguay's frontier zone now open, the Brazilian government actively encouraged its citizens to move across the border. Newspapers and radio stations in southern Brazil broadcast propaganda encouraging settlement in Paraguay. These ads focused largely on the low cost of land that ranged anywhere from 1/6 to 1/10 of the price compared to Brazil.¹² With funding from the World Bank and the Inter-American Development Bank, Paraguay's government instituted tax programs in the border region to incentivize migrants. Along with favorable credit rates, eastern Paraguay offered the added bonus of zero income tax and a minimal—and rarely enforced—land tax. Brazilians further benefitted from the lack of an export tariff, meaning that all production on Paraguayan lands flowed back to Brazil untaxed. Smallholders in Brazil became very receptive to their government's publicity campaign and often saw Paraguay as a land of opportunity. As Kohlhepp observes, for small landholders expelled from Paraná, migration to eastern Paraguay not only offered the prospect of higher quality lands, it included “the added allure of social mobility in a nascent border community.”¹³

Take, for example, the case of one Brazilian who relocated to Paraguay in 1977. After selling his 17.5-hectare plot of land to Itaipu for 520,000 cruzeiros (CR\$), he moved to Paraguay and bought 75 hectares for only CR\$ 230,000. With the money remaining from the sale of his original lands, he bought a house, planted 25 hectares of soybeans and still had a bit left over to buy a tractor the following year.¹⁴ Stories such as these most assuredly spread through rural

¹¹ Albuquerque, *A Dinâmica das fronteiras*, 67.

¹² Kohlhepp offers the 1/6 cost estimation, while Kleinpenning quotes the price as 1/10 compared to Brazil. (Gerd Kohlhepp, “Incorporação do espaço fronteiriço do leste do Paraguai na esfera de influência brasileira.” In G. Kohlhepp et al. *El Espacio interior de América del Sur: Geografía, Historia, Política*, (Frankfurt: Vervuert, 1999), 209; J.M.G. Kleinpenning, *Man and Land in Paraguay*. (Providence, RI: FORIS Publications, 1987), 178).

¹³ Kohlhepp, “Incorporação do espaço fronteiriço,” 210.

¹⁴ Menezes, *La Herencia de Stroessner*, 173. The unnamed Brasiguai is cited from *Jornal do Brasil*, 7/7/1977.

Brazil and motivated thousands of farmers to seek new opportunities in Paraguay, causing the number of Brasiguaios settlers to increase dramatically. As late as 1969 there had been fewer than 11,000 Brazilians living in eastern Paraguay. Once Itaipu's expropriations began less than a decade later that figure jumped to nearly 150,000.¹⁵

Although Brasiguao settlement seemed to favor the Brazilian state, it also served the interests of Paraguay's dictatorship. Determined to "modernize" the countryside, Alfredo Stroessner saw the type of subsistence and small-scale agriculture practiced by the indigenous and peasant communities as a hindrance to the country's productive capacity. The Paraguayan regime thus considered Brasiguaos a valuable import to bring new technologies, agricultural know-how, and access to capital.¹⁶ When asked about the growing presence of Brazilian farmers, Alberto Fernandez, a captain in the Paraguayan army and director of a private land settlement company, proclaimed "We're simply doing what Brazil already did when it stimulated the arrival of Italian, German, and Japanese settlers to its country."¹⁷ Under the auspices of the Institute for Rural Wellbeing (IBR, el Instituto de Bienestar Rural) in the mid-1960s, the Paraguayan government sold off state-owned lands to high-ranking officials and politicians, who frequently auctioned them off to Brazilian colonists.¹⁸ Corruption became especially rampant in the early years of the border's colonization, as well-connected bureaucrats received privileged jobs in charge of land speculation and distribution.¹⁹ One report claimed that "those in charge of

¹⁵ Kohlhepp, "Incorporação do espaço fronteiriço," 208.

¹⁶ Ramón Fogel and Marcial Riquelme, eds. *Enclave sojero: merma de soberanía y pobreza*. (Asunción, Paraguay: Centro de Estudios Rurales Interdisciplinarios, 2005), 124.

¹⁷ "Por um sonho, a travessia de uma fronteira," *Veja*, 3/3/1971, 34.

¹⁸ Kleinpenning, *Man and Land in Paraguay*, 179. The IBR was created in 1963 to incorporate Paraguay's peasant population into the nation's economic development. Despite the declarations of a fair system of land management, the Paraguayan state distributed rural deeds in a manner that consolidated existing hierarchies. Elites throughout Paraguay received most IBR titles, yet in the border regions specifically, a disproportionate number of government lands were given to Brazilians. (Menegotto, *Migrações e fronteiras*, 41).

¹⁹ The term 'corruption' has been the subject of recent debate, wherein some scholars consider it a category imported 'from the North' and superficially imposed on foreign cultures. For more, see Dieter Haller and Cris

controlling and taxing the area quickly became millionaires, or basically that instead of actually administering, all the officials charged taxes however they pleased without drawing up any legal documents.”²⁰ In this manner, the collusion of state and local elites exacerbated an unequal form of land distribution throughout the border region.²¹

Although a small subset of migrant farmers benefitted from the expanding foreign enclave, most Brasiguaios confronted a series of lingering problems. Government employees, for example, forced many farmers to pay exorbitant amounts of money to receive their migration papers. In the words of one observer, the settlers “lived between illegality and permanent extortion from the Paraguayan authorities.”²² Large numbers of Brazilian immigrants also struggled to gain legal ownership of lands they bought either from the Paraguayan state or through *colonizadora* companies based in Brazil. One such company, Industrial Mbaracayú S.A., allegedly sold properties to nearly 8,000 Brazilian families only to then deny them the actual land deed.²³ A *Folha de São Paulo* article explained that 70 percent of Brazilians living in Paraguay did not have the legal title to their lands and were instead forced to work as tenant farmers, sharecroppers, or itinerant day-laborers.²⁴ Another article cited an example from the Paraguayan municipality of Puerto Sece where 400 Brasiguai families paid four times for the same land to four different administrators.²⁵ Despite the promises of a better life, many farmers

Shore. *Corruption: Anthropological perspectives*. (London: Pluto, 2005). Its use in this chapter aims to portray instances where government bureaucrats and military officials acted outside of the purview of their immediate responsibilities, practices that enriched them and their acquaintances and/or distributed land in ways that ran counter to the letter of the law.

²⁰ Fernanda Feliú, *Los Brasiguayos: Canindeyú Zona Alta*. (Asunción, Paraguay: Imprenta LEO S.R.L., 2004), 47

²¹ For an analysis of the Paraguayan government’s willingness to sell off its own land to Brazilians, see Klempner, *Man and Land in Paraguay*, 180. Although the Stroessner government clearly advocated for and facilitated the import of Brazilian immigrants, much of this history resulted from the actions of local elites, members of the military, and functionaries who capitalized on opportunities in a poorly regulated environment.

²² Fogel and Riquelme, *Enclave sojero*, 126.

²³ Wagner Rocha D’Angelis and Juvêncio Mazzarollo, “A migração brasileira no Paraguai,” *Cadernos Justiça e Paz*, No. 2, June 1981, 15.

²⁴ “Encontro analisa a vida dos ‘brasiguaios,’” *Folha de São Paulo*, 9/2/1982, 17.

²⁵ “As terras sem títulos, problemas pelos colonos,” *Folha de São Paulo*, 11/23/1981, 8.

found themselves, in the words of one headline, living “in Paraguayan hell.”²⁶

Considering the challenges faced by the initial wave of immigrants, and knowing their role in laying down the first roots of what later became a thriving soy monopoly, the early Brasiguaios functioned as a form of agricultural shock troops. Simply put, they were mobilized and exploited in order to clear lands, settle farms, and establish a base from which larger development and industry could take hold.

In Brazil, both the dictatorship and opposition forces made explicit links between Brasiguaios and the northern resettlement projects. In 1973, Brazil’s surveillance agency, the National Information Service (SNI, Serviço Nacional de Informações), commissioned a confidential survey of settler farmers in Paraguay. The report asked Brasiguaios why, given the challenges of life in Paraguay, they did not simply go to the new agricultural colonies in the Amazon. Some claimed that the cheap lands kept them in Paraguay, while others told of hearing stories that Brazilians who went to the Amazon died of yellow fever, and had been “completely abandoned” by the Brazilian government.²⁷ This survey shows that Brazil’s military regime knew of the Brasiguaios’ hardships and moreover, that the government attempted to keep sending these farmers to regions that aligned with national interests. Critics of the dictatorship also held up the mistreatment of Brasiguaios as proof of the injustices of military rule. At a transnational meeting of Latin American opposition groups, the assembly denounced “the predatory occupation of a new political and agrarian frontier, like what already happened in western Paraná and which is [also] happening again in the Amazon.”²⁸ Whether across

²⁶ “Colonos brasileiros no inferno Guarani,” *Revista Panorama*, 6/18/1980, 16-17.

²⁷ Informação No. 0100/S-102-AI-CIE, Ministério do Exército, 1/24/1975. BR AN,BSB N8.0.PSN, EST.285, AN-BSB.

²⁸ Organizers included Paraguay’s Domingo Laino—Stroessner’s main critic—and several Brazilian politicians from the PMDB opposition party. “Carta das oposições-Brasil/Paraguay.” Asunción, Paraguay, 6/1/1980. Source: Fundo “Kirinus,” unmarked folder. CEPEDAL.

international borders or within Brazil's own frontier zones, settler farmers factored into the policies—and resulting criticisms—of Brazil's dictatorship.

Advances in agricultural technologies accelerated the settlement of Paraguay's border region and triggered new conflicts among local communities. The biggest influence came from the introduction of mechanized soybean cultivation in the 1970s.²⁹ Because the industrialized production of soybeans required relatively low amounts of manual labor, small- and medium-scale farmers expanded their lands under cultivation without needing to hire more workers. This facilitated a new wave of land grabbing by Brazilian farmers that further marginalized local Paraguayans. In response, Paraguayan peasants formed the Agrarian Leagues, a grassroots campaign that government authorities saw as a threat to national security. In many instances, the Stroessner regime responded by deploying the army to expel the peasant collectives. In one example from 1970, Paraguayan soldiers forcefully removed and set fire to the houses of 1,300 families in the border municipality of Yhú in order to confiscate their lands.³⁰ Once the state kicked out local Paraguayans, military personnel seized the lands and sold them off as private holdings—often to Brazilian colonists.

For their role in territorial colonization, Brasiguaios often incurred the hostility of local communities. Paraguayan peasants denounced Brazilian migrants as “colonizers, invaders and destroyers of nature and of Paraguayan culture.”³¹ In rural Paraguay, Brasiguaios became the symbol of the so-called “Brazilian invasion.” In a 1977 news article a local farmer described the

²⁹ Between 1972 and 1977, the area under cultivation in Paraguay rose at an annual rate of 16 percent, of which 25 percent produced soybeans. (Menezes, *La Herencia de Stroessner*, 14) Soy first appeared in Paraguayan agricultural censuses in the 1970s, and its production expanded such that within 30 years Paraguay became the world's sixth largest producer of soybeans, significant for a country with fewer than 7 million inhabitants. The cultivation of soybeans became so central to the Paraguayan economy that by 2004, the crop occupied nearly 2 million hectares—over 50 percent of all cultivated lands in the country (Albuquerque, *A Dinâmica das fronteiras*, 83).

³⁰ Marcial Riquelme, “Notas para el estudio de las causas y efectos de las migraciones brasileñas en el Paraguay.” In *Enclave sojero*, 136.

³¹ Albuquerque, *A dinâmica das fronteiras*, 107.

devastation brought by Brazilian immigrants: “the small homes [of Paraguayan farmers] are being destroyed. They’ll be built again, but only to be torn apart again. The whole thing keeps repeating.”³² The nature of frontier expansion meant that even if many of the early Brasiguaios came from similar socio-economic backgrounds as Paraguayan farmers, they nonetheless contributed to a process of displacement and repression.

These settlement patterns formed an ongoing cycle in the reorientation of eastern Paraguay. As more small-scale Brasiguaios settled in Paraguay, their presence pushed out local farmers whose subsequent mobilizations stood as justification for the government to further appropriate peasant lands. As soy grew in importance, land consolidated in the hands of a new rural elite and small-farmers—Brazilian and Paraguayan alike—lost their lands at an increasing rate. One Brazilian settler told the *Folha de Londrina* that despite owning his farm in Paraguay for fifteen years, he was expelled to make room for a new plantation, declaring that the border region now belonged “in the hands of the big landowners, and [us small-holders] won’t last very long.”³³

These new agricultural oligarchies were comprised almost exclusively of Brazilians. In an underlying paradox of Brasiguaios immigration, Brazilians living in Paraguay wound up expelled by their own countrymen. As we shall see at the end of this chapter, the mistreatment of Brasiguaios did not only occur on foreign lands. When migrants began returning to Brazil in the early 1980s, their fellow citizens routinely treated them as unwelcomed pariahs. The Brazilian countryside they had left behind the previous decade was in a process of transformation, and they again found themselves in the middle of agrarian struggles that extended from western Paraná throughout the far reaches of Brazil.

³² *Última Hora*, 6/20/1977, 13, cited in Laino, *Paraguay: fronteras y penetración brasileña*, 80.

³³ “Explorados no Paraguai,” *Folha de Londrina*, 8/7/1985.

Brazil's Internal Frontiers

The start of Brasiguayo immigration in the early 1970s occurred as the Brazilian dictatorship initiated one of the most ambitious state-run development programs in the country's history. Anna Luiza Ozorio de Almeida calls the 1970s the "Decade of Colonization," highlighting the Amazon frontier in particular for receiving almost 3 million people.³⁴ The desire to settle Brazil's frontiers existed for most of the twentieth century. In the influential 1931 book *Projeção Continental do Brasil*, the army captain Mário Travassos charted Brazil's territorial expansion and rise to continental supremacy. Along with urging national development toward the resource-rich lands of Bolivia, Travassos saw the domination of the Amazon as key to Brazil's hegemony in South America.³⁵ Travassos' views had lasting effects on Brazil's geopolitical policies. Not only did his writings greatly influence General Golbery do Couto e Silva—the dictatorship's leading ideologue in the 1960s and 1970s—they also paved the way for a series of initiatives prior to the military taking power. The presidency of Juscelino Kubitschek (1956-1961) erected the new national capital inland at Brasília, which the Brasília-Belem highway then connected to the Amazon. Advances in transportation technologies allowed the Brazilian state to more easily access and develop the Amazonian regions—long considered Brazil's "last frontier."

The development of Brazil's northern reaches greatly accelerated after the military regime took power in 1964. Under the Doctrine of National Security, military leaders gave unparalleled attention and resources to Brazil's frontiers, both the borders with neighboring Latin American nations and the internal "backlands." The dictatorship saw agriculture as a tool of

³⁴ Anna Luiza Ozorio de Almeida, *The Colonization of the Amazon*, (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1992, 1-29).

³⁵ Seth Garfield observes that Travassos's ideologies combined "Rudolf Kjellen's theory of the porousness of territorial boundaries with Halford Mackinder's creed that control of the continental "heartland" held the key to military superiority." Garfield, *In Search of the Amazon*, 31.

frontier colonization intended to resolve land conflicts in central and southern Brazil. Ozorio de Almeida argues that territorial expansion in the 1970s offered “a way to circumvent the land problem, taking the landless to frontier regions and leaving property structures in the rest of the country untouched.”³⁶ Other scholars observe that the resettlement process “represented a path of least resistance” to address the lack of land reform in Brazil.³⁷ Moreover, the northward agricultural expansion provided a vehicle for establishing a government presence to protect against guerrilla insurgencies like the Araguaia War that occurred in the northern states of Goiás, Pará, and Maranhão from 1967 through 1974.³⁸

In June 1970, Emílio Médici, the dictatorship’s fifth military president, announced plans for the construction of the Trans-Amazonian highway and the National Integration Plan (PIN, Plano Nacional de Integração). The PIN aimed to settle one hundred thousand families in Brazil’s northern regions by the middle of the decade. In the words of one government report, the PIN sought to “mark, by the presence of Brazilian men in Amazonian lands, the conquest for themselves and for their country, of that which always belonged to them, so that no one would ever dare to contest them on this objective.”³⁹ Although the PIN never fulfilled its ambitious goal of relocating a hundred thousand families, it nonetheless provided the financial and political impetus for a massive demographic shift.⁴⁰

³⁶ Ozorio de Almeida, *The Colonization of the Amazon*, 4.

³⁷ Lee J. Alston, Gary D. Libecap, and Bernardo Mueller. *Titles, Conflict, and Land Use: the Development of Property Rights and Land Reform on the Brazilian Amazon Frontier*. (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1999), 41.

³⁸ For more on Araguaia, see Schmink and Wood, *Contested Frontiers in Amazonia*, 72-74.

³⁹ Ministério da Agricultura, Instituto Nacional de Colonização e Reforma Agrária (INCRA), Projeto Integrado de Colonização Altamira — 1. INCRA, Brasília, 1972, cited in Philip M. Fearnside, “Brazil’s Settlement Schemes: Conflicting Objectives and Human Carrying Capacity,” *Habitat International*, Vol 8, No, 1, 1984, 47.

⁴⁰ Various scholars have analyzed the limitations of the PIN and the process through which the military government largely abandoned the goal of developing state-run colonization projects, shifting instead toward the end of the 1970s to private initiatives of large-scale cattle ranching. See Schmink and Wood, *Contested Frontiers in Amazonia*, 76; Alston et al, *Titles, Conflict, and Land Use*, 42-43; and Thomas Ludewigs et al, “Agrarian Structure and Land-cover Change Along the Lifespan of Three Colonization Areas in the Brazilian Amazon,” *World Development* Vol. 37, No. 8, (August 2009): 1350.

Table 5.1 shows the changes in rural population by region in the 1960s and 1970s, reflecting the trend toward northern colonization. After seeing the country's largest rise during the 1960s, the southern states then experienced the sharpest decline the following decade. Rural population loss in the south and southeast occurred as the north and northeast became the only regions in all of Brazil to see an increase in its rural demographics during the 1970s. The effect on the southern countryside especially impacted the state of Paraná. After seeing a net growth of almost 1.5 million people in the 1960s, Paraná's rural population then dropped by nearly 1.3 million a decade later.⁴¹ These shifts also resulted from a steep rise in rural-to-urban migration brought about by the introduction of mechanized agriculture and subsequent loss of many farming jobs.⁴² In the context of this changing countryside, the construction of the Itaipu dam and the displacement of tens of thousands of people presented the government with a large pool of potential migrants for its goals of northward territorial expansion.

Regions	1960-1970	1970-1980
North*	383,076	924,532
Northeast	1,945,981	957,853
Center-West	720,432	- 178,430
Southeast	- 1,224,574	- 1,963,936
South	1,826,351	- 2,023,200
Brazil (total)	3,651,266	- 2,283,181

Table 5.1: Changes in rural population by region. *North: Acre, Rondônia, Amazonas, Roraima, Pará, Amapá; Northeast: Maranhão, Piauí, Ceará, Rio Grande do Norte, Paraíba, Pernambuco, Sergipe, Alagoas, Bahia; Center-West: Mato Grosso, Mato Grosso do Sul, Goiás, Distrito Federal; Southeast: São Paulo, Rio de Janeiro, Minas Gerais, Espírito Santo; South: Paraná, Santa Catarina, Rio grande do Sul. Source: Ozorio de Almeida, *The Colonization of the Amazon*, 18.

As mentioned in the introduction to this chapter, Itaipu's leaders and federal authorities had been operating behind the scenes since the mid-1970s to send farmers to the northern

⁴¹ Ozorio de Almeida, *The Colonization of the Amazon*, 28.

⁴² For example, Paraná's urban population grew by almost a million people from the 1960s to the 1970s. (Ozorio de Almeida, *The Colonization of the Amazon*, 28).

colonization projects originally envisioned by the PIN. For many years, the farmers' movement at Itaipu delayed the efforts to simply ship farmers northward. On the eve of the Foz do Iguaçu protest camp in March of 1981, many of the displaced farmers still had no idea where they would relocate. For the landed farmers who soon won increased compensation packages and could afford to buy new lands, the issue of resettlement proved less troublesome. But the region's landless peasants, sharecroppers, and day-laborers now anxiously focused on whether the government would provide new lands, the location of potential lands, and what type of life awaited the farmers on the so-called colonization projects (*projetos de colonização*).

The fact that a relatively low number of the displaced ultimately went to these agricultural colonies—less than ten percent of those living in Itaipu's flood-zone—resulted from the Justice and Land Movement's campaign to win higher land prices, thereby allowing farmers to find new lands nearby. Many bought new property within the state of Paraná. Others left for Paraguay or purchased land in states throughout Brazil, including Rio Grande do Sul, São Paulo, and Minas Gerais, among others.⁴³ Yet the negotiations between Itaipu and the farmers' leadership left thousands of landless Brazilians with neither a compensation package nor a promised relocation site. Barely two weeks after the Foz do Iguaçu protest demobilized, the government began a year-long process of resettling the region's landless families. In total, authorities sent nearly 4,000 people displaced by Itaipu to three main colonization projects. (Table 5.2) Far from the idyllic conditions depicted by federal authorities, the relocation sites contained lands ill-suited for farming and the projects' lack of infrastructure resulted in problems of disease and malnutrition. The remainder of this chapter explores the history of how farmers who had already confronted the traumas of displacement now confronted an additional set of

⁴³“Desaproriações, área do reservatório (margem esquerda),” 1983 Itaipu report, Microfilm r4148.187-195, CDIB.

challenges in the three resettlement colonies.

Project Name	Serra do Ramalho	Pedro Peixoto	Arapoti
State	Bahia	Acre	Paraná
Distance from Foz do Iguaçu	2,200 km	3,700	700
Size of project (hectares)	257,000	296,243	3,876
Number of Itaipu settlers	72 families 399 people	191 families 1,193 people	401 families 2,390 people
Average claimed land size	20 hectares	19 hectares	10 hectares

Table 5.2: Statistics on three main resettlement project. Source: “Desapropriações, área do reservatório (margem esquerda),” 1983 Itaipu report, Microfilm r4148.187-195, CDIB.

From its inception, the Justice and Land Movement demanded new lands within Paraná. Largely resigned to the eventual flooding of their own lands, the MJT farmers lobbied Itaipu and INCRA to acquire nearby properties for displaced farmers. In response, Itaipu gave a series of public statements attempting to deflect criticisms by showing that it did “everything possible to benefit the expropriated” and that the military regime remained committed to “giving [farmers] the humane and Christian treatment that they deserve.”⁴⁴ Claiming to have fully explored the options of finding nearby lands, Itaipu declared it nearly impossible to relocate families within Paraná. Extensive documentation from within Itaipu, however, disproves the statements that land within Paraná were simply not available.

Throughout the entirety of its standoff with the mobilized farmers, Itaipu claimed that it worked closely with the federal government to find a solution that would satisfy the demands of the displaced farmers. Yet from the very beginning of the expropriation process, Itaipu’s behind-the-scenes deliberations suggest that the Binational had only briefly explored the possibility of finding new lands within Paraná. Documentary evidence also reveals the underlying motivation to send the farmers far from their flooded homes. In the middle of 1978, Itaipu began discussing the situation of the displaced farmers with INCRA, the government branch legally responsible

⁴⁴ E/DG/0221/79, 4/11/1979. Source: Archive of FETAEP, Curitiba, Paraná.

for the farmers' relocation. Very quickly, however, it became clear that INCRA had little desire, and even fewer resources, to process the situation at Itaipu. In particular, INCRA cited its previous difficulties in relocating farmers displaced by the Sobradinho dam in the north-eastern state of Bahia.⁴⁵ On the heels of INCRA's reluctance, Itaipu's leaders began to shift all attention towards colonization projects in the north.

The correspondence archive of Itaipu's executive office shows that around this time the Binational received numerous proposals from different *colonizadoras* (private agrarian companies). These corporations boasted of their successful track-record in building agricultural colonies in regions throughout Brazil—especially in the Amazon—and even mentioned their ability to influence the passage of land laws favorable to new projects.⁴⁶ The Sinop Company, for example, described its ability to help colonize the Amazon and made an explicit appeal to the underlying logic of the military regime's development goals, writing that “we must send Brazilian settlers to the regions that make up [the nation's] ‘geo-economic and demographic’ holes.”⁴⁷ These letters seemed to accelerate Itaipu's desire to pursue northern projects. The Binational soon brought in private corporations and government authorities to help plan the northward relocation.⁴⁸

Despite the inclination to send farmers to northern settlement projects, an underlying dynamic of racial and class disparity still meant that *certain* sectors of the displaced could stay in

⁴⁵ Letter from Laureço Vieira da Silva, president of INCRA, to Gen. José Cavalcanti, president of Itaipu, 8/14/78, Ofício INCRA P/No. 296, Microfilm 728.1259-1261, CDIB. Other exchanges between INCRA and Itaipu over these issues included Meeting between Itaipu legal department and INCRA 5/24/1978, Microfilm 729.1043-1053 CDIB; and Letter from Gen. Cavalcanti to INCRA president Vieira da Silva, 5/30/1978, Microfilm 728.1262-1263.

⁴⁶ Letter from Construtora Andrade Gutierrez S.A. to Gen. Cavalcanti, 3/16/1979, Microfilm 8241.974-978, CDIB; and Letter from Indeco S.A. to Gen. Cavalcanti, 12/9/1979, Microfilm 1398.1822, CDIB.

⁴⁷ Letter from Colonizadora Sinop S.A. to Gen. Cavalcanti, 8/4/1978, Microfilm 728.323-325 CDIB.

⁴⁸ Examples of Itaipu's shifting goal of northward expansion and the role of private *colonizadoras* include statements General Cavalcanti, the president of Itaipu, who observed that “the participation of private initiatives ... will help solve the situation of families that must be resettled.” (Letter from Gen. Cavalcanti to president of INCRA, E/DG/0461/78, 9/13/1978. Microfilm 694.785-786, CDIB)

Paraná. At a December 1978 meeting in Rio de Janeiro between the leaderships of Itaipu and INCRA, General Cavalvanti stated that “men accustomed to working the fertile lands of Paraná are not prepared to go to the Amazon.” Itaipu’s legal director, Paulo da Cunha, elaborated by declaring that the small amount of land that *was* available in Paraná should go to the older farmers “who do not have the courage to confront a new region.”⁴⁹ The history of settlement in Paraná meant that the older farmers almost all migrated from the southern states of Rio Grande do Sul and Santa Catarina, while the younger ones had more recently come from Minas Gerais and Bahia. This acted as a thinly veiled acknowledgement that the older, whiter, and title-owning settlers could stay nearby while the younger, darker-skinned, and poorer farmers should be sent to the government’s frontier projects. As shown in Chapters Two and Three, supporters of the farmers’ movement often invoked this same racialized narrative to argue that the Euro-descendent families should remain in Paraná. With both the federal government and sympathetic politicians implying that material and social attributes should determine which farmers could stay in Paraná, it became even harder for the region’s landless peasants to avoid the northern agriculture colonies.

At a follow-up to the previous gathering in Rio de Janeiro, representatives of eight different *colonizadoras* met with Itaipu and INCRA to discuss the role of private companies in relocating the displaced farmers.⁵⁰ Along with setting in motion the eventual choice of the three government-run resettlement projects, this meeting offers further insight into the logic of the military regime’s agrarian policies. Itaipu’s president Calvacanti opened by welcoming the *colonizadoras*, many of whom he considered friends from his tenure as Minister of the Interior.

⁴⁹ “Notas da reunião com o INCRA.” 12/5/1978, Rio de Janeiro. Source: Microfilm r728.1273-1285. CDIB.

⁵⁰ “Notas da reunião com o INCRA e empres colonizadoras.” 12/15/1978, Rio de Janeiro. Source: Microfilm 728F.1299-1317. CDIB.

Having collaborated with these companies on previous projects in the Amazon, Cavalcanti reiterated that he “always had more faith in private initiatives than in the abilities of government agencies.”⁵¹ Cavalcanti and his colleagues then outlined the logistics of how the *colonizadoras* could work in tandem with INCRA to relocate the farmers, discussing details of the communities themselves and the timelines for relocation and financial payments.

In the years to follow, many expropriated farmers heeded INCRA’s publicity campaign and purchased lands through *colonizadoras* on projects throughout Brazil. Although the private projects did not necessarily offer better conditions than those eventually found at INCRA’s three relocation sites, the choice to even pursue the *colonizadora* option remained available only to those who received financial compensation from Itaipu. Beginning in 1979, Itaipu widely disseminated a list of *colonizadora* projects approved—and ostensibly regulated—by INCRA. Speaking with politicians and media outlets, Itaipu repeated its preference for paying the farmers and giving them the “right to choose freely” from various options on the open market.⁵² Private companies made these same claims and sought to capitalize on the uncertainty pervading the entire borderlands. One company told the São Paulo-based *Jornal da Tarde* that, “If farmers don’t want to go to Paraguay, they still can’t stay in Paraná ... The North of the country has the benefit of larger tracts of land at competitive prices.”⁵³ This echoed the colonization strategy initially used to attract settlers to Paraguay, as the promise cheap lands surely resonated with impoverished rural Brazilians. Publicity for northern projects described the numerous benefits and services awaiting farmers. All of the INCRA-approved private projects would supposedly include roads, schools, hospitals, churches, banks and the infrastructure to give “farmers and

⁵¹ “Notas da reunião com o INCRA e empres colonizadoras.” 12/15/1978, Rio de Janeiro. Source: Microfilm 728F.1299-1317. CDIB.

⁵² “Subsídios sobre desapropriações,” Itaipu internal memo, 1979. Microfilm R1316.135-136, CDIB.

⁵³ “Desapropriações. E começa o êxodo para o Norte,” *Jornal da Tarde*, 4/9/1979, 12.

their families the support necessary [to maintain] a community-centered life.”⁵⁴ But like the experience of Brasiguaios across foreign borders, the farmers within Brazil soon learned firsthand that the reality of frontier life rarely aligned with its idyllic representation.

Throughout the end of 1979 and into 1980 the question of relocation remained a core pillar of the fight against Itaipu. In a letter to the President of Brazil and to the Ministers of Agriculture and the Interior, the farmers demanded resettlement options within Paraná.⁵⁵ And when the Justice and Land Movement officially formed at the Santa Helena land encampment in July 1980, the protest’s first public statement attacked the government’s relocation policies:

They want to expel us to Paraguay or to the Amazon. Because with the money they’ve offered we’ll never be able to buy new lands here in the region, and for the resettlement in Paraná, which is our greatest desire, absolutely nothing has yet to be done ... WE WANT LAND IN PARANÁ. DO NOT EXPEL US. WE WANT TO PLANT AND HARVEST, BUT ONLY IN PARANÁ.⁵⁶

As outlined in Chapter Three, the demands relating to agrarian reform and “land-for-land” within Paraná faded away during the 15-day Santa Helena encampment. As the protest gained greater support and mainstream political traction, the movement’s leadership of landed farmers and Church allies focused on the issue of expropriation prices. The MJT opted to mobilize for financial compensation rather than land-based demands and the final agreement with Itaipu dealt almost exclusively with how much Itaipu would pay for different plots of flooded land.⁵⁷ In the face of government programs determined to send them away, and having seen the possibility of winning nearby lands dissipate at the Santa Helena camp, the resettlement colonies became increasingly likely destinations for the region’s peasant farmers.

⁵⁴ Letter from General José Cavalcanti to Irmut Helmet Krugel, President of the Associação das Câmaras de Vereadores da Faixa da Fronteira, 1/23/1979. Microfilm R1397.338-340, CDIB.

⁵⁵ “Agricultores x Itaipu,” *Hoje*, 4/12/1979, 4.

⁵⁶ “Ao povo, o governo, e à Itaipu,” 7/14/1980. Source: CPT-Londrina, Paraná. (Capitalization consistent with original).

⁵⁷ Only a single item concerned lands in Paraná, relating to the possibility of reactivating the Bolsa Agrária. “Ata da reunião realizada em Itaipu,” 7/27/1980. Microfilm r2135.901-904, CDIB.

Barely two months after the Santa Helena protest, Itaipu announced that settlers could now leave for the colonization sites.⁵⁸ One was the Serra do Ramalho Project in the north-eastern state of Bahia. And in a slight concession to the farmers' long-standing demand, INCRA established a second colony called Arapoti in the north-western interior of Paraná.⁵⁹ Although Arapoti satisfied the farmers' demand to receive land within Paraná, it suffered from the same lack of resources as the northern colonization projects. With the Bahia and Arapoti colonies ready, Itaipu and INCRA explored various options for additional relocation sites, giving particular consideration to lands in Minas Gerais.⁶⁰ In the end, however, the government chose a third project called Pedro de Peixoto in the Amazonian state of Acre—one of the northern-most regions of the country situated over 4,000 kilometers from western Paraná.

Resettlement Projects

Between May 1981 and June 1982, INCRA transferred 3,982 people from their homes in western Paraná to the three resettlement projects. For the relocation process, the government provided CR\$40 million of financing, 50 INCRA employees, and the use of 136 buses and 219 trucks.⁶¹

⁵⁸ "Reunião entre a diretoria da Itaipu Binacional e a Comissão de Expropriados," Santa Helena, 10/1/1980. Microfilm r2135.926-930, CDIB.

⁵⁹ The project's official name was Poti, but it was commonly referred to as "Arapoti," the name of the nearby town.

⁶⁰ Examples of Itaipu's inquiry into Mato Grosso lands in: Letter from Gen. Cavalcanti to Minister of Agriculture Angelo Amauri Stabile, E/DG/0142/82, 4/2/1982, Microfilm, 3358.327-328, CDIB; Letter from Governor of Minas Gerais, Francelino Pereira dos Santos to Gen. Cavalcanti, GM No. 259, 4/30/1982, Microfilm 3359.291, CDIB.

⁶¹ "Desapropriações, área do reservatório (margem esquerda)," 1983 Itaipu report, Microfilm r4148.187-195, CDIB.



FIGURE 5.2: Settlers arrive at the Arapoti colonization project, 1981. Source: INCRA state office, Curitiba.

The projects in Bahia and Acre were the first to receive farmers displaced by Itaipu. These initiatives originally began in 1975 and 1977, respectively—well before the dam’s expropriation conflict became a national issue.⁶² Only in the immediate aftermath of the Justice and Land Movement, however, did INCRA begin sending hundreds of Paraná families thousands of kilometers away. The first caravan to Bom Jesus da Lapa in Bahia departed less than 10 days after the end of Foz do Iguaçu protest encampment. A few weeks later buses began taking farmers on the week-long drive to Acre. Critics saw this as a strategy to further clamp down on the grassroots mobilization that recently culminated in front of Itaipu’s construction site. Pastor Werner Fuchs, a leader of the farmers’ movement, characterized the immediate northern resettlement as an effort “to empty western Paraná of its current social tension.”⁶³ In the aftermath of a popular struggle that challenged the legitimacy of military rule, the government

⁶² The Bahia project was initially established in 1975 to accommodate families displaced by the Sobradinho dam. The Acre colony began in 1977, and at the time was the second largest agricultural project in all of Brazil. Source: “Deputados homenageiam os 43 anos do Incra no Acre,” <http://www.incra.gov.br/web-deputados-homenageiam-os-43-anos-do-incra-no-acre>, accessed 3/26/2016.

⁶³ “Comissão Pastoral da Terra critica Itaipu pelo envio de colonos da usina para o Acre,” *Folha de Londrina*, 7/25/1981.

seemed eager to prevent future protests by sending away thousands of peasants and small-farmers.

Similar to how Brasiguaios immigrants served to establish a Brazilian presence in Paraguay, so too did the northern settler farmers clear the way for what became booming industries of cattle ranching and timber extraction. Hence, the farmers displaced by Itaipu also functioned as agricultural shock troops for the dictatorship's frontier policies—both in the national security sense of fortifying borders and by opening new regions to agricultural expansion. Marianne Schmink and Charles H. Wood observe that under military rule, “developmentalism became firmly joined to the national security doctrine. The fusion of the two produced a distinctive perspective that informed every aspect of the military's behavior in Amazonia.”⁶⁴ Opponents of these policies viewed northern settlement as little more than an attempt to exploit farmers. Speaking at a national meeting about agrarian colonization in 1984, Pastor Hans Train denounced the government for prioritizing private commercial interests over the wellbeing of rural Brazilians:

The current form of colonization is little more than land speculation, and does not seek [to actually] settle men on these lands. The farmers are thrown into unknown regions, in the middle of the jungle, without technical support or infrastructure. There, they clear the lands as best as they can and later are forced to leave again. Then the large companies come in and take over.⁶⁵

In order to arrive at the northern agricultural colonies, the farmers first endured a nine-day bus ride. One woman remembered that the drive to Acre made almost no stops on its 4,000-kilometer journey, and that INCRA did not provide enough food for all of the families onboard.⁶⁶ The lack of supplies en route to the colonization projects foreshadowed the conditions awaiting

⁶⁴ Schmink and Wood, *Contested Frontiers in Amazonia*, 69.

⁶⁵ “Encontro sobre colonização em São Paulo,” January 16-19. *Poeira* No. 32, February 1984, 16.

⁶⁶ “Os Desapropriados,” documentary film directed by Frederico Fülgraff, 1983.

farmers on their arrival. Within only a few months of settlement in Acre, *O Estado de São Paulo* reported that Paraná settlers had contracted malaria, measles, and hepatitis. Because INCRA did not provide the promised building materials to construct houses, families lived in canvas tents that left them exposed to the elements. Many people became ill, including an eight-year-old child who died of malaria.⁶⁷ Another farmer explained: “Nobody had any way of going to see a doctor, you practically died on the way there. For 20 kilometers we walk with our things on our backs. [My] daughter was four-years-old, and my girl died on the side of the road.”⁶⁸ Other media outlets reported on the high price of food staples, a pervasive lack of drinking water, and INCRA’s inaction on resolving these issues.⁶⁹ For its inability to adequately oversee the northern agrarian projects, INCRA earned the dubious nickname of the “Instituto que Nada Conseguiu Realizar na Amazônia” (the Institute that Managed to Accomplish Nothing in the Amazon).⁷⁰ Even public officials spoke out against the agrarian colonies. Acre’s Secretary of Agriculture denounced the imposition that the federal government had placed on his state, and noted that the “farmers are going hungry, they don’t have medical care or schools, and suffer intense bouts of malaria that’s affecting 40-percent of people.”⁷¹

The opening of this chapter quoted a farmer as saying, in part, “I was tricked ... All that we got, with all their promises, was sickness, death, and despair in the middle of this jungle. And nothing else, nothing else.”⁷² After already experiencing the hardships of displacement, the former Paraná farmers now living in the north felt betrayed, both by Itaipu for not having made available better lands and by INCRA for giving a false idea of life on the colonies.

⁶⁷ “Colonos paranaenses com malária no Acre,” *O Estado de São Paulo*, 8/27/1981.

⁶⁸ “Os Desapropriados,” documentary film directed by Frederico Fülgraff, 1983.

⁶⁹ “Agricultores de Itaipu no Acre,” *Poeira* No. 18, September 1981, 24.

⁷⁰ Scmink and Wood, *Contested Frontiers in Amazonia*, 77.

⁷¹ “Colonos do Sul estão abandonados no Acre,” *Folha de Londrina*, 11/25/1983.

⁷² “Os Desapropriados,” documentary film directed by Frederico Fülgraff, 1983.



FIGURE 5.3: Road to Acre, May 1983 (left). A family displaced by Itaipu in Acre for two years (right). Source: “Os Desapropriados,” documentary film directed by Frederico Fülgraff, 1983.

The failure of federal policy to adequately oversee the agrarian projects reveals a core contradiction in the logic of state-directed frontier colonization. This chapter has made clear that government leaders could mobilize mass numbers of potential settler farmers, whether by force (displacement) or appeal (propaganda). Yet life on the agrarian projects suggests that the federal government cared far less about actually governing the colonies. By essentially abandoning the farmers, the Brazilian state did more than just fail to uphold its social and legal contract; the near-total neglect of northern settlers implied that the landless peasants did not even deserve inclusion in Brazilian society. Many farmers indicated that the original trauma of the Itaipu flood was partially offset by knowing that their sacrifice for the dam would help Brazil enter a new era of prosperity. The frontier experience, however, left the settlers further excluded from the Brazilian nation that Itaipu would help construct. So despite living well within the national boundaries of Brazil, these settler farmers had become men without a country.

The Arapoti Colony

The federal government registered Arapoti as a state-run agrarian project in early August

1981 and the first farmers arrived at the end of September. INCRA resettled all of the 2,400 people by the following June of 1982—four months before Itaipu’s flood. Some of the earliest newspaper coverage of Arapoti glorified the project as a new “phase of pioneers”—an extension of the logic of frontier colonization that previously depicted the southern farmers as brave settlers in western Paraná. More than just a sanitized vision of the farmers themselves, this initial reporting also relied heavily on INCRA’s public relations statements that idealized Arapoti as a highly efficient project that would enable a community-centered way of life.⁷³ In the aftermath of the MJT having denounced the government’s disregard for rural livelihoods at Itaipu, INCRA appeared intent on framing its relocation projects so as to shield it from potential criticism.

Life in Arapoti, however, presented a different reality. Similar to the demographics of the northern settlers, peasants constituted the majority of Arapoti settlers, as 77 percent were categorized as tenant-farmers (*arrendatários*).⁷⁴ Located in north-western Paraná—within a day’s drive of Foz do Iguaçu, the state capitol of Curitiba, and also the city of São Paulo—Arapoti suffered from rampant food shortages and a lack of basic infrastructure. Even without the north’s malaria-plagued jungles and despite its closer proximity to urban areas, Arapoti still provided numerous challenges that paralleled those in Bahia and Acre. One farmer recalled the poor quality of land and the inadequate housing provided by INCRA:

We wanted to come here to look at the lands and Itaipu didn’t want anyone [to do that.] They told us that the land would be good for planting, but when we arrived it wasn’t like what they said. And even the houses don’t have enough space for beds, because [they’re] really small, with eight people in a house that’s 2.5 by 5 [square meters]. We can’t be here, we have to leave. In the end, almost everyone is trying to leave.⁷⁵

⁷³ “Reassentamento em Arapoti revive fase de pioneiros,” Folha de Londrina, 11/4/1981, 24-28.

⁷⁴ Of the 401 families relocated to Arapoti, 312 (77%) were “arrendatarios,” 40 (10%) were small-farmers, 36 (9%) were rural wage-workers, and 13 (3%) lived on private lands. “Desapropriações, área do reservatório (margem esquerda),” 1983 Itaipu report, Microfilm r4148.187-195, CDIB. Statistics on the settlers’ financial situation from “Situação do Projeto Poty, no município de Arapoti/PR,” Serviço Nacional de Informações, Memo Informação No, 130/17/AC/83, 2/18/1983. In SNI ACE.3721/83, AN-RJ.

⁷⁵ “Os Desapropriados,” documentary film directed by Frederico Fülgraff, 1983.

In September 1982, Deputy Gernote Kirinus (from the opposition Brazilian Democratic Movement Party, PMDB) gave a speech in the state legislative assembly denouncing INCRA for abandoning four hundred families who had just suffered through “the social destruction caused by Itaipu.” Kirinus claimed that federal authorities had failed to process the legal titles for the resettlement plots and that the farmers now confronted “misery” and “a delirious hunger” from an inability to grow food on the arid lands.⁷⁶ In the following months, regional newspapers increased their reporting, offering headlines such as “Arapoti living a cruel existence” and “Displaced western farmers are starving in Arapoti.”⁷⁷ Many families struggled to survive financially, as unproductive harvests forced some to either chop down what few trees they possessed (to sell as firewood) or to take out loans. These financial difficulties and the lingering specter of hunger left many farmers looking for a way to leave the project. Although their contracts with INCRA stipulated that a plot of land had to remain in the hands of one family, some reportedly ignored the agreement and tried to sell their lands.⁷⁸

The situation became especially unstable toward the end of 1982. As discontent grew within Arapoti, government authorities actually decreased their support of the farmers. INCRA reasoned that by providing food supplies to underwrite the farmers’ unsuccessful harvests, it had steered them away from the project’s goal of self-sufficiency.⁷⁹ In December, the government cut off all food donations to Arapoti. This action only served to heighten the growing conflict—one report noted a fear of potential looting in nearby supermarkets. Only a few days before

⁷⁶ “Fome em Arapoti,” *Hoje*, 9/17/1982, 5.

⁷⁷ “Arapoti vive cenário de uma herança cruel, diz deputado,” *Diário Popular*, 12/25/1982; “Colonos removidos do Oeste passam até fome em Arapoti,” *Folha de Londrina*, 1/4/1983, 24-26.

⁷⁸ Estado do Paraná, Coordenação Estadual de Defesa Civil—CEDEC/PR. “Relatório sobre o problema dos agricultores reassentados pelo INCRA da área do lago de Itaipu para Arapoti.” In SNI ACE/4068/83, AN-RJ.

⁷⁹ Serviço Público Federal, “Relatório sobre PROJETO POTY,” INCRA-4(09) No. 018, 1/12/1983, 2. In SNI ACE/4068/83, AN-RJ.

Christmas, INCRA finally allowed a shipment of 3,000 kilograms of food that provided rice, beans, oil, salt, and sugar.⁸⁰ In the aftermath of this tension, the Paraná state government conducted a survey of Arapoti. The report observed that families had initially arrived “without the minimum resources necessary to survive, the lands were in terrible conditions” and that almost everyone lacked critical nutritional support. Moreover, the project had poor sanitation conditions and little access to water.⁸¹ Although the government never admitted so publicly, the report concluded that the principal cause of these problems “was a lack of integrated planning” between INCRA and the local municipal authorities.⁸² Based on these findings, INCRA introduced new plans to increase food support, offer technical agriculture courses, extend electric power lines and roads, and improve the project’s medical facilities and its schools.

INCRA’s renewed commitment appears to have produced few tangible results. By the middle of the following year national media outlets provided extensive coverage of the conditions at Arapoti.⁸³ In July 1983 the *Folha de São Paulo* ran a lengthy exposé titled “Ex-farmers from Itaipu are now going hungry on Arapoti.”⁸⁴ The article claimed that a significant portion of the project’s 425 families suffered from hunger and that most people survived on provisions from the local government. The report described farmers as living in make-shift plastic tents rather than wooden houses, and numerous interviews elaborated on the “psychological problems” and “trauma” caused by going into debt to cover bad harvests. The

⁸⁰ Ibid., “Relatório sobre o problema dos agricultores reassentados,” 5-6.

⁸¹ Ibid., 5-7.

⁸² Ibid., 8. Various sections of the report discuss the issues that helped enable Arapoti’s problems. These include references to INCRA’s own lack of logistical planning, the inability of the local municipal government to adapt for the rapid population rise from the farmers’ relocation, and the fact that the region was already plagued by widespread employment issues.

⁸³ Although national media began providing more in-depth coverage, newspapers in Paraná still produced a much higher volume. One INCRA report noted that in the month of November 1983 alone, 65 newspapers within Paraná wrote about the resettlement projects, 35 of which it deemed “positive,” 21 “negative,” and 9 “neutral.” *Resenha dos jornais do Paraná, avaliação mensal*, Nov. 1983. Source: INCRA state office, Curitiba.

⁸⁴ “Ex-colonos de Itaipu agora passam fome em Arapoti,” *Folha de São Paulo*, 7/3/1983, 11.

four schools within Arapoti were chronically underfunded and did not provide enough of the legally-mandated school lunches—“the main reason why students come, since they have almost nothing to eat at home.” A farmer named João Carlos Turcatto observed that, “we never could have imagined being in a situation like this. We had good land [before Itaipu]. And all of a sudden we’re tossed onto lands that produce nothing ... INCRA totally abandoned us.”



FIGURE 5.4: “Ex-colonos de Itaipu agora passam fome em Arapoti,” *Folha de São Paulo*, 7/3/1983.

Similar to the negative attention from the previous December, the national exposure of Arapoti spurred an internal investigation. Unlike the previous report from the state government, the dictatorship’s main intelligence agency, the Serviço Nacional de Informações (SNI, National Information Service) conducted this new survey.⁸⁵ Along with describing the project’s glaring logistical problems, the study also revealed that because of Arapoti’s small and unproductive land plots, many farmers had left the project to seek work in nearby towns as itinerant laborers. This led to an increasingly negative perception of the farmers within the surrounding populations; inhabitants of nearby towns referred to people from Arapoti as “INCRA’s hobos”

⁸⁵ Confidential SNI Informação No. 130/17/AC/83, 8/8/1983, in: SNI ACE.3721/83. AN-RJ.

(*vagabundos*) or “INCRA’s slum-dwellers” (*favelados*). Despite INCRA’s stated mission of supporting rural Brazilians, its failed programs pushed farmers toward a life of urban poverty. Like the Brasiguaios in Paraguay and the settlers in northern Brazil, the families of Arapoti were left ungoverned by federal authorities.

The SNI report also reflected the unfolding political climate of *abertura*. While acknowledging Arapoti’s problems of poverty and hunger, the SNI noted that these issues only gained wider public awareness during the recent election period, “when the project became a center of attention for [candidates] who offered improvements in exchange for votes.”⁸⁶ Because political candidates appealed to Arapoti’s struggling farmers, the SNI report framed the demands of rural communities not as valid claims, but rather as the manipulation of opposition forces. As they had during the 1980 and 1981 land encampments, government authorities continued to deny farming communities the political legitimacy required to overcome the hardships created in large measure by the policies of the military regime itself.

In the following years as Brazil navigated the final phases of a return to democratic rule, conditions at Arapoti crumbled even further. Some families lost their lands when they defaulted on loans to the Banco do Brasil—money borrowed in part to cover costs incurred by the lack of government support.⁸⁷ The dry, unproductive lands continued to churn out underwhelming harvests and according to some inhabitants, INCRA failed to implement any long-term structural improvements.⁸⁸ By the end of 1985, some six months after the dictatorship handed over power to a new civilian government, Arapoti had become, in the words of one politician, “a rural favela.”⁸⁹ Agricultural failures and unemployment had brought about a level of poverty that

⁸⁶ Confidential SNI Informação No. 130/17/AC/83, 8/8/1983, 2. In: SNI ACE.3721/83. AN-RJ.

⁸⁷ “Colono de Arapoti pode perder terra,” *O Estado do Paraná*, 8/12/1983, 9.

⁸⁸ “Projeto Poti desaponta famílias de agricultores,” *O Estado do Paraná*, 11/2/1984.

⁸⁹ Confidential SNI Informe No. 096/130/AC/85, 11/4/1985, In: SNI ACE.53321/85. AN-RJ.

sparked petty and violent crimes, including five homicides. Nearly 100 families illegally broke their contracts with INCRA in order to abandon Arapoti. Those that stayed demanded the government find them new lands, a form of re-resettlement for farmers that had already gone through multiple stages of displacement and relocation.

Conclusion: Never to Return Home

The desire to abandon Arapoti underscores the enduring problem for farmers who after being uprooted by Itaipu tried to migrate elsewhere: the irreversible nature of the flood meant that even those able to leave resettlement initiatives had few options for where to go next. With their original lands under water and having lost confidence in federal authorities to provide adequate alternatives, many migrant farmers either continued to struggle in their current situation or they joined a growing trend of rural-to-urban migration and entered the informal economy in nearby cities. The growing population of *boias-frias* (itinerant day-laborers) further stigmatized farmers within Paraná society. The families sent to Bahia and Acre confronted an even harsher reality. Not only did they suffer from a similar lack of government support and bleak economic prospects, but they did so in inhospitable environments thousands of kilometers from their previous homes. Most did not have the financial means to leave and after a drawn-out process of resettlement, many likely stayed in the north simply because they had no other choice.

The challenges of returning home extended equally to the Brasiguaios farmers in Paraguay. The early 1980s saw the first concentrated examples of return migration to Brazil. This trend resulted largely from the previously analyzed land conflicts in which rural Paraguayans began occupying Brazilian-owned properties.⁹⁰ Compounded by the financial

⁹⁰ Albuquerque, *A Dinâmica das fronteiras*, 231.

hardships faced by the average Brasiguai, the backlash from local communities persuaded many to yearn for a return to Brazil. José Raimundo, a 68-year-old Brazilian immigrant living in eastern Paraguay, described his disenchantment with life as a Brasiguai: “Everything was an illusion. Now I only want to sell my five alquieres and return to die in [Brazil].”⁹¹ The process of returning, however, was far from simple. Upon their return to Brazil many farmers were shunned and seen as dangerous outsiders by political authorities and the landed elite, who feared that the Brasiguaies would return in large numbers to threaten the established social order.⁹² With no legal title to lands in Brazil, many returning Brasiguaies encountered the same challenges of unemployment and urban poverty facing farmers who had abandoned the Arapoti colony.

This dissertation has offered a counter-narrative to the vision of the Itaipu dam as a developmentalist triumph that ushered in an unprecedented era of prosperity for Brazilians. Not only did the dam fail to improve the lives of all citizens equally, but its impact extended far beyond supplying a new source of hydroelectric energy. Rather, Itaipu occupied a fundamental sphere in the dictatorship’s geopolitical and ideological goals. The experiences of the displaced farmers chronicled in this chapter reveal how small-farmers and peasants in western Paraná became a form of agricultural shock troops that the dictatorship could deploy and discard. This territorial expansion satisfied the military’s national security concerns by shoring up vulnerable frontiers while also dissolving potentially disruptive land conflicts in southern and central Brazil. Moreover, by redirecting rural migration westward into Paraguay and northward into Brazil’s internal border regions, the government initiated a program of frontier colonization that facilitated new forms of larger industrial agriculture.

⁹¹ “A ilusão brasileira no Paraguai,” *Folha de São Paulo*, 11/22/1981, 8.

⁹² Albuquerque, *A Dinâmica das fronteiras*, 229.

In the 1970s and 1980s, poor settler farmers functioned as some of the main vehicles for Brazil's territorial growth, though they rarely received government support or recognition. In Paraguay, Brasiguaios communities following the allure of cheap and fertile lands soon confronted a corrupt agrarian bureaucracy and animosity from distraught local Paraguayans. Within less than a decade, many Brasiguaios saw their own lands taken over by wealthy Brazilians who then established large-scale soy plantations. On the eastern banks of the Paraná River, thousands of farmers displaced by Itaipu journeyed north to INCRA's colonization projects. Once there, they confronted barren lands, diseases, and a chronic lack of state support. The Brazilian government exploited and abandoned both groups of rural Brazilians, leaving them to toil as men without a country.

As the poorest sector of the western Paraná countryside, these settler farmers had few avenues for contesting the development policies of the Brazilian state. Around this same time, however, the plight of farmers became a national issue. Conditioned by a history of rural struggle that predated the military regime, landless Brazilians used the context of *abertura* in the early 1980s to mobilize against the sorts of policies that allowed the government to exploit Brasiguaios and settler farmers with no consequences. The next chapter will now explore the renewed fight for agrarian reform that came together in the aftermath of the struggle at Itaipu and the emergence of a movement to defend the livelihoods of Brazil's landless workers.

Chapter Six

‘Land for Those Who Work it:’ MASTRO and a New Era of Agrarian Reform in Brazil

In late 1974 as Itaipu entered the initial phase of expropriations for the dam’s construction zone, *O Estado de São Paulo* observed that the “largest remaining concern in the future flood area has been solved.” Under a headline of “[The] landless will be compensated,” the article reported that those without property deeds would still receive 50 percent of the value of the land on which they currently worked.¹ For the thousands of landless families living in the western Paraná borderlands, this news offered the first public reassurance that Itaipu would include them in the expropriation process.² Even if the dam would irreversibly flood their homes, the prospect of receiving partial financial compensation might offer the chance to relocate on nearby lands. The statements made in 1974, however, proved the first in a long string of unfulfilled promises.

At almost no point in the following decade did Itaipu pay the landless and their demands went almost entirely ignored. This form of marginalization resulted from misleading federal policies and the actions of neighboring rural communities. Because most of the farmers in the Justice and Land Movement (MJT, Movimento Justiça e Terra) focused on winning higher prices for their legally owned properties, the initial movement against Itaipu largely silenced the landless voices. Lied to by the government and overlooked by a grassroots struggle that claimed

¹ “Posseiro será indenizado,” *O Estado de São Paulo*, 12/15/1974.

² As explained in the “Note on Orthography” at the start of this dissertation, I follow Clifford Welch’s use of the term “landless” to describe “agricultural wage workers, sharecroppers, small family farmers, migrant rural workers, and all others who pursued agricultural livelihoods without being owners of significant property or full-time employers of alienated labor.” (Clifford Welch, “Camponeses: Brazil’s Peasant Movement in Historical Perspective (1946-2004),” *Latin American Perspectives*, Vol. 36, No. 4, July 2009, 150, note 1).

to defend them, the landless soon mobilized around their own vision of agrarian rights that extended beyond the scope of both the Itaipu dam and the military dictatorship.

This chapter traces the history of the landless campaign that formed in the aftermath of the conflict at Itaipu, a group known as MASTRO—the Landless Workers Movement of Western Paraná (Movimento dos Trabalhadores Sem-Terra de Oeste do Paraná). MASTRO formed in July 1981, barely two months after the Justice and Land Movement demobilized at the Foz do Iguaçu protest camp. Rallying around the slogan of ‘land for those who work it,’ MASTRO fought exclusively for the region’s landless farmers. While the landed farmers framed their demands around financial compensation, the new landless movement sought to achieve larger goals of agrarian reform and the redistribution of land. This ideological shift translated into a diverging set of strategies. Whereas the earlier fight chose to stage encampments on the periphery of Itaipu’s offices, MASTRO led occupations on private and state-owned lands in which hundreds of individuals took up residence on abandoned and under-used properties.

Between 1981 and 1984 MASTRO counted almost 10,000 members and served as a central organizer of the 1984 founding conference of the Landless Workers Movement (MST, Movimento dos Trabalhadores Rurais Sem Terra) that has since become one of the largest social movements in the Western Hemisphere. Despite playing a key role in the MST’s formation, MASTRO has received relatively little attention from Anglophone scholars.³ Along with offering a prehistory of the MST, this chapter discusses the implications of why the landless farmers of MASTRO broke away from the initial fight at Itaipu. Moreover, it explores how a particular vision of agrarian rights positioned landless Brazilians to confront both the immediate realities of military rule while also preparing to maintain their fight in a potential democratic future.

³ For major works on the MST that do not discuss MASTRO, see fn 41, page 36 of this thesis.

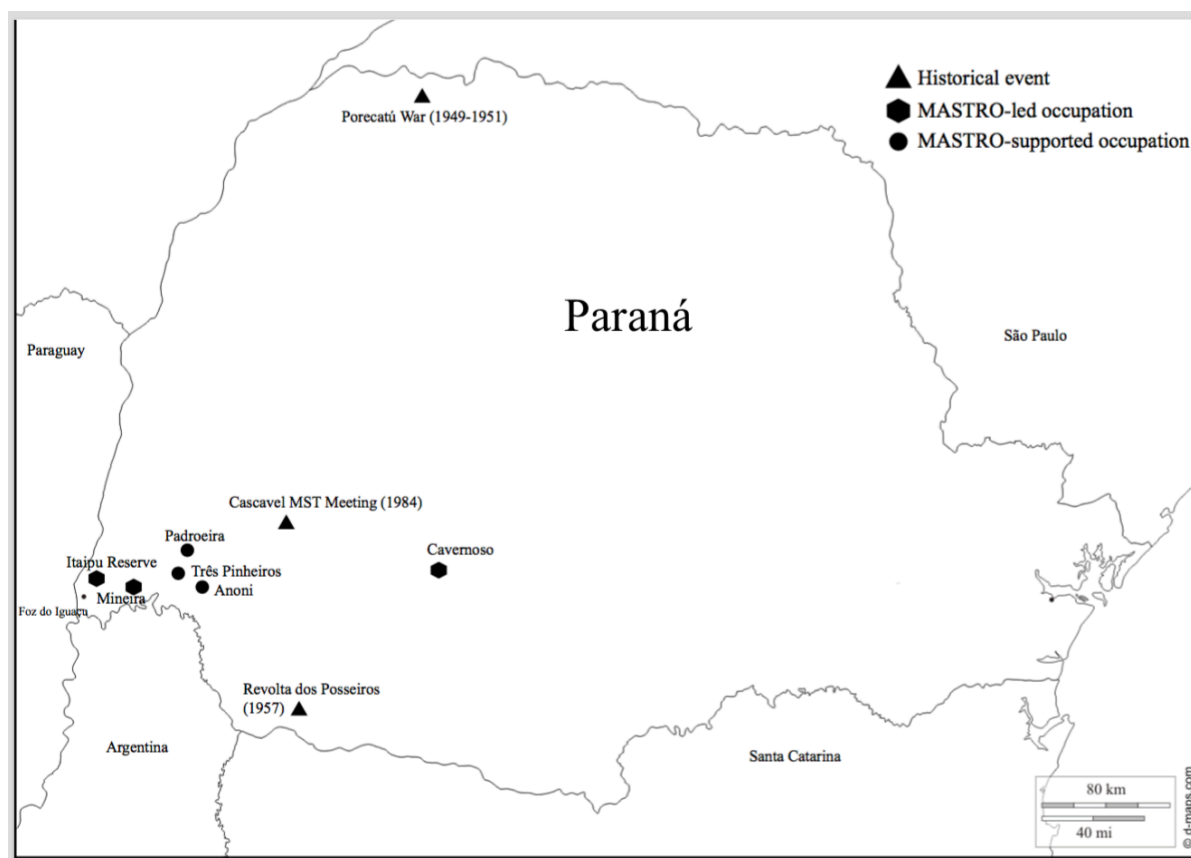


FIGURE 6.1: Map of MASTRO land occupations in western Paraná, 1983-1984. Image modified from www.d-maps.com.

This chapter focuses on six land occupations in western Paraná that began in 1983 and 1984. MASTRO played a supporting role in the first three cases on the Padroeira, Três Pinheiros, and Anoni farms, and served as the primary organizer for the remaining occupations of the Cavernoso and Mineira farms, and the Itaipu reserve. Four of the six occupations witnessed physical repression from either hired gunmen (responsible for two murders) or from state troopers (who beat, tortured, and harassed the farmers). The occupations lasted anywhere from a few weeks to multiple years, and two of them ultimately secured the legal titles to the lands in question and became *assentamentos*, or official settlement communities.⁴ Although MASTRO participated primarily in these six occupations, at least seven other actions occurred in western

⁴ Since the return to democratic rule in 1985, *assentamentos* have become the primary goal of MST land occupations, a process that even if successful can take up to two decades.

Paraná during this same period.⁵ The concentration of these occupations made the region one of the leading centers of landless mobilization in Brazil and helps explain why the MST held its founding conference in the nearby city of Cascavel.

In Brazil like throughout Latin America, the countryside included a wide range of groups from different regional, class, and ethnic backgrounds. With distinct histories of migration and labor processes, and drawing from personal interactions with both the Brazilian state and neighboring citizens, no two rural community categories were exactly alike. Variations across the Brazilian countryside enabled diverse groups to form distinct relationships with the land. In practice, these conceptions of land tenure led to what I theorize as the dialectic of land and socio-political legitimacy. Land expresses both material connections—such as title-holding, longevity of occupation, and improvements made—as well as deeper cultural values. In the case of the Itaipu conflict, the title-owning small-farmers considered land to be a source of *individual property* while the landless saw it as a basis for their *collective rights*. A third relationship discussed in Chapter Four concerns the Avá-Guarani's view of land as a *way of life*. These different perceptions resulted in different forms of social mobilization that, in turn, helped influence each group's legitimacy within Brazilian society.

Although the limitations of the original movement at Itaipu forced the landless to create an independent movement, the experience of confronting a central appendage of the dictatorship served as an important incubator of political consciousness. One man remembered the earlier land encampments as “the start of the fire that ignited everything, we didn't worry anymore. The

⁵ Other land occupations in western Paraná included the following farms: Giacomet-Marodim in Chopinzinho (1983), Quinhão 11 in Sertaneja (1983), Imaribo in Mangueirinha (1984), Rio das Cobras in Quedas do Sul (1984), Brilhante in Cascavel (1984) and Serra Igreja in Morretes (1984). Source: João Edmilson Fabrini, “Os assentamentos de trabalhadores rurais sem terra do centro-oeste/PR enquanto território de resistência camponesa,” PhD thesis, Universidade Estadual Paulista, 2002, 109; and Davi Felix Schreiner, “Entre a exclusão e a utopia: Um estudo sobre os processos de organização da vida cotidiana nos assentamentos rurais (região sudoeste/oeste do Paraná,” PhD thesis, University of São Paulo, 2002, 61.

people saw that they had rights.”⁶ Similarly, a former leader of MASTRO recalled that Itaipu provided a catalyst for agrarian reform since it created a “no alternative” situation for thousands of people with no other recourse after the 1982 flood.⁷ This observation suggests that if not for the scale of the Itaipu dam and its impact on the western Paraná countryside, subsequent rural struggles might have developed along a drastically different timeline.

Like farmers in the Paraná borderlands, many Brazilians lived a double-reality of *abertura*, the form of democratization they experienced as their immediate reality and the one they understood to predominate elsewhere in the country. Compared to the earlier conflict at Itaipu, the landless movements of the early 1980s represented an entirely distinct challenge to the status quo. Although the MJT encampments brought negative attention to Itaipu and the military regime, its leadership kept the movement within the existing boundaries of private property law. To be sure, the MJT’s allies helped turn the fight for fair expropriation into a referendum on the dictatorship. The focus on financial compensation, however, meant that once the government negotiated a settlement—and especially after Itaipu’s 1982 flood—the movement no longer posed a threat to mainstream society. In contrast, because the landless movements occupied private property and fought for the redistribution of land, they confronted waves of repression that rarely occurred elsewhere during Brazil’s official democratic transition.

In 1983 and 1984 two Paraná farmers were shot to death on land occupations organized by MASTRO and hundreds more were physically expelled from their homes. Violence against rural communities has predominated throughout Brazilian history, and although peasant movements had existed for many generations, grassroots landless struggles—with no explicit political affiliation—only began to organize at a national level in the context of *abertura*. With

⁶ “Pastel” Adriano, interview with author. 11/3/2014, Santa Terezinha, Paraná.

⁷ Delfino Becker, interview with author. 11/23/2014, Querência do Norte, Paraná.

democratic rule looming on the horizon, the prospect of an autonomous and unified rural campaign helps explain why these new challenges to private land holdings provoked violent responses from elite forces—both hired gunmen and state troopers.⁸ Despite occasional news coverage, landless occupations and the subsequent violence took place far from the public spotlight. The relative isolation of these events sets them apart from both the far more visible actions at Itaipu and from the paradigmatic opposition struggles of the time like the ABC labor strikes or the Diretas Já electoral campaign. While millions of people in Brazilian cities could denounce military rule with little fear of reprisal, thousands of impoverished families occupied remote areas of the countryside under constant threat of attack. More than just a static comparison of rural and urban protests, this chapter argues that although landless movements like MASTRO emerged in the climate of *abertura*, their long-term vision of agrarian reform positioned them beyond the mainstream parameters of Brazil's official democratic transition.

In the most immediate sense, MASTRO resulted from the MJT campaign at Itaipu. Its ideological roots, however, traced back to regional peasant movements prior to the dictatorship. These earlier struggles from the 1940s through the 1960s included uprisings within the state of Paraná and also the creation of rural organizations like the Movement of Landless Farmers (MASTER, Movimento dos Agricultores Sem Terra) in the southern state of Rio Grande do Sul. As a link between pre-dictatorship rural mobilizations and the post-*abertura* growth of the MST, MASTRO shows how the struggle for land developed as a process unmoored from any particular time period or form of government.

⁸ State troopers refers to the 'Polícia Militar,' a body that exists unaffiliated with the military. The Polícia Militar originated in the state militias prior to the dictatorship and although it mimics a military hierarchy, the state government controls it.

This chapter does not claim that MASTRO was the sole vehicle for keeping alive the lessons of previous rural struggles, as numerous movements under military rule also mobilized in defense of rural Brazilians.⁹ In particular, the Confederation of Agricultural Workers (CONTAG, Confederação Nacional dos Trabalhadores na Agricultura) made agrarian reform its “*bandeira de luta*,” or rallying flag.¹⁰ As we shall see, rural unions under dictatorship grew at unprecedented rates and won substantial benefits for its members. Given the context of military rule, the political scientist Biorn Maybury-Lewis celebrates the expansion of rural unionism as “the politics of the possible.”¹¹ The focus on wage increases and social welfare programs, however, kept the movement within a specific set of goals that did not always advocate for landless or precarious rural workers like those in MASTRO. With no formal affiliation to organized labor or political parties, and as a movement that emerged from the emblematic fight against the Itaipu dam, MASTRO offers a compelling and under-explored case study for understanding the meanings of land and mobilization. This chapter provides a new example of what historian Clifford Welch calls the “theme of rural worker agency in the making of modern Brazil.”¹²

⁹ For more on other rural mobilizations during Brazil’s dictatorship see José de Souza Martins. *A militarização da questão agrária no Brasil: terra e poder, o problema da terra na crise política*. (Petrópolis: Vozes, 1984); Maybury-Lewis, 1994; Leonilde Sérvo de Medeiros. *Reforma agrária no Brasil: História e atualidade da luta pela terra*. (São Paulo: Editora Fundação Perseu Abramo, 1996); Pereira, 1997; and Rogers, 2010).

¹⁰ Arilson Favareto, “Agricultores, Trabalhadores: Os trinta anos de novo sindicalismo rural no Brasil,” *Revista Brasileira de Ciências Sociais*, Vol. 21, No. 62, (October 2006): 30.

¹¹ In the context of the victories won by rural unions, the author defines “the politics of the possible” as “the capacity to evaluate and dodge repression, to use available political ‘space’ for keeping alive grassroots struggles, and to get around (and even turn to advantage) institutional rules designed to undermine labor initiatives.” (Maybury-Lewis, *The Politics of the Possible*, 2).

¹² Welch. *The Seed was Planted*, 4.

Background: the Legacies and Memories of Peasant Action

The 1974 *O Estado de São Paulo* article that opened this chapter resulted from a preemptive strategy to keep peasants from mobilizing against Itaipu's expropriation policies. By announcing that landless farmers would receive compensation, authorities displayed an acute awareness of the region's longer history of rural mobilization. With so much at stake in the construction of the world's largest hydroelectric dam, Itaipu and its allies in the military regime surely felt the need to avoid any repeats of the peasant uprisings that marked the Paraná countryside since the late 1940s. Two years before an organized farmers' movement took shape, public announcements from Itaipu already targeted landless workers. The attempt to avoid peasant unrest—whether by cooptation or coercion—showed the extent to which anxieties over earlier rural struggles factored into the development goals of Brazil's dictatorship.

The history of land struggles in Paraná closely links to the state's patterns of migration and agricultural expansion. Settler farmers first arrived in the region during the late 1930s as part of the "March to the West" initiated by President Getúlio Vargas.¹³ Sparked by high coffee prices and declining agricultural yields in the neighboring state of São Paulo, Paraná's population grew from approximately 1.2 million in 1940 to almost 7 million three decades later.¹⁴ This demographic expansion placed added pressure on the availability and price of land. From 1940 to 1960 the total amount of lands under cultivation nearly doubled and the per hectare price of land rose from Cr\$98 in 1940 to Cr\$674 in 1970.¹⁵

¹³ Although mostly linked to the frontier states of Mato Grosso and Goiás, Foweraker shows how the "March to the West" also involved the settlement of western Paraná. Joe Foweraker, *The Struggle for Land: a Political Economy of the Pioneer Frontier in Brazil from 1930 to the Present Day*. (Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 1981), 29.

¹⁴ Alston et al, *Titles, Conflict, and Land Use*, 5.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 131-132.

The initial growth in the early 1940s had been enabled by the policies of the state government. In order to incentivize the settlement of western and northern Paraná, the state offered unoccupied public lands with relatively little taxation or oversight. However, the end of Vargas' Estado Novo regime in 1945 saw a new governor take power in Paraná who shifted course by distributing massive amounts of public land for the creation of private estates. In the town of Porecatú, a conflict arose between the wealthy Lunardelli family and hundreds of local families over who had the right to live and work on nearly one hundred thousand acres of property. With the support of the Peasant Leagues (the rural branch of the Brazilian Communist Party, PCB), the farmers faced off in a violent standoff with the Lunardelli's hired gunman. Known as "the Porecatú War," the conflict lasted from 1949 to 1951 and resulted in the deaths of dozens of peasants, soldiers, and landowners.¹⁶ Six years later, the region also witnessed the Revolta dos Posseiros (Squatters Rebellion) in the city of Francisco Beltrão some two hundred kilometers west of the future Itaipu dam site. For the month of October 1957, landless workers seized control of the city and demanded the government expropriate the lands of several estates.¹⁷ Given extensive coverage in national news outlets (Figure 6.1), the Squatters Rebellion expanded on the momentum generated by the Porecatú War to establish a precedent—and from the perspective of the elite, a threat—of Paraná as a space of radicalized landless mobilization.¹⁸

¹⁶ For more on the Porecatú War, see Welch. *The Seed was Planted*, 129-139; Joaquim Carvalho da Silva, *Terra roxa de sangue: a guerra de Porecatu*. (Londrina: Editora UEL, 1996); and Angelo Priori, *O levante dos posseiros: a revolta camponesa de Porecatu e a ação do Partido Comunista Brasileiro no campo*, (Maringá, PR: EDUEM, 2011).

¹⁷ Iria Zanoni Gomes. *1957: a revolta dos posseiros*. (Curitiba, PR: Criar Edições, 1986).

¹⁸ An additional event in western Paraná, the "Uprising of 1961" in the town of Flor da Serra, saw a group of landless families occupied the properties of several colonization and timber extraction companies. (Antonio Marcos Myskiw, "Colonos, posseiros e grileiros: Conflitos de terra no Oeste Paranaense (1961/66)" Masters thesis, Universidade Federal Fluminense (UFF), 2002, 77-86)



FIGURE 6.2: Image of Revolta dos Posseiros, reproduced in Everly Pegoraro, “Um conflito em imagens: representações fotográficas da Revolta dos Posseiros de 1957,” *discursos fotográficos* Vol. 4, No. 5 (July-Dec 2008), 98.

For some farmers in western Paraná that would later belong to MASTRO, these earlier events served as personal and collective referents. Nildemar Silva, a leader of MASTRO in the early 1980s, holds strong memories of his family’s participation in the Revolta dos Posseiros. More than just an example of peasant radicalization, Silva saw the uprising as a victory that allowed landless farmers to remain in the region at a time of changing land relations and the rise of large agro-estates:

That history of rebellion and of the settler resistance that my family was part of, it was also very present, yeah, [in MASTRO.] We learned that the resistance would help us continue that process of struggle. Because if our families hadn’t resisted in the 50s, we definitely would’ve been expelled to other regions... [And for MASTRO,] people couldn’t take it any more, they had nothing left. And I think that with the construction of Itaipu, [it connected to] the Revolta dos Posseiros, with the resistance in southern Brazil, with the Porecatú War, I think that everyone was looking for the confidence to organize as families and to fight and make occupations to guarantee our rights.¹⁹

¹⁹ Nildemar Silva, interview with author. 11/3/2014, Assentamento Antonio Tavares, São Miguel do Iguaçu, Brazil.

Two decades before the creation of MASTRO a previous generation of landless movements began to push for agrarian reform. Responding, in part, to new laws under the Vargas regime that gave labor rights to farm workers, the Peasant Leagues—a front organization established by the PCB—emerged in the mid 1940s with dozens of organizations in Paraná, São Paulo, Rio de Janeiro, Minas Gerais, and Pernambuco.²⁰ For the case of Itaipu, the most influential of these early struggles was the Movement of Landless Farmers (MASTER) formed in the south-central region of Rio Grande do Sul in the early 1960s. With the support of the state's populist governor, Leonel Brizola, MASTER led a series of land occupations between 1962 and 1964, when the military coup resulted in the imprisonment or exile of many rural leaders.²¹ Gabriel Ondetti credits MASTER with popularizing the strategy of direct occupations and for establishing the social identity of the landless rural worker that allowed future movements to take on their “most massive organized expression in the smallholder-dominated areas of southern Brazil.”²² MASTER brought unprecedented attention to the issue of landlessness and helps explain the inspiration behind the ideological framework—and even the name—of MASTRO in the early 1980s.

Militant rural movements in the 1950s and 1960s presented a growing challenge to the landed elites' stronghold on political and economic power in the Brazilian countryside. Pushed

²⁰ Welch, “Camponeses,” 129. For more on the Peasant Leagues, see Clodomir Santos de Moraes, “Peasant Leagues in Brazil,” in *Agrarian Problems and Peasant Movements in Latin America*, edited by Rodolfo Stavenhagen (New York: Doubleday, 1970), 453-501; and José de Souza Martins, *Os camponeses e a política no Brasil* (Petrópolis: Vózes, 1981), 21-102. Most scholarly work on the Peasant Leagues focuses on movements in the northeast, examples include Florencia E. Mallon, “Peasants and Rural Laborers in Pernambuco, 1955-1964,” *Latin American Perspectives*, Vol. 5 No. 4 (Fall 1978): 49-70; and Pereira, *The End of Peasantry*, esp. 3-32, 63-65, 165.

²¹ Master was founded by Milton Serres Rodrigues, the mayor of Encruzilhada do Sul, who had the support of Governor Brizola. Marcelo. Both men belonged to the Brazilian Workers' Party (PTB, Partido Trabalhista Brasileiro. (Marcelo Carvalho Rosa, “Sem-terra: os sentidos e as transformações de uma categoria de ação coletiva no Brasil,” *Lua Nova*, No. 76 (2009): 200-207).

²² Ondetti, *Land, Protest, and Politics*, 79, 13.

forward by this grassroots pressure, President João Goulart advocated for rural workers and displayed a willingness to enact far-reaching agrarian reform. According to Clifford Welch, the combination of popular militancy and support from Goulart provided an impetus for the dictatorship's 1964 coup.²³ With the start of military rule, a new wave of repression swept over the Brazilian countryside.

In the infancy of Brazil's dictatorship, the government followed through on its anti-communist rhetoric by taking a hardline approach to dealing with potential rural unrest. At the national level this manifested as a prolonged effort to root out any seeds of Cuba-inspired guerrilla warfare, such as the Araguaia War in the late 1960s and early 1970s when ten thousand soldiers fought against roughly sixty guerrilla fighters in the northern jungles of Goiás.²⁴ Along with overt state actions, the repression of Brazil's countryside also included the normalization of local-level abuses. The use of hired thugs known as *jagunços* or *grileiros* served as a long-standing tactic of landed elites seeking to force peasant farmers off their land. Yet the violent displacement of rural families appears to have accelerated under military rule. In western Paraná, for example, armed men consistently harassed and beat landless peasants, threatening to shoot them or burn down their houses. The holdings of the Public Archive of Paraná—specifically the files from the DOPS secret police, Departamento de Ordem Política e Social—offer numerous

²³ Welch points in particular to a speech on March 13, 1964—two weeks before the eventual military coup—given by President Goulart to almost 200,000 people that advocated for radical agrarian reform. General Castello Branco, who would soon serve as the first military president, remembers hearing Goulart's speech and feeling motivated to get even more involved in planning the coup. (Welch, *The Seed was Planted*, 333)

²⁴ Souza Martins, *A militarização da questão agrária no Brasil*, 51-53.

cases of hired *jagunços* attacking small-scale farmers indicate every year between 1969 and 1973.²⁵ In certain instances, local politicians allegedly paid the assailants.²⁶

In the repressive climate of authoritarian rule from 1964 to 1985, the rural trade union movement paradoxically grew to over nine million members, making it the single largest category of organized workers in all of Brazil and one of the largest labor groups in all of Latin America.²⁷ The expansion of rural unions in Brazil stands in contrast to what occurred in neighboring Latin American countries during their respective dictatorships. Before the 1973 coup of Augusto Pinochet, Chile had 850 rural unions with roughly 250,000 members; by 1981, however, that number dropped to 348 unions and 27,000 members. In Argentina, the percentage of unionized rural workers dropped 15 percent between the early 1960s and the late 1980s.²⁸ Overseen by labor federations such as CONTAG, the rise of unions in Brazil linked closely to programs initiated by the dictatorship itself, above all the Rural Assistance Fund (FUNRURAL, Fundo de Assistência Rural) that extended medical coverage and social services to workers in the countryside.²⁹ Although FUNRURAL delivered many tangible benefits to rural workers, it also helped transform unions into “a creature of the military regime, although not entirely a tame one” where corruption became a common trait amongst the co-opted leadership.³⁰ Despite the

²⁵ “Documentos sobre ‘gang’ de grileiros e corruptos do sudoeste do Paraná,” report sent to the Secretaria de Segurança Pública do Estado do Paraná, 1969-1970.; “‘Jagunços’ voltaram a atacar no sudoeste,” *Tribuna*, 9/25/1972, 5; “Paraná: o temor aos posseiros,” *Folha de São Paulo*, 10/29/1972; “Problemas de terra,” No. 219/73-CISESP/DI, 8/1/1973. All files in PT 159A.15A, APP.

²⁶ Polícia Militar do Estado do Paraná, Informação No. 026 PM/2/69, “Problemas de terras no sudoeste,” 5/7/1969. In PT 159A.15A, Source: APP.

²⁷ Statistics come from Maybury-Lewis, *The Politics of the Possible*, 12.

²⁸ *Ibid.*

²⁹ Welch, “Camponeses,” 138.

³⁰ Welch writes that the FUNRURAL enabled some unions “it allowed some rural unions “to become corrupt fiefdoms, as payroll deductions obliged workers to contribute to FUNRURAL while the unions themselves banked the money and decided who was eligible for services. It was a purely corporatist system, a perfect fit for the hierarchical union structure the pre-*golpe* movement had helped build.” Welch, *The Seed Was Planted*, 359.

advances of formal rural unions, their connections to the dictatorship obviated a deeper challenge to the legitimacy of military rule.

Once opposition forces began to loosen the military's grip on power in the mid-1970s, grassroots rural movements—much like civil society more broadly—began to reassert its demands. As discussed in Chapter Three, peasants staged a land occupation in 1979 on the Natalino Farm in Rio Grande do Sul.³¹ The protesters stood firm and eventually won the appropriation of 1,870 hectares of land for over 160 families. Similar occupations occurred throughout southern Brazil in the early 1980s, suggesting the emergence of landless workers as both an increasingly visible sector of the population and a distinct social force.³²

Like other agrarian reform movements of the late dictatorship period, MASTRO invoked the military's own laws as a basis for its political and legal legitimacy. Specifically, MASTRO sought to invert and redeploy the meanings of the 1964 Rural Land Statute (ET, Estatuto da Terra). The military regime passed the ET almost immediately after it seized power. Written as a prerequisite for participating in the programs and financing opportunities of the Alliance for Progress, the dictatorship intended the ET to regiment land reform and pacify the rural labor and movements that had radicalized at the end of João Goulart's presidency. José de Souza Martins shows that this agrarian reform served the military's aim of expanding capital industry in the countryside and deflating political struggles for land.³³ During this period governments in certain Latin America countries also initiated similar policies under the belief that the concentration of land among the lower classes provided “an incubator of revolution” and an inefficient use of both

³¹ It should be noted that land occupations were also staged in other Latin American countries during the second half of the 1970s, most notably the “tomas” in Chile and Peru.

³² The Comissão Camponesa da Verdade (Peasant's Truth Commission) offers an especially useful resource for the study of rural mobilization and repression during under Brazil's dictatorship. (Comissão Camponesa da Verdade: Relatório final, violações de direitos no campo, 1946-1988. Brasília, 2014)

³³ Souza Martins. *A militarização da questão agrária no Brasil*, 32.

land and labor.³⁴ For Brazil, Wendy Wolford explains that although the law contained “extremely progressive [policies] on paper,” the dictatorship never implemented it as written. Instead, the ET enabled the government’s relocation of over 200,000 families from northeastern and southern Brazil to the savannahs of the Center West and the Amazon Basin, a process detailed in Chapter Five.³⁵

Although the military government tried to dictate the terms of agrarian reform, rural Brazilians consistently invoked certain aspects of the ET to defend their own vision of agrarian change.³⁶ MASTRO mainly focused on two clauses of the Land Statute. Article 18 authorized land expropriation for the “social good” and also required the rational management of properties. Article 28 allowed for the transfer of property owned by individuals who “employ predatory activities and refuse to implement standards for the conservation of natural resources” and in areas “with high concentrations of tenant farmers, sharecroppers and squatters.”³⁷ Although rarely followed in practice, these laws provided groups like MASTRO with the language of state policies to formulate an alternative approach to agrarian reform.

Along with the limitations of the MJT campaign at Itaipu, MASTRO also formed as a reaction to recent changes in Brazil’s agricultural economy. Throughout the 1970s export crops increasingly displaced food crops and agriculture became more industrialized. The mechanization of agriculture in Paraná, for instance, led to a growing reliance on tractors, an expensive piece of machinery that also implied a new focus on single crop production. In 1970 there were roughly 18,000 tractors on Paraná farms; by 1980 that figure more than quadrupled to

³⁴ Jacques Chonchol. “Land Tenure and Development in Latin America.” In Claudio Veliz. 1985. *Obstacles to Change in Latin America*. (London: Oxford University Press), 83.

³⁵ Wolford, *This Land is Ours Now*, 45.

³⁶ Medeiros, *História dos Movimentos Sociais no Campo*, 91.

³⁷ As reproduced in *Nosso Tempo*, 5/5/83, 7.

over 79,000.³⁸ During the same period (1970-1980), almost 100,000 rural properties disappeared in Paraná, either from state expropriations or the consolidation of agricultural estates.³⁹

Rosemary Thorp shows that Brazil's large internal debt in the early 1980s caused inflation to skyrocket and placed severe financial burdens on the lower classes; 73 percent of Brazil's rural population at this time lived in poverty.⁴⁰ MASTRO thus launched its campaign for agrarian reform in this context of a drastically changing countryside.

Progress and Limitations within the Justice and Land Movement

Although the MJT marginalized the landless farmers within its ranks, the movement's leadership did include the landless demands at certain moments in the fight against Itaipu. When the movement published its first major declaration in October 1978—an open letter to Brazil's President Ernesto Geisel—the 15-point list included the demand that “Squatters receive at least 50 percent of the land's value, in accordance with the initial promise of Itaipu Binational.”⁴¹ Perhaps this inclusion resulted from the young movement needing to attract as many people as possible, or maybe farmers were simply more optimistic early on that they could achieve a wider range of goals. Over the course of the movement, however, the MJT leadership redirected its goals and the concern for the landless workers declined.

As shown in Chapter Three, a turning point in the silencing of landless voices came during the 1980 land encampment in Santa Helena. During the MJT's negotiations with Itaipu, the farmers' leadership decided to stop pushing for an increasingly popular demand of “land-for-

³⁸ Leandro Baller, “Fronteira e fronteiriços: A construção das relações sociais e culturais entre brasileiros e paraguaios (1954-2014).” PhD thesis, Universidade Federal da Grande Dourados (UFGD), 2014, 245.

³⁹ Souza Martins. *A militarização da questão agrária no Brasil*, 99.

⁴⁰ Rosemary Thorp. *Progress, Poverty and Exclusion: An Economic History of Latin America in the Twentieth Century*. (Washington: Inter-American Development Bank, 1998), 255.

⁴¹ “O que os colonos querem de Itaipu,” *Hoje*, 11/2/1978, 4.

land” that would have granted the displaced families new tracts of nearby land instead of simply receiving financial compensation. Rather than the existing expropriation structure based on financial transactions, land-for-land implied the redistribution of land and a new government approach to agrarian reform. One of the movement’s early leaders, Carlos Grillmann, recalled the missed opportunity and the complicated nature of the land-for-land question:

Well that was a huge compromise, it was an issue that in the end lost [the leadership] a lot of internal support. Because it had been a political question and when money gets involved it’s complicated to keep the struggle. And there was also the question of urgency and needing to bow to the situation, because the [Itaipu] project was about to come, it was almost done. And that land-for-land also needed more time, to see if maybe with a slower expropriation process. But maybe if the movement had started a few years earlier, say four or five years before ... it would’ve been enough time to go more into that, but there wasn’t enough time. It was too fast.⁴²

Despite the growing momentum behind land-for-land, the 1980 Santa Helena accord between the MJT and Itaipu made no mention of the landless.⁴³ Although the MJT leadership secured a “gentleman’s agreement” to compensate the landless at “a fair price,” no deal ever officially materialized.⁴⁴ In the aftermath of these decisions, the landless workers continued to face marginalization from Itaipu, from the Brazilian government, and within their own movement.

There are numerous reasons why this process of social silencing took place. First, as Itaipu’s November 1982 flood loomed closer, pressure mounted for the MJT to achieve the largest number of victories for the largest portion of its membership. Landed farmers who took part in the MJT and received financial compensation from Itaipu echoed this sense of urgency. Adil Fochezatto, for example, said that “we had to accept because we had no other option, the

⁴² Carlos Grillmann, interview with author, 10/22/2014, Foz do Iguaçu.

⁴³ “Ata da reunião realizada em Itaipu em 27/07/80,” R2135.901-904, CDIB.

⁴⁴ “Posseiros também assegura direitos,” *Poeira*, No. 12, July/August 1980, 11.

water was going to rise and [Itaipu] would have kicked us out anyways.”⁴⁵ Another woman recalled that “if we didn’t leave really quickly, the water would have taken everything, even us.”⁴⁶ The smaller size of the landless sector, both in terms of population numbers and influence, likely influenced the MJT leadership to focus on more attainable goals that would benefit a greater number of people.⁴⁷

Moreover, the support from opposition forces connected to the national *abertura* meant that the farmers’ movement at Itaipu included an increasingly political dynamic. Although the *abertura* broadened the MJT’s reach and helped expand the political consciousness of its members, the attention it received changed the scope of the fight at Itaipu. As previously discussed, with the eyes of Brazil fixed on farmers in western Paraná it became politically risky for the MJT to advocate the sort of structural agrarian reform that would have benefitted the landless. Instead, at a time when Brazilians throughout the country tested the limits of political legitimacy, the MJT leadership chose to focus their demands on the immediate question of financial indemnification. The climate of *abertura* helped frame the MJT as a legitimate struggle

⁴⁵ Adil Fochezatto, interview with author. 11/14/2014, Santa Helena Velha.

⁴⁶ Dona Suita, interview with author, 11/16/2014, Santa Helena.

⁴⁷ Because Itaipu’s expropriation statistics only counted those with legal title, it is impossible to know exactly how many landless families were impacted. The official number of people affected was an estimated 40,000. As shown in Chapter Two, Guiomar Germani calculates that the actual number is between 42,000 and 43,000. But even Germani’s estimations (extrapolated from census data in 1970 and 1975) do not include the squatters, day-laborers and itinerant rural workers who were forced off their lands and might have left the region without being accounted for by Itaipu or the government. Moreover, Itaipu’s official numbers use the unit of “families” (meaning individual expropriation cases) rather than the total number of people on a given plot of land. Itaipu’s official calculation is of 8,500 families: 1,600 urban and 6,900 rural. Itaipu’s only official acknowledgement of the landless comes from its statistics (as shown in Chapter Five) of the 4,082 people sent to the three agrarian colonization projects. Two close observers at the time offer their estimates for how many landless Brazilians were impacted by Itaipu. Miguel Isloar Sávio, one of MASTRO’s leaders, said that among the 6,900 displaced rural families, between 30 and 40 percent were landless. (Miguel Isloar Sávio, interview with Davi Schreiner, 10/15/1996, São Miguel do Iguaçu. Interview transcript courtesy of Davi Schreiner). The journalist Juvêncio Mazzarollo, on the other hand, places the number at 20%. (Mazzarollo, *A Taipa da injustiça*, 49). Using a conservative middle figure of 25%, and based off Germani’s calculation that the 6,900 rural families represented 38,455 total people, one can estimate a baseline of roughly 9,500 landless people. Subtracting the 4,082 individuals sent to resettlement projects, it is fair to suggest that between 5,000 and 6,000 displaced people were not accounted for in Itaipu’s statistics. As such, rather than the official estimate of 40,000, or even Germani’s approximation of 42,000, the number might more accurately be in the range of between 46,000 and 48,000.

of downtrodden farmers confronting an unjust appendage of the military government. The movement's leadership and allies likely feared that a change in narrative could lose the battle for public opinion and thus jeopardize the prospects of winning tangible victories.

The simultaneous development of political consciousness and social marginalization within the MJT further exemplifies the double-reality of *abertura*. The meanings of land and opposition held by the region's landless peasants originated prior to the start of military rule, yet the confrontation with Itaipu—a powerful symbol of a repressive dictatorship—placed struggles in the early 1980s within a national framework of democratization. Despite their presence in a movement linked to *abertura*, landless farmers in western Paraná remained on the outside of the political changes taking root. Although these landless Brazilians saw their vision for the future as part of the *abertura*'s broader rhetoric of democratic rights, their marginalized status in both mainstream society and within existing rural movements presented a far different reality.

The exclusion of landless workers resulted from diverging perceptions of land, what I theorize as the dialectic of land and socio-political legitimacy. The title-owning small-farmers considered land a source of *individual property* while the landless saw it as a foundation of their *collective rights*. These different conceptions of land led to distinct forms of social mobilization. A telling example comes from the final stages of the Foz do Iguaçu protest in April 1981 when the MJT conducted a survey of the entire camp to gauge potential steps moving forward. Responses included proposals to block all entrances to the dam with tractors, to have children and women invade Itaipu's headquarters, and even to halt construction all together.⁴⁸ Although the survey did not specify the background of respondents, we can infer that the suggestions for

⁴⁸ "Roteiro para reuniões por barraca," included in Confidential AESI informação E/AESI.G/IB/BR/021/81, 3. File: SNI ACE.892/81Source: AN-RJ. The results of this intra-camp survey were made public and covered in many news outlets, ex: "Agricultores de Itaipu divulgam novas táticas," *Diário do Paraná*, 4/9/1981, 4.

more direct action came from the landless members of the MJT. The movement never implemented any of these strategies and focused instead on brokering a deal for the best financial concessions. When the MJT reached an agreement with Itaipu in early May, the landed farmers could celebrate the victory of a significant price increase. The landless, however, won no tangible gains and many soon relocated to faraway agrarian projects in northern Brazil.

The different relationships to land held by these two sectors of the Paraná countryside impacted not only the strategies employed at the time, but also the ways in which the movement has since been remembered. One landed farmer who used his compensation package from Itaipu to establish a thriving agricultural business recalled that Itaipu paid everyone, even those without legal deeds.⁴⁹ Many of the property-owning farmers justified their actions as a defense of the lands they had purchased and invested money in over many years. In the initial fight against Itaipu, these landed farmers often told stories about how their families had arrived in the region, bought land, cleared the forest, and settled a previously barren and wild landscape—selectively blind to the existence of nearby indigenous communities. Dona Suita, a woman now in her early 60s, spoke about her family’s motivation for taking part in the MJT: “We bought it and paid for it. If it had been a question of land invasions, that’s one thing, but we had bought [our land].”⁵⁰ By this logic, those who did not own their land had less legitimacy to take a stand against Itaipu.

Despite the limits placed on landless participation in the MJT, many eventual members of MASTRO still look back on the initial fight at Itaipu as a fundamental moment in a new social awakening. One tenant farmer stated that “The main thing Itaipu taught us was the capacity that us peasants have to resist.”⁵¹ Another woman linked the MJT’s protests to the rise of popular

⁴⁹ Mario Noro, interview with author, 11/14/2014. Santa Helena Velha, Brazil.

⁵⁰ Dona Suita, interview with author, 11/16/2014, Santa Helena, Brazil.

⁵¹ Itamar de Silva, interview with author, 11/3/2014, assentamento Antonio Tavares, São Miguel do Iguaçu, Brazil.

struggles, saying that “the Santa Helena encampment was the seed of everything, that’s where it all started and the encampment was where the Church got involved and where the farmers learned to fight.”⁵² These sorts of positive attachments did not form only in hindsight; during the MJT’s campaign at Itaipu, certain groups already recognized the potential for a larger and more direct movement. After visiting the government’s proposed Bahia resettlement project in August 1980, Marcelo Barth reported back to the MJT farmers about the deplorable conditions found in the north. Barth stressed the need to take extreme action if Itaipu continued to ignore their demands. At the general assembly that followed, Barth helped craft the following declaration:

We consider our expulsion from western Paraná an undeserved and unattainable exile; the lands for sale [here] in the region are reaching absurd levels; we know that there are enough areas of land in this region to resettle all of us; we demand the immediate appropriation of this area, and that the same law be used that authorized the President of the Republic to decree the [initial] expropriation of our lands. We will wait only 30 days for a satisfactory response; at the end of that time we will occupy the lands of our own choosing... [even] if it becomes necessary to occupy with force.⁵³

Although the MJT rarely included these approaches in its official declarations, the demand of land expropriation and the willingness to stage occupations existed as a consistent, if often overlooked, undercurrent of the MJT. And in the aftermath of the initial fight—once Itaipu no longer served as the main enemy—a movement emerged that expanded on the lessons of the previous struggle to mobilize for agrarian reform and the defense the landless livelihoods.

The Creation of MASTRO

On the heels of the MJT campaign against Itaipu, a new group formed that played a key role in reshaping the landscape of agrarian struggles in Brazil: the Movement of Landless Workers of

⁵² Wife of Afio Genaro, interview with author, 11/16/2014 assentamento Antonio Tavares, São Miguel do Iguaçu, Brazil.

⁵³ “Terra por terra,” *Poeira* No. 13, September 1980, 15.

Western Paraná (MASTRO). Juvêncio Mazzarollo writes that MASTRO was officially founded at a meeting in São Miguel do Iguaçu on September 2, 1981.⁵⁴ Conversely, Maria de Fátima Ribeiro claims that MASTRO did not form until May 1982.⁵⁵ Both authors are incorrect. A lengthy article in a July 1981 issue of *Nosso Tempo* discussed the newly created MASTRO.⁵⁶ Although the report does not indicate exactly when the group launched, it describes a movement with a defined platform and set of goals. More than just revising an historiographic inaccuracy, this intervention shows that by the middle of 1981 MASTRO already existed as an established organization. This means that barely two months removed from the Foz do Iguaçu encampment, a new movement took shape that served as both a continuation and a challenge to the previous struggle against Itaipu.

Having learned from the earlier experience at Itaipu where a connection to national politics limited the movement's ability to escalate, landless farmers envisioned MASTRO as an autonomous organization with no political affiliation. A form of rotating leadership allowed members to voice their own experiences and influence the movement's decisions.⁵⁷ Although certain farmers took on more visible roles than others, in theory MASTRO existed as a leaderless movement. One participant, Afonso Camer, remembers how farmers drew lessons from other rural struggles, both the MJT fight at Itaipu and earlier examples like the 1896 Canudos War in northeastern Brazil: "Canudos became a very interesting history [for MASTRO], where Antonio Conselheiro was a leader that brought together a bunch of people. But when the leader died, the movement ended. So that was the risk... If they kill the leader the movement goes away."⁵⁸

⁵⁴ Mazzarollo, *A Taipa da injustiça*, 146.

⁵⁵ Ribeiro, *Memórias do concreto*, 50, note 8.

⁵⁶ "Movimento dos agricultores sem terra," *Nosso Tempo*, 7/29/1981, 12.

⁵⁷ Leozil Ribeiro de Moraes Junior. "Mastro: A formação do movimento dos agricultores sem terra do oeste do Paraná (1970-1990). (Masters thesis, Universidade Estadual do Oeste do Paraná-UNIOESTE, 2010), 25-63

⁵⁸ Afonso Camer, interview with author, 11/3/2014, Medianeira, Paraná.

MASTRO never quite existed as a leaderless movement; along with the larger roles played by certain individuals, the group also received logistical support from local branches of the Syndicate of Rural Workers (STR, Sindicato dos Trabalhadores Rurais).⁵⁹ The goal of non-affiliation, however, underscores the effort to create a more responsive and sustainable organization.

Above all, MASTRO aimed to bring about an agrarian reform that was “total, complete, immediate.” Denouncing the expulsion of small-holders by large estates, MASTRO blamed the government for selling land to the wealthy in a process they called “directed colonization.” Along with demanding access to land, MASTRO also identified the presence of agro-industries as a primary source of problems, displaying a shifting awareness of ‘the enemy’ away from Itaipu and toward private enterprise in general.⁶⁰ A selection from MASTRO’s anthem reflects the direction and character of the fledging movement:

So much land abandoned / Beautiful land unplanted
So much land in few hands / So many people who have nothing
Sacred calloused hands / Whose table lacks bread.⁶¹

MASTRO’s first regional assembly took place on September 2, 1981 with roughly 60 people meeting at the Syndicate of Rural Workers in the town of São Miguel do Iguaçu, located 40 kilometers east of Foz do Iguaçu.⁶² Within a month of the first regional assembly, MASTRO grew to include 1,780 registered members in 22 groups across three municipalities in western Paraná. As MASTRO continued to expand throughout the region, both the Federal Police and the National Information Service (SNI, Serviço Nacional de Informações) began to monitor the

⁵⁹ The three STR’s were all located in western Paraná: São Miguel do Iguaçu, Santa Helena, and Medianeira.

⁶⁰ “Movimento dos agricultores sem terra,” *Nosso Tempo*, 7/29/1981, 12.

⁶¹ Mazarollo, *A Taipa da injustiça*, 151.

⁶² “1a ata,” 9/2/1981. SNI ACE.2632/82, AN-RJ. For a history of the Sindicato dos Trabalhadores Rurais-São Miguel do Iguaçu, see Flaviane Mônica Christ, “Memórias, projetos e lutas na formação histórica do Sindicato dos Trabalhadores Rurais de São Miguel do Iguaçu/PR (1970-2009),” Master’s thesis, UNIOESTE-Marechal Cândido Rondon, 2010.

group.⁶³ One report remarked on the broadening membership base, writing that MASTRO “does not seek to only attract farmers; the leadership explained that anyone with ‘an agrarian background’ can join the movement, since its vision is ‘more people, more strength.’”⁶⁴

A survey conducted of MASTRO in 1982 provides a closer look at the organization’s membership.⁶⁵ Although it only counted 688 of the over 6,000 members, the survey sheds light on the movement’s general demographics. The overwhelming majority of MASTRO members (96%) were male, 69% were married, and the average age was 35-years-old. Survey respondents reported 21 different categories of employment, most commonly day-laborer (29%), squatter (17%), informal worker (15%), and share-cropper (11%). In another sign of MASTRO’s broad reach, however, smaller sectors also included fisherman, domestic worker, and waiter. In terms of education, only 16% of respondents had completed primary school and another 14% were illiterate. The final category of data concerned region of origin. Most came from the southern states of Santa Catarina and Rio Grande do Sul (combined 53%), though the remaining members came from an additional eleven states throughout Brazil including Paraná, Bahia, Ceará, São Paulo, Sergipe, Pernambuco and Minas Gerais. From this survey we can construct the picture of an average MASTRO member as a young adult male, married and likely with children, with little if any education, and having immigrated from either the southern countryside or the northern regions of Brazil. Although the demographics of this survey did not differ drastically from the participants in the previous Justice and Land Movement, one fundamental characteristic distinguished the members of MASTRO: whereas those who received financial indemnification

⁶³ Examples of state surveillance include DPF Pedido No. 130/81, in BR.AN.BSB.ED.03.4, p. 50/57, October 1981. Source: AN-RJ; and SNI Report on MASTRO, 0143/116/ACT/81, 11/23/1981. Source: APP.

⁶⁴ Polícia militar do estado do Paraná, Informe No. 763/81-PN/2, in SNI ACE.2632/82. 12/21/1981. Source: AN-RJ.

⁶⁵ Survey statistics come from “Levantamento de agricultores sem terra,” no date. Source: office of Sindicato dos Trabalhadores Rurais-São Miguel do Iguaçu, hereafter STR-SMI. Although no date is marked on the survey files themselves, another document suggests that MASTRO conducted the survey between late 1981 and early 1982. “MASTRO em 28/1/1982,” STR-SMI.

from Itaipu had owned an average of 15 hectares of land, farmers in MASTRO were almost exclusively landless.⁶⁶

In early 1982 the scope of MASTRO's meetings began to change. Government surveillance reports suggest that MASTRO started to discuss which farms in the region could be sites for direct action protests. According to state security forces, MASTRO had researched potential properties to occupy and knew, for example, how many brothers of a particular family owned a farm in Santa Helena, when they had inherited it from their father, and exactly how many hectares they controlled.⁶⁷ MASTRO did not stage any land occupations until the following year, but their preparations to do so less than six months after the movement's creation shows a clear initiative. As the group held internal discussions for larger protests, it also began appealing to national politicians. A letter to the federal senators in February 1982 outlined the movement's four main goals: land in Paraná; new policies to protect the legal and contractual rights of rural workers; more availability of farm credits and loans; and new systems for acquiring land.⁶⁸ With the November 1982 elections on the horizon—one of the most tangible advances yet of the *abertura*'s official transition to civilian rule—it appears likely that although unaffiliated with any political party, MASTRO nonetheless saw the utility in using political allies and the context of democratization as a way to garner support and media attention.

By May, what had initially started as a small group of farmers had become a full-fledged movement that counted over 6,600 members.⁶⁹ Earlier government surveillance tended to only

⁶⁶ Statistics on Itaipu's expropriations come from Bento Ribeiro, *Memórias do Concreto*, 28. Although most MASTRO members were landless, a few participants owned very small tracts of land. In the above-cited survey, 8 people (1.2%) were categorized as small-farmers. And MASTRO allowed also farmers with less than six alqueires of land to join. (Source: "1a ata," 9/2/1981. SNI ACE.2632/82, AN-RJ.)

⁶⁷ "Atividades de MASTRO na região oeste do estado do Paraná," Informe No. 052-82-PM/2-PMPR, in "Questões de terras do oeste do Paraná e sudoeste," No. 003496, APP.

⁶⁸ Open letter to the Senate Agricultural Commission, Brasília. 2/27/1982, Of. No. 059/82. Source: STR-SMI.

⁶⁹ Letter to Valter da Costa Reis, Chefe Geral do SNI, from José Guilherme Cavagnari, Coordenador Regional, INCRA/PR, 3/12/1982, Of. INCRA-4(02) No. 225. Source: SNI ACE.2632/82, AN-RJ.

provide basic details on MASTRO, but the movement's growth seemed to provoke a new sense of alarm. Along with chronicling when and where MASTRO held its meetings over the previous nine months, an SNI report in May offered three broader conclusions: "MASTRO has energized the hope for resettlement within the region of western Paraná. The movement can spread to other cities, increasing the risk of the invasions already being planned. [And] the movement has political and electoral connotations, undermining the public image of the government."⁷⁰ A similar SNI memo later elaborated by describing MASTRO as "a movement conditioned to be used by subversive organizations to create centers of agitation in the countryside."⁷¹ As democratization loomed on the horizon, MASTRO represented an emerging form of grassroots dissent positioned against both the dictatorship and the long-term inequalities of Brazilian society.

Over the following months MASTRO increased its presence in a budding national movement. First, the group held its largest event to-date, convening over 4,000 people in the town of Medianeira and crafting a declaration titled "The Shout of the Landless" (*O grito dos sem-terra*).⁷² In emphasizing the need for access to land, the document called for MASTRO to join with similar movements across Brazil and to begin occupying the lands of unproductive farms in the region. Three weeks later, MASTRO hosted a three-day meeting, again in Medianeira, that included 70 representatives from throughout the country. According to Bernardo Mançano Fernandes, this was Brazil's first major convening of landless peasants.⁷³ On the heels of these two summits, MASTRO then served as one of four co-organizers for the First National

⁷⁰ SNI Informação No. 0031/117/ACT/82, in SNI ACE.2632/82, 5/11/1982, AN-RJ.

⁷¹ SNI Informação No. 0064/16/ACT/82, 9/16/1982, in SNI ACE.3302/82. AN-RJ.

⁷² "O Grito dos Sem Terra," *Poeira*, No. 22 May-June 1982, 6-9.

⁷³ Bernardo Mançano Fernandes, "The Formation and Territorialization of the MST in Brazil," in Miguel Carter (Ed), *Challenging Social Inequality: The Landless Rural Workers Movement and Agrarian Reform in Brazil*, (Duke University Press, 2015, 119). Additional information on the July 9-11 Medianeira meeting comes from SNI Informe No. 256/119/APA/82, in SNI ACE.3486/82. AN-RJ.

Landless meeting in the central state of Goiânia.⁷⁴ Having firmly established a presence at the national level, MASTRO began working toward its goal of obtaining land in Paraná.

While still preparing for potential land occupations, MASTRO also accelerated its campaign of engaging with public officials. In early August 1982, the group's leadership met in Curitiba with the governor of Paraná, José Hosken de Noves, who then promised to work with the Institute for Lands and Cartography (ITC, Instituto de Terra e Cartografia) to evaluate the demands of the landless. Moreover, the governor pledged to "spare no effort in seeking a solution to the farmers' problems."⁷⁵ The group also sent a delegation to Brasília to meet with the Minister of Land Affairs, Danilo Venturini.⁷⁶ In light of these appeals, INCRA made its first official gesture to MASTRO, offering access to resettlement plots in the Amazonian states of Acre, Roraima, and Mato Grosso.⁷⁷ At a general assembly later in the month, farmers denounced INCRA's proposal, emphasizing the movement's central goal of winning land in Paraná. More encouraging news arrived in the form of the ITC report that Governor Hosken de Noves had commissioned, which outlined 507,000 hectares of land that the government could appropriate.⁷⁸

Although the ITC's findings did not guarantee any state response, it suggested that authorities acknowledged the existence of large land tracts ready for potential redistribution. This concession became even more significant when INCRA reversed its previous emphasis on northern settlement and informed MASTRO at the end of 1982 that the government could resettle two thousand families within Paraná over the course of the following year.⁷⁹ The motives

⁷⁴ An SNI report observes that the Goiânia meeting was organized by Centro de Treinamento de Líderes (CTL) of the Archdiocese of Goiânia, the Pastoral Land Commission (CPT), MASTRO, and the Movimento de Animação Cristã no Meio Rural (ACR). SNI Informação No. 019/19/AGO/SNI/82, in SNI ACE.3526/82, AN-RJ.

⁷⁵ SNI Informação No. 259/15/AC/82, item 7, p 4. In SNI ACE.29096/82. AN-RJ.

⁷⁶ Ibid, item 8.

⁷⁷ Letter to Sindicato de Trabalhadores Rurais de São Miguel do Iguaçu, from Coordenador Regional de INCRA/PR, Of.INCRA-4(09) No. 560, 8/16/1982. Source: STR-SMI.

⁷⁸ Relato da 2a assembleia geral, MASTRO, Medianeira, Paraná. 8/28/1982. Source: STR-SMI.

⁷⁹ "MASTRO realiza mini assembléias," *Poeira*, November 1982, No 25, 17.

behind INCRA's statements were complex. On the one hand, the 1982 elections had just taken place as Brazil witnessed a general resurgence of leftist political and grassroots mobilizations. In this sense, the promise of resettling so many farmers nearby in Paraná implies an attempt to placate a growing social movement. Yet INCRA's claims also suggested that government officials began to take seriously the demands of landless mobilizations.

An internal report written by INCRA's regional director toward the end of 1982 reveals how popular groups like MASTRO forced the government to reassess the viability of its existing agrarian system. Noting the existence of over 200,000 landless families in Paraná, José Guilherme Cavagnari discussed the advances made by MASTRO: "Over the last year this behavior has gained strength such that if their demands are not satisfied, new 'movements' will form [and] protests will become more frequent and radical... with threats to invade private lands."⁸⁰ Cavagnari observed that MASTRO had developed a distinct ideological base that "stimulated a radicalization" and even acknowledged that the group "had demonstrated a grand capacity to organize ... almost 7 thousand rural families."⁸¹ More than discussing MASTRO's potential to spark new movements, the report used the group's demands as a platform for suggesting new state policies. Echoing the ITC results, Cavagnari wrote that Paraná contained as many as 500,000 hectares of underused land in the state and that his government could expropriate as much as 100,000 hectares of that total.⁸²

One of Cavagnari's conclusions hinted at the extent to which the climate of *abertura* had instilled an anxiety about popular forces. The report urged INCRA to "Equip labor unions such that they can assume the role of selecting and controlling the 'organized movements' ... Here the

⁸⁰ "Bases para uma política de assentamento de agricultores: Propostas para o estado do Paraná." José Guilherme L. Cavagnari, September 1982. Source: SNI Informação No. 135/17/AC/82, in SNI ACE.29309/82, AN-RJ.

⁸¹ Ibid., 2.

⁸² Ibid., 3.

understanding is implicit that the surplus of non-organized farmers can accelerate new imbalances between [the government's] attention to their demands and new social conflicts.”⁸³ As previously discussed, such statements resulted from the government's close relationship with mainstream rural unions. Yet in the *abertura* landscape of the early 1980s, MASTRO proved far more resistant. In fact, the group's determination to remain independent of political and labor organizations led to instances of tension with rural unions. One state report observed that these conflicts occurred because landless movements and formal labor unions tended to attract a different membership base.⁸⁴ Celso Anghinoni, a member of MASTRO, recalls that once the group began staging land occupations, certain sectors of the union movement withdrew their support of the landless farmers.⁸⁵ In the context of *abertura*, different groups of rural Brazilians continued to engage and challenge one another over the role of the countryside in Brazil's potential democratic transition.

In a year-end overview of MASTRO, the Pastoral Land Commission's *Poeira* newsletter noted that 1983 would become “the year of popular movements, of neighborhood associations, of agrarian reform movements in the countryside [...]. All this because the political climate of *abertura*, the staging of elections and the victory of the opposition ... make possible this popular mobilization.”⁸⁶ This resurgent momentum of grassroots protest continued into the early months of 1983 and helped MASTRO organize its largest actions yet.

⁸³ “Bases para uma política de assentamento de agricultores: Propostas para o estado do Paraná.” José Guilherme L. Cavagnari, September 1982. Source: SNI Informação No. 135/17/AC/82, in SNI ACE.29309/82, AN-RJ., 8.

⁸⁴ IPARDES (Instituto Paranaense de Desenvolvimento Económico e Social), “Assentamentos rurais no Paraná,” 1992, 24.

⁸⁵ Celso Anghinoni, interview with author. 11/23/2014, Querência do Norte, Paraná.

⁸⁶ “Previsões para 1983,” *Poeira*, November 1982, No 25, 17.

From Encampments to Occupations

By April 1983, roughly eighteen months into MASTRO's existence, the landless farmers of western Paraná appeared to have lost any remaining confidence in the state and federal government to intervene on their behalf. Although MASTRO emerged from the comparatively peaceful encampments at Santa Helena and Foz do Iguaçu, the group developed more direct tactics to confront what its members perceived to be larger injustices. The transition from the Justice and Land Movement to MASTRO evolved as shift from encampments to occupations. The former strategy recognized the existing laws of land ownership while the latter aimed to put forth a new system of land tenure. Luiz Pozzolo, a member of MASTRO who also took part in the early MJT struggles, remembers a clear contrast between the two movements: "The fight against Itaipu was different, yeah because it was already defined, there was a demand [for a better price] that was negotiated. So the [MASTRO] occupations were more complicated. They were against the law, what we were doing was against the law." Reflecting the notion of land as the basis for *collective rights*, Pozzolo added that contrary to claims by newspapers and government critics, MASTRO's actions did not constitute a land *invasion* but rather a land *occupation*, stating that "an invasion is you taking something that isn't yours, an occupation is re-taking something that was robbed, because the large estates were all stolen... Who actually invaded was that big farmer."⁸⁷

MASTRO's formation in the early 1980s sparked a series of landless groups throughout the state. Inspired by MASTRO, the veritable alphabet soup of grassroots organizations included MASTEL (Landless Workers Movement of the Paraná Coast), MASTRECO (Landless Workers of Center-West Paraná), MASTEN (Landless Workers Movement of Northern Paraná), and

⁸⁷ Luis Pozzolo, interview with author. 11/12/2014, Guaraníaçu, Paraná.

MASTES (Landless Workers of Southwest Paraná). Although rural discontent had simmered for decades, the climate of *abertura* allowed these movements to forge new platforms for challenging their marginalized standing in Brazilian society. With MASTRO as the first and largest of these groups, Paraná became one of Brazil's most active centers of landless mobilization.

Beginning in 1983 MASTRO took part in six land occupations: the first three in a supporting role and three subsequent actions completely under its own leadership. Nildemar Silva looks back on the start of these occupations as a moment when rural communities learned how to mobilize together: "To win that right to land, to get a settlement, the families had to make an occupation, they had to stay united... The movement began to understand that it was possible to defend our rights if we were organized and that [happened in] the occupations."⁸⁸

MASTRO's participation in these actions started on April 13 when nearly 500 farmers occupied unused lands on the Reunidas Padroeiras farm in Matelândia.⁸⁹ Although not the sole instigator of the occupation—farmers who had worked on the farm served as lead organizers—MASTRO contributed logistical support and helped attract public attention.⁹⁰ According to the occupying families, the state government intended to expropriate the farm in the 1970s but it remained as private property for the Minolli family. In the early 1980s tenant farmers discovered that the son of the farm's owner had filed a claim against his father to win full ownership for himself. While the claim proceeded in court, the farm technically had no legitimate owner and

⁸⁸ Nildemar Silva, interview with author. 11/3/2014, Assentamento Antonio Tavares, São Miguel do Iguaçu, Paraná.

⁸⁹ The Padroeiras occupiers were seeking to have 4,000 alqueires of the property deeded to them.

⁹⁰ Information on MASTRO's role in the different land occupations in western Paraná in 1983 and 1984 comes mainly from SNI Informação No. 0125/17/ACT/83, in SNI ACE.4372/83, Source: AN-RJ. The final document from the MST's 1984 founding meeting also provides details on MASTRO's role in these occupations. "Ocupações de terra no ano de 83," Encontro Nacional dos Sem Terra, January 1984, Cascavel, 9. Courtesy of Davi Schreiner.

the workers planned their occupation accordingly.⁹¹ The landless farmers thus capitalized on a family's internal dispute to stake a claim to a portion of farmlands that the government had previously failed to expropriate.

Within the first month of the Matelândia occupation public support shifted toward the farmers. On April 28, the mayor of Matelândia released a statement of support for the landless families and the following month both the State Secretary of Public Safety and Paraná's director of the Institute for Lands and Cartography (ITC) expressed sympathy for the occupation.⁹² These declarations, however, did not guarantee government action. Claus Germer, the newly elected state Secretary of Agriculture and a key ally in the earlier fight against Itaipu, stated that his office could not pass any agrarian reform because that power lay with INCRA at the federal level.⁹³ In the face of government inaction, landless farmers continued to pressure authorities by directly agitating for agrarian reform.

⁹¹ Along with physically occupying the land at Padroeiras, the farmers also hired a lawyer to process legal claims to transfer land ownership. ("Invasão," *Nosso Tempo*, 4/21/83, 10)

⁹² "Secretário promete paz a colonos de Matelândia," *Folha de Londrina*, 5/21/1983, 6.

⁹³ "Invasão," *Nosso Tempo*, 4/21/1983, 12.

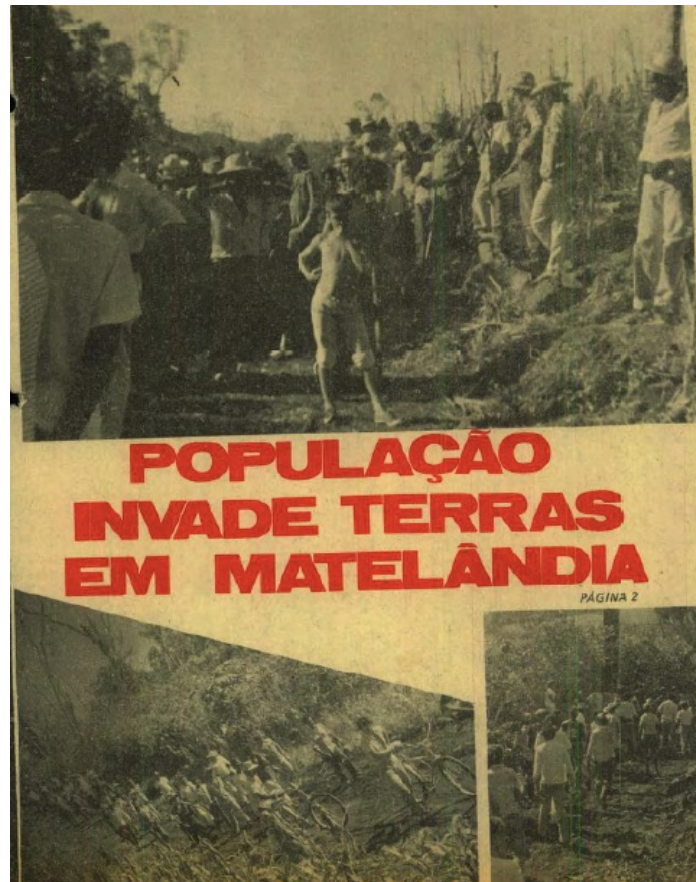


FIGURE 6.3: The April 8 1983 cover of *Nosso Tempo* announces the land occupation in Matelândia.

Six weeks into the Matelândia occupation, MASTRO held a general assembly ten kilometers away in Medianeira. Along with over 3,000 farmers, the meeting brought together representatives from INCRA, the diocese of Foz do Iguaçu, the local town council, the ITC, and local rural unions.⁹⁴ Early in the meeting, the representative from INCRA, Maria Angela Somero, addressed the farmers and outlined a proposal for resettlement in the Amazon. As Wright and Wolford observe, the federal government at this time often attempted to defuse local conflicts by relocating communities.⁹⁵ After years of demanding access to land within their home

⁹⁴ Report on MASTRO's third general assembly, 5/25/1983, Medianeira. Compiled by the Municipal Office of Medianeira. Source: SNI ACE.4372/83, AN-RJ.

⁹⁵ Wright & Wolford, *To Inherit the Earth*, 70.

state of Paraná, the farmers in Medianeira roundly denounced the offer of distant lands.”⁹⁶ At the end of the meeting, the attendees approved a document with four demands:

- (1) the ITC delimit land that can be acquired by the farmers through State agrarian credits;
- (2) that INCRA and the ITC immediately verify the areas of social tension and the unproductive farms in Paraná and work toward their expropriations with the goal of agrarian reform;
- (3) that a commission from MASTRO be included in the process of surveying these areas; and
- (4) that MASTRO organize alongside the authorities a commission to verify INCRA’s surveys and projects in the north of the country.

The document ended with an affirmation that “MASTRO emerges to raise the voices of those without land. The present farmers once again confirm the demands of the movement: Land in Paraná. Land only for those who work it and need it to live.”⁹⁷

MASTRO’s actions within Paraná occurred as a national economic crisis impacted farmers and the working poor throughout Brazil. Framed by a pair oil shocks in 1979 and 1983, inflation rose from 77 percent in 1979 to 179 percent in 1983. During the same period, Brazil’s external debt likewise grew from US\$50 billion to US\$98 billion.⁹⁸ Subsequently, President Figueiredo implemented sweeping austerity measures that disproportionately placed the burden of adjustment policies on the lower classes.⁹⁹ Rising inflation lead to a 246 percent increase in the price of staple foods between 1982 and 1983, a serious problem made worse when the federal government passed legislation in July 1983 that limited the wages of Brazilian workers.¹⁰⁰ Having begun negotiations with the International Monetary Fund to curb inflation and bring

⁹⁶ Quotes from the Medianeira meeting from ““Queremos terra no Paraná,”” *Nosso Tempo*, 6/2/1983, 18.

⁹⁷ MASTRO, “Em marcha para a terra prometida.” Document crafted at the third general assembly of MASTRO, 5/25/1983, Medianeira. Courtesy of Davi Schreiner.

⁹⁸ Mainwaring, *Rethinking Party Systems in the Third Wave of Democratization*, 90.

⁹⁹ Warner Baer, “Brazil’s Rocky Economic Road to Democracy” in Graham, Lawrence S., and Robert Hines Wilson. 1990. *The Political Economy of Brazil: Public Policies in an Era of Transition*. (Austin: University of Texas Press), 51.

¹⁰⁰ Data on food prices and inflation from Alves, *State and Opposition*, 235.

down the national debt, the government enacted Decree Law No. 2045 that cut all salaries by 20 percent in relation to the newly introduced Consumer Price Index.¹⁰¹

In response, Brazilian workers launched a new wave of protests in the middle of 1983. An explosion of strikes throughout Brazil culminated with a national day of protest on July 21. São Paulo “was like a holiday” and saw over two million workers take part in different strikes—including a turnout of nearly 95 percent of all workers in the most concentrated industrial regions. Approximately one million workers in Rio Grande do Sul went on strike and the city of Rio de Janeiro witnessed its largest demonstration since 1968’s “March of the 100,000.”¹⁰² This massive showing of opposition denounced the dictatorship’s financial policies and demanded the return of political freedoms, above all the return of direct presidential elections as championed by the *Diretas Já* (Direct Elections Now) campaign. These demonstrations serve as further evidence of the double-reality of *abertura*, because at the same time that millions of people in major cities safely defended their own hopes for a democratic future, thousands of rural Brazilians continued to live in highly repressive circumstances.

The Matelândia land occupation on the Padroeiras stretched into its third month amongst rising tensions. In July, a group of *jagunços* (hired thugs) most likely paid by the Minolli family set fire to the houses of 15 families, forcing them to abandon the occupation.¹⁰³ And in early September farmers exchanged gunshots with the farm’s hired security forces, although no injuries or deaths resulted. A rumor circulated within the occupation that state troops would soon march on the farm to physically remove the farmers.¹⁰⁴ Police never marched on the occupation,

¹⁰¹ Alves, *State and Opposition* 240. The law reducing benefits for state workers was Decree-Law No. 2036.

¹⁰² Information on July 1983 strikes from: Alves, *State and Opposition*, 243-244.

¹⁰³ “Jagunços já expulsam famílias em Matelândia,” *Folha de Londrina*, 7/2/1983, 8.

¹⁰⁴ “Aumenta a tensão na Fazenda Padroeira,” *Nosso Tempo*, 9/9/1983, 8.

although they did arrest—and allegedly torture—two farmers.¹⁰⁵ This escalation of violence reverberated with other rural protests throughout the region.

The two concurrent land occupations in western Paraná took place on the Anoni and Três Pinheiros farms, in the municipalities of Marmaleiro and Matelândia, respectively. Similar to the Padroeira farm, INCRA previously cleared Anoni for expropriation yet the property sat idly in private hands.¹⁰⁶ On July 17, 1983 40 families occupied the Anoni farm and violence ensued within days. At 7am on the morning of July 21 a *jagunço* named João Scarton arrived with a contingent of armed men and surprised five farmers outside of their tents. The landless workers fled amidst a scattering of gunfire, killing a 53-year-old father of nine named João Maria de Paula.¹⁰⁷ The murder received national media attention, with a headline from *O Estado de São Paulo* reading “A death in the fight for land already expropriated.”¹⁰⁸ In spite of the violence, farmers maintained their occupation. As Luiz Pozzolo recalls, “everyone was afraid, but if we had been too afraid nothing would have happened because we had no other options. It’s [better to] die fighting.”¹⁰⁹ Another farmer explained that the occupations persevered out of simple necessity: “We resisted because we had to. Hunger speaks louder than [fear], and it spoke for many people.”¹¹⁰

Two weeks after the death on the Anoni farm, 50 families staged another land occupation on the Três Pinheiros estate in Matelândia. Less than a month into the occupation state troopers

¹⁰⁵ “Violência irrompe em vários pontos, na luta pela terra,” *Folha de Londrina*, 9/1/1983.

¹⁰⁶ The Anoni farm was officially expropriated by INCRA on 31 March 1980 via Decree No. 84.603. Source: SNI Informação No. 0125/17/ACT/83, in SNI ACE.4372/83, Source: AN-RJ.

¹⁰⁷ Details of the Anoni camp and violence from “Conflito de terra: uma pessoa morre,” *O Estado do Paraná*, 7/29/1983, and “João de Paula: na Cruz do latifúndio,” report compiled 7/28/1983 by the Rural Workers Syndicates of Capanema, Dois Vizinhos, Ampére, Nova Prata do Iguçu, Francisco Beltrão and Santa Izabel D’Oeste. Courtesy of Davi Shreiner.

¹⁰⁸ “Um morto em luta por terra já desapropriada,” *O Estado de São Paulo*, 12.

¹⁰⁹ Luis Pozzolo, interview with author. 11/12/2014, Guaraniaçu, Paraná.

¹¹⁰ Afonso Camer, interview with author, 11/3/2014, Medianeira, Paraná.

swarmed onto the farm and physically expelled all of the families. One article observed that police abandoned the occupants in the cold rain and even tried to seize a Brazilian flag that the occupation had “guard[ed] religiously.”¹¹¹ This image of farmers and police fighting for control of the Brazilian flag is emblematic of the deeper challenges facing poor rural communities during this period. Nearly two decades into Brazil’s dictatorship, the expansion of grassroots actions like the landless occupations suggested the military’s loosening grip on power. But despite the reemergence of opposition forces, many Brazilians still lived in a climate of authoritarian repression. Regions like the western Paraná countryside symbolized the unfulfilled promise of a new democratic era; for poor Brazilians like those in MASTRO, the official end of military rule in 1985 did not bring about any immediate change to the daily realities of rural poverty. So when state troopers tore down the Brazilian flag and forced the Três Pinheiros occupiers to set up a new camp along the side of the highway, it represented more than just the end of their land occupation. It served as a recurring sign of the farmers’ exclusion from mainstream society, both in the waning years of the dictatorship and in a potential democratic future.

Whereas MASTRO had played a supportive role in the initial three land protests in western Paraná, the culmination of these recent events pushed the organization to lead its own occupations. On September 19, almost 40 families occupied the Cavernoso farm (also known as Lagoa Santa) in the municipality of Guarapuava. According to MASTRO, the farm’s previous owner used the 200 hectares to grow drugs but the police had since thrown him in jail, leaving the land vacant. One of the occupying farmers told the *Folha de Londrina* “We are going to stay here, strong, and take control of the farm. I’ve never had a piece of land and now I’ll fight for a

¹¹¹ “Violência irrompe em vários pontos, na luta pela terra,” *Folha de Londrina*, 9/1/1983, 7-8.

place to plant.¹¹² When the governor of Paraná personally visited Cavernoso, the farmers presented a list of demands reflecting a new stage of mobilization. Determined to create entirely new communities, MASTRO now demanded the government provide materials for the construction of houses, schools, and medical facilities.¹¹³ The occupation persisted for over a year before the government consented to a deal that eventually allowed 208 people to permanently live on the land.¹¹⁴

Some six months after MASTRO's occupation at Cavernoso, the group staged two follow-up actions. While Cavernoso stood almost 200 kilometers from the group's center of operations in São Miguel do Iguaçu, the second occupation returned to MASTRO's symbolic birthplace. In May 1984, 60 families occupied land that belonged to the Itaipu Binational Corporation. These 70 *alquieres* formed part of the dam's security line rimming the reservoir lake, an area that INCRA planned to incorporate into an ecological reserve.¹¹⁵ Compared to the previous land occupations that took place almost exclusively on private agricultural lands, MASTRO now targeted an area belonging jointly to the state government and the Itaipu dam. One of the occupying farmers said that by taking their fight directly to INCRA and Itaipu, the farmers had "stepped on the right wound."¹¹⁶ The occupation lasted only eight days before police dispersed the farmers, but its momentum resurfaced less than two months later when MASTRO mobilized its largest action yet.

On June 17 members of MASTRO seized control of 1,280 hectares of land on the Mineira farm in the same municipality of São Miguel do Iguaçu. This occupation became

¹¹² "Colonos do MASTRO ocupam uma fazenda em Guarapuava," *Folha de Londrina*, 9/24/1983.

¹¹³ "Cavernoso: era uma fazenda sem gente," *Poeira*, No. 31 December 1983, 17-18.

¹¹⁴ "Cavernoso: acordo garante plantio," *Jornal dos Trabalhadores Sem Terra*, No. 41 January 1985, 5.

¹¹⁵ "Ocupação da área do INCRA em São Miguel," *Poeira*, No. 33 1984, 31.

¹¹⁶ "Invasões das terras da Itaipu," *O Estado de São Paulo*, 6/9/1984, 8; "Mais uma invasão de terra," *Folha de Londrina*, 6/21/1984, 21.

MASTRO's most challenging, longest-lasting, yet ultimately successful direct action protest. For two and a half years, MASTRO maintained its occupation of the Mineira property. The group also held a parallel protest camp for four months outside of INCRA's headquarters in the state capital of Curitiba.¹¹⁷ The growing profile of the Mineira occupation received a boost from the visit of Luiz Inácio "Lula" da Silva, the president of the Workers' Party (PT, Partido dos Trabalhadores) and the most prominent activist of the period. Addressing the occupying families, Lula declared that "Every worker in this country needs to know the courageous fight of the landless farmers of western Paraná, because the day that all workers have the courage that you are showing here, the strength of will that you display, on that day there will be no more oppressors and exploiters."¹¹⁸ The perseverance of the Mineira occupiers eventually secured the expropriation of nearly 700 hectares of land redistributed amongst 41 families.¹¹⁹ When INCRA officially handed over the land in February 1987, farmers renamed the area Assentamento Sávio-Dois Vizinhos in honor of one of MASTRO's lead organizers, Miguel Isloar Sávio.

Prior to the victory, however, the farmers endured numerous challenges. Within the occupation's first month 50 armed troopers entered the area and pushed out over 100 families. According to one report, the police swept through the encampment and destroyed tents, furniture, and clothing.¹²⁰ The police also arrested twelve members of MASTRO and detained them in Medianeira.¹²¹ These events served as some of the largest police actions of the period against landless occupations in Paraná.

¹¹⁷ "Colonos invadem o Incra," *O Estado do Paraná*, 7/24/1984; and "Sob pressão, INCRA promete agir," *Jornal dos Trabalhadores Sem Terra*, No. 40 November 1984, 7.

¹¹⁸ "Com o Coração Ferido de Desgosto por Serem Brasileiros," *Nosso Tempo*, 9/27/1984, 14.

¹¹⁹ Schreiner, "Entre a exclusão e a utopia," 456.

¹²⁰ "Polícia usa violência contra os sem terra," *Jornal dos Trabalhadores Sem Terra*, No. 37 August 1984, 9.

¹²¹ "Posseiros expulsos," *Jornal do Estado*, 7/1/1984, 1.

An interesting news angle came from a *Folha de Londrina* article regarding a dozen women who defiantly remained on the land even after the police raid to pressure for the release of their husbands.¹²² The resolve of these women appears to have helped secure the eventual freedom of the arrested farmers. Their depiction in the media, however, hints at an underlying tension. Women were vital members of MASTRO, just as they were in the earlier fight at Itaipu and in other landless struggles of the period. Yet they remained almost completely absent in news coverage of the movement. The few mentions of female farmers often contained little information beyond how many women and children lived in a given land occupation.



FIGURE 6.3: Left, a mother breastfeeds her child on the INCRA/Itaipu land occupation. (Source: *Nosso Tempo*, 6/29/1984, 11). Right: women and children on the Mineira farm occupation. (Source: *Jornal dos Trabalhadores Sem Terra*, July 1984, 3).

¹²² “As mulheres resistem,” *Folha de Londrina*, 7/1/1984, 12.

Although news article included images of suffering mothers holding babies, the media rarely quoted women. This silencing also existed within MASTRO itself. In interviews, female members of MASTRO still speak with pride in having participated in the land occupations, but they also explain how the men prohibited them from taking any leadership role whatsoever. Teolide Turcatel remembers the machismo that predominated in MASTRO, saying “We wanted equality, we fought for equality, and the men got angry at us, the leadership didn’t want us to get more involved.”¹²³ Along with being excluded from the movement’s decision-making progress, Teolide recalls that when the police threatened to invade MASTRO’s camps, the leadership sent women with their children to the frontlines to lessen the chance of a violent attack. Another woman, Iraci Maino, offers a similar perspective: “In the camps, a woman was for cooking, for cleaning, for working, for taking care of things, but not for taking part in anything.”¹²⁴ When asked about the role women played in these movements, male interviewees spoke enthusiastically about their courage and support of MASTRO. But none offered any indication they saw women as having played anything more than a supporting role.

This dissertation has presented numerous examples of the contradictions that exist within social movements. In the fight against Itaipu, the Justice and Land Movement neglected indigenous groups almost entirely and never prioritized the demands of landless workers. MASTRO, despite originating as a movement marginalized by Brazilian society and by a previous rural struggle, nonetheless reproduced its own hierarchies and inequalities. The limitations placed on women like Teolide and Iraci show that MASTRO’s status as an organization comprised of the countryside’s most oppressed sectors did not preclude it from exhibiting forms of social silencing and exclusion. In spite of these internal tensions, landless

¹²³ Teolide Turcatel, interview with author, 11/2/2014, Medianeira, Paraná.

¹²⁴ Iraci Maino, interview with author, 11/2/2014, Medianeira, Paraná.

occupations continued to spread throughout western Paraná and across the nation. The growing momentum culminated in a meeting in early 1984 that stood as a watershed moment in the history of social movements in modern Brazil.

Cascavel and the Formation of the Landless Workers Movement

From January 20-22 1984, approximately 100 people from twelve states gathered in the western Paraná city of Cascavel to discuss the situation of landless farmers in Brazil. Over these three days the Landless Workers Movement (MST) officially formed.¹²⁵ This represented the largest attempt in Brazilian history to establish a nation-wide organization devoted to agrarian reform. The MST has since become one of the most prominent social movements throughout Latin America. Its creation in 1984—one year prior to the official end of military rule—marked the emergence of landless farmers as a nationally organized and politically potent force.

This chapter has not aimed to draw a causal link between the struggle for land at Itaipu and the formation of the MST. Understanding how MASTRO resulted from the limitations at Itaipu, however, allows for a closer study of rural mobilizations in Brazil. The MST has inspired a robust body of scholarship that, as Welch observes, tends to depict the movement as a reaction to the concentration of land in the hands of a small rural elite and the mechanization of agriculture, processes that “made land difficult for peasants to retain and drastically reduced the need for rural labor.”¹²⁶ Without diverting attention from the landless movement’s main goal of access to land, the case of MASTRO demands that scholars rethink the roots of the MST. Along with denouncing the abuses of agricultural estates and an unresponsive government bureaucracy, the landless struggles in western Paraná suggest that the MST also emerged from inequalities

¹²⁵ For a detailed account of the Cascavel meeting, see Branford & Jan Rocha, *Cutting the Wire*, 21-25.

¹²⁶ Welch, “Camponeses,” 127-128.

among rural communities. The connections between Itaipu and the MST illuminate the continuities and the fissures between different forms of rural mobilization.

Numerous Anglophone scholars have written about the MST's founding conference without making a single reference to MASTRO's participation.¹²⁷ Numerous Brazilians, on the other hand, have presented MASTRO as an important piece in the 1984 creation of the MST.¹²⁸ The MST's own website lists MASTRO alongside the Encruzilhada Natalino conflict as the two most influential antecedents of the Landless Workers Movement.¹²⁹ An overview of MASTRO's role in the 1984 Cascavel meeting thus offers a starting point for understanding how the localized conflicts in western Paraná helped open a new era of landless struggles throughout Brazil.

It is no coincidence that the MST's national founding took place in western Paraná, less than 150 kilometers from the Itaipu dam. After hosting the Medianeira regional conference in 1982, MASTRO established a presence among national landless movements. Along with serving as a logistically feasible meeting point for groups arriving from across Brazil, western Paraná had also become one of the country's most active zones of landless mobilization. Of Brazil's twelve largest land occupations in 1983, four took place in the state of Paraná.¹³⁰ The minutes of the Cascavel meeting provide further evidence of the respect and importance accorded to MASTRO. After introductions on the morning of the first day, the afternoon focused on a "presentation of the experiences of struggle." MASTRO was the very first group to recount its history.¹³¹ On the summit's third and final day, attendees identified MASTRO's Cavernoso and

¹²⁷ See footnote 3 of this chapter.

¹²⁸ Schreiner, 2002; Mazzarollo, 2003; Junior, 2010; João Pedro Stedile & Bernardo Mançano Fernandes, *Brava gente: a trajetória do MST e a luta pela terra no Brasil*, (São Paulo: Expressão Popular, 2012).

¹²⁹ "History of the MST," 2/12/2003. <http://www.mstbrazil.org/content/history-mst> Accessed 6/29/2016.

¹³⁰ "Ocupações de terra no ano de 83," Encontro Nacional dos Sem Terra, January 1984, Cascavel, appendix 4. Courtesy of Davi Schreiner.

¹³¹ Draft of minutes, "Encontro nacional dos trabalhadores sem terra," Cascavel, Paraná, 20-22 January, 1984. Courtesy of Werner Fuchs, 3.

Anoni occupations as some of the most notable victories across the country.¹³² Finally, a SNI surveillance report noted that a representative from MASTRO, Dalézio Schmidt, served on the meeting's leadership committee.¹³³

Acknowledging MASTRO's role at the 1984 Cascavel meeting provides more than just an historiographic correction. Rather, it underscores how members of MASTRO went from being almost an afterthought in the fight at Itaipu to key contributors in the creation of Brazil's largest social movement. For Brazilians who fought in movements like MASTRO and the MST, the idea of *land as a collective right* represented more than just a desire for agrarian reform. Rather, it aimed to redefine poor rural Brazilians as legitimate socio-political actors within Brazilian society.

Despite the progress made at Cascavel—and perhaps because of it—rural families continued to face severe repression. The ongoing violence suggests that Brazilian elites remained determined to keep the countryside isolated from the broader return of democratic freedoms. Four months after the Cascavel meeting, hired gunmen killed a 52-year-old father of ten named Raimundo Nonanto de Oliveira on the Padroeiras land occupation—the site of MASTRO's first mobilization.¹³⁴ The murder of landless farmers became almost common during this period; the MST claimed that 116 rural Brazilians were killed in 1983 alone.¹³⁵ The death of Nonanto de Oliveira, however, offered particular cause for alarm because it happened three months *after* the state government brokered a deal between the farm's owners and the occupying families.¹³⁶ Although the ITC theoretically secured the sale of almost 200 hectares of land to be distributed

¹³² Draft of minutes, "Encontro nacional dos trabalhadores sem terra," Cascavel, Paraná, 20-22 January, 1984. Courtesy of Werner Fuchs, 21.

¹³³ SNI Informação 0016/19/ACT/84, 2/7/1984, 3. In SNI ACE.4741/84, AN-RJ.

¹³⁴ "Assassinado líder dos posseiros em Padroeira," *Jornal dos Trabalhadores Sem Terra*, July 1984, 4.

¹³⁵ "Trabalhadores rurais assassinados no ano de 83," Encontro Nacional dos Sem Terra, January 1984, Cascavel, appendix 3. Courtesy of Davi Schreiner.

¹³⁶ "Fazenda Padroeira: acordo é decidido," *Tribuna do Paraná*, 3/20/1984.

amongst 116 families, it appears that the government did not begin processing the contracts. Nor did the state protect the lives of farmers as they waited for their new land titles.

Conclusion:

The violence against landless communities again highlights the double-reality of *abertura*. A month before the Padroeira murder, one million demonstrators took to the streets of São Paulo in the single largest protest in Brazilian history.¹³⁷ Part of the national Diretas Já campaign that fought (unsuccessfully, in the end) for direct presidential elections, the events in São Paulo marked an apex of mainstream opposition forces in the *abertura*. The torrent of urban opposition in the early- to mid-1980s stands in contrast to the authoritarian realities that persisted in places like the western Paraná countryside. In both cases, Brazilians rallied around a particular vision of democratic rights. When urban citizens mobilized for electoral and political rights, they did so with relatively little pushback. But when landless Brazilians fought under a banner of agrarian rights, they confronted undulating waves of repression. Farmers like those in MASTRO often saw themselves as participants in Brazil's democratization, yet this enduring violence reflects the ongoing exclusion of rural Brazilians, both under dictatorship and in a potential democracy looming on the horizon.

Landless mobilizations in the early 1980s in western Paraná offer a complicated balance sheet. On the one hand, the region became a center of an emerging national movement and hosted the 1984 founding of the MST. Moreover, many of the occupations achieved their goals of having land expropriated and redistributed. Although it took 15 years, the Fazenda Anoni occupation eventually became the Assentamento José Eduardo Raduam, with 3,946 hectares of

¹³⁷ Skidmore, *The Politics of Military Rule in Brazil*, 243.

land redistributed amongst 436 families.¹³⁸ And as mentioned earlier, in 1987 MASTRO's Fazenda Mineira occupation became the Assentamento Sávio-Dois Vizinhos.¹³⁹ These achievements, however, form one part of a larger history of landless struggle that also includes a series of deaths, assaults, and forced displacement. Landless movements like MASTRO and the MST sought to transform the existing structure of land tenure, a goal considered radical—and thus unacceptable—by elites throughout the country. The audacity of this challenge helps explain the resulting violence in the early 1980s.

Having seen how the repression of rural livelihoods diverged from the evolution of political freedoms in Brazilian cities, the following chapter traces the story of a journalist in Foz do Iguaçu to examine another reality of *abertura* in the Paraná borderlands. The military regime imprisoned Juvêncio Mazzarollo for two years when his criticisms of the Itaipu dam and his coverage of the farmers' movements drew the ire of local elites. At the national level, freedom of the press had largely returned and the harassment of journalists seemed a relic of previous decades. Yet Mazzarollo remained in jail on trumped up charges until an international solidarity campaign and his own staging of two hunger strikes forced the government to grant his release.

Similar to how farmers in western Paraná continued to live in a climate of authoritarian rule despite Brazil's alleged democratic reopening, Mazzarollo's history as "the last political prisoner" sheds light on how the *abertura* developed across multiple competing realities throughout the country. Thus far this dissertation has looked primarily at the meanings of rural-based political rights in relation to what developed in large cities. The case of Juvêncio Mazzarollo, however, offers an example of a non-farmer also living in a world of double

¹³⁸ Schreiner, "Entre a exclusão e a utopia," 456.

¹³⁹ Members of MASTRO also resettled on two additional successful land occupations: the Assentamento Abapan in the municipality of Castro, and the Assentamento Vitória da União in Manguerinha. *Ibid.*

abertura. The journalist saw his writings as part of the larger return of media and democratic freedoms, but borderland elites seeking to protect their legacy—and that of the Itaipu dam—imposed a very different reality. Mazzarollo's experience closely linked to that of the farmers displaced by Itaipu. But his repression as a journalist in the border town of Foz do Iguaçu depicts the double-reality of *abertura* as more than just a contrast between rural and urban spaces. As evidenced in the case of Mazzarollo, dictatorship and democratization existed as inherently experiential processes for all Brazilians regardless of region or social class.

Chapter Seven

The Last Political Prisoner: Juvêncio Mazzarollo and the Twilight of Brazil's Dictatorship

April 6, 1981 began as a normal day at the Foz de Iguaçu office of the Brazilian newspaper *Nosso Tempo*. As the paper's three editors put the final touches on that week's issue, a knock came from the front door. An unknown man dressed in a dark suit and tie stood outside. The stranger introduced himself as a member of the Federal Police and presented a summons for Juvêncio Mazzarollo, one of *Nosso Tempo*'s editors and lead writers. A powerful local politician named Elias Kudsi wanted to meet with Juvêncio, and the journalist spent the rest of the day nervously awaiting further instructions.¹ At 4:00pm security forces arrived to escort him to the Federal Police station.²

The son of Italian immigrant farmers, Juvêncio grew up in the state of Rio Grande do Sul and from an early age bore witness to injustices in the Brazilian countryside, both by toiling alongside his family as an agricultural laborer and later through the Liberation Theology teachings of the local church. His first personal encounter with the military regime came in 1968 when police detained him overnight for participating in the student leaders conference in Ibiúna, São Paulo organized by the National Union of Students (UNE, União Nacional dos Estudantes).³ For most of the 1970s Juvêncio worked as a public school teacher in Medianeira, Paraná, but was fired in 1978 over remarks he made during a strike. Paraná's governor at the time, Jaime Canet, had called the striking teachers "subversive," to which Juvêncio declared, "the only subversive

¹ Reflecting the Brazilian tradition of calling people by their first name, this chapter will often refer to Juvêncio Mazzarollo simply as Juvêncio.

² Descriptions of this encounter come from, "Depoimentos," *Nosso Tempo* 4/15/1981, 5-7. All issues of *Nosso Tempo* are housed at the Centro de Direitos Humanos e Memória Popular in Foz do Iguaçu, Brazil.

³ Victoria Langland (2013) provides a full history of UNE during military rule.

here is the Governor since he ignored the law.” Unemployed and blacklisted from public sector jobs, Juvêncio struggled for two years until moving to Foz do Iguaçu where he and two colleagues started an independent political newspaper.⁴

On this day in 1981, the journalist with a background of regional activism found himself in a building of the national armed forces, representatives of a Brazilian state ruled by a military dictatorship. Upon arrival, police placed Juvêncio in an interrogation room with the city’s mayor, a local judge, and an influential army colonel named João Guilherme da Costa Labre. From this moment forward, Juvêncio became the central figure in a conflict that pitted his newspaper against the Brazilian military regime. Although officials brought no charges against him that evening, authorities soon accused Juvêncio of having violated the National Security Act (LSN, Lei da Segurança Nacional) and threw him in jail the following summer. For nearly two years Juvêncio remained in prison. He won his freedom only when an international solidarity campaign—coupled with his own staging of two hunger strikes—forced the government to grant his release. During this period at the end of Brazil’s dictatorship, the regime did not jail not a single other journalist. After twenty years of military rule, Juvêncio Mazzarollo was “the last political prisoner.”

Scholars have entirely overlooked Juvêncio’s imprisonment, yet his story offers significant insight into the realities of *abertura*. Although Juvêncio may have been the last, he certainly was not the only political prisoner during the two decades of military rule; Brazil’s dictatorship jailed, killed, tortured, disappeared, and repressed thousands of people, including many journalists. Nor was he the most famous political prisoner in the early 1980s. The military regime jailed the union leader and future president, Luiz Inácio “Lula” da Silva in 1980 under

⁴ Biographical information comes from Vilma Macedo, interview with author, 9/27/2014, Foz do Iguaçu; and DOPS Inf. p/JM-20 Cir. JD, 3/17/1982. In: 52-z-0-31.378, State Archive of São Paulo.

the LSN, just as it did with the Amazonian land and human rights activist Chico Mendes.

Although Juvêncio's story includes elements of mainstream political opposition common to traditional understandings of democratization, it stands out for its position at the intersection of two narratives that scholars have not always seen as connected to the process of *abertura*: local struggles in different regions across Brazil and the development goals of the military regime.

This chapter will use Juvêncio's imprisonment to expand the concept of a double-reality of *abertura*. Despite this dissertation's primary focus on the western Paraná countryside, the idea of a double-reality does not only posit that rural Brazilians experienced one democratization and urban citizens another. Rather, it argues that all Brazilians lived in a world of double *abertura*: the one they perceived as the official nation-wide process of democratization and the one they experienced as their own reality and vision for the future. The case of Juvêncio Mazzarollo offers an important corollary to the study of Itaipu by showing how the writings of a journalist in a border town became an international drama that illuminated Brazil's disjointed transition out of military rule.

Juvêncio's earliest articles in *Nosso Tempo* focused on allegations of torture and corruption by local authorities. These denouncements drew the ire of the military elite in Foz do Iguaçu—especially two colonels, the city's mayor Clóvis Cunha Vianna and the aforementioned João Labre. Motivated by the ongoing *abertura*, Mazzarollo saw his scathing exposés as belonging to a broader movement of media freedom and popular dissent. The local elite, however, were not yet ready to allow these new spaces of opposition. As a result, they initiated a criminal trial to guard the privileges to which they had become accustomed over the previous two decades of dictatorship. Hence, the double-reality of *abertura* existed equally for popular forces *and* elites. If Juvêncio's repression initially resulted from a clash between how Brazilians

in a border city understood the *abertura*, it escalated after a series of local events gave the conflict a national audience. As the home of the Itaipu hydroelectric, Foz do Iguaçu served as the epicenter of the military's development program. As farmers mobilized against Itaipu, Juvêncio Mazzarollo and his newspaper became the movement's most outspoken and supportive media outlet. For the government, Juvêncio's earlier denunciations presented a problem at the local level, but the national attention brought by the farmers' movement and the centrality of Itaipu to the dictatorship pushed Foz do Iguaçu's military elite to silence *Nosso Tempo*.

The police first approached Juvêncio in April of 1981 at the height of the farmers' encampment outside Itaipu. Over the next two years, Mazzarollo's trial and subsequent imprisonment embodied the tensions and competing experiences of Brazil's *abertura*. For the local elite who felt removed from the democratization process, Juvêncio's repression served as an attempt to exercise their quickly fading power. For the national government, the coverage given to the farmers drew attention away from Itaipu's triumphant narrative that the military hoped to leave as a legacy before the full return of democratic rule. For opposition groups throughout Brazil, Juvêncio transcended his role as a dissident journalist to become a rallying point for democratization. This saga offers a revealing example of how political and social networks, mass media, and international solidarity brought specific campaigns to the forefront of public debates. This invokes Steve Stern's conceptualization of "politicocultural legitimacy" whereby civil and political society actors both seek to validate and consolidate their program and vision for the future.⁵ Juvêncio's trial and imprisonment captivated national headlines and debates, and its history elucidates how different social actors in different regions of the country experienced *abertura*.

⁵ Stern, *Reckoning with Pinochet: The Memory Question in Democratic Chile, 1989-2006*. (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010), 356.

As historians and activists reinterpret the period of dictatorship from new perspectives, a body of scholarship has focused on the history of journalists and the media. These studies—from mostly Brazilian authors—chronicle the struggles of newspapers during military rule, dealing mostly with issues of media resistance and censorship.⁶ The existing literature places the height of media repression between the 1968 passage of the authoritarian Institutional Act 5 and 1975, when the military imprisoned, tortured, and killed the São Paulo journalist Vladimir Herzog. At the most immediate level, then, Juvêncio’s imprisonment nearly a decade later forces current scholarship to expand its periodization of media repression. Additionally, *Nosso Tempo*’s founding in 1980 suggests that while the role of oppositional media at the national level diminished by the late 1970s—what Bernardo Kucinski calls the “institutionalization of critical journalism”—regions like Foz de Iguaçu offered both a space and a demand for dissident newspapers.⁷

This chapter analyzes the content and context of *Nosso Tempo*, a newspaper that scholars outside of Brazil have yet to study.⁸ Despite Juvêncio’s status as a political prisoner, the military allowed him to write from his jail cell and the letters he sent to friends and colleagues became a weekly column in *Nosso Tempo*. This affords the opportunity to analyze his writings before,

⁶ For media resistance see Bernardo Kucinski, *Jornalistas e revolucionários: nos tempos da imprensa alternativa*. (São Paulo: Editora Página Aberta, 2001); Maria Aparecida de Aquino, *Censura, imprensa, estado autoritário, 1968-1978: o exercício cotidiano da dominação e da resistência, O Estado de São Paulo e Movimento*. (Bauru, SP: EDUSC, 1999); Fernando Molica & Antero Luiz, *10 reportagens que abalaram a ditadura*. (Rio de Janeiro: Editora Record, 2005); and Sandra Reimão, *Repressão e resistência: censura a livros na ditadura militar*. (São Paulo, SP, Brasil: EDUSP, 2011). For censorship see Moacir Pereira, *O golpe do silêncio: imprensa, censura e medidas de emergência*. (São Paulo: Global Editora, 1984); Anne-Marie Smith, *A Forced Agreement Press Acquiescence to Censorship in Brazil*. (Pittsburgh, Pa: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1997); Beatriz Kushnir, *Cães de guarda: jornalistas e censores, do AI-5 à constituição de 1988*. (São Paulo: Boitempo Editorial, 2004); and José Ernani de Almeida, *Denuncismo & censura nos meios de comunicação de Passo Fundo, 1964-1978*. (Passo Fundo, RS: Méritos Editora Ltda, 2006). Carlos Chagas also provides his own perspective as a journalist living through and covering the second half of Brazil’s dictatorship, Carlos Chagas, *A Ditadura militar e a longa noite dos generais: 1970-1985*, (Rio de Janeiro: Record, 2015).

⁷ Kucinski, *Jornalistas e revolucionários*, xxvii.

⁸ Most of *Nosso Tempo*’s ten-year run (1980-1990) now exist digitally at: <http://www.nossotempodigital.com.br/>

during, and after his internment. Juvêncio's prison writings therefore function as both the historical record of a political prisoner and as commentary from Brazil's oppositional media.

Starting in May 1983 *Nosso Tempo* routinely referred to Juvêncio as "the last political prisoner," a designation picked up by the mainstream press when the National Security Act officially expired on December 14, 1983.⁹ With the end of the LSN, most of Brazil's political prisoners finally received their freedom. This included a number of journalists, such as four writers at the oppositional weekly *Coorjornal* and Ricardo Lessa from *Hora do Povo*, the print organ of the MR-8 revolutionary group.¹⁰ In December of 2014 Brazil released the findings of its National Truth Commission (CNV), a detailed exposé on the crimes of the military regime—the details and limitations of which are further discussed in the conclusion of this thesis. Although the CNV includes lists of the known victims of torture, murder, and forced disappearance, it offers no inventory of political prisoners. As such, we cannot definitively confirm that Juvêncio was, in fact, the last political prisoner.

The more profound insight, however, comes from the symbolic and politicizing implications of Juvêncio's designation as "the last political prisoner." It matters less that Juvêncio in particular became known as the final prisoner after two decades of repression. The meaning lies in its context and phrasing. His repression during a period of alleged reopening underscored the disjuncture between the official progress of *abertura* and the realities that persisted at the local and personal level. Moreover, calling Juvêncio the *last* prisoner nearly two years before the dictatorship actually ceded power implied a collective demand for the end of

⁹ *Folha de São Paulo* used the term for the first time on page six of its December 24, 1983 issue.

¹⁰ The four *Coorjornal* journalists freed in 1983 were Elmar Bones, Osmar Trindade, Rosvita Saueressig, and Rafael Guimarães. (Kucinski, *Jornalistas e revolucionários*, 219); Ricardo Lessa, e-mail correspondence with author, February 22, 2013.

military rule. As the last political prisoner in a nation still ruled by dictatorship, Juvêncio Mazzarollo reflected both the call for opposition and the promise of a new era.

***Nosso Tempo* Enters the Fray**

Nosso Tempo published its inaugural issue on December 3, 1980 as an avenue for denouncing the injustices of the military regime. In its first publication, the opening editorial introduced its readers to the paper's ideological pillars: "We at *Nosso Tempo* will seek our own options. We opt for liberty. As such, we strive for independence. We will resist until the end [...] Nobody can mediate this choice. Our principles have no price. We will never turn this newspaper into an executioner of these principles."¹¹ The cover of *Nosso Tempo*'s first issue displayed this objective. Looming above the bold-faced title "CONFESSION FACTORY," a drawing depicted a naked man, hands tied together, hanging upside down from his ankles while snarling men in overcoats held him in place and burnt his face with a lit cigarette. (Figure 7.1) A reference to the abuses of military rule, the image showed a torture method used by the dictatorship called "the parrot's perch" (*pau de arara*). *Nosso Tempo* alleged that Foz do Iguaçu's military police committed torture against local inhabitants, identifying only one individual by name: the city's head judge, João Kopytowsky.¹² Surely enraged at *Nosso Tempo*'s public accusations of overseeing torture, Judge Kopytowsky was one of the three authorities present at Juvêncio's initial summons.

¹¹ Untitled editorial, *Nosso Tempo*, 12/3/1980, 2.

¹² "Tortura," *Nosso Tempo*, 3/12/1980, 4.



FIGURE 7.1: The cover of *Nosso Tempo*'s first issue, 12/3/1980.

Although torture served as a central theme in *Nosso Tempo*'s first publication, criticisms of the local government and the unfolding struggle of displaced farmers soon became the newspaper's primary focus. In only its third issue, *Nosso Tempo* printed a three-page story about the failures of the administration of Colonel Cunha Vianna. Writing that *Nosso Tempo* did not want to "only be an organ of news, but also an active participant in municipal life" Juvêncio Mazzarollo organized a roundtable discussion for local left-wing figures to talk about Cunha Vianna. Juvêncio's report gave the impression of an incompetent mayor with no support from the general population.¹³ Within days Cunha Vianna personally contacted *Nosso Tempo* and demanded an interview.¹⁴ Juvêncio took advantage of this opportunity and confronted Cunha

¹³ "Políticos condenam prefeitos biônicos," *Nosso Tempo*, 12/17/1980, 7-9.

¹⁴ "Cunha Vianna ficará até 82," *Nosso Tempo*, 12/24/80, 10-11.

Vianna about the mismanagement of public funds, the prioritization of Itaipu at the expense of Foz do Iguaçu residents, and the fact that his status as mayor came via federal appointment rather than a direct popular vote.¹⁵ Despite Cunha Vianna's efforts to improve his public image, the interview ultimately portrayed him as an out-of-touch military politician.¹⁶

A series of articles one month later continued to denounce the local government. In February *Nosso Tempo* obtained and printed a letter signed by the mayor authorizing the illegal seizure of the property and finances of a local citizen.¹⁷ Two weeks later *Nosso Tempo* reported that Cunha Vianna submitted a request to change his official title from "Colonel" to "Mayor," a development that *Nosso Tempo* mocked under the headline of "Is the mayor embarrassed of being a colonel?"¹⁸ Until this point Juvêncio Mazzarollo and his newspaper had denounced Cunha Vianna's administration for torture, corruption, and a disregard for the average citizens of Foz do Iguaçu. None of these articles appeared to incite any immediate repression or intimidation. That changed in March 1981 when *Nosso Tempo* began covering the farmers' encampment in front of Itaipu.

By the time *Nosso Tempo* published its initial issues at the end of 1980, the Justice and Land Movement had already staged its land encampment at Santa Helena. The farmers' movement soon accelerated in March 1981 with the start of its second protest camp on the periphery of Itaipu's entrance gates. In this climate of local opposition and with a national spotlight cast on Foz do Iguaçu, Judge Kopytowsky, Mayor Cunha Vianna, and Colonel Labre summoned Juvêncio Mazzarollo to the Federal Police building. According to Juvêncio, the

¹⁵ In 1968, the military regime designated the region around Foz do Iguaçu as a "national security zone" and cancelled all direct elections for mayor. (Project Law No. 13, passed by Congress on 4/17/1968).

¹⁶ "Cunha Vianna ficará até 82," *Nosso Tempo*, 12/24/1980, 11.

¹⁷ "Prefeito dá uma de juiz e cai do cavalo," *Nosso Tempo*, 2/25/1981, 13.

¹⁸ "Perfeito tem vergonha de ser coronel?" *Nosso Tempo*, 3/4/1981, 12.

meeting quickly proceeded into a series of insults aimed at himself and the work of *Nosso Tempo*. Recounting the events of that initial meeting, Juvêncio identified the importance of the land encampment: “That week the farmers displaced by Itaipu had camped in Foz de Iguaçu and the situation in the city was extremely tense. [The farmers] asked for help and Colonel Labre refused. [*Nosso Tempo*] provided total coverage of the farmers’ movement.”¹⁹ The generals criticized Juvêncio’s editorial line and threatened him with legal punishment if the newspaper continued its coverage.²⁰ Despite these warnings, *Nosso Tempo* maintained its support of the farmers and continued condemning the local government.

Three days after the initial summons, authorities charged Juvêncio and two his co-editors, Aluizio Palmar and João Adelino de Souza, with having violated Article 14 of the National Security Act. Article 14 made it a crime “To make public, through any means of mass communication, untrue or biased information, or true information in a partial or distorted manner, in such a way as to create or attempt to create hostility against the constituted authorities.”²¹ The 5th Regional Military Tribunal oversaw the investigation and summoned all three editors to the Foz de Iguaçu police station to provide statements. With official charges lodged against them, the editors of *Nosso Tempo* used the pages of their newspaper to denounce the Brazilian state and vowed to defend their freedom of expression in the face of the National Security Act. A subsequent editorial observed that, “After [reading] the revelations that we are going to make here, whomever still [believes in] the open investigation into this newspaper [under] the National Security Law, is either crazy or consciously swallowing lies.”²² In reaction

¹⁹ “Enquadrados na Lei de Segurança Nacional,” *Nosso Tempo*, 9/30/1981, 8.

²⁰ Amnesty International, Document AMR 19/14/82. Source: files of the Mazzarollo family.

²¹ The text of Article 14 of the LSN comes from “Juvêncio Condenado,” *Nosso Tempo*, 10/7/1982, 2.

²² “Delegado comprova que processo é injusto,” *Nosso Tempo*, 4/15/1981, 2. The original editorial stated “está louco ou é comendo conscientemente pedras por manteiga” (is crazy or is consciously eating rocks as butter).

to his arrest, Aluizio Palmar stated simply, “What kind of *abertura* is this?”²³

At this point, Juvêncio did not understand why the government targeted his newspaper. If the government saw *Nosso Tempo* as an avenue for subversive politics, he wanted to know “Why do they not [also] pursue and attempt to destroy other militants in the press who are not journalists and who are completely willing to attack the authorities?”²⁴ *Nosso Tempo* was one of many oppositional newspapers under dictatorship and it did not appear to have much influence outside of southwestern Brazil. Thomas Skidmore has argued that heavy press censorship and repression following the 1968 passage of Institutional Act No. 5 stimulated the emergence of the new genre of publications in the 1970s from which *Nosso Tempo* would eventually emerge: the political weekly.²⁵ These political weeklies formed the base of the alternative press that from 1964 to 1980 included over 150 oppositional newspapers.²⁶ Bernardo Kucinski divides the alternative press into three sectors: the “satiricals” like *Pasquim*, *Bondinho*, *Ex*, and *Versus*; the “journalists” such as *Coorjornal* and *Repórter*, and the “revolutionaries” connected to political parties or fronts like *Opinão*, *Movimento*, and *Em Tempo*.²⁷ Kucinski highlights the oppositional media’s steadfast denunciations of torture and human rights violations, along with its criticisms of the government’s economic policies.²⁸ These larger oppositional newspapers in more established urban centers confronted the dictatorship with seemingly no repressive repercussions, yet *Nosso Tempo*, in a border town on the periphery of the Itaipu dam, incited repression from military authorities.

²³ “Ques abertura é esta?” *Nosso Tempo*, 4/15/1981, 7.

²⁴ “Ques abertura é esta?” *Nosso Tempo*, 4/15/1981, 7.

²⁵ Skidmore, *The Politics of Military Rule in Brazil*, 187.

²⁶ Kucinski, *Jornalistas e revolucionários*, xiii. Rivaldo Chinem, another journalist from this era, places the number of alternative press newspapers closer to 300 (Rivaldo Chinem, *Jornalismo de guerrilha: a imprensa alternativa brasileira, da ditadura à internet*. São Paulo: Disal, 2004, 7).

²⁷ Kucinski, *Jornalistas e Revolucionários*, ix.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, xiii.

Three months into the investigation, Juvêncio and his colleagues won a significant, but ultimately brief, victory. On July 22, 1981 a judge from the 5th Regional Military Tribunal in Curitiba rejected the original charges made against the three editors.²⁹ Considering that a guilty verdict under Article 14 of the LSN carried a sentence of up to two years in prison, the writers of *Nosso Tempo* saw this as a potential turning point. This sense of triumph, however, dissolved less than two months later with a new set of charges that now accused only Juvêncio Mazzarollo. This accusation landed Juvêncio in jail the following summer.

Singling out Juvêncio because of his “dangerousness” (*periculosidade*), this second round of charges invoked the same Article 14 from the first arraignment. In addition, Juvêncio stood accused of also violating Articles 33, 36, and 42 of the National Security Act.³⁰ The charges against Juvêncio carried a combined possibility of a twenty-year prison sentence. Whereas the earlier charges related to general events and perceptions—an ambiguity that helped lead to the charges’ rejection in July—the indictment against Juvêncio focused specifically on an article he published in a July issue of *Nosso Tempo* titled “You Can’t Milk a Dead Cow,” (*Não se tira leite de vaca morta*). Although the article in question denounced the military government and called for the return to a democratic society, it was no more incendiary or radical than any of his previous writings.³¹ Nevertheless, the military investigation cited the “Dead Cow” article as enough evidence to accuse Juvêncio and *Nosso Tempo* of making “violent and direct acts against the regime of the constitutional authorities, seeking to incite true subversion.”³²

What can one infer from the military’s second round of charges against Juvêncio Mazzarollo? Was his article so provocative that it merited a criminal investigation? An overview

²⁹ “Juiz-Auditor recusa denúncia contra Nosso Tempo,” *Nosso Tempo*, 9/22/1982, 2.

³⁰ “Enquadrados na Lei de Segurança Nacional,” *Nosso Tempo*, 9/30/1981, 8.

³¹ “Não se tira leite de vaca morta,” *Nosso Tempo*, 7/29/1981, 12.

³² “Enquadrados na Lei de Segurança Nacional,” *Nosso Tempo*, 9/30/1981, 8.

of other newspapers during this period reveals that Brazilian journalists repeatedly challenged the military regime and suffered little to no repression. One example comes from 1978, a year before President Figueiredo officially inaugurated the *abertura* policy and four years prior to Juvêncio's imprisonment. Investigating the story of a bomb that exploded in the offices of the daily newspaper *O Estado de São Paulo* ten years prior, a journalist at *Repórter* named Luiz Alberto proved that military forces had both committed the attack and covered up their actions by blaming the bombing on leftist revolutionaries. Neither Alberto nor his paper received any persecution for revealing state violence.³³ According to Joan Dassin, the most important test of press freedoms during this period came via reporting of the 1981 Riocentro bomb plot, a plan by the military's ultra-right faction to incite a counter-coup to reverse the *abertura*. In response to Riocentro, "new techniques of investigative reporting were developed on the spot" and one Brazilian journalist claimed that the press "passed with flying colors as the story was kept alive."³⁴

The dictatorship did little when journalists revealed government bombings, secret torture, and kidnappings, but the regime threw Juvêncio Mazzarollo in jail when he critiqued the Foz do Iguaçu military elite and became a leading disseminator of news on Itaipu.³⁵ An assessment of Juvêncio's trial reveals that contrary to the official charges against his "Dead Cow" article, his imprisonment resulted from the overlapping interests of local and national elites during one of the most delicate phases of Brazil's transition away from military rule.

³³ Chinem, *Jornalismo de Guerrilha*, 18. Alberto's article was titled "Descoberto plano que fabricou o AI-5 em 68."

³⁴ Joan R. Dassin, "The Brazilian Press and the Politics of Abertura," *Journal of Interamerican Studies and World Affairs*, Vol. 26, No. 3 (Aug., 1984), 396.

³⁵ For more on other oppositional news stories during this period, see Fernando Molica and Antero Luiz, *10 reportagens que abalaram a ditadura*. (Rio de Janeiro: Editora Record), 2005.

Freedom of Expression on Trial

Juvêncio Mazzarollo's trial started on November 11, 1981 and did not conclude until June 27 of the following year. Journalists from two of Brazil's leading daily newspapers, *O Globo* and *O Estado de São Paulo*, attended the trial and kept the country well informed of its proceedings.³⁶

This media presence shows that although Juvêncio initially provided one of the only voices covering the farmers' movement against Itaipu, by the time of his trial—and perhaps equally because of it—the story had evolved into a national topic. The trial offered a showcase of the dictatorship's stand against oppositional forces in the waning years of military rule and it drew widespread interest from those who recognized its implications for the progress of *abertura*.

Led by the lawyer Rene Dotti, Juvêncio's defense cited *Nosso Tempo*'s coverage of the Itaipu conflict to argue that rather than advocating seditious politics, the newspaper simply took the side of a popular social movement. As reported by *Nosso Tempo*, out of all the questions raised during the trial, the question of Itaipu was “amply exposed. The movement of the farmers dispossessed by Itaipu was the most profoundly analyzed.”³⁷ This strategy sought to justify Juvêncio's articles by showing that public support for social movements like the farmers' struggle had become increasingly acceptable at this stage of the *abertura*. Far from being a radical, Juvêncio's defense portrayed him as a concerned Brazilian citizen during this era of national transition.

The second defense strategy similarly placed Juvêncio's writings within a logic of contemporary politics. To disprove the claim that *Nosso Tempo* published subversive materials, Juvêncio's lawyer read aloud the platform of the Democratic Social Party (PDS, Partido

³⁶ “Condenado pela Espúria Lei de Segurança Nacional,” *Nosso Tempo*, 7/30/1982, 8.

³⁷ Ibid.

Demócrata Social), the new iteration of the government's since-abolished ARENA party. The defense showed that Juvêncio's writings echoed particular stances of the PDS. Hence, far from a revolutionary subversive, Juvêncio even shared certain beliefs with right-wing political parties. A final tactic implicated Foz do Iguaçu's military elite, as Dotti said that the repression resulted from "a personal grudge on the part of Colonel Labre."³⁸ Many outside of the courtroom also shared this opinion. In front of President Figueiredo and the Federal Assembly, a Paraná state deputy named Osvaldo Macedo gave a speech declaring that Colonel Labre only cared about "satisfying his own personalistic desires." Macedo called on the President and deputies in attendance to defend Juvêncio and to honor the meaning of democracy, concluding that "The law is the law. But a colonel is nothing more than just a colonel."³⁹

The context of the Itaipu dam reveals the full magnitude of Juvêncio's ongoing trial. In the late 1970s Juvêncio wrote a series of exposés criticizing Itaipu's construction and the treatment of local communities. Because of these essays on Itaipu, the military regime considered Juvêncio a dissident even before the launching of *Nosso Tempo*.⁴⁰ Two weeks prior to the publication of *Nosso Tempo*'s inaugural issue, Itaipu's internal security warned the executive committee that "subversive" materials would soon circulate throughout the region.⁴¹ Itaipu's worries appear trenchant as over its first few months *Nosso Tempo* devoted the majority of its coverage to the farmers' movement. As shown in Chapter Three, Itaipu's leaders at this moment had to deal with the fallout of the *Time* magazine allegations of corruption. With their public

³⁸ "Juvêncio condenado," *Nosso Tempo*, 10/7/1982, 2.

³⁹ Macedo sent Juvêncio a copy of his speech and a personal note that "the threats suffered by your newspaper are limited to the arrogance of colonel and the bitterness of a judge." Source: files of the Mazzarollo family.

⁴⁰ News articles include an April 12, 1979 piece in *Hoje* titled "Itaipu: o preço desumano do progresso." Most importantly, in 1980 he published a book on the Santa Helena land encampment and the early iteration of the farmers' movement called *A taipa da injustiça: Itaipu x agricultores expropriados*.

⁴¹ Confidential Memo. Itaipu Binacional, Informação No. E/AESI.G/1B/BR/0061/80. Document dated 11/19/1980. Source: IBCD.

image in doubt on a global stage, Itaipu executives became increasingly anxious about Juvêncio Mazzarollo and his escalating calls for more radical action from the protesting farmers. In fact, confidential records show a meeting on July 14 between Itaipu's legal director, Paulo da Cunha, and the Ministry of Justice.⁴² These talks decided that the SNI (National Information Service) would gather information to build a case against the newspaper, and also that Itaipu's president José Cavalcanti should engage the federal courts toward the long-term goal of charging *Nosso Tempo*'s editors under the auspices of the LSN.

Two days after the meeting between Itaipu and the Ministry of Justice, Juvêncio published an article titled "When Violence is Justified" that likely compelled the authorities into taking decisive action.⁴³ A series of SNI memos sent directly to President Calvacanti over the following month called for immediate legal action if *Nosso Tempo*'s political tone did not soften. These exchanges emphasized that Itaipu carefully monitored a potential trial through Cavalcanti's close connection to the Regional Superintendent of the Federal Police.⁴⁴ Additionally, of the 41 agenda items at Itaipu's 1981 year-end legal conference, the issue of Juvêncio Mazzarollo was the only one marked "confidential" and "off-the-record"—suspiciously leaving no details as to what exactly Itaipu's leaders discussed.⁴⁵ Finally, the minutes of a classified meeting reveal that on the whole Itaipu considered its public relations campaign successful, noting a clear decrease in "criticisms of the Itaipu project." The sole exception, however, was *Nosso Tempo*, whose writers continued to publish articles that remained "insulting and provocative to government authorities and entities, [particularly] Itaipu Binacional."⁴⁶ So

⁴² Informação No. 224/81/03/DSI/MJ; contained in folder SNI ACE.18410/81, AN-RJ.

⁴³ "Quando a violência se justifica," *Nosso Tempo*, 5/6/1981, 2.

⁴⁴ Informação No. 0290/19/AC/81; contained in folder SNI ACE.18410/81, AN-RJ; AESI.G/IB/BR/010/81. Document dated July 1981. Courtesy of Aluizio Palmar.

⁴⁵ Itaipu Binacional. I/AJ.ADV/0153/81. Microfilm No. R3530.1075-1083. 10/6/1981. Source: IBCD

⁴⁶ E/AESI.G/IB/BR/056/81. 11/30/1981. Courtesy of Aluizio Palmar.

while Itaipu and its collaborators in the dictatorship celebrated a more public image, Juvêncio Mazzarollo lingered as a persistent problem.

Through the chronology of Juvêncio's arraignment and the evidence revealed in the above-cited documents, it appears that a combination of local forces, military officials, and Itaipu administrators wanted to silence *Nosso Tempo* and pressured the Supreme Military Tribunal to act accordingly. What likely started out as a vendetta by local elites soon merged with the national development interests of the dictatorship. Juvêncio Mazzarollo's trial thus stretched into 1982 with a great deal at stake for all involved.

After nearly seven months of testimony, argument, and deliberation, the court handed down a verdict at 2pm on June 27, 1982. On charges relating to Articles 14, 36, and 42 of Brazil's National Security Act, the court found Juvêncio Mazzarollo and *Nosso Tempo* not guilty. On the charge of Article 33 of the LSN, however, Juvêncio was found guilty. Whereas the other three articles dealt with inciting "subversion" in the general population, Article 33 pertained to "Offending the honor or dignity" of government authorities. Juvêncio's sentencing under Article 33 offers surprisingly candid proof that Juvêncio's repression resulted from the vendetta of the local military elite.⁴⁷ Although Article 33 carried possible prison time of up to four years, Juvêncio received only one year in jail followed by two years conditional parole.⁴⁸ According to those present at the trial, the reading of the guilty verdict brought a stunned silence to the courtroom. When a lieutenant colonel asked the public to clear the room, a few people in the gallery began to cry. Juvêncio remained seated for nearly an hour before three federal agents escorted him to a nearby police department and to the Piraquara prison later that night.⁴⁹

⁴⁷ As outlined in the Lei de Segurança Nacional (LSN), Lei No. 6.620.

⁴⁸ "Mazzarollo condenado na LSN." *O Estado do Paraná*, 6/23/1982. Source: files of the Mazzarollo family.

⁴⁹ "Juvêncio condenado," *Nosso Tempo*, 10/7/1982, 2.

Juvêncio Mazzarollo, a man who colleagues described as “shy, but courageous” went to prison for criticizing a government that, in theory, had already begun transitioning to a free and open democracy.⁵⁰ A *Nosso Tempo* editorial emphasized the contradiction between the veneer of an official reopening and the imprisonment of a journalist: “Nepotism, corruption, and theft are all being discussed daily by the press and by honest politicians without being punished... Juvêncio Mazzarollo, who dared denounce all of this, is behind bars.”⁵¹

Despite seeing their colleague thrown in jail for criticizing the dictatorship, writers at *Nosso Tempo* actually increased their criticisms in the aftermath of Juvêncio’s verdict. In 1983, for example, 30 of *Nosso Tempo*’s 42 issues (71 percent) had a front page that contained either a critique of military politics or a headline relating to the evolving farmers’ struggle over land. This persistence did not go unnoticed by Itaipu and military officials, as an SNI report observed that *Nosso Tempo*’s “editorial line continues to be based on the following characteristics: opinionated, border-line sensationalistic, using a language common to the alternative press and publishing material of highly rebellious quality.”⁵² So rather than toning down their stance against the regime, *Nosso Tempo* devoted more energy to covering the same topics that landed Juvêncio in prison.

⁵⁰ Werner Fuchs, interview with author, 7/13/2013. Curitiba, Brazil.

⁵¹ “Juvêncio condenado,” *Nosso Tempo*, 10/7/1982, 2.

⁵² Confidential SNI report. SNI 003214/81, 8/12/1982. Courtesy of Aluizio Palmar.



FIGURE 7.2: Freedom for Juvêncio Mazzarollo. The caption is from Teotônio Villela's visit to Juvêncio in prison: "You are not in jail for stealing chickens, but for denouncing those who actually stole them. You are a hostage held here so that everyone will know that in Brazil a man is imprisoned for the crime of having an opinion." Source: files of the Mazzarollo family.

The outpouring of solidarity and support for Juvêncio paralleled the accelerating opposition movement nation-wide. The Freedom for Juvêncio Mazzarollo Committee formed within 24 hours of the guilty verdict and the following morning the Paraná Student Union organized a demonstration in the state capital of Curitiba.⁵³ Marching through the city, the protest waved signs and distributed pamphlets denouncing the verdict as "a violation of the freedom of the press and expression." By that same afternoon, graffiti spread across Curitiba and

⁵³ According to the files of the Federal Police, The Freedom for Juvêncio Mazzarollo Committee was organized and led by the youth section of the PMDB, primarily its president, Carlos Grillmann, who later became a state deputy. Source: Confidential Federal Police report 0300/83-SI/DPF.1/FI/PR. 10/21/1983. Courtesy of Aluizio Palmar.

Foz de Iguaçu declaring “Down with the National Security Act! Free Juvêncio!” and “No More Dictatorship! Freedom for Juvêncio!”⁵⁴

Juvêncio’s imprisonment became emblematic of the larger struggle to end military rule, as letters of solidarity poured in from all over Brazil identifying him as a symbol of the fight for democracy. After five months in prison, the prominent opposition lawyer Dalmo Dallari visited Juvêncio and said that “Mazzarollo, condemned by the LSN, is an active participant of the Brazilian political process and his courage is being admired throughout Brazil, having his name transformed into a banner for those who want democratization in the country.”⁵⁵ The National Labor Front (Frente Nacional do Trabalho) similarly declared “His imprisonment is even more proof that what is being called *abertura* is little more than a series of superficial acts to impress the international community.”⁵⁶ A pamphlet put out by the Workers Party (PT, Partido dos Trabalhadores) calling for a general strike on October 25 listed freedom for Juvêncio as the third demand—behind a denouncement of anti-wage laws and unemployment, yet before union rights and free and direct elections.⁵⁷ Juvêncio’s saga had in many ways become synonymous with national opposition struggles.

As the *abertura* continued along its curvy path, Juvêncio’s prospects of freedom suffered a serious setback. Approaching the end of his initial one-year sentence, Juvêncio appealed for release on parole in September 1983. In response, the Supreme Military Tribunal voted 7-4 to instead *increase* his sentence by an additional two years.⁵⁸ This ruling had a tremendous impact on Juvêncio, both in terms of his political convictions and his own psychological wellbeing. As

⁵⁴ *Poeira*, No. 25. Nov./Dec. 1982. Courtesy of Werner Fuchs.

⁵⁵ “Teotônio visita Juvêncio na prisão,” *Nosso Tempo*, 3/10/1983, 2.

⁵⁶ Statement from Frente Nacional do Trabalho. 10/22/1982. Source: files of the Mazzarollo family.

⁵⁷ Document from the Partido dos Trabalhadores, October 1983. Source: files of the Mazzarollo family.

⁵⁸ “Teotônio visita Juvêncio na prisão,” *Nosso Tempo*, 3/10/1983, 2.

he revealed in a personal letter, "I am just now starting to realize how serious my situation is... It feels almost impossible to find any optimism about the future. What I see happening in Brazil is catastrophic. We are lost."⁵⁹ This experience and feeling of hopelessness stayed with Juvêncio for the rest of his life. His widow, Vilma Macedo, believes that his time in prison left profound scars on his soul, relating that Juvêncio once confided to her that "whenever I wake up, sadness is already waiting for me."⁶⁰

The increase in his sentence forced Juvêncio to confront a reality he had perhaps not yet fully considered. Rather than succumb to his newfound feelings of despair, he decided to take action. Emboldened by the contrast between his own repression and the *abertura* freedoms he perceived beyond his prison walls, Juvêncio protested the increase in his sentence by staging a hunger strike. He went on strike October 23, 1983, writing that the authorities had,

Stupidly [robbed] me of my life for futile reasons. Nothing, absolutely nothing justifies such a severe punishment. I can no longer allow—by the ethical duty and through the body that God gave me—fascist inquisitors to make me into the grass on which they feed their sadism and that they carry out, at my expense, the role of oppressor for all society... I have already suffered enough. The situation is unbearable. This must finally end.⁶¹

The hunger strike attracted national media attention and placed enough pressure on state authorities that Paraná's senator, José Richa, publicly declared his intent to intercede at the federal level.⁶² Along with informing the nation of his personal struggle, Juvêncio sought to use his hunger strike as a means to protest the LSN and the continued existence of a repressive Brazilian state. Human rights groups picked up the story of Juvêncio's hunger strike as Amnesty

⁵⁹ Letter from Juvêncio Mazzarollo to Aluizio Palmar. Source: files of the Mazzarollo family.

⁶⁰ Vilma Macedo, interview with author, 9/27/2014. Foz do Iguaçu, Brazil.

⁶¹ "Juvêncio em greve de fome," *Nosso Tempo*, 11/4/1983, 23.

⁶² "Juvêncio encerra greve de fome," *Nosso Tempo*, 11/11/1983, 1.

International mobilized a letter-writing campaign that sent thousands of letters from all over the world to Brazil's President, to the Minister of Justice, and to Minister of the Interior.⁶³

After sixteen days without food, he called an end to the hunger strike, writing that the action had served its purpose of bringing attention to his cause. Moreover, he reemphasized the ideology driving his actions, writing that "The right to information belongs to everyone; no man is free if he lacks the right to say and know the truth; no country is free when there is a law that punishes those who denounce a crime but does not punish the real criminals."⁶⁴



FIGURE 7.3. Starting in February of 1984 (after 516 days) *Nosso Tempo* printed a running tally of the length of Juvêncio's imprisonment in the top corner of the front page of almost every issue.

By early 1984, Juvêncio's situation remained unchanged and although the *abertura* seemed to advance at the national level, he was not yet free. His patience depleted and seeing his situation as increasingly unsustainable, Juvêncio decided to again take direct action. He began a second hunger strike on March 23, exactly a year-and-a-half from when the government first put him in prison. Claiming with "absolute certainty" that he was the victim of a terrible injustice,

⁶³ The personal files of Juvêncio Mazzarollo contain copies of over 1,500 letters from fifteen countries: Greece, Tasmania, Sweden, Switzerland, Austria, Germany, Belgium, the USA, Canada, France, Spain, Italy, the United Kingdom, New Zealand, and Australia. Source: files of the Mazzarollo family.

⁶⁴ Statement written by Juvêncio Mazzarollo. 11/9/1983. Source: files of the Mazzarollo family.

the imprisoned writer vowed to only feed himself again as a freed man: “Freedom or death. It is my choice... I hope to survive, but that is now in the hands of Justice in which, despite everything, I am still required to trust.”⁶⁵

The second hunger strike and the media attention it generated mobilized an unprecedented showing of support, with solidarity actions spread across Brazil and beyond. The Board of Supervisors in Foz de Iguaçu voted unanimously to approve a motion of solidarity, declaring that “Juvêncio did nothing more than denounce corruption and take the side of the less-fortunate.” Members of Paraná’s Legislative Assembly sent a commission to Brasília to lobby national authorities and redress the “national shame” unfolding in their state. The National Conference of Brazilian Bishops (CNBB, Conferência Nacional dos Bispos do Brasil) used its connections to rally support and attention. Brazil’s most militant labor organization, the Unified Workers Central (CUT, Central Único de Trabalhadores) circulated petitions demanding his release. Students throughout Brazil held rallies and eight teenagers in Curitiba staged their own hunger strike in solidarity. And as far away as London, journalists and students at the British Communication School held assemblies and set up permanent protest camps.⁶⁶

The message delivered by Juvêncio’s second hunger strike resonated with a population exhausted by twenty years of dictatorship. To the delight of the embattled journalist and his supporters, the Supreme Court freed Juvêncio Mazzarollo on April 6, 1984, ten days into his second hunger strike. In a decision with clear implications for the future direction of Brazil, in the end the Supreme Court, a federal body, overturned the original sentence handed down by the Military Tribunal. The transition to civilian rule did not occur until the following March of

⁶⁵ Letter from prison written by Juvêncio Mazzarollo, 3/28/1984. Source: files of the Mazzarollo family.

⁶⁶ Details on solidarity actions come from “Todos querem Juvêncio em liberdade,” *Nosso Tempo*, 4/7/1984, 20 and “Vencemos,” *Nosso Tempo*, 4/13/1984, 15.

1985—and direct elections for the presidency did not return until 1989. But Juvêncio’s release in 1984 signified an important phase in Brazil’s democratic opening. Sentenced in 1982 by a Military Tribunal, Juvêncio Mazzarollo won his freedom two years later from a civilian court when a national solidarity movement turned his prison sentence into a banner for Brazilian democracy. Juvêncio saw his repression as symptomatic of the suffering shared by all Brazilians, writing that “My freedom was a victory for all. It was a victory of the people and of Justice.”⁶⁷ *Nosso Tempo*’s headline proclaimed “*Vencemos*”—We Won. Newspapers across Brazil carried the message of Juvêncio’s release and hundreds of supporters gathered outside of his Curitiba prison to commemorate the conclusion of a long campaign that until that moment, had provided very few moments worth celebrating.⁶⁸

Writing as a liberated journalist for the first time in nearly two years, Juvêncio Mazzarollo credited the solidarity movement for winning his freedom. He praised the efforts of opposition forces in Foz do Iguaçu, across Brazil, and throughout the world, saying that only through grassroots mobilization could “the last political prisoner in the country could leave from where, for justice, he should never have entered.”⁶⁹

⁶⁷ “Vencemos,” *Nosso Tempo*, 4/13/1984, 15.

⁶⁸ “Supremos liberto o último preso político do País.” *O Estado de São Paulo*. 4/7/1984.

⁶⁹ “Vencemos,” *Nosso Tempo*, 4/13/1984, 15.



FIGURE 7.4: Juvêncio Mazzarollo arriving at the Foz do Iguaçu airport after his release from prison.
Source: files of the Mazzarollo family.

Conclusion

It is difficult to outline an exact chronology of Brazil's *abertura*. Most scholars trace the *abertura*'s earliest roots to 1974 and President Geisel's policy of *distensão*, or political decompression. Establishing its end point, however, is far more complicated. Among the more persuasive arguments for when the *abertura* came to a close include the 1979 reform laws that gave amnesty to political exiles and enabled the formation of new political parties. The election of 1982 offers another compelling conclusion, as opposition parties earned sweeping victories at the polls in what many considered a democratizing sea change.

Seeing these events as emblematic of the *abertura* problematically assumes that events occurring in Rio de Janeiro, São Paulo, and Brasília reverberated at the same level and timescale

across Brazil. The case of Juvêncio Mazzarollo shows how the *abertura* developed in multiple ways depending on the social status and regional location of a given person or group. Although the legislative goals of *abertura* had advanced by 1982, Juvêncio's imprisonment suggested that not everyone belonged to this widening society. For critics of the dictatorship, the repression of Juvêncio Mazzarollo suggested that democracy remained a distant notion. The military government, for its part, saw *Nosso Tempo*'s coverage of the farmers' movement as a challenge to image of Itaipu it hoped to leave as a legacy before the approaching return to democratic rule. In this sense, the Itaipu dam functioned as an enduring mark of dictatorship, immune to changes brought by democratization. The actions of local elites, moreover, show that all Brazilians, and not only farmers, or working communities, or political dissidents, experienced a double-reality of *abertura*. Military leaders in Foz do Iguaçu considered themselves above the process of *abertura* that they saw unfolding in major cities, and they maneuvered against Juvêncio in an attempt to exercise their quickly fading power.

Juvêncio's history in the western Paraná borderlands complicates what scholars tend to portray as a linear narrative. While millions of people took to the streets and to the polls to defend their vision of a democratic future, Juvêncio and the farmers he wrote about were excluded from the official progress of *abertura*. This double-reality suggests that even on the cusp of Brazil's democratic return, the country remained divided. Split along lines of region, class, ethnicity, and gender, Brazilians experienced life under dictatorship in fundamentally different ways. Just as the period of dictatorship was not lived as a singular process by all Brazilians, so too did the return to democracy involve a chorus of competing realities. The uneven transition out of military rule suggested that these social fissures would endure long after the *abertura*.

Conclusion

The Many Realities of *Abertura*

Brazil's return to democratic rule in 1985 had an inauspicious start. The day before the March 15 inauguration set for the first civilian leader in 21 years, president-elect Tancredo Neves fell ill. The 74-year-old Neves had been the candidate of the Democratic Alliance, a coalition of centrist opposition groups seeking to defeat the staunchly pro-military former governor of São Paulo, Paulo Maluf. When Neves received over 70 percent of votes, supporters heralded his presidency as the start of a new era. The front-page headline of the *Folha de São Paulo* boldly proclaimed: "The authoritarian cycle has ended."¹

And yet, Neves never became president. After undergoing emergency surgery to remove a benign intestinal tumor the night before his inauguration, Neves could not take the oath of office. Instead, vice president José Sarney was sworn in as acting president. Sarney, from the same conservative party as Maluf (the Democratic Social Party, PDS), had only made it on the ticket as a concession to the military establishment. Sarney's interim presidency became permanent on April 21 when Neves died from an infection caused by his numerous surgeries. Despite the veneer of a democratic transition, the country was now ruled by a man who only six years before had been the president of ARENA, the official party of Brazil's dictatorship.

Despite the convenient symbolism of Brazil narrowly missing out on its return to democracy, Neves' election had never, in fact, been democratic. Rather, it resulted from a calculated move to placate the outgoing military authorities. These maneuvers formed part of the

¹ "Acabou o ciclo autoritário; Tancredo é o 1o presidente civil e de oposição desde 64," *Folha de São Paulo*, 1/16/1985, 1.

official policy of *abertura* (political opening) that envisioned a return to civilian rule through controlled stages of political reform, including amnesty and party reform laws in 1979 and direct elections in 1982 for all positions except the presidency. Neves was slated to become president in 1985 not because the Brazilian people preferred him to Maluf, but because he had been chosen by the same Electoral College system used by the dictatorship for nearly two decades to indirectly select national leaders—a veneer of democracy on which the military established its legitimacy.² Despite the efforts of a massive groundswell of protest that had rallied behind the Direct Elections Now campaign (*Diretas Já*), the 1985 elections took place without a popular vote.³ Because of this, Brazil would not have a directly elected president until Fernando Collor de Mello in 1989, four years after the ‘official’ return of civilian rule.

This dissertation has argued that the *abertura* never offered the sort of political and social reopening claimed by its supporters, at least not for all Brazilians. From this perspective, the 1985 death of Tancredo Neves did not signal the unfulfilled potential of Brazilian democracy. Because the *abertura*’s purview of political reform excluded a significant portion of society, the drama of 1985 was less a missed opportunity than it was the continuation of an already contradictory process.

Numerous scholars have analyzed how the 1985 elections limited the forward progress of Brazilian democracy.⁴ Written largely by political scientists, these works chronicle the

² The indirect Electoral College was composed of members of Congress (Senators and Federal Deputies) and select delegates from state assemblies and municipal chambers. The elections of 1982 determined the Electoral College that selected Neves in 1985.

³ The *Diretas Já* campaign succeeded in putting forth a constitutional amendment in April 1984 to reintroduce direct presidential elections. The amendment, however, fell 22 votes shy of the total needed to pass the Chamber of Deputies. The definitive account of *Diretas Já* comes from Domingos Leonelli and Dante de Oliveira, *Diretas Já: 15 meses que abalaram a ditadura*, 2nd edition, (Rio de Janeiro: Editora Record, 2004).

⁴ Analysis of Brazil’s post-1985 transition include Scott Mainwaring, “The Transition to Democracy in Brazil,” *Journal of Interamerican Studies and World Affairs* Vol. 28, No. 1 (1986): 149-79; Frances Hagopian, “Democracy by Undemocratic Means”? Elites, Political Pacts, and Regime Transition in Brazil, *Comparative Political Studies*, Vol. 23, No. 2 (1990): 147-170; Timothy J. Power, J. *The Political Right in Postauthoritarian Brazil: Elites*,

negotiations and long-term outcomes of the “pacted” transition that paved the way for the Electoral College’s selection of Tancredo Neves in 1985. The idea is that in exchange for handing over formal power to civilians, the military regime retained decisive influence over the contours of *abertura* and the subsequent transition. The problem with this claim, however, is that it depicts democratization as a process molded exclusively by elites. Scott Mainwaring and Donald Share categorize Brazil as an example of “transition through transaction” through which elites controlled the timing and mechanisms of political change.⁵ Bernardo Kucinski similarly describes the *abertura* as a process that “reaffirmed the Brazilian political tradition of conciliation amongst elites.”⁶ This approach entirely overlooks the role of non-elite actors. Moreover, it assumes that all Brazilians defined their hopes for a new democratic era in purely political terms. The Brazilian political scientist Bolivar Lamounier, for example, sees the *abertura* as a success for opposition movements insofar as they became “a powerful political-electoral force” that benefitted from the passage of an amnesty law and the return of party pluralism.⁷ Reflecting the limited framework of the *abertura* itself, scholarly focus on political change neglects the full range of experiences attached to dictatorship and democratization.

As Steve Stern has shown in his work on memory struggles in Chile during the regime of Augusto Pinochet, “elites did not act in a vacuum,” but instead responded to a variety of popular pressures from below.⁸ Despite the pacted transition’s exclusion of non-elite social forces, Stern

Institutions, and Democratization. (University Park, Pa: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2000); and Juan J. Linz and Alfred C. Stepan. *Problems of Democratic Transition and Consolidation: Southern Europe, South America, and Post-Communist Europe*, (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996), esp. 66, 150-187.

⁵ Scott Mainwaring and Donald Share, “Transitions through Transaction: Democratization in Brazil and Spain.” In Wayne Selcher, ed., *Political Liberalization in Brazil: Dynamics, Dilemmas, and Future Prospects*, (Boulder: Westview, 1986), 175-215.

⁶ Kuckinski, *O Fim da Ditadura Militar*, 139.

⁷ Bolivar Lamounier, “Authoritarian Brazil Revisited: the Impact of Elections on the *Abertura*,” In *Democratizing Brazil: Problems of Transition and Consolidation*, Ed. Alfred Stepan (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989), 71.

⁸ Stern, *Reckoning with Pinochet*, 367.

nonetheless urges scholars “not to discard the core insight but to refine it—by considering more precisely the boundaries of pacts, their necessary fictions, and their consequences over time, when placed alongside other social dynamics.”⁹ Like the Chileans who “kept alive the memory question as a central moral reckoning for a democratic society” so too did Brazilian communities like those in western Paraná advocate their own alternative visions for democratization.¹⁰ The case of Itaipu exemplifies how citizens of different socioeconomic and regional backgrounds experienced the *abertura* as anything but a controlled or linear transition from dictatorship to democracy. Whether through the history of Brazilian farmers at Itaipu, Chilean human rights activists, or scores of other non-elite Latin Americans, scholars must account for the variety of grassroots histories that exerted parallel influences on the return of civilian regimes.

To understand more deeply why the *abertura* yielded an incomplete democracy, it is critical to retrace the history of non-elite Brazilians whose livelihoods were equally ignored by military and civilian rulers. The history of Itaipu offers a particularly striking example of this claim. Because of the dam’s geopolitical importance and its capacity to mobilize a heterogeneous opposition, it draws attention to the forms of collective resistance often overlooked in traditional narratives of Brazil’s military period. And as a case study of local communities advancing their own vision of democracy, the history of Itaipu shows how Brazilians strove to overcome their peripheral status, both during the *abertura* and after the transition to civilian rule.

The history of land and opposition that emerged around the Itaipu dam shows that for Brazilians like those in the western Paraná borderlands, democracy remained a distant promise. Because areas like the Paraná countryside had suffered repression regardless of whether Brazil was under military or democratic rule, local families saw few of their own concerns reflected in

⁹ Stern, *Reckoning with Pinochet*, 365.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 368.

the official rhetoric of *abertura*. While Brazilian elites and urban social movements inched along a gradual if inconsistent path of democratization, displaced farmers, peasants, and indigenous communities confronted an entirely different reality. Mainstream opposition forces mobilized for political reform and direct presidential elections—goals that offered few immediate benefits to displaced rural communities in search of land. So although the struggle at Itaipu emerged in the context of *abertura*, both its origins and its demands existed beyond the immediacy of Brazil's political reopening.

Frameworks of Repression

This dissertation has used the case of Itaipu to make three theoretical contributions. First, the double-reality of *abertura* contends that Brazilians lived in a world of double *abertura*, the one they experienced as their own reality and the official version of democratization they perceived to be occurring throughout the country. Second, the dialectic of land and socio-political legitimacy argues that diverging relationships to land resulted in different forms of social mobilization from various rural communities. Third, the issue of indigenous representation shows how federal policies and interactions with non-Indian rural neighbors rendered Brazil's indigenous groups socially and ontologically invisible. To draw out the larger implications of these three conclusion, the remaining sections of this conclusion will now reflect on how each offers a framework for understanding forms of violence and repression rarely analyzed in discussions of Brazil's dictatorship.

The Double-Reality of Abertura

The most violent period of Brazil's military dictatorship was the so-called 'years of lead' (*os anos de chumbo*) phase under the presidency of Emílio Médici (1969-1974). After this wave

of disappearances and torture, the newly chosen government of Ernesto Geisel (1974-1979) announced a policy of liberalization, or *distensão*. Geisel called for a “slow, gradual, and secure” transition away from hardline military rule and under his watch human rights abuses diminished, press censorship loosened, and the Institutional Act No. 5 expired.¹¹ In 1979, the *abertura* was then established by President João Figueiredo as the official sub-phase of controlled liberalization: an amnesty law allowed exiles to return, a reform bill reorganized political parties, and elections for state governor eventually returned. These political changes gave the impression that even if Brazil remained in an authoritarian climate, a less repressive society had begun to take root. When seen from the perspective of popular struggles at Itaipu, however, the realities of *abertura* take on a parallel set of meanings. In a speech during the farmers’ 1980 protest camp in Santa Helena, one participant declared that “Violence is engrained in the structure of our country, and Itaipu is just one part of that.”¹² Hence, the various modes of repression in western Paraná presented a different reality of *abertura* from what many local inhabitants believed to be unfolding across the country.

As discussed in the introduction of this thesis, the Itaipu dam represented a form of what Barbara and Allen Isaacmen call “epistemic violence.”¹³ More than just displacement, forced relocation, and the destruction of property, the dictatorship’s goal of building the largest dam on the planet left irreversible scars on the region’s social landscape. As one farmer recalled, Itaipu “was terrible for you, and you know why? Because before we were a community... [but] then everything started to change, one person left for here, another moved over there, there was no way to maintain a community. Everything changed.”¹⁴ Thirty years later, this rupture still

¹¹ Atencio, *Memory’s Turn*, 10.

¹² Mazzarollo, *A taipa da injustiça*, 95.

¹³ Isaacman & Isaacman, *Dams, Displacement, and the Delusion of Development*, 16.

¹⁴ Adil Fochezatto, interview with author. 11/14/2014, Santa Helena Velha, Paraná.

lingers. One woman whose mother and sister were forced to resettle in the Amazon fought back tears while describing the process of being displaced: “My whole family lived there, and we had a beautiful home, near a waterfall, it was beautiful, magnificent. But to this day we feel like dying of sadness.”¹⁵

As an irreversible mark on the social and physical landscape of western Paraná, the case of Itaipu emphasizes the competing scales of time in the double-reality of *abertura*. The nature of Latin American dictatorships was that they would eventually fall from power, an aspect that perhaps fueled their desire to enact policies based on a sense of enduring legitimacy. In Brazil, this ideology of manifest destiny was known as *Brasil Grande*. As such, military regimes initiated projects like Itaipu to permanently alter their country’s environmental, physical, and social landscapes. Military rule might be fleeting, but the impact of developmentalism lived on. From the perspective of *abertura*, even the most inclusive political victories appear temporary compared to the long-term impact of projects like Itaipu. Direct elections and democratic freedoms might return, but the homes flooded by Itaipu never would.

The Dialectic of Land and Socio-Political Legitimacy

The Paraná borderlands offer an example of a site where three categories of rural Brazilians lived in close proximity of one another. Despite inhabiting the same landscape and mobilizing against a common enemy in Itaipu, the experience of each group diverged according to its distinct relationship to land. The title-owning farmers saw land as a source of *individual property*, landless workers (peasants, share-croppers, and day-laborers, among others) saw land as a basis of their *collective rights*, and for the Avá-Guarani indigenous community, land existed

¹⁵ Dona Suita, interview with author. 11/16/2014, Santa Helena, Paraná.

as a *way of life*. These perceptions of land impacted the socio-political legitimacy of each group by determining the strategies taken to defend their particular livelihoods. In turn, these forms of social mobilization elicited different responses from the military regime, with the degree of repression corresponding to the threat that each group posed to the existing social order.

In the context of *abertura*, each group sought to position itself as a legitimate social and political force by basing its campaign on laws created by the dictatorship. The landed farmers relied on the 1967 Constitution to advocate for increased financial compensation, the landless peasants appealed to the 1964 Land Statute to demand agrarian reform, and the Avá-Guarani cited the 1973 Indian Statute to protect both their territorial rights as Indians and their political rights as citizens. By relying on military laws as a source of legitimacy, rural Brazilians showed that despite being excluded from the official policies of democratization, the *abertura* nonetheless existed as a tangible concept to be invoked by any group wishing to advance their own hopes for a more equal society. These legal strategies, however, provided just one framework for socio-political legitimacy. To defend its perception of land, each group also employed other forms of protest shaped by its current social standing and its vision for the future. The overlapping histories of the landed and landless farmers at Itaipu exemplify the deeper implications of land, legitimacy, and repression in Brazil.

In the initial struggle against Itaipu, the Justice and Land Movement (MJT) mobilized to receive higher expropriation prices in order to buy new properties elsewhere. Comprised mainly of European-descendant landed farmers and their allies in the Church, the MJT leadership staged protest encampments on the periphery of Itaipu. Seen as humble farmers peacefully defending their right to individual property, the farmers received a tremendous outpouring of support from sectors of civil society. In the uncertain climate of *abertura*, the MJT's reliance on peaceful

strategies bolstered its standing as a legitimate—and politically acceptable—social movement. Although the Itaipu dam represented a broader form of epistemic violence, and aside from a standoff with police at the start of the 1981 Foz do Iguaçu protest, the landed farmers rarely suffered direct violence. In contrast, when landless workers developed more confrontational strategies they triggered widespread repression from the government and from rural elites.

After having their demands neglected in the struggle against Itaipu, landless farmers fought to abolish the current system of land tenure under the newly formed banner of MASTRO, the Movement of Landless Workers of Western Paraná. Whereas the MJT used a strategy of *encampments*, MASTRO led a series of *occupations* where hundreds of families seized control of abandoned or underused lands. Seeking the redistribution of land and federal agrarian reform, landless groups like MASTRO based their legitimacy around an understanding of land as a collective right for all Brazilians. Seeking to protect their properties and the status quo, the military government and wealthy elites responded violently. On occupations organized by MASTRO in 1983 and 1984, state police and hired gunmen killed two farmers, and dozens more were beaten, imprisoned, and physically expelled from their homes. These events in western Paraná mirrored a growing national trend as hundreds of landless peasants died on similar occupations throughout the country.

For landless Brazilians, the dialectic of land and socio-political legitimacy functioned as both a catalyst of protest and a source of repression. Because the *abertura*'s focus on political structures did little to disrupt the structural inequalities long embedded in the Brazilian countryside, landless groups in western Paraná mobilized in more radical ways that went beyond the official contours of Brazil's democratic transition. For doing so, they confronted waves of repression that would continue even after the 1985 return of civilian rule.

The (In)visibility of Indigenous Struggles

The Avá-Guarani indigenous community suffered a social rupture more profound in its consequences than that experienced by the neighboring farmers. Their lands had been the pillar of a way of life and the Itaipu flood represented a deep ontological break. More than just a striking example of repression in the countryside, the history of the Avá-Guarani shows how constructions of race, legitimacy, and indigeneity created a dual existence in the Brazilian countryside. Although visible substantively, indigenous communities were invisible and diminished officially.

In the MJT fight at Itaipu, farmers almost entirely ignored the plight of the Avá-Guarani living some 20 kilometers north on the shores of the Paraná River. On one hand, this neglect resulted from the recent history of immigration in the area; starting in the 1950s, settlers arrived in western Paraná and many established farms on indigenous lands seized by the state government. The animosity between Indians and settlers lingered in the decades that followed. Yet when the MJT mobilized against Itaipu's expropriation policies, members of the Avá-Guarani attempted to participate in the farmers' protests. Aside from a single gesture of solidarity at the opening of the Foz do Iguaçu encampment, farmers turned a blind eye to the Avá-Guarani. A former MJT leader acknowledged that sectors of the farmers' movement "didn't even know there were *índios* in the region."¹⁶ In a 2014 interview, the indigenous leader Adriano Tupã Rokenji recalled that in the community's effort to make common cause with the MJT, "we were never even seen by the farmers."¹⁷ Not only did this selective oversight preclude the chance of forming a broader movement against Itaipu, it further relegated the Avá-Guarani as barely

¹⁶ Carlos Grillmann, interview with author, 10/22/2014, Foz do Iguaçu.

¹⁷ Adriano Tupã Rokenji, interview with author. Aldeia Indígena Tekoha Itamarã, 11/6/2014.

visible figures in the Brazilian countryside.

Federal policies helped codify this blending of indigenous visibility and invisibility. As part of Itaipu's expropriation process, FUNAI (the National Foundation of Indigenous Affairs) subjected the Avá-Guarani to a survey intended to determine their "Indianness." Among other categories, the test measured an individual's skin pigment, language, clothing, and name. FUNAI used these criteria to claim that only a handful of "genuine Indians" lived in Itaipu's flood zone—an effort to diminish the physical and symbolic presence of the community. In response, the Avá-Guarani mobilized to have the full size of their population counted and led a grassroots movement to protect their cultural, territorial, and political rights. The community used solidarity networks to attract media attention, lobby politicians, and gain allies in civil society. Thanks in large measure to the public pressure generated by the Avá-Guarani, FUNAI soon abandoned the "Criteria of Indianness" as its nation-wide policy. The successful campaign to cancel FUNAI's survey exemplifies how indigenous groups could assert their visibility.

In spite of this victory, however, the community's overall situation did not change. In June 1982—four months before the Itaipu flood—FUNAI relocated the Avá-Guarani to an indigenous reservation and in the decades since, the community has shuffled between two additional government reserves. During the standoff at Itaipu, much like today, the Avá-Guarani remained invisible to the public eye.

Even in Brazil's largest effort to-date to account for the brutality and violence of its authoritarian past, the repression of indigenous groups remains categorically overlooked. The 2014 National Truth Commission (CNV, Comissão Nacional da Verdade) confirmed 343 cases of murders or forced disappearances committed by agents of the military regime and revealed the

pervasive use of torture and illegal imprisonment.¹⁸ These categories of state-sanctioned violence correspond most closely with the way scholars and human rights activists tend to analyze periods of political violence. As argued throughout this dissertation, however, violence under an authoritarian regime did not only result from the direct actions of the dictatorship. To the CNV's credit, the report does detail less-official forms of repression, including against urban workers, militants, the LGBT community, and university students. Additionally, the CNV determined that under the dictatorship and in the preceding decades (1946-1988) at least 8,350 Indians were killed. Despite the inclusion of indigenous deaths—which even the CNV recognizes as only a partial total—these cases of violence are not included in the main body of the report. Rather, the section on indigenous repression exists as a thematic appendix, coming after the final conclusions and recommendations.¹⁹ And whereas the CNV provides a detailed biography and when available, a picture, of each of the 343 certified victims of state violence, the appendix on violence against Indians includes few individual names or personal details. Even fifty years later, the official victims of the military dictatorship are memorialized as people, each with a family and a story to tell. Brazil's Indians, on the other hand, remain almost entirely unidentified. Notwithstanding the challenges of compiling evidence of abuses against indigenous groups, the structure of the CNV reinforces the dual existence of Brazil's Indian communities. Visible at times, indigenous groups remain forever in the background, just beyond society's collective gaze.

The point here is not to voyeuristically highlight instances of violence, but rather to place them within the context of how rural repression existed before, during, and after the official parameters of military rule. Nor is it a suggestion that other regions in Brazil—both rural and

¹⁸ Relatório da Comissão Nacional da Verdade, December 2014. Source: <http://www.cnv.gov.br>

¹⁹ “Violações de direitos humanos dos povos indígenas” Texto V, Vol. II. Ibid.

urban alike—did not continue to face their own forms of physical and social violence in the waning years of dictatorship. Instead, the persistence of violence in the Paraná borderlands suggests that although the abuses surrounding Itaipu were amplified by the climate of authoritarian rule, they belonged to a broader history of authoritarianism. This perspective complicates the traditional periodization of dictatorships. More importantly, it also demands that scholars of modern Brazil, especially those studying the military era, attempt to look past the static boundaries of a given political system or time period in order to trace the deeper constructions of social exclusion and repression. Of the many realities of *abertura*, perhaps the starkest of all is the understanding that the incomplete process of democratization resulted not from the transition out of military rule, but from the inequalities long embedded in the fabric of Brazilian society. The experience of the Avá-Guarani and the not-quite-visible status of indigenous repression draw out this point sharply. As the product of a history that predated the 1964 military coup, this reality of severe inequality and invisibility would persist even after the 1985 return to civilian rule.

Epilogue: The Legacies of Itaipu

The completion of China's Three Gorges dam in 2012 dethroned Itaipu as the largest dam in the world. With an installed capacity of 22,400 megawatt hours (Mwh) the Chinese dam on the Yangtze River far surpassed Itaipu's total of 14,000 Mwh. However, the sense of grandeur and national pride that originally led Brazil's dictatorship to build 'the project of the century' has not dissipated. Citing its higher average annual output—the Yangtze's seasonal flooding causes fluctuating spikes in production—Iaipu Binational still celebrates its dam as "the world's largest

generator” of hydroelectric energy.²⁰ In the last decade, Itaipu also received global attention when Brazil’s Luiz Inácio “Lula” da Silva and Paraguay’s Fernando Lugo renegotiated the initial 1973 treaty. As shown in Chapter One, the original agreement required Paraguay to sell its unused portion of Itaipu’s energy exclusively to Brazil at a fixed and below-market rate until the treaty expired fifty years later in 2023. But in 2009, in a rare period when leftist presidents governed both countries, Brazil agreed to triple its payments and to allow Paraguay to sell its energy at market rates. In an era of regional integration—both countries belong to the Southern Cone’s common market, MERCOSUL—the renegotiated treaty was heralded as a sign that Latin American nations could shed their historical antagonisms. The 2012 ousting of Lugo in Paraguay and the economic and political crises plaguing Lula’s Workers Party (PT) in Brazil have since returned much of the regional tension that has traditionally defined Itaipu’s history.

But the legacy of the Itaipu dam extends beyond the realm of geopolitics and development. As important as its production of energy or its reshuffling of regional power dynamics, Itaipu must also be understood as a site of intense social mobilization. Along with its implications for the history of *abertura*, the farmers’ standoff at Itaipu also helped initiate a transnational anti-dam movement. This campaign became especially concentrated in Brazil, a country among the world’s top ten builders of large dams.²¹ In his study of hydroelectric projects throughout the Global South, Sanjeev Khagram credits the Justice and Land Movement with influencing subsequent struggles that confronted a continuous succession of dam projects throughout Brazil. Above all, the lessons of struggle at Itaipu helped propel resistance against a

²⁰ The official masthead of Itaipu’s website reads: “Itaipu: the world’s largest generator of renewable clean energy.” <https://www.itaipu.gov.br/en> Accessed 7/6/2016.

²¹ Khagram. *Dams and Development*, 142.

series of over 20 dams built in the Uruguai River Basin.²² As part of their efforts to halt the construction of these projects, organizers brought in speakers from western Paraná and screened a documentary made on the fight at Itaipu—the same film directed by Frederico Fülgraff cited throughout this dissertation.²³ This movement led to the creation of the Commission of People Affected by Dams (CRAB, later renamed MAB, the Movement of People Affected by Dams) that has since evolved into one of the largest grassroots organizations in Brazil.²⁴

Finally, a discussion of Itaipu inevitably invokes the ongoing question of the Belo Monte project in the Amazonian state of Pará. Planned by the Brazilian government since the 1980s, Belo Monte would be the third largest dam in the world, following only Itaipu and Three Gorges in China. Compared to the MJT's direct influence on other anti-dam movements, the connections between Itaipu and Belo Monte are more symbolic. Along with the size of each project, both dams represent the efforts to use hydroelectric development as a means to establish the state's presence in 'frontier' zones; whereas Itaipu secured access to the fertile agricultural lands of eastern Paraguay, Belo Monte would facilitate new settlement projects in the Amazon. A key difference, however, is that the movement against Belo Monte has tapped into global activist networks that had not yet formed during the period of Itaipu's construction.

Belo Monte has arguably become the most controversial development plan in the Global South, in no small measure because activist campaigns have focused on the plight of the Kayapó indigenous community and the potential destruction of Amazonian forests.²⁵ Although the

²² Ibid., 149. At the same time that Itaipu was being built, other dams were also sparking rural resistance across Brazil, including the Tucuruí dam in Pará, the Sobradinho dam in Bahia, and the Itaparica dam in Pernambuco.

²³ Franklin Daniel Rothman and Pamela E. Oliver, "From Local to Global: the Anti-Dam Movement in Southern Brazil, 1979-1992," *Mobilization: an International Journal*, Vol. 4, No. 1, 49.

²⁴ Marcelo Carvalho Rosa, "Beyond the MST: the Impact on Brazilian Social Movements," in Miguel Carter (Ed), *Challenging Social Inequality: the Landless Rural Workers Movements and Agrarian Reform in Brazil*, (Durham, NC: Duke Univ. Press, 2015), 379-380.

²⁵ For more on Belo Monte, see Peter Taylor Klein, "Engaging the Brazilian State: the Belo Monte Dam and the Struggle for Political Voice," the *Journal of Peasant Studies*, 2015, Vol. 42, No. 6, 1137-1156; and Tracy Devine

framework of the anti-Belo Monte movement differs from what took place at Itaipu, the underlying dynamics belong to a common history of rural mobilization. In both cases, a localized standoff with a government project grew into a broader movement with far-reaching implications. Whether in 1980s military Brazil or under civilian rule in 2016, these campaigns serve as vehicles for contesting and defining the meanings of development, land, and opposition in Brazil.

By considering the Itaipu dam experientially, this dissertation has re-imagined it. More than a development project, an energy source, or a geopolitical monument, Itaipu was an arena of conflict and opposition that reshaped society. It projected rural livelihoods into national debates over land, development, and democracy. By exploring the dynamics *within* the rural struggle against Itaipu, moreover, this study has shed new light on the diverse racial, class, and indigenous realities of life in the Brazilian countryside. In a twenty-first century world where hydroelectric energy remains both appealing and controversial, the history of Itaipu reveals the full range of linked narratives that must be considered together to properly understand the social impact and implications of mega-dam projects.

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