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The impact of land policies on international migration:

The case of the Brasiguaios

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- analyse migration as part of broader global change
- contribute to new theoretical approaches
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Abstract

In the second half of the twentieth century, Brazilian and Paraguayan ‘national’ land policies reshaped ‘local’ social relations in both countries, especially in the eastern region of Paraguay. Between the 1960s and 1970s, the Brazilian land policies implemented to attract internal migrants for the development the central-eastern region followed a pattern of failures that motivated peasants and small farmers to leave the region. In the meantime, Paraguay was introducing a series of land policies to attract Brazilian migrants to develop the eastern side of Paraguay through the development of agriculture. Although Paraguay would achieve its objectives, land policies’ changes in the 1980s stimulated Brazilians to leave the country returning to Brazil. As a result of the migration processes led by land policies in both countries, Brazilian migrants returned to Brazil as self-defined *Brasiguaios*¹.

Keywords: migration, social movement, identity, *Brasiguaios*

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¹ An earlier version of this paper was presented at the ‘Determinants of International Migration: A Theoretical and Empirical Assessment of Policy, Origin and Destination Effects’ conference held between 23 and 25 September 2014, at Wolfson College, University of Oxford.

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1 Introduction

This examines how Brazilian and Paraguayan ‘national’ land policies influenced the mass migration of Brazilians to Paraguay, which have ultimately led to the formation of the *Brasiguai* group identity (Brazilian + Paraguayan). In the first part of this paper, I examine land policies implemented in Brazil and Paraguay between the 1950s and 1970s, including policies for internal migration from the northeast to the south of Brazil led by the Brazilian government. I then explore the migration processes of Brazilians to Paraguay resulting from land policies in both countries. Then, in the last part, I examine changes in these policies during the 1980s that stimulated a reverse migration of Brazilian migrants from Paraguay self-defining as *Brasiguaios*.² Migrants navigating their lives upon the Brazilian–Paraguayan border have formed the *Brasiguai* identity.

2 Land policies in Brazil

In Brazil, domestic land policies seeking to populate the poorly inhabited central-western part of Brazil started to be implemented during the mandate of the Brazilian president Getulio Vargas (1930–1945). The main objective was to develop through agricultural production the state of Goiás, in the centre of Brazil, and the state of Mato Grosso do Sul, on the border with Paraguay. As a strategy to stimulate migration from other regions of Brazil, Vargas put in place a series of land policies known as ‘March to the West’ (*Marcha para o Oeste*).

The Brazilian government had two reasons justifying their interest in populating the regions of Goiás and Mato Grosso do Sul. Firstly, as these regions had a fertile soil, it would be economically beneficial to populate them through the development of agriculture. Secondly, the Brazilian government would reinforce its sovereignty by populating the region of Mato Grosso do Sul, of which the southern part belonged to Paraguay until the end of the Paraguayan War (1864–1870).

The Paraguayan war is still vivid in the minds of many people, especially amongst Paraguayans who connect some of their present difficulties to the outcome of this war. Carolina³ is a resident in the landless camp⁴ Antônio Irmão. She told me that, ‘they [the Paraguayans] hate Brazilians because... this part of Mato Grosso do Sul [in Brazil] should be Paraguay, they have a huge resentment with Brazil, the war is over, but they have never forgotten it’ (Carolina, 23, 18, 2010, Antônio Irmão – Brasiguaios)⁵. It is estimated that 60 per cent of the population of Paraguay died during this war, amongst which 90 per cent of the male population were killed, with Paraguay losing 40 per cent of its original territory (Souchaud 2011). Neither country disputes the demarcation of its territory made in 1872 and there is no tension between them over this matter. Nonetheless some bitterness is stirred when Paraguayans recall

² This paper is based on my Ph.D. research on *Brasiguaios’ Everyday Practices of Transnational Living*, in the department of Sociology at the University of Warwick. It is a multi-sited ethnography of the cities of Ponta Porã (Brazil), Pedro Juan Caballero (Paraguay) and the landless camp Antônio Irmão-Brasiguaios, in Itaquiraí, in the state of Mato Grosso do Sul (Brazil). The landless Antônio Irmão, created in 2008, as a result of the arrival of a scale number of self-defined Brasiguaios coming from Paraguay, became known as the ‘landless camp of Brasiguaios’, estimated to be around 90 per cent of the land camp’s population. My empirical research was carried out between 2012 and 2015. Currently, the landless camp has 113 families registered as resident there (it is estimated that there were approximately 600 families living in this camp in 2011).

³ In order not to expose the identity of participants, all respondents’ names were replaced with pseudonyms.

⁴ The Brazilian Workers’ Landless Movement members establish camps, usually near a state of federal highway where they live until they receive land from the Brazilian government.

⁵ When citing excerpts from interviews, I use the following system: Pseudonym of the respondent, age at the time of the interview, years living in Paraguay, year of return to Brazil, and location of the interview.

that a large area of the fertile state of Mato Grosso do Sul became part of Brazil as result of the Paraguayan War.

Figure 1: Map of Brazil



Source: Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics - IBGE

In order to develop these regions, Vargas’ government first attracted the *Nordestinos* (north-eastern) farmers, especially from the impoverished states of Bahía, Paraíba and Pernambuco. *Nordestinos* were a group mainly comprised of ethnically mixed Europeans, Amerindians and those of African descent. This region had experienced drought and economic difficulties since the 1930s that would last until the 1980s. Consequently, due to the problems of the north-eastern region, the *Nordestinos* were a relatively easy group to migrate to other regions of Brazil. Then, Vargas and his successors subsequently implemented strategies to attract the *Sulistas* (southerners) to the central-western region of Brazil. The *Sulistas* were comprised largely of those of European descent and to attract them, the government placed

heavy emphasis on the fertile soil, abundance of water and climatic conditions similar to conditions found in the south.

Later, in the 1950s, the Brazilian president Juscelino Kubitschek (1956–1961) continued Vargas' programme by launching the 'Plan of National Development' (*Plano Nacional de Desenvolvimento*), well known by its motto: 'Fifty years of progress in five.' Although the Brazilian government had invested heavily in attracting migrants from different parts of the country, it was unsuccessful at creating favourable conditions for them to develop agriculture in the central-western part of Brazil. While some land programmes failed to encourage migrants to remain in the region, other programmes developed mechanised modes of production that drastically reduced the number of people required for agricultural production (Cortez 1993; Tiburcio 2011).

In addition, the construction of the bi-national Itaipú hydroelectric dam (1974–1983) on the border between Brazil and Paraguay would later contribute to the migration of Brazilians to Paraguay. The construction of the lake on the border between Brazil and Paraguay forced the displacement of 42,000 people, of which 38,000 were small farmers. After receiving compensation – land was much cheaper and fertile in Paraguay – an enormous number of Brazilians decided to migrate to Paraguay (Albuquerque 2010:66).

The momentum created by unsuccessful national programmes in Brazil to resettle migrants from other regions of the country, the construction of the bi-national Itaipú hydroelectric that forced some farmers to leave the area, along with Paraguayan land policies, influenced a mass migration of Brazilians to Paraguay.

3 Land policies in Paraguay

In 1954, while Brazil was struggling to resettle internal migrants in the central-western region of the country, General Alfred Stroessner came into power in Paraguay (1954–1989). At the time, the fertile land of the eastern region of Paraguay was still mostly covered by its natural vegetation. Until the 1960s, this region was one of the last suitable places remaining in South America for intensive agricultural development (Tiburcio 2011: 191–192). Stroessner therefore introduced a series of policies to attract Brazilian immigrants to the eastern side of Paraguay (Alto Paraná, Canindeyú and Amambay departments) through the development of agriculture. Being that Brazil was an economically powerful neighbour, with its agricultural production well developed through mechanisation, it was in the interest of Paraguay to have highly skilled farmers with experience in mechanised production, those capable of developing agriculture in the eastern region of the country. By offering economic incentives and making changes in the Paraguayan law, the government believed that it would soon achieve its objective.

In the 1960s, General Stroessner planned a series of policies known as 'March to the East' (*Marcha al Leste*). Stroessner's first strategy in his series of policies sought to attract migrants by promoting land sale to Brazilians through *colonizadoras* (Brazilian private companies based in Brazil selling land in Paraguay). In the beginning of the 1960s, *colonizadoras* advertised in Brazil that: 'with the sale of one alqueire⁶ [of land] in Brazil it would be possible to buy more than five [alqueires of land] in Paraguay,' with the Paraguayan government financing the initial investment to prepare the land (Wagner 1990: 16).

In the Paraguayan government passed law 852/63 and law 854/63 creating, respectively, the Institute of Rural Welfare (*Instituto de Bienestar Rural*) and the Agrarian Statute (*Estatuto Agrario*). Law 852/63

⁶ The alqueire is a unit of measure for the distribution of productive land. Used in Brazil since the time the country was a colony of Portugal, it is still widely used and is the equivalent of 2.42 hectares.

created the Institute of Rural Welfare to promote colonisation, land reform and oversee the use of land. Law 854/63 created the Agrarian Statute to stimulate and guarantee that rural properties were carrying out its social function. According to this law, rural property would accomplish its social function if the exploitation and use of the land proved rational, and regulations on the conservation and recuperation of the land were observed.

In 1967, the Stroessner regime passed a new constitution making significant changes to the law, one of which was the abolition of the national law prohibiting foreign nationals from purchasing land in the country. The objective was to encourage Brazilians to migrate to Paraguay. Subsequently, in order to prevent Paraguayan peasants from interfering in development plans, between 1971 and 1975 the Paraguayan government repressed and prosecuted Paraguayan peasant associations.

This excerpt from an interview with Adilson, a migrant who returned from Paraguay to Brazil in 2012 and now lives in the landless camp Antônio Irmão-Brasiguaios, gives evidence of the efficacy of Paraguay's strategies: 'I went to Paraguay [at the age of 8] in 1972... Brazilians who went to Paraguay had relatives over there, had friends, or they had a good economic situation, any small amount [of money] was a lot on the other side... Brazilians were the first to enter, by selling 1 hectare in Brazil, you could buy 10 or 15 hectares, depending on the region, or even more, so, it was easy to buy farms and more farms, thus the region developed very fast' (Adilson, 50, 40, 2012, Antônio Irmão-Brasiguaios). Paraguay's objective was clear: having highly skilled Brazilian farmers, and this objective was achieved. Land policies, along with cheap land and economic incentives, attracted a mass migration of Brazilians to Paraguay.

Rather than a spontaneous process that took place through 'land policies', mass migration of Brazilians to Paraguay was perceived as a meticulously planned agreement between Brazil and Paraguay. Whether or not they constituted a plan agreed between Brazil and Paraguay aimed at attracting different groups of Brazilians, Paraguayan land policies were planned and implemented over time 'without' the interference of Brazil. By allowing the implementation of Paraguayan policies to attract Brazilian farmers, one might suspect the existence of a hidden expansionist agenda in Brazil.

According to Cortez, the Brazilian president Geisel (1974–1979) had aimed to occupy 121.889 km² – 33 per cent of the territory of Paraguay – with 1,200,000 Brazilians, making up approximately 45 per cent of the Paraguayan population at the time (1993: 188–199). The Paraguayan government's policies of stimulating Brazilian migration to Paraguay could have arguably undermined Paraguay's sovereignty. After all, having a large population of Brazilians living in Paraguay could give the Brazilian government an opportunity to strengthen its politico-economic influence over Paraguay's decision making processes. Although this alleged occupation never happened, Brazilian presence is very significant in Paraguay.

4 Mass migration of Brazilians to Paraguay

Collectively, Paraguayan and Brazilian land policies served to influence the mass migration of Brazilians to Paraguay. The impact of land policies can be seen through estimates of the volume of Brazilian migrants to Paraguay. Statistical evidence suggests that migration from Brazil started to increase in the 1950s, shortly after Paraguayan land policies started to be implemented, and acquired a force hitherto unseen in the 1960s. For instance, in 1943, there were only 513 Brazilians living in the eastern side of Paraguay. 1956, it had increased to 636 Brazilians living in the eastern side of Paraguay. There was then an abrupt increase in Brazilian migrants in the second half of the 1960s. In 1962, there were up to 2,250 Brazilians in the region. With the abolition of the law prohibiting foreign nationals from purchasing land in the country in 1967, there were 11,000 Brazilians living in Paraguay by 1969

and 150,000 by 1979, making up 10 per cent of the entire country's population. Most of them lived in the eastern region of Paraguay within 200 kilometres from Brazil (Tiburcio 2011: 189).

According to Marques (2009), in 2001 there were 442,104 Brazilian migrants in Paraguay. Currently, it is estimated 500,000 Brazilian descendants living in Paraguay of which 60 per cent live in the country over 30 years (Fiorentin 2013). However, the Bertelsmann Foundation suggests the presence of up to 600,000 Brazilians merely in the eastern side of Paraguay (Donner et al. 2014). The table below shows a view of the extent of the migration of Brazilians to Paraguay.

Table 1: Volume of Brazilian migrants in Paraguay

Year	1943	1956	1962	1969	1972	1979	1982
Total	513	636	2,250	11,000	31,869	150,000	250,000
<hr/>							
Year	1985	1986	2000	2001	2002	2012	2014
Total	500,000	350,000	454,501	442,104	459,147	500,000	600,000 ⁷

Source: Own elaboration based on individual research using data from Laino (1977), Wagner (1990), La Nación (2003), Marques (2009), Albuquerque (2010), Tiburcio (2011), Lissardy (2012), Simon (2013), Fiorentin (2013) and Donner et al. (2014).

Nowadays, the estimate of 500,000 has been broadly used by the media in Brazil and Paraguay when referring to this group (Lissardy 2012 (O Estado de S. Paulo); Simon 2013 (BBC Paraguay); Última Hora 2003). Although the total number of Brazilians in Paraguay is uncertain, the Paraguayan Department of Migration estimates that 360,000 Brazilians live illegally in the country (MFP 2006). Some sources suggest that individuals of Brazilian descent have superseded the number of Paraguayan counterparts in certain regions, making up over 70 per cent of the population in some towns on the eastern side of Paraguay (Souchaud 2001: 22). They have reached up to 95 per cent of populations in some bordering towns in the Itapúa, Alto Paraná, Canindeyú y Caaguazú regions (FIAN Internacional and La Vía Campesina 2006: 15).

My empirical data have unveiled that some families migrated within Brazil, and then migrated to Paraguay. In some cases, after settling in the central-western region of Brazil, some families saw their adult offspring migrating to Paraguay. There is also the case of European migrants who arrived in Brazil after Second World War, and soon migrated to Paraguay. Thus, it is possible to find Brazilian colonies in Paraguay where they speak German as a first language.

Any figure from either country regarding the volume of Brazilian migrants in Paraguay is still subject to discussion. These figures are all likely to underestimate the actual numbers and the complexity of the migration processes of Brazilians to Paraguay. They may leave out the groups of migrants living in remote areas and so excluded from official statistics, along with migrants who were visiting Brazil at the time when the data were gathered. Although it is unlikely that the existing data provide an accurate figure, these figures enable an understanding of the extent to which land policies in both countries have influenced the migration of Brazilians to Paraguay. This mass migration of Brazilians to Paraguay, seen by the Brazilian government as a positive alleviation of internal land problems, occurred in different waves.

⁷ Up 600,000 individuals of Brazilian origin in the eastern side of Paraguay alone.

5 Waves of migration to Paraguay

Similar to the waves of internal migrants to the central-western region of Brazil, the Paraguayan government differentiated Brazilian migrants according to their ethnic origin and/or social class. The first group they encouraged to migrate to Paraguay was the *Nordestinos* (north-easterners) followed by the *Sulistas* (southerners), while a third wave of Brazilian migrants comprised of Brazilian individuals who lived in Brazil near the Paraguayan border (Tiburcio 2011: 193–194).

Although *Nordestinos* comprised the largest migrant group, they were also the most deprived, consisted mostly of impoverished peasants. The history of slavery and sugar production in the northeast of Brazil had contributed towards the racial prejudice shown towards this group. They were seen as inherently obedient. Consequently, *Nordestinos* were perceived to be less educated and so suitable for doing the hard work of clearing the land for agriculture. Being that Brazilian land policies were unsuccessful in settling this deprived group of people in the central-western region of Brazil (Tiburcio 2011), this group appeared most appropriate for preparing the land for soy production. In the 1960s, it is estimated that 75 per cent of the Brazilian migrants in Paraguay were *Nordestinos* (Wagner 1990: 15).

Paraguay only started to attract the second wave of migrants at the end of the 1960s. Stroessner started the second part of his colonisation plan by attracting mostly European-descended *Sulistas* from the south of Brazil. By this point the land had been prepared for the production of soy and had so gained value. According to Wagner (1990), workers of the local Catholic Church reported that *Colonizadoras* operating in Paraguay had the task of carrying out Stroessner's plans.⁸ First, the colonisation companies would give an advantage to German descendants (*Sulistas*); then carefully convince the *Sulistas* that they would be able to teach the 'lazy Paraguayans' and the 'black Brazilians'⁹ how to work on the land (17). Given that land was much cheaper in Paraguay than in Brazil, many *Sulistas* sold their properties in Brazil and acquired extensive farms in Paraguay to become large land owners.

Sulistas were both ethnically and socially different from the *Nordestinos*. *Sulistas* were mostly relatively wealthy farmers of European descent living in the states of Paraná, Santa Catarina and Rio Grande do Sul. Whilst many *Sulistas* prospered, mechanising the modes of production, as they had already done in Brazil becoming major producers of soy the biggest Paraguayan agro-export, the *Nordestinos* started to migrate to other regions of the country where they would compete for jobs with Paraguayan peasants (Souchaud 2009: 105–107).

While *Nordestinos* and *Sulistas* groups were comprised of migrants coming from other regions of Brazil, the third wave of *Nordestinos* migrates was comprised of individuals from the borderline region of Brazil (Tiburcio 1994). Due to their geographical proximity with Brazil, this group were often ignored as migrant group. However, as they have moved from Brazil to Paraguay, they are a *de facto* migrant group in Paraguay. Truly, given the proximity of their local of residence in Paraguay in relation to Brazil, many of them often falsely claim to be residents of Brazil in order to profit from the Brazilian social security system, free health care, free public education, amongst other benefits.

⁸ In 1967, Pope Paul created the Office for the Pastoral Care of Migrants (Pastoral do Migrante), an arm of the Catholic Church dedicated to assist migrant and itinerant people.

⁹ Paraguayans, many of them of indigenous heritage, were perceived to be more used to producing for subsistence rather than for profit, hence, they were categorised as 'lazy'. As for *Nordestinos*, with their usually darker skin, they were often referred to as 'black' to differentiate this group from European descendants. The use of the label 'black' to non-Europeans dates back to the Paraguayan War (1864–1870) when it was used by Paraguayans to undervalue the black Brazilian soldiers who were slaves at the time. Derogatory names such as 'monkey' were also used at the time. Slavery was abolished in Brazil in 1888.

The Paraguayan government achieved its objective of populating the eastern region of Paraguay with Brazilian migrants. Yet, Brazilian migrants in Paraguay are a diverse rather than a homogenous group, their differences in socio-economic, state of origin and racial heritage having caused them to be segregated. Brazilians reproduce in Paraguay the similar politics of identity played out in Brazil, in which *Sulistas* are still perceived as more educated and wealthier than *Nordestinos*.

In fact, some individuals receive nicknames according to their state of origin in Brazil, for example, 'João Bahiano' or 'Antonio Paraíba'. In some cases, they are even known by the name or by the demonym of their place of origin: 'Ceará', 'Paraná', 'gaucho' or 'alemão' (a German person)¹⁰. However, most Brazilian migrants in Paraguay followed activities closely related to those of land ownership and agricultural production. Brazilians introduced the monoculture of soy, while developing urban areas and being involved in the construction of highways in the region. Over time, Brazilians and their descendants became responsible for most of the soy produced in Paraguay.

6 Brazilians' agricultural production in Paraguay

The introduction of soy by Brazilian investors in the 1970s made Paraguay the fourth largest producer of soy globally (Tiburcio 2011: 31). The economic impact of Brazilian migration became particularly noticeable at the end of the 1970s, when activities acquired unprecedented force and visibility. Until the beginning of the 1980s, since the agricultural production of Brazilian migrants benefited the Paraguayan economy, there was much incentive for the descendants of these migrants to remain in the country without major inconvenience. In 1981, the Brazilian media already reported that the eastern side of Paraguay had become an area of integration comprised of differentiated elements. It was named the 'Brasiguai world', 'the land of the Brasiguaiois, created by Brazilians who went to live on Paraguayan soil' – a new and effervescent region where soy production would unite Brazil and Paraguay (VEJA 1981: 19–49).

As Brazilian migrants acquired economic influence in parts of Paraguay, different Brazilian institutions expanded their activities to Paraguay. By 1981, Brazilian banks had opened branches in Paraguay with managers sent from Brazil. It is estimated that banks had in total the equivalent of \$5 million per year to loan to Brazilians residing in Paraguay, which would be invested in agricultural production (VEJA 1981: 49). Both countries were so economically connected that when a crisis hit Paraguay, it was also felt on the Brazilian side, and the businesses that supplied farmers in Paraguay saw a reduction of 70 per cent on their sales. Moreover, Brazilian banks that financed the purchase of tractors and agricultural supplements saw a reduction of 90 per cent on financial transactions (Alves 1990: 336).

The Paraguayan 'over' agricultural production in the 1980s gives an idea of how Brazil and Paraguay were united by the Brazilians living in this fertile soil. Paraguay exported 1.6 million tonnes of soy, when in fact it could only produce half of that quantity. In 1989, although Paraguay was not a major producer of coffee, each coffee tree also 'produced' 80 tonnes of coffee beans; in reality each coffee tree is capable of producing about 2.5 kilograms. This 'Paraguayan over-production' was later explained when it was reported that half of this soy had actually been produced in Brazil and illegally transported to Paraguay to meet its share in the Chicago stock exchange, and 15 trucks had entered Paraguay carrying 30 tonnes of coffee on 27 December 1989. At the time it is also believed that almost all of Paraguay's 4.5 million cattle were smuggled into the country, originally from Brazil (Alves 1990: 8–39).

¹⁰ Bahia, Paraíba and Ceará e Paraná are the name of states in Brazil, and 'gaucho' is the demonym of individuals born in the state of Rio Grande do Sul.

Nowadays, it is estimated that the majority of soy producers are Brazilians: 40 per cent are Brazilian; 36 per cent are German, Japanese or Mennonite¹¹, and 24 per cent are Paraguayan (FIAN Internacional and La Vía Campesina 2006). Brazilians are currently responsible for 90 to 95 per cent of soy production in the country (Costa 2011: 59). By the 1980s, as Brazilians became a major ethnic group in certain regions of Paraguay, acquiring an economic influence, tension over land ownership and soy production increased rapidly and led to heightening tensions between Brazilian farmers and landless Paraguayan groups.

7 Changes in Paraguayan land policies

In the 1980s, the Paraguayan government started to consider changes in its policies. The Paraguayan government thus started to discuss the revision of the 1967 real property law passed by Stroessner which had allowed foreigners to purchase properties in the country. The government started to consider the establishment of a zone inside Paraguay's borders in which foreigners would be prohibited from purchasing land and the government would be able to expropriate land on the grounds of national security. Yet, as Senator Garabelli put it at the time: 'a [Brazilian] family that naturalises, singing our hymn, respecting our flag and traditions, will be more than welcome to remain, integrating with our environment and incorporate in our productive system'. Or, in the words of the President Andrés Rodríguez, before considering repatriation, 'we have to initiate the task of Paraguaysation of Brazilians.' Given that 90 per cent of Brazilians were living illegally in Paraguay and would not be allowed to transfer the ownership of the land to a relative (including a son- or daughter -in-law), most of them would have to leave the region (Alves 1990: 59–66).

In the meantime, the media within and outside Brazil started to report that Paraguayan landless groups were taking actions against Brazilian farmers, who had started to return to Brazil fleeing Paraguayan victimisation (Rocha 1985). Paraguayan landless groups were expelling Brazilians and their descendants under fire. As land reform had not been successfully implemented in Paraguay, Paraguayan landless groups had popular support to carry out their actions. While local religious workers from the Catholic church in Paraguay were persecuted for helping Brazilians to obtain a visa and acquire permanent titles for their lands, some individuals 'simply disappeared' after clashing with the Paraguayan police force (Wagner 1990: 23). Although there were reports of arbitrary arrests and torture carried out by the police when individuals refused 'to pay for authority protection' (Alves 1990: 21), the Paraguayan government took no action to protect members of this group.

Brazilian migrants did not acquire Paraguayan citizenship for different reasons. On one hand, some Paraguayan register officers illegally refused to register the Brazilian migrants' babies born in Paraguay. In other cases, Paraguayan register officers would ask for a bribe, which was intentionally a high value, to prevent Brazilians registering their children in Paraguay. As Brazilian migrants could 'simply disappear' if they had reported the register officers to the police, many Brazilians had no interest in registering their children in Paraguay. On the other hand, Brazilians usually delivered their children in Brazil. To ensure their children's Brazilian citizenship through birth, Brazilian migrants visited a Brazilian town days before the baby was due to be delivered. Nevertheless, when it was not possible to visit Brazil to deliver their babies, parents would ensure their babies were registered as born in Brazil.¹²

¹¹ Mennonites are a religious denomination, predominantly of German descent, with rather close community ties. However, independently of their nationality, Mennonites are referred to as a distinct group. Academic and non-academic literature often presents Mennonites as a 'national' or 'ethnic' group.

¹² If a baby is born in a remote area, the baby can still be registered if the parents can produce two witnesses certifying the information. Usually, Brazilian migrants in Paraguay would falsely testify on each other's behalf.

This change in the law became a longstanding issue. The new law only passed in 2005 after a long period of discussion concerning issues such as the depth of the exclusion zone, how the land was to be repossessed, what to do with the Brazilian nationals holding permanent titles to the land and how this land would be distributed amongst the Paraguayans. The Paraguayan government sanctioned the law 2532/05 establishing a 50km zone inside Paraguay's borders within which foreigners of neighbouring countries were prohibited from purchasing land (Paraguay 2005). Being that this law did not affect foreigners from non-neighbouring countries, it was viewed as a direct measure to provoke the departure of Brazilian nationals. However, the implementation of law 2532/05 has been questioned by many landless groups in Paraguay because such legislation cannot be retroactive, and some Brazilian farmers could still purchase land under the names of their Paraguayan-born offspring.

The change in position from attracting to expelling Brazilians and their descendants from Paraguay happened over time as result of political changes starting in the middle of the 1980s in Paraguay. In 1985, the mass return of the first organised group of Brazilian migrants – now calling themselves *Brasiguaios* – became a landmark in presenting the impact of land policies on international migration between Brazil and Paraguay.

8 Mass return from Paraguay

In June 1985, more than 1,000 self-identifying *Brasiguaios* families¹³ arrived in the town of Mundo Novo in the state of Mato Grosso do Sul, where they camped next to the town hall demanding land and support to start a new life. The return was organised with the support of the Office for the Pastoral Care of Migrants in Paraguay through contacts in Brazil, representatives of the Brazilian Landless Workers' Movement (MST) and members of the Office for the Pastoral Care of Migrants of the city of Foz do Iguaçu in Brazil (Ausier 2008).

Upon their arrival, this group produced an open letter to the government using the *Brasiguaios* prerogative, which started saying: 'we are *Brasiguaios* [Brazilians returning from Paraguay]... the situation in Brazil was difficult [this is why we migrated to Paraguay in the 1960s and 1970s]. Land is in the hands of big landowners... Farmers cultivate with machines'. They then exposed the problems they had experienced in Paraguay in the 1980s that had led them to return to Brazil, and concluded by demanding that the Brazilian government implement agrarian reform. In this letter, besides reinforcing their rights as Brazilians, they upheld their status as *Brasiguaios* to differentiate themselves as a distinct group from the rest of Brazilians ('*Brasiguaios* Letter to the Population' in Sprandel 1992: 500). Since 1985, the term has been used interchangeably to refer to individuals with ties in Brazil and Paraguay, especially Brazilian migrants in Paraguay and returnees who are engaged in agricultural practices.

Although the term *Brasiguaios* had been used before amongst Brazilian migrants in Paraguay, this was the first time that *Brasiguaios* referred to their group identity to demand their national rights as Brazilian citizens. The *Brasiguaios* strategy produced results, with their transnational experiences adding to their condition of uprooted individuals in need of land for living. As Deputy Cruz said, '*Brasiguaios* have already overcome the stage, let's say, vocational... *Brasiguaios* is completely integrated in [agricultural] production' (Alves 1990: 19). As a group they received special treatment from institutions of Brazilian land reform (Ausier 2008) and were settled by the Brazilian National Institute for Colonization and

¹³ The Brazilian Worker's Landless Movement records the number of families they assist, not individuals.

Agrarian Reform in record time in the city of Ivinhema, also in the state of Mato Grosso do Sul, about 200 km away from Mundo Novo¹⁴.

The success of this group encouraged the Landless Workers' Movement to send their leaders to Paraguay to support other groups of *Brasiguaios* to return to Brazil, which would later be called 'hotline' (Wagner 1990: 30). This return was part of what Cortez called the 'movement of repatriation of *Brasiguaios*' who organised themselves in both countries to return to Brazil (Cortez 1993), especially to the state of Mato Grosso do Sul.

Due to the proximity with Paraguay, the state of Mato Grosso do Sul was, and is still, a state very likely to receive landless people coming from Paraguay. In the 1980s, Pedro Ramalho, President of FETAGRI (Federation of Workers in Agriculture) already predicted that 'these people [*Brasiguaios*] in Paraguay will have to return one day, and the closest place is [the state of] Mato Grosso do Sul. But here there is no space for all... we will request support from all [Brazilian] states to repatriate our brothers over there [in Paraguay], but it will be important that each [Brazilian state] of them take his *Brasiguai*o; it is not discrimination, it is really a lack of space [in the state of Mato Grosso do Sul]' (Alves 1990: 77). Table 2 gives the figures regarding the number of migrants from Paraguay.

Table 2: Number of migrants from Paraguay

Year of the Census	Total number of Brazilian returnees from Paraguay (Brazilian born)	Total number of non-Brazilian nationals from Paraguay (foreign migrants)	Total number of migrants from Paraguay
1991 (1986/1991)	8,657 80.7 per cent	2,074 19.3 per cent	10,731
2000 (1995/2000)	28,418 80.2 per cent	7,028 19.8 per cent	35,446
2010 (2002/2010)	13,748 55.7 per cent	10,918 44.3 per cent	24,666

Source: Own elaboration based on the IBGE's census conducted in 1991, 2000 and 2010.

These figures underestimate the actual numbers. The IBGE gathers data every 10 years and presents the number of individuals who returned to the country within the last five years prior to the census. As a large number of Brazilians were living illegally in Paraguay, it is not known how many Brazilians have migrated to and returned from Paraguay since the 1980s. It is even more difficult to know the number of self-defined *Brasiguaios*. In general, it is known that most Brazilian migrants in Paraguay return to the states of Paraná or Mato Grosso do Sul where many of them lived before, having family members or friends who have returned in the previous years. This is the case of the people living in the landless camp Antônio Irmão-Brasiguaios, in the state of Mato Grosso do Sul, where many already know each other from Paraguay.

¹⁴ The National Institute for Colonization and Agrarian Reform- INCRA (*Instituto Nacional de Colonização e Reforma Agrária*) is the federal government organ created in 1970 to administer land reform issues in Brazil.

9 The *Brasiguai* identity

The *Brasiguai* identity is to some extent an outcome resulting from the impact of land policies on international migration between Brazil and Paraguay.¹⁵ The term *Brasiguai* is the combination of the Portuguese words *Brasi(leiro)* and *(Para)guaio*. Foremost amongst these first theoretical articulations of the *Brasiguai* group identity is the early definition articulated by the sociologist Marcia Sprandel who sought to conceive of them as a self-defined ethnic group that also experienced recognition by others. According to Sprandel, a *Brasiguai* is ‘a Brazilian farmer that migrated to Paraguay seeking land’. However, such initiatives failed, leading the farmer to return to Brazil and demand land. More recently, researchers have conceived *Brasiguaios* as a group with a hybrid identity connected to both Brazil and Paraguay and comprising of different categories. For instance, Albuquerque (2010) identifies five categories included within this group: a) Brazilian migrants who went to Paraguay and returned to Brazil without success; b) Brazilians owning large farms in Paraguay; c) the offspring of Brazilian migrants born in Paraguay who adopted the nationality of that country; d) both the original migrants and their descendants who have mixed Brazilian culture with elements of Paraguayan culture; and e) all Brazilian migrants living in Paraguay (227).

In summary, the *Brasiguai* group identity refers to migrants who initially failed to succeed economically in Brazil, then again failed to succeed in Paraguay and so returned to Brazil. I perceive a *Brasiguaios* in terms of the self-definition of individuals holding socio-cultural ties – irrespective of which countries they were born – and who participate in processes which encompass both Brazil and Paraguay and/or are part of networks related to such processes. The *Brasiguai* identity is framed in terms of the migrants’ perspective to alter their social position through land ownership, agricultural production and cross border mobility.

The latest lasting effect of the Brazilian and Paraguayan land policies on international migration is the return of another large group of self-defined *Brasiguai* families from Paraguay to Brazil. In 2015, again with the support of the Brazilian Workers’ Landless Movement (MST), 1,500 landless families formed the landless camp José Márcio Zoia in Japorã, a small bordering town in the state of Mato Grosso do Sul bordering Paraguay, in Brazil. According to the MST’s leader Jonas Carlos da Conceição, this landless camp will be landmark in the history of the landless movement, besides being the largest landless camp in the state; it revives the struggle of *Brasiguaios* for land. The history of establishment of the MST in the state of Mato Grosso do Sul started with the struggle for the rights of the *Brasiguaios*, and they will continuously support their return from Paraguay (Vilas Boas 2015).

10 Conclusion

Whether Stroessner’s land policies unintentionally backfired on Paraguay or not, I wish to emphasise that since the 1960s land policies have influenced international migration between Brazil and Paraguay. Paraguay’s land policies from the 1960s through to the 1970s coincided with the interests of the government of Brazil who, at the very least, favoured having Brazilians living in Paraguay. Migration processes were facilitated by different favourable conditions. Internal land reforms and results in different Brazilian states helped to catalyse large-scale migration to the central-western region of Brazil, part of which would migrate to Paraguay. Evidently, Paraguay used the momentum created by the dissimilar internal land reform outcomes in different Brazilian states to attract Brazilians to Paraguay.

Along with the influence of ‘national’ land policies, the proximity between Brazil and Paraguay, easy and uncontrolled access between both countries, the mass migration of Brazilians to Paraguay and return

¹⁵ The term is sometimes spelled, especially in Spanish literature, as *Brasiguayo* (male) or *Brasiguaya* (female).

were also shaped by geopolitics, international relations and governments' use of populist policies. Yet, the impact of land policies in both countries is still noticeable in the life of Brazilian migrants in Paraguay, and those who have decided to return to Brazil. The meaning of the *Brasiguayo* group identity cannot be understood without considering the migration processes, resulting from land policies, which connected them at a very individual level and often in a very intimate way with Brazil and Paraguay. The land policies in Brazil and Paraguay influencing international migration processes and the formation of the *Brasiguayo* identity stand side by side. The *Brasiguayo* transnational identity is the ultimate outcome of the impact of land policies on international migration.

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