

European land settlement and development in Latin America

The evolution of an idea from Interwar to the early Post-WWII years

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***Abstract:** This article examines the birth and evolution of the idea of land settlement as a way to combine and resolve two issues diachronically considered problematic: on the one hand, the underdevelopment in Latin America due to a certain extent to the lack of labour force that could exploit the immense lands available; on the other hand, the overpopulation in Europe accompanied by volatile problems such as unemployment, particularly in critical times such as between and after the two World Wars. Based on archival material retrieved from the National Archives and Records Administration in Washington D.C., the Archives of the FDR Presidential Library and Museum in New York, the Archives of the IOM Office in Athens and the São Paulo State Archive, we attempt to provide a genealogy of this idea since the Interwar period and the ways in which it has materialised by governments and international organisations, namely the ILO and the ICEM.*

Keywords: migration; land settlement; development; Latin America; international organizations

Introduction

The idea of land settlement is not novel. Various pre-modern polities have transferred masses of agricultural settlers into idle or newly conquered territories in order to expand their productive potential and tax yield or to increase their security against external enemies or local populations considered as unruly. Since the sixteenth century, Spain, Portugal and later Britain and France systematically transferred agricultural settlers to the Americas and later Algeria, South Africa, Rhodesia, Australia and New Zealand. From the nineteenth century, the British government, and later the governments of the dominions of Canada, Australia and New Zealand, offered free passage and land to white British immigrants wishing to settle in their territories.

Since the beginning of the twentieth century appeared the idea that colonial powers should contribute to the development of the peoples of Asia and Africa under their tutelage. Moreover, during the Interwar and the post-WWII years the idea of land settlement from a national project became part of the concept of managing migration at an international level to the advantage of both European countries with a surplus population and overseas countries that wanted to develop

their “virgin lands” through the import of manpower. From 1930 to 1960 a series of projects proposed the mass organized transfer of agricultural laborers from Europe to overseas countries. Although these schemes did not lead to any tangible results, they signpost the maturation of the idea of migration as an agent of development and the importance of the colonization of idle lands in the periphery in the post-war planning of the United States for post-war economic recovery through the influx of displaced persons from war-torn Europe.

Before WWII: the role of the ILO

During the Interwar period, the International Labour Organization (ILO) was pivotal in framing these plans while during and especially after WWII the United States took over this agenda (Venturas, 2015). As early as 1921, the ILO pioneered the idea of organized migration. At the International Economic Conference in 1927 it was widely accepted that “a number of the world’s existing difficulties result from defective distribution of population” (Thomas, 1927: 262). During the 1927 World Population Conference, ILO director Albert Thomas summarized the principles for a global regulation of population flows. He underlined the necessity to replace the “spontaneous movements [...] by political intervention and conscious and methodical planning” (Thomas, 1927: 258). He invoked the necessity of an international authority that would decide “the conditions under which territory lying within the sovereignty of a given State and obviously unoccupied might be thrown open to certain classes of emigrants” (Thomas, 1927: 263). On the other hand, he acknowledged the limitation of the right of emigration in accordance to selection criteria set by immigration countries and the necessity of assimilation of immigrants in order to assuage security concerns.

The ILO tried to formulate its proposals taking into account the limitations posed by the immigration policies of the receiving states. In this context, since the United States had limited migration from southern and eastern Europe using the quota laws and Britain had adopted its own scheme for emigration inside the Empire, the only available space for the absorption of the surplus population from these parts of Europe was considered to be Latin America. It is interesting that this view prevailed notwithstanding the fact that until 1936 Latin American countries applied restrictionist immigration policies. Therefore, while paying lip service to the principle that all immigration countries had the final word over the number and kind of migrants they would accept, Thomas adopted a two-tier system suggesting that Latin American states loosen their limitations questioning whether “a people has a natural right to maintain a hold on territory which it does not exploit and from which it is incapable of extracting the maximum yield” (Thomas, 1927: 262).

The ILO presented in February 1937 to the International Studies Conference a proposal for the institution of an international organisation of migrations that would function as a mediatory international body in agreements on migration (Kulischer, 1943: 7). In order to comply with the desires of certain emigration countries such as Poland and the immigration countries of Latin America, the ILO inaugurated, during a conference in Geneva in 1938, the discussion and study of the issue as part of the broader plan for the institution of an international organisation that would inform prospective immigrants, provide help during the journey and the initial phase of the adaptation to the host country (Waelbroeck, 1944: 5). Considering that some overseas countries would gradually relax the migration restrictions, specifically for farmers, the emigration of agricultural settlers should become the primary aim of the proposed body (Kulischer, 1943: 7).

The published conference proceedings noted that the migration problem was “closely related to international investments and trade” since “migration should be accompanied by investment of national or foreign capital in the country of immigration in order to provide there the means of production” and that only through bilateral cooperation and organizations providing the necessary capital for development works in remote areas, settlement and migration movements could succeed (ILO, 1938: 32 and 71; Waelbroeck, 1944: 6). Besides, it underlined that increasing the production in receiving countries through the influx of immigrants is useless if the foreign markets cannot absorb the surplus products. For the above reasons detailed technical studies were necessary in order to draw up practical schemes (ILO, 1938: 66-68). At the time, both emigration and immigration countries lacked the necessary funds to invest in order to assist the migration cycle. For this reason, the ILO proposed that third countries could finance the endeavour through a “settlement organisation” (ILO, 1938: 84-85). Moreover, participants’ views concerning the desirable “immigrant stock” were influenced by eugenic ideas that were prevalent at the time. The Venezuelan representative at the conference noted:

[A]ccording to science and experience, there are a number of facts which militate against cross-breeding between certain ethnic groups and history proves that the very fact of such groups living together is more or less likely to undermine the stability and unity of the nation. There are races the members of which do not mix voluntarily with the native population; there are others which, even if they do, tend to alter the national character or even to change the whole culture of a people. (ILO, 1938: 108)

Furthermore, he underlined the necessity to choose districts with a climate similar to that of the settlers’ country of origin. The ILO, nevertheless, called for flexibility in the selection pointing out that although certain immigration countries may not desire immigrants from particular ethnic groups, they should bear in mind that settlers from specific countries might not be available (ILO, 1938: 86).

We have to underline that racial prejudice and political concerns played an important role in the choice of desirable immigrants. Already in 1936, the Indian economist Radhakamal Mukerjee proposed the creation of an international migratory code, under the supervision of the League of Nations, with the aim to organize the migration of surplus “oriental laborers” to idle areas of the world in order to boost agricultural development, but since immigrants from Asia were unwelcome in most immigration countries this project did not materialize (Peterson, 2012: 335). Even after the end of WWII refugees from communist China remained for a long time stranded in Hong Kong, as Australia and many western countries were unwilling to accept them. Although most countries in Latin America were willing to receive agricultural settlers, many were unwilling to receiving massive flows of both Jews as a result of anti-Semitism and nationals from Germany and Italy for fear of becoming prey to the expansionist designs of those countries (Lozada, 1944: 3). The issues of “desirable migrant stock” and the economic viability of large land settlement migration projects remained equally important during the following years for those who envisaged massive immigration schemes.

During the Interwar period, along with the big land settlement schemes envisaged by international organisations, smaller projects materialized through voluntary associations and private companies. The Jewish Colonisation Association (JCA) with the financial support of magnates and philanthropists founded agricultural colonies by Jews persecuted initially in the Russian Empire and during the Nazi rule in Germany. The effort had bigger success in Argentina but faced

serious problems in south Brazil as a result of local conditions, political instability and later resistance by the Getúlio Vargas administration (Falbel, 2007).

Various German private colonization companies, voluntary and religious associations were also very active in this process (Kothe, 1993; Prutsch, 2013: 12; Arendt, 2011). There was a criticism that many of these associations had as their principal aim not to address the interests of the immigrants but of the German industrialists hoping to increase exports in overseas countries and even some accused them of “human trafficking” (Kothe, 1993, 105). One of the most important groups that founded agricultural colonies during the 1930s in Latin America were the Mennonites, a diasporic protestant group of mainly German ethnic origin, that overtime had developed a strong ethno-religious identity (Goossen, 2017). First arrived a group that had previously settled in Canada. They were followed by coreligionists who had settled in the Russian Empire during the eighteenth century and fled the Soviet Union during the 1930s to escape collectivization. They migrated to Mexico, the state of Santa Catarina in Brazil and the Chaco region in Paraguay (Ramos, 2016: 209; Dana/Dana, 2008: 86; Eicher, 2014). The colony of Rolândia in the Brazilian state of Paraná was founded initially as a settlement for Germans fleeing the economic crisis, but after the rise of the National Socialists to power it served as a refuge for anti-Nazi and Jewish refugees, although the cohabitation between pro-Nazi Germans and their opponents proved difficult (Breunig, 1983; Prutsch, 2013: 12). These land settlement projects did not always aim at attracting farmers from Europe but were secondary colonies for Germans already living in Brazil for generations. The Colônia Porto Novo was founded as a settlement of catholic Germans from southern Brazil under the instigation of the Jesuits in the state of Santa Catarina but subsequently received a number of immigrants from Germany (Schneider, 2017: 96).

The first half of the twentieth century also marked the beginning of Dutch immigration in south Brazil with the founding in 1911 of the catholic colony of Carambei in the state of Paraná (Fraga, 2008: 62). The most successful example of a private land settlement project was that of the Companhia das Terras Norte do Parana (CTNP) a British consortium that also owned the railway to the port of Santos. The CTNP started in 1930 to settle in its lands first Germans from the Soviet Union in the colony of Heimtal, Germans from the free city of Danzig (Gdansk), Italians and Japanese in Nova Danzig, Spanish in Arapongas and Mandaguari and Slovaks in Bratislava (Kohlhepp, 1975: 56; Prutsch, 2013: 10). Although our focus is on land settlement by Europeans, we have to mention that maybe the most important group of agricultural settlers during the Interwar period in South America were the Japanese, since the Brazilian government considered them as “almost white”. The majority of the total of about 164.000 immigrants moved to the states of São Paulo and Paraná where the city of Londrina became the centre of Japanese settlement (Prutsch, 2013: 11).

During WWII: The “M” project

The process of organized land settlement was interrupted by the outbreak of WWII, but as the conflict raged, the president of the United States initiated, as part of the preparation for post-war reconstruction in the line proposed by the 1938 Geneva and Evian conferences, what was named the “M” project that aimed at planning the relocation of millions of people to overseas countries and territories (Cohen, 2012: 102). The bureaucracy that was formed as a result of the expansion of the state mechanism by Franklin Delano Roosevelt thought that it was ready, as the United States became a superpower, to expand its scope of activities. This project was thus

an effort to apply at an international level the measures taken during the New Deal in the United States to boost development. The “M” project staff located the regions that suffered most by overpopulation “their racial and religious composition, and their nationals’ potential skill and adaptability as emigrants” as well as the refugee groups that would not be repatriated and tried to match them with “potential areas of settlement with an appraisal from economic, social, geographic, ecologic, demographic, and geopolitical angles” (Field, 1962: 4) taking into account previous resettlement schemes in order to propose the most adequate solution for each case. Geographers that had already studied agricultural settlement in Latin America such as Leo Waibel, Henry J. Bruman, James F. Normano (Isaac Lewin) were among the scholars who participated in the project. Leo Waibel studied the settlement possibilities in Africa, Central America and along the Saint Lawrence River in Canada while Bruman focused on Brazil (Bell/Silva, 2018: 201-202).

The cornerstone of the project was the use of the advances in agricultural technology in order to increase the absorptive capacity of specific regions in overseas countries and improve the living conditions of the population in non-industrialized regions. The project staff was instructed to limit their endeavour in furnishing “a series of Studies on world-wide settlement possibilities as well as population problems” without “dreaming up vast hydroelectric or irrigation projects” or propose the number of settlers that any region could support (Field, 1962: 3). Contrary to the instructions given to the researchers, president Roosevelt had his own grandiose plans to solve the problem of displaced persons through the irrigation of “vast desert or semi-desert areas in North Africa, Southwestern Asia and Australia” and at the same time advance the interests of U.S. companies that would develop cheap and efficient desalination technologies (Field, 1962: 327-8).

Following the line of thought expressed in the 1938 Geneva conference, the co-director of the project Isaiah Bowman underlined in 1945 that although the “prosperity in new lands” was related to migration, it depended on the ability of industrial centres to absorb the raw materials produced by the immigrants (Bowman, 1945: 5). He was optimistic that as a result of the reconstruction and the effort to cope with “consumption demands” in developed countries the post-war expansion of the economy would benefit regions that produced “raw materials”, and in a second phase this process would lead to the industrialization of the periphery (Bowman, 1945: 9).

During a period when the Allies were combating German racist theories the “M Project” was equally based in racial preconceptions and a will to solve some of the social and political problems that had arisen from the war, through disentanglement of populations and mass re-settlement of minorities. At the same time, it perpetuated the idea, that both surplus population and ethnic minorities were a source of instability in Europe and should be transferred to overseas countries (Robinson, 2003). This line of thought led to the decision in the 1945 Potsdam Conference for the expulsion of ethnic Germans from Eastern Europe and the provinces annexed by Poland and the Soviet Union.

The studies prepared during the project, taking into account the availability of land, the possibility of irrigation projects, the health conditions, communications, industry and immigration legislation, were supposed to provide the frame for the resolution of the problem after the war. The team concluded that Argentina, Brazil, Bolivia and Venezuela in South America as well as Canada and Alaska in North America were the best spaces for the installation of Europeans. Roosevelt himself considered that Latin American countries were the ideal space for the resettlement of refugees and unemployed from Europe. According to Greg Robinson (2003),

since they were economically and politically underdeveloped, they would benefit from “being colonized” by Europeans.

In May 1944, the Conference of Commissions of Inter-American Development recommended that Latin American states “adopt policies to encourage the inflow of settlers required for the development of their natural resources and the expansion of their economies” and favoured consultations along the lines proposed by the ILO before the war for the “establishment of a permanent international body” that would provide assistance to the “national immigration and settlement agencies”. More specifically concerning land settlement the Conference suggested that the participant countries promote measures to “develop and modernize [...] agriculture” and encourage “the development of agricultural settlement and colonization projects with provision of necessary land, highways, and services including sanitation and education” (Inter-American Development Commission, 1944: 8-9).

After WWII: land settlement in the agenda of international organisations

During the years that followed the end of the Second World War and until the foundation of the Intergovernmental Committee for European Migration (ICEM), there were no large-scale international land settlement projects. However, a series of organizations, such as the World Bank, the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), the World Health Organisation (WHO) pushed forward the development agenda. The World Bank, once the United States through the Marshall Plan took over the charge of European reconstruction, moved its focus to the development of the periphery (Field, 1962: 27). In the immediate post-war years, those various international organizations relegated responsibility for the coordination of migration to the ILO, a United Nations organization since 1946, which had taken an active role in organizing the migration of both refugees and labour migrants during the interwar period. However, throughout the immediate post-war period, the main stakeholders did not intend to create a specialised agency to coordinate and administer migration due to the organisational and financial difficulties involved. The ILO continued to hold an interest in the idea of organized land settlement as part of its effort to extend its activities in the field of international migration (Parsanoglou/Papadopoulos, 2019).

During this period several land settlement projects, not necessarily related with the activities of the International Refugee Organization (IRO), were established. In Brazil, even after the centralization policies of the 1930s, states had considerable autonomy in their immigration policy. During the early post-war period, the states of Paraná in south Brazil and Goiás around the future capital Brasília concurred in efforts to attract agricultural settlers from Europe. The governors of Paraná, Munhoz da Rocha, and Goiás, Coimbra Bueno, were very active in promoting colonization (Bell/Silva, 2018: 211). However, during the early post-war period Paraná was more attractive for the foundation of cooperative agricultural colonies by Europeans because of its infrastructure, the distance between coast and main cities and the existence of a network of older European settlements. The land settlement projects included also descendants of immigrants in south Brazil mainly of Italian and German origin that already had a knowledge of local conditions. For example, the Mennonite settlers of Witmarsum moved in 1950 to Paraná (Muller, 1974: 14; Ramos, 2016: 212). The aim of these projects was twofold: develop “idle lands” and substitute less productive extensive for intensive agriculture and increase the production of basic food stuff, such as wheat and dairy products. Although the

size of the land plots awarded to the settlers was relatively small, they were encouraged to form cooperatives in order to practice monoculture of market products (Ramos, 2016: 209). In June 1948 the cooperative of Holambra was founded by 100 Dutch families in the state of São Paulo under the auspices of the Brazilian and Dutch governments (Papadopoulos, 2022: 78-79). During the following years, the number of Dutch colonies increased, as a result of the interest of both the Dutch government in exporting its “surplus population” and of the Brazilian government in increasing the production of dairy (Papadopoulos/Kourachanis, 2015, 165). In the state of Paraná, near the older colony of Carambeí were founded the colonies of Monte Alegre in 1949, Castrolanda in 1950 and Arapoti in 1960 by protestants, and Tronco (São Antônio) by catholics. In the state of Santa Catarina was founded the colony of Tijuquinhas in 1950 and in the state of Rio Grande do Sul, the colony of Não-Me-Toque in 1951 by catholics. The settlers of Monte Alegre later joined Arapoti, Tronco was absorbed by Carambeí and Tijuquinhas by Não-Me-Toque (Fraga, 2008: 55). The constellation of Dutch settlements with their solidarity spirit and strong emphasis on collaboration, notwithstanding religious differences, was one of the most successful examples of organized land settlement in the post-war period.

In 1951, 500 Swabian German families from Yugoslavia, experienced in the cultivation of cereals, were settled in Guarapuava, under the supervision of CARITAS and l'Aide Suisse à l'Europe, and the support by both the Brazilian and Swiss governments with technical assistance provided by the ILO (Stein, 2011). Moreover, under an agreement signed by the governments of Brazil and Italy a joint Italo-Brazilian colonization and immigration company was created, which undertook two projects: the first scheme provided for the settlement in the State of São Paulo of some 150 Italian farming families, plus another 50 families of employees and artisans, and an additional 700 workers (Papadopoulos, 2022: 78). In the State of Goiás were founded the colonies of São Geraldo by 30 families and Rio Verde by 60 Italian farming families, 15 employee families and a further 240 workers and artisans (Bell/Silva, 2018: 212). In 1952, a committee was sent to Italy in order to select 420 families that would be apt to settle in Brazil (Seleção de agricultores, 1952).

The Italian Credit Institute for Italians Abroad (ICLE) had made a number of surveys for the possibility of land settlement in other Latin American countries, but the only project undertaken was that in Chile, where Italian families were to be settled on small projects to engage in farming and industrial activities derived from agriculture. In Venezuela the National Agrarian Institute was engaged in establishing small settlements of both Venezuelan and European families; 19 colonies were established and lands in 2.000 settlements outside these colonies had been distributed to more than 11.000 people. During that time a second group of Mennonite refugees settled in South America, 5.000 from the Soviet Union in Paraguay, 1.000 from former German territories in Uruguay, while some of those that had migrated before the war to Paraguay bought lands in Bolivia (Goossen, 2017: 246).

After the end of the war, it was IRO that introduced a “global system of humanitarian-based population transfer” in order to relieve western European countries from the burden of displaced persons and avert the economic, social and political unrest from the continuous presence of those who were considered idle people (Holleufer, 2002: 133). The countries of Latin America decided to accept a share of those refugees. Among them the more desirable group were the Baltics, followed by Ukrainian, Poles, Russians and Yugoslavs while most countries, as during the interwar period, were unwilling to accept Jews (Andrade, 2011: 78). This

marked a shift in their migration policy that favoured Italian or Spanish settlers, considered more easily assimilable and often came up against resistance from civil servants and intolerance from local inhabitants (Andrade, 2011: 88). During IRO's mandate almost 100.000 people were resettled in Latin America, about 10% of the total number of DPs transferred overseas. The majority of them, about 79.000 displaced persons, went to Argentina (32.712), Brazil (29.000) and Venezuela (12.000) (Holleufer, 2002: 140-141; Andrade 2011: 88). The governments of these countries gave priority to farmers, qualified workers and technicians that could colonize their underpopulated regions under the direction of each country's immigration or colonization institutes (Andrade, 2011: 76; Holleufer, 2002: 154). In order to be accepted, many urban dwellers or people with academic degrees, had to declare that they were farm labourers, a fact that undermined the colonization projects. On the other hand, Chile and Mexico gave priority to skilled workers among the displaced persons.

The appearance of a new player: the ICEM

While IRO was accelerating its efforts for the resettlement of Displaced Persons, ILO was trying to formulate a project for the regulation of migration flows. ILO's efforts to deal with the issue culminated in the 1951 Naples Conference, which failed due to U.S. efforts to limit the influence of Soviet Union and its satellites in international organizations. Another reason for the failure of the conference was that the main immigration countries insisted that they should retain their control over the selection of immigrants (Parsanoglou/Tourgeli, 2017b). As a result, the United States took the initiative in December 1951 for the creation of a new intergovernmental body outside of the United Nations framework. The newly formed organisation began operations in February 1952 and was initially named the Provisional Intergovernmental Committee for the Movement of Migrants from Europe (PICMME). The new organization had the double aim of relieving Europe from its surplus population and contributing, through the influx of workforce, in the development of countries in the periphery. It marked thus a step in the effort of integrating the economies of centre and periphery in the Western world (Paiva, 2008: 10). After a few months, the organization was renamed the Intergovernmental Committee for European Migration (ICEM) and as a result of the Cold War priorities of the United States its life was extended.

The ICEM planned to settle massively displaced persons and surplus population in Latin America, although the projects that finally materialized once more did not match the enthusiasm of their inceptors. One reason for this was that the U.S., Canada and Australia, contrary to Latin American and southern European countries, did not wish to invest in what was termed "migration services", that is in projects that aimed at facilitating the reception, placement and integration of migrants (Paiva, 2008: 10, Parsanoglou/Tourgeli, 2017a). Already at the Brussels Migration Conference in 1951, according to the U.S. delegation that played the role of leader in establishing an Intergovernmental Committee for the management of migration from Europe, the main objective of this committee should be to "facilitate the movement of surplus populations from countries of Western Europe and Greece to countries affording resettlement opportunities overseas" (U.S. Delegation 1951).

In this context, emigration was considered mainly in demographic terms, more precisely related to the problem of "overpopulation" in post-war Europe; immigration was conceived mainly in economic terms, particularly through the lenses of economic underdevelopment and shortcomings or development and

opportunities offered especially in the vast “unexploited” territories of South American countries (Papadopoulos/Parsanoglou, 2015: 48-49).

However, land settlement as such does not appear during the initial steps towards the establishment of the PICMME. Other issues, much more urgent such as the finalization of the organizational and administrative structure, the design and implementation of a migrant transportation plan as well as the drafting of rules of procedure and of a constitution attracted most of the attention during the first two sessions of the Committee. Nevertheless, already during the third session of the PICMME, held in Washington D.C. in June 1952, the idea of agricultural colonization or land settlement appears in the discussions. The delegate of the Peruvian government, Fernando Morales Macedo, explained his government’s interest in participating in the session as an observer by stressing the paradox that

certains pays aient de problèmes d’excédent de population, alors que de vastes territoires de l’Amérique du Sud, par exemple, et le Pérou, entre autres pays, avec des richesses naturelles qui n’attendent que la main de l’homme pour se transformer en valeurs économiques, ont, au contraire les problèmes posés par les faibles densités d’habitants, manque de main-d’œuvre, manque d’exploitation.

And he continued:

Il serait facile de croire qu’un simple accord entre pays qui ont des problèmes opposés suffirait à résoudre la question. Malheureusement, il est loin d’en être ainsi. C’est pourquoi le Gouvernement du Pérou marque avec satisfaction qu’une organisation internationale, jeune encore, et pleine de promesse, PICMME, s’attelle à la tâche de résoudre des situations tout aussi urgentes que pleines d’un sens humanitaire (Morales-Macedo, 1952).

In the same spirit, Italian delegate Comte Giusti Del Giardino exclaimed in reference to what a delegate from another Latin American country said:

je suis très touché par ce qu’a dit le Représentant du Chili. Il a parlé d’une terre sans hommes, moi en parlant, je parle des hommes sans terre, alors nous voyons, les raisons pour nous mettre d’accord existent, alors maintenant d’étudier les moyens (Giardino, 1952).

The technical means to which the Italian and other delegates to the third session were referring were to be examined in detail by the newly elected first Director of the PICMME, Hugh Gibson, and presented in the following session, held in Geneva in October 1952. This report highlights that the obstacles to the expansion of migration lie in the receiving countries rather than in the emigration countries. Referring more particularly to Latin American countries, the Director mentions that

the present stringent limitations [to absorb immigrants] are attributable to the lack of capital needed for the overall economic development programmes of the countries concerned and to the fact that while a number of organisations engage in the necessary activities for the promotion of resettlement possibilities, there is at present insufficient effective co-ordination of their efforts” (Gibson, 1952).

As mentioned above, the two main obstacles for the successful implementation of land settlement projects were, firstly, the need of large amounts of capital that the governments, particularly those of the receiving countries, did not dispose and, secondly, the lack of sufficient technical expertise. According to the director of the ICEM (Gibson, 1952: paragraphs 27-41), the latter could be remedied by requirement of expertise and technical assistance from various agencies – mainly international. Technical expertise was needed both during the stage of planning and implementation. Before the establishment of a colony, solid knowledge was required on land, on labour and on markets. The location of the settlement and its specific characteristics with regard to climate, soil, water, existing agriculture and

existing communications was considered basic in planning a viable land settlement (for more see Basic Working Paper, 1953). As for labour and markets, knowledge that crossed national borders was required. ICEM proposed to Henry Bruman, who had continued to study land settlement in Brazil after WWII and had field knowledge of the conditions and the results of previous schemes, to collaborate with the committee. Bruman declined, but in 1955 he made a research visit to the ICEM headquarters in Geneva (Bell, 2014: 25). His published research provided material for planning land settlement projects. Labour shortage might be easily identified in a specific region or even nation-wide, but for labour availability countries interested in agricultural colonization had to turn to transnational or international sources.

The most complicated issue, however, which would hinder the implementation of land settlement projects, was the constant lack of capital. The establishment of a colony required a certain infrastructure and a series of interventions. For this reason, and because receiving countries could not bear the economic burden alone, the ICEM director proposed a four-partite scheme of financing, consisting in the establishment of a colonization company (as it happened for example with the Italo-Brazilian agreement of the early 1950s) with the following allocation of sources: 30% from the immigration country, 30% from the emigration country, 20% from the movement agency (in our case, the ICEM) and 20% from external sources, e.g. the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development, the Export-Import Bank in Washington, the Organization for European Economic Co-operation as far as European governments were concerned. It was also suggested that the reimbursement of investors could follow the path “by the migrant to the colonisation company and by the company to its investors”. Additional measures that could enhance the economic viability of land settlement projects, and therefore the return of capital, could be the creation of training farms where settlers would be able to receive updated training and the encouragement of farmers in receiving countries to hire in their existing farms a greater number of migrants suitable for agricultural labour (Gibson, 1952: paragraphs 67-70).

The significance accorded to land settlement is also demonstrated by the fact that governments of Australia and Latin American countries were called to present to the following sessions of the Committee pilot land settlement projects, where the potential role of ICEM could be discussed. In addition, in autumn 1953, a special meeting of land settlement experts was held in Florence, where representatives of 13 governments, 3 international organisations and two independent scholars (one from the Netherlands and one from Italy) gathered in order to collect existing knowledge on the subject, set principles and criteria for viable projects and investigate possibilities for practical planning and implementation of such projects. Material concerning factors that hinder land settlement, criteria for a successful implementation, technical and financial means for implementing, specific services to be provided, e.g. medical services, and other, was produced during the meeting in Florence (Risquez-Iribarren, 1953).

A couple of weeks later, in October 1953, during the sixth session of the ICEM held in Venice, the director presented a specific *Report on land settlement* based on the initial development of ICEM policy on the issue. In this report he underlined the role that the Committee could play in land settlement policies, a role however quite limited according to the will of member-states:

It was not felt [at the previous session] that the Committee could use its funds for investment purposes or assume direct responsibility for land settlement projects but rather that it should act as a catalytic agent, making its services available at the request of governments in the

preparation of plans and their presentation to international banking institutions. (Gibson, 1953: paragraph 2)

From the beginning, thus, and despite the fact that governments and the Committee recognized the demanding character of land settlement projects in technical and financial means, the role of ICEM was limited to that of a mediator between sending and receiving countries and between governments and international organizations and institutions.

This explains the fact that the bulk of land settlement projects, before and after the establishment of the ICEM, were based on either national policies, like in the case of Venezuela where the ‘sowing petrol’ principle led consecutive governments to an expansionist colonizing land policy that also affected agricultural expansion (Gibson, 1953: paragraph 7); on bilateral agreements, such as the case of the Brazilian Company for Italian Colonization and Immigration which created most of the colonies in the country or the Italo-Chilean Settlement Company (CITAL) and the Germano-Chilean Company in Chile; or in a combination of the two, like in the case of Argentina, where in the framework of the second Five-Year Government Programme (for the period 1952-1956) the Argentine government signed an agreement with the ICEM for the establishment of a training farm in the province of Buenos Aires (Damilakou, 2004: 37).

Despite all the above-mentioned efforts, it must be noted that land settlement never became the main or even a major way in managing international migration through the ICEM. Even in 1955, during the second session of the Council of the ICEM, deputy director Pierre Jacobsen deplored the fact that migrants

have been much more attracted by the large cities of immigration countries than by the vast opportunities offered by the rural areas, and the situation arising from this unbalanced immigration is being aggravated by the simultaneous exodus of the local population itself from agricultural to urban areas. (Jacobsen, 1955: paragraph 49)

For many the selection of inadequate agricultural labourers combined with the bad conditions in the rural areas of receiving countries were the main reasons for the deceiving results.

After 1955, the idea that countries of Latin America did not need a mass influx of migrants but specialized workers who could contribute to the passage from extensive to intensive cultivation, the mechanization of agriculture, the introduction of terraced cultures and the claiming of new land started to gain weight (Gazeta Mercantil, 1956). For this reason, ICEM in collaboration with ILO and local authorities hoped to promote a more selective migration of agricultural workers towards Latin America (Folha da Manhã, 1956a). Contract workers would be selected according to the need for workers with knowledge of specific cultures (Diário de São Paulo, 1956). In 1956, the director of ICEM declared during a visit to Brazil that the Committee was trying to receive guarantees that contract labourers after some years would be able to acquire land with beneficial terms, in order to accelerate the immigration of agricultural workers towards Latin America (A Gazeta, 1956; Folha da Manhã, 1956b; Fanfulla, 1956c). According to this plan, preplaced agricultural workers would accumulate the necessary capital, by working exclusively as sharecroppers or cultivating assigned fields between coffee harvests (Visão, 1956; Fanfulla, 1956a). This idea did not exclude the option of distributing to agricultural workers idle lands in the interior in order to fulfil the promise to “settle people without land” to “land without people” (Diário Popular, 1956). But, contrary to past projects, it was recognized that it was impossible to attract agricultural workers who would face bad living and sanitary conditions and would have no hope of acquiring land (Fanfulla, 1956d). Successful colonization projects as that of

Padrinha in the state of São Paulo provided an example to follow (Fanfulla, 1956b). Other assessments based on national cases, such as the Argentine one, minimised the role of agricultural colonization in the effective absorption of European immigrants (Damilakou, 2004: 50-52).

If we consider the statistics of migrants transported by the ICEM from February 1952 to March 1957, we see that for all Latin American countries, with the exception of Chile and Costa Rica, agricultural immigration was to a lesser or to a greater extent less important than other schemes. In the case of the most important immigration country of the region, Argentina, 97,6% of those transported by the ICEM migrated under the family reunion scheme as dependents; in the case of Brazil, which was the country that developed the biggest land settlement projects, 13,9% of immigrants during that period moved through agricultural schemes. In the case of the third most important immigration country, Venezuela, agricultural families did not constitute more than 1,2% of the total (ICEM, 1957).

Land settlement projects were carried out with the technical assistance by the ICEM and other international organizations, and funded by international institutions or by national agencies, such as the Banco de la Nación Argentina, or the Development Loan Fund established in 1957 within the U.S. International Cooperation Administration.

Scholars have pointed out that local administrations often were against mass immigration and created obstacles to the implementation of various projects decided by the central government. In July 1953 the director of the Department of Immigration and Colonization in the Secretary of Agriculture of São Paulo declared that the actual economic conditions in Brazil, the lack of electricity, adequate food supplies, and the mobilization of workers did not favour the settlement of foreign agricultural workers. Moreover, he underlined that as a result of the devaluation of the currency the workers would not be able to send remittances to their families back in Italy (Seleção de agricultores, 1953).

Conclusion

Despite the initial proclamations that land settlement could be the way of dealing successfully with both overpopulation in Europe and underdevelopment in Latin America and despite the optimism that “Land settlement through migration is both urgently needed and feasible” (ICEM, 1953: 1), it seems that this specific tool of migration management remained quantitatively limited if not marginal. What is interesting and important though about land settlement are the discourses and approaches that it generated. Migration was being discussed in multidisciplinary and transnational fora adopting holistic, quasi scientific approaches. Either we consider the attempt to establish land settlement as a major way to manage migration flows another grand narrative that collapsed before changing anything or a significant step in migration history, it is without any doubt a revealing source of the main concerns, perspectives and discourses that emerged in the post-war world of migration.

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