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State expansion, development imaginaries and mobility in a peripheral frontier: the case of Caracaraí, Brazil

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Abstract

This article examines social transformation and mobility dynamics in Caracaraí, a rural frontier town in the State of Roraima, Brazil, from the 1950s to the 1990s. During this short period, we observe a rapid diversification of migration in Caracaraí: from non-migratory mobility tied to the micro-scale extraction of local products to more-permanent settlement in town, rapid shifts in the direction of internal migration patterns and back to non-migratory mobility patterns again. Drawing from frontier migration studies and mobility transition theories, this paper adopts a social transformation perspective to explore the relation between social change and these mobility transitions. The changing role of the state, from a promoter of infrastructure to a provider of services and public employment, the restructuring of the local economic fabric and its reorientation towards more secondary and tertiary activities, and inhabitants' imaginaries of the development potential of Caracaraí all explain the shift in migration processes. Investigating these processes, we observe that (i) the state promoted new opportunities, leading to a decline in traditional circular mobility, alongside the growth of temporal workers and spontaneous migrants; (ii) infrastructure advancements encouraged non-migratory mobility patterns between Caracaraí and Boa Vista, the capital city of the State of Roraima; (iii) the provision of public employment intensified internal rural-urban and urban-rural migration patterns, from communities in the interior of the State of Roraima to Caracaraí and *vice versa*, and (iv) development imaginaries – the perception of how Caracaraí *should* and *could* be in the near future – prevented voluminous emigration, during periods of socio-economic slowdown. This research highlights the meaningful role of the state in altering livelihoods and migration decision-making processes. In particular, it shows how state expansion framed cultural imaginaries of the 'good life', favouring the desire to stay put in periods of high economic uncertainty, even when life aspirations were not being met by local opportunities.

Keywords: state expansion, migration aspirations, internal migration, non-migratory mobility, collective imaginaries, 'good life', social transformation

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1. Introduction

This article presents insights into an in-depth qualitative study that investigated the social transformation occurring in Caracaraí and its influence on changing mobility patterns. Caracaraí is a peripheral rural frontier Brazilian town in the State of Roraima and the analysis covers the period from the 1950s to the 1990s, when Roraima was undergoing major political and socio-economic transformation. Until the 1960s, the ‘traditional’ livelihoods of the town were tied to river transport, (un)loading activities, the micro-scale extraction of local products – such as rubber and Brazil nuts from the tropical rain forest – and the hunting of animals. Migration to Caracaraí stemmed from river-based commerce and extractive activities, which attracted temporary dockworkers, cattle caretakers, traders and extractive workers. From the mid-1960s to the 1990s, we observe a diversification of migration in Caracaraí, due to the rapid expansion of the state and a micro-urbanisation process. These attracted high volumes of temporary contractual workers, small entrepreneurs from North-Eastern Brazil and Amazonas, and peasants from *Baixo Rio Branco*,¹ as new occupations emerged in the construction industry and the public sector. Within half a decade, Caracaraí’s characterisation shifted; from being considered initially as an area of circulatory mobility associated with extractive activities, to being seen as a place for more permanent settlement, rapid shifts in the direction of internal migration patterns – from in-migration to out-internal migration – and back to modest circulatory patterns associated with commuting between Caracaraí and Boa Vista – the capital city of the State of Roraima – and Caracaraí and the forest. These rapid shifts in mobility patterns raise interesting questions about the town’s early phases of economic and governmental transformation and their effects on the livelihood and the migration decision-making of the population. How can we explain the rapid shifts in the migration patterns of the town?

According to mobility transition models, Caracaraí could be described as a pre-industrial society (Zelinsky 1971) or resource niche (Skeldon 1997). This is because, despite the active presence of the state, its economy is peripheral, largely based on bureaucratic and administrative functions, with weak links to the global economic system. Zelinsky (1971), in his seminal article *The Hypothesis of the Mobility Transition*, suggested that mobility dynamics are related to demographic transition and general processes of modernisation and growth – which he called the *vital transition*. As societies transition from high fertility and decreasing mortality rates to low mortality and fertility, international, frontierward and rural-urban migration volumes stagnate and decrease to give way to circulatory, intra-urban mobility patterns (Zelinsky 1971: 233). In Caracaraí, circulatory mobility dynamics were intrinsic to the traditional lifestyle of the population, being disrupted by the expansion of capitalist companies in the 1970s and gaining momentum, once again, when the active role of the state as a promoter of infrastructure faded out in the 1990s. Despite the growth of a more complex mobility system, the return to traditionally precarious and circular livelihoods challenges the widely criticised linearity of modernisation (Brohman 1995; Hout 2016; Shah 1996) and partially questions Zelinsky’s representation of circular mobility transition in late transitional societies (Zelinsky 1971: 243–245).

¹ The *Rio Branco* is the principal affluent of the *Rio Negro* which, in turn, is the most voluminous tributary of the Amazon River. Until the mid-1970s it was the only option for the transportation of goods and people between the State of Roraima and the State of Amazonas, not losing its relevance until the early 1990s. Caracaraí is located on the right bank of the *Rio Branco* and, thus, became an important geographical site and commercial hub. *Baixo* (lower) *Rio Branco* refers to the area and settlements on the lower parts of the river.

Skeldon (1997), expanding on Zelinsky's (1971) mobility transition hypothesis, distinguished five tiers of development – the *old core*, the *new core*, the *expanding core*, the *labour frontier* and the *resource niche* – each characterised by analogous dynamics of economic growth and corresponding migration patterns. He suggested that resource areas, the *resource niche*, are characterised by weak state structures and peripheral economies – tenuously linked to the other tiers and to the global economic system – that function as resource suppliers to industrial hubs. The relation to the global migration system is also fragile and the migration primarily results in circular, non-permanent patterns internal to the region (Skeldon 1997). Development is dependent on the discovery of resources that are valuable for core countries, which might trigger larger and more varied patterns of migration. Additionally, state formation is fundamental for the explanation of migration patterns (Skeldon 1997), particularly in the *resource niche*, frontier regions where governmental policies, such as funding for infrastructure, result in increasing migration patterns. In Roraima, the role of the state was particularly relevant: the post-1964 military government showered the region with funds for infrastructure plans and started a number of agricultural projects (Barbosa 1993; Diniz 2002; Nogueira, de Rezende Veras and de Souza 2013). This highlights the importance of activities promoted by the state, which are generally left unexplored by migration studies and frontier (migration) theories – which focus, to a greater extent, on economic and demographic forces.

Indeed, the findings from this study contribute to the general debate connecting migration and development. They challenge common 'frontier' narratives that tend to relate migration to the 'frontier', with land colonisation schemes and with the struggle for and acquisition of land plots by rural impoverished peasants. Moreover, they also challenge traditional thinking on frontier expansion – which is often understood on a linear rural-to-urban scale and a pre-to-post capitalist cleavage. Indeed, earlier research emphasises the consequences of economic and urban developments in the migration patterns of frontier communities (Browder and Godfrey 1990; Foweraker 1981; Martins 1984), overshadowing the consequences of broader development processes – such as cultural imaginaries, life aspirations and the role of the state as a provider – on mobility (see Diniz 2001).

To understand the specific processes of change that transform a less-complex migratory system, a peripheral rural area, into a more intricate one, we must consider the broader dimensions of the transformation forming the social domain (de Haas, Fransen, Natter *et al.* 2020). Adopting a 'social transformation' approach, which reveals the mechanisms related to continuing, fundamental shifts in societal organisation and their impact on mobility (Castles 2003, 2010; de Haas *et al.* 2020; Khondker and Schuerkens 2014), this paper addresses the following questions: What was the impact of deep social forces on both the town and the residents of Caracaraí? Which social factors determined the mobility transitions observed?

This article is based on four weeks of field research, conducted in Caracaraí in 2019, which included semi-structured interviews, field observation and archival research in the municipal archives and the library of the *Universidade Estadual de Roraima*, Caracaraí campus. The paper first provides an overview of the socio-economic and political structures that shaped the local lifestyle and migration in the town during the first half of the twentieth century. Secondly, it analyses how mobility patterns in Caracaraí changed during the 1960s–1990s, highlighting the main (im)mobility trends. Thirdly, I explore how the dimensions of social change have influenced local livelihoods and migration patterns. Finally, I explore how we can theoretically explain the migration processes observed in Caracaraí.

2. A theoretical perspective: mobility transitions in a peripheral frontier

This paper relies on several strands of migration theory to understand Caracarái's rapid shifts in mobility patterns: i) theories on rural-urban and rural-rural migration patterns; ii) migration transition theories; and iii) frontier migration evolution-stage models.

Neoclassical economic theories postulate that workers from rural areas migrate as a strategy to take advantage of wage differentials (Harris and Todaro 1970; Ranis and Fei 1961; Todaro 1969), while historical-structuralism hints at migration as the outcome of the penetration of capitalism – through the development of infrastructure and large exploitations of cash crops – into rural areas. Traditional farmers and peasants, now unemployed, would look for labour opportunities in urban areas, where they would join the new industrial proletariat (Massey, Arango, Hugo *et al.* 1993). Historical-structural and neoclassical theories² suggest that the capitalist expansion, better employment opportunities and wage differentials which emerged in Caracarái during the 1960s attracted migrants from the interior of the municipality – where settlements were more peripheral and livelihoods more precarious – as well as individuals from North-East Brazil, where changing soil productivity, land concentration and degradation triggered economically depressed frontiers (Diniz and Gonçalves Lacerda 2014). Nevertheless, these theories do not explain why, in the 1980s, when the construction boom ended, migrants from rural areas arrived in town, nor why, in the 1990s, during a period of economic downturn, some decided to stay put rather than migrating to more dynamic nuclei. Similarly, the New Economics of Labour Migration (NELM), which propose that, in areas with limited safety nets, migration serves as a household strategy to reduce uncertainty and risk (Stark and Bloom 1985; Taylor 1999), do not explain the engagement of some in 'traditional', precarious extractive activities in the 1990s, when economic slowdown hit Caracarái. Why did families not adopt migration as a strategy to generate more secure savings?

A second set of relevant insights comes from migration transition theories, which allow the exploration of the relation between macro-level change patterns and migration volume, duration and composition. These theories suggest that migration, as an intrinsic part of the development process, tends to initially intensify and diversify with the development of economic and technological structures. The development of transport and socio-economic structures triggers mobility from and to more-distant locations. For instance, the restructuring of Caracarái's economy from extractive to secondary sectors attracted skilled and spontaneous migrants from North-East Brazil, when the migration system of Caracarái was originally tied to rural areas of the interior of Roraima and the neighboring State of Amazonas. Similarly, the expansion of roads facilitated the

² Neoclassical and historical-structuralist migration theories present radically different interpretations of the world development system and how it influences migration. In fact, historical-structuralist theories emerged as a response to neoclassical models. Yet, both theoretical frameworks present mobility as a manifestation of unequal development processes: neoclassical theories explain migration as a consequence of development differences between rural and urban areas, supported on wage differentials and an uneven capitalist expansion, whereas historical-structuralist theories see migration as a product of unequal development between developing and developed countries. In addition, while structuralists dispute the presumptions of equilibrium held by functionalists, they fail to address the more central assumption of more-development-means-less-migration and its derivative reasoning that migration would almost completely stop if such an equilibrium were achieved (see de Haas 2010: 13–14). Therefore, the combination of both theoretical models provides a more comprehensive perspective on how migration might take place in a context of distinct development processes, despite important differences in the core understanding of how development and, thus, mobility, impact on the population.

commuting patterns that absorbed migration in the 1990s, leading to more-complex non-migratory mobility dynamics. Migration transition models, however, present shortcomings. Apart from the great emphasis on demographic and urban transition and their deterministic nature (Castles, de Haas and Miller 2013), Zelinsky (1971) proposed five broad, long-term phases of development (from a pre-modern traditional society to a future super-advanced society). Nonetheless, the rapid migration transition of Caracarái (from circulatory mobility linked to ‘traditional’ extractive activities, to rapid shifts in the direction of internal migration patterns, to commuting) raises questions about the duration of the mobility transition phases in Zelinsky’s model (see Vezzoli 2020). How are rapid shifts in mobility related to, in theory, longer-term development phases? In addition, circulatory movements in late transitional societies theoretically become more complex, especially within urban networks, while earlier mobility patterns persist but are scaling down (Zelinsky 1971: 243–245). This does not explain why circulation patterns associated with ‘traditional’ extractive activities steadily shrunk during the 1970s, to then gather momentum in the 1990s.

Finally, frontier evolution-stage models, in a similar fashion to migration transition theories, advance that the development processes of the frontier influence mobility patterns into and from frontier areas (Diniz 2001, 2002). Therefore, depending on the evolutionary phase of the frontier, we can observe distinct interplays between structural forces and migration: i) *pioneer frontiers* are characterised by a lack of markets, poor infrastructure connections, peasant agricultures and, predominantly, chain migration and restrained circulation patterns within the frontier; ii) incipient labour and land markets together with improvements in networks, give way to *transition frontiers* where the geographical origin of migrants is broadened and circulatory and temporal migration expanded; iii) *consolidated frontiers* are constituted by extensive agricultural and ranching companies, land concentration, the fading out of circulatory dynamics due to stable salaries, and latecomer migrants; lastly, iv) *urbanised frontiers* represent urban nuclei, characterised by rural-urban migration, skilled migrants and highly mobile unskilled individuals, who are likely to circulate steadily, looking for urban and rural employment (see Diniz 2001). This model focuses on the mobility dynamics of frontier agricultural settlements, whereas Caracarái was a commercial hub. Despite this, the model offers valuable insights into understanding mobility in Caracarái.

According to this theoretical strand, Caracarái was, already during the 1940s, a *transition frontier*, given its strategic location and the temporal migration of dock workers and traders (see Section 4). From the mid-1960s onwards, the changes in the structure of the village with the spread of capitalist forces triggered a diversification of the migration dynamics, attracting migrants from the interior of the municipality, while traditional circulatory movements tied to extractivism faded, as predicted in *consolidated frontiers* settings. However, frontier evolution-stage models do not explain why non-migratory mobility dynamics took a different shape to that predicted for *urbanised frontiers* during the 1990s. Instead of observing the permanent settlement of skilled migrants, these latter migrated to nearby, larger, urban nuclei such as Boa Vista in the early 1990s and engaged in commuting. In addition, some unskilled individuals, rather than travelling around looking for urban or rural employment, stayed put in Caracarái and returned to the ‘traditional’, precarious extractive activities. In fact, cultural imaginations, affective attachment and hope in the development potential of Caracarái prevented the emigration of many in a context of socio-economic slowdown. How do imaginaries of the near future shape (im)mobility decisions? Which social forces explain the migration outcome of Caracarái?

These migration and frontier theories contribute, partially, to the understanding of the mobility transition in Caracará but fail to explore the interaction of social forces and migration decision-making processes. For instance, the expansion of the economy, apart from being an economic process, also involves reverberations on the political structure, the urbanisation process, the technological infrastructure or the cultural imaginaries of the population (de Haas *et al.* 2020). To acknowledge all these processes, this article adopts a broader, more comprehensive social transformation framework. This perspective enables me, on the one hand, to examine the forces of change operating in the town of Caracará during the 1950s–1990s and, on the other, to account for their implications for migration.

De Haas *et al.* (2020) operationalise the concept of social transformation and distinguish five principal dimensions of change: the *economic*, the *political*, the *technological*, the *demographic* and the *cultural*. All five interact with each other and develop over time. Dimensional changes contribute to societal shifts that impact on people's livelihoods and (im)mobility patterns. For example, the expanding role of the state and increasing investment in technological networks and urbanisation processes might stimulate the migration of particular population segments, such as skilled personnel, while altering traditional socio-economic structures and encouraging the adaptation of peasants, farmers and extractive workers. Adopting the framework of social transformation allows me to investigate the interaction of the five dimensions and their influence on mobility. How does the restructuring of the economy from extractive to industrial interact with technological improvements? How does the expanding role of the state interplay with an economic downturn? How does the state shape imaginaries and hope? Finally, what are the migratory effects of the specific sequencing of economic restructuring, infrastructure improvements, state expansion and changing life imaginaries?

3. Methodology

This study combines the macro-level social history of Caracará and micro-level life stories of migrants, returnees and non-migrants. The linkage between the two levels was a missing element from Zelinsky's (1971) and Skeldon's (1997) macro-level theoretical perspectives; thence, this paper captures how macro-level structural opportunities and constraints during the period from the 1950s to the 1990s influenced the agency of individuals, the migration processes in town and the adaptation strategies of the population.

On the one hand, I map the transformations of and social changes in Caracará since the 1950s in order to comprehend how profound changes, such as the expanding role of the state, infrastructural improvements and social imaginaries, are associated with mobility. This provides an understanding of how spheres that, *a priori*, might be unrelated to migration play a role in migration and non-migratory mobility processes. The data collection included the analysis of secondary literature on the political, economic and cultural history of Caracará and longitudinal statistics (1960–2000) which reveal insights into the structure of the town at different points in time. The lack of population registers in Caracará hinders the verification of the mobility patterns gathered throughout the interviews, the exploration of migration volumes and the distribution and occupational composition of the population in the municipality. However, national and regional population censuses, although limited, allow me to analyse such dynamics.

At the micro level, the data collected through interviews with migrants, returnees and non-migrants identify associations between macro-level societal changes and people's adaptation strategies, as well as migration decisions. The selection of the interviewees had the objective of representing the mobility and immobility decisions of the population during the 1950s–1990s, regardless of specific characteristics such as

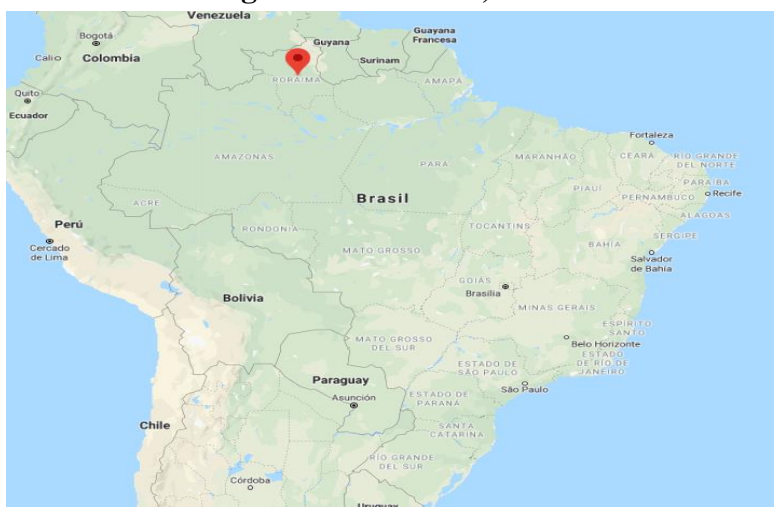
ethnicity. The collection of life stories allows me to grasp my participants' migration expectations before arriving in Caracaraí, the aspirations and obstacles in Caracaraí as well as people's perception of the town's social transformation and its impact on the population's opportunities.

Twenty semi-structured interviews³ were carried out which captured the mobility and immobility motives, the different life histories and the trajectories of 21 individuals,⁴ and reflected their personal experiences of Caracaraí's transformation. The interviews were conducted in Portuguese with the assistance of bilingual Brazilian assistants. Of the interviewees, 14 were male and seven female; the youngest was 45 years old and the oldest 91; 13 individuals were internal migrants from the Amazonas, North-Eastern Brazilian states and the lower-part of the *Branco* river, whereas four were returnees and four were non-migrants. All qualitative data were coded using the following coding structure: i) codes based on the operationalisation of the social transformation perspective (see de Haas *et al.* 2020), which facilitated the inquiry about the social transformation experienced in the demographic composition, economic and political organisation, infrastructure and aspirations of the town; and ii) migration-specific codes, which were designed inductively from the collected interview data and which traced, among others, the participants' migration motives. This paper includes direct citations from interviewees; sources are identified using the following system: for example, I1 for interview number 1 and I7 for interview 7. The data collected through the interviews are consistent with the secondary literature and the available quantitative data and provide a deep understanding of the migration dynamics and the changes taking place in Caracaraí at the political, economic and technological levels.

4. Caracaraí, a social and migratory review up to the late 1950s

Caracaraí is a peripheral rural town in the Amazon basin, in the State of Roraima, Brazil's northernmost state (Figure 1). Historically, the town's economy depended on its river-based commerce, the extraction of forest products, such as rubber and Brazil nuts, and the fur trade. The population included water transport workers, traders and merchants, and pioneer migrant farmers headed for the opening of forest exploitations for small-scale farming.

Figure 1. Caracaraí, Brazil



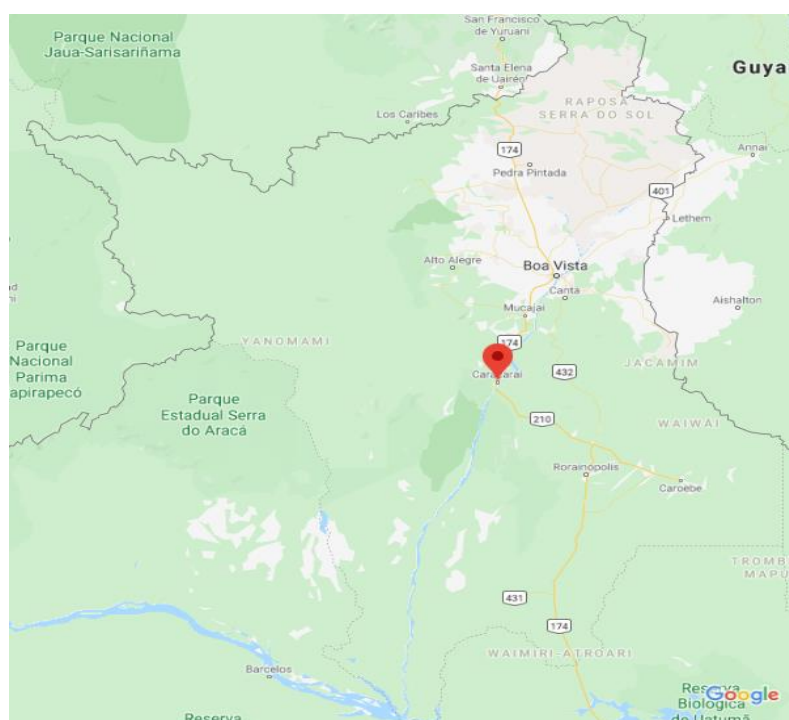
Source: Map data © 2020 Google

³ The interviews were conducted together with Simona Vezzoli, a member of the *MADE* team.

⁴ This is because a couple was interviewed together.

The location of the town on the *Rio Branco* (Figure 2) made it a strategic economic and maritime site and a point of economic convergence between the upper and lower parts of the *Rio Branco*. While the more fertile savanna-style fields in Northern Roraima (Furley and Mougeot 1994: 16) favoured cattle farming, which started in the late-eighteenth century to provide meat to southern states (Barbosa 1993), the poor quality of the soil in the southern part of the state made it prone to forest extraction activities – such as rubber and Brazil nut exploitation – and fishing (Hemming 1994; I2, I3, I4, I6, I10, I13 and I15). River transport was the sole transportation option and the nearby rapids of *Bem Querer* made it essential to wait in Caracaraí until road BR-174 was constructed in 1976⁵ (Barbosa 1993). Thus, most people worked both in the (un)loading of cattle and cargo and on extractive activities. The local population, although dependent on extractivism, was also involved in the storage of products and the keeping of cattle, which were fundamentally supplementary activities (I4, I6). In addition, the town's economy was characterised by a barter system between the extractive workers and the dock workers. The population relied, then, on informal job activities characterised by exchange networks, and migrants generally arrived in Caracaraí because they were working in incipient capitalist activities such as the (un)loading services.

Figure 2. Course of the *Rio Branco* in Roraima and Caracaraí's position



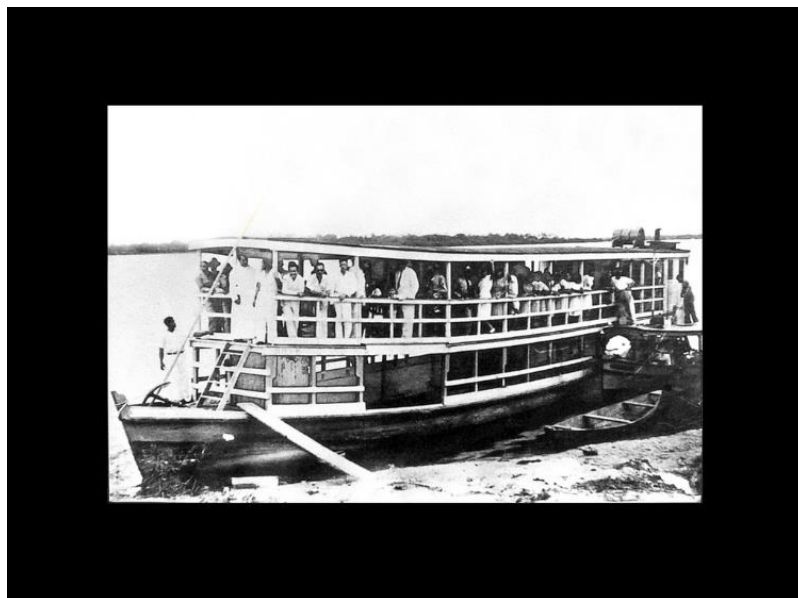
Source: Map data © 2020 Google

The increasing presence of traders and merchants during the 1950s altered the barter economy, as income-generating jobs and an employer–employee relation was introduced. In addition, these networks indicated the heterogeneity of the population. A few traders, who had better economic conditions and trade contacts, employed extractive workers, whom they provided with foodstuff and boats (I12, I13, I15). The workers settled along the *Branco* and in the rainforest for approximately three months, extracting

⁵ The river did not completely lose its importance until the completion of the road's paving in the early 1990s.

rubber and Brazil nuts and hunting animals, before returning to Caracaraí to sell their commodities. The living conditions in the town were, thus, accompanied by seasonal and circular mobility patterns. The economic growth of the town was based on the short-term, temporary migration of dock workers, cattle keepers (Figure 3) and skilled traders and merchants.

Figure 3. The arrival of dock workers and cattle keepers at Caracaraí's port around the 1950s



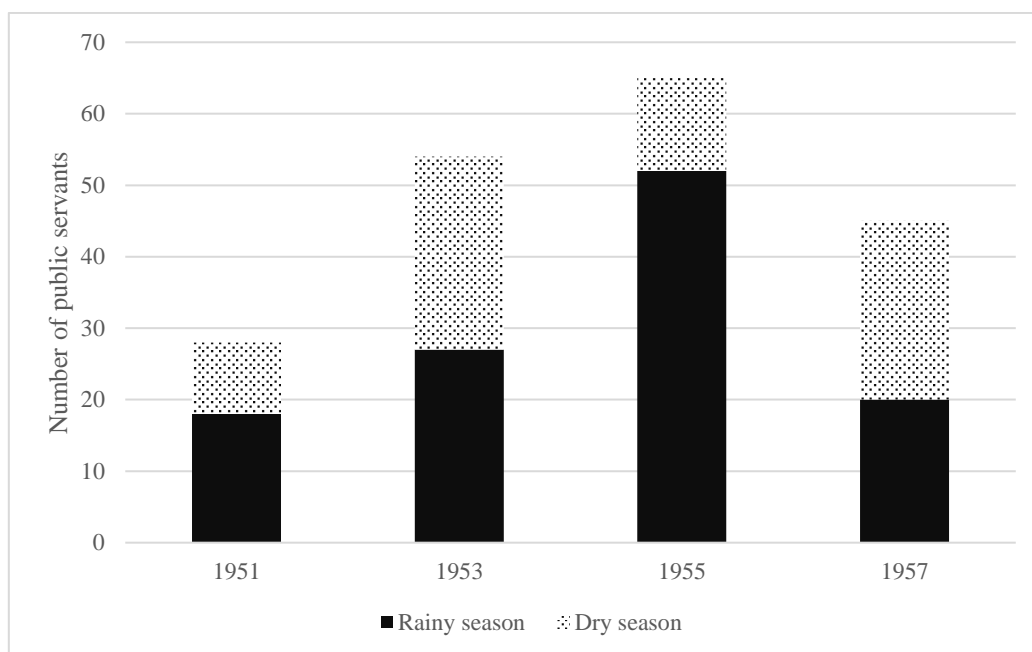
Source: Unknown, provided by Prof. Petronio, Caracaraí.

In addition, in this period we observe the growth of public services, which stemmed from the rationale of the Vargas' government i) to have a more direct and effective control over the Amazonas region, ii) to promote the socio-economic development of the territory and iii) to solve the low population density in specific frontier areas (Magalhães 2008; Santos 2010). Such objectives led to the establishment of three federal territories in 1943, one of which was the Federal Territory of *Rio Branco*, the current State of Roraima. The Vargas government's policy triggered the need to strengthen local administrative structures. Thence, in 1950 Caracaraí became the seat of the Municipality of Caracaraí, which comprised the lower half of today's State of Roraima, and the beneficiary of a small public sector. The collected family histories suggest that migration from the nearby settlement, *Bem Querer*, became more prominent with the enlargement of public services in the town during the 1950s (I4, I6), strengthening migration patterns that were already present due to its commercial links.

Although public administration was a new sector in Caracaraí, its size and importance was minimal in the late 1950s. Since Caracaraí was a community of approximately 18 houses, public services consisted of a state school, a small public health centre and a telegrapher. Moreover, public employment was seasonal as it stopped during the dry season (I14; Figure 4). While the rainy season (from approximately April to September) made the river navigable, during the dry season (from October to March) navigability was harder, scaling down river-based commerce and every other activity associated with it such as public employment. Over time, the provision of funds by the Federal Government to Federal Territories (Barros 1998) enabled the emergence of a small public administration sector which enabled income-generating employment in the

dry season. These employment opportunities increased the populations' ability to ensure the family's sustenance through pluri-activity, which included engagement in the traditional extractive activities, in the (un)loading services and in the seasonal public administration at times. The governmental expansion also implied directed (although not very successful) migration initiatives, aimed at attracting labourers from economically distressed territories in North-East Brazil, primarily from Maranhão (Diniz and Gonçalves Lacerda 2014).

Figure 4. Number of public servants in Caracarái during the dry and rainy seasons,⁶ 1951–1957



Source: Territorio Federal do Rio Branco (1951, 1953, 1955, 1957).

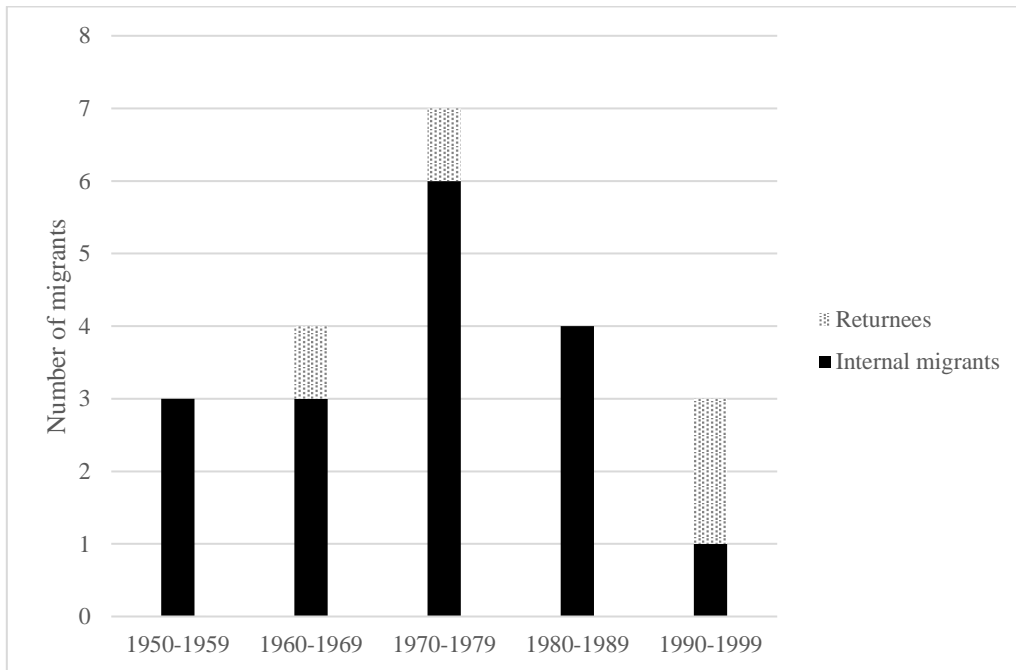
In sum, Caracarái offered limited socio-economic opportunities; local livelihoods were largely tied to trade and extractive activities, which saw the local population engaged in circular mobility patterns. In the 1950s, we observe the first signs of change tied to public administration and to the introduction of income-generating jobs which would contribute to fundamental political, economic and cultural transformations starting in the 1960s. These had important migration consequences. The next section explores the shifts in migration and non-migration processes during the 1950s–1990s.

5. Migration diversification during state-led development, 1950s–1990s

Starting in the late 1950s, the small community of Caracarái became an increasingly important destination for internal migrants and, as time passed, different socio-economic groups engaged in various forms of mobility, including commuting to Boa Vista, the state capital. Despite the limitation of official registers, the interview data, although unrepresentative, reveal the increasing complexity of migratory and non-migratory mobility: while inflows of internal migration were important in the 1950s, by the 1990s it was the return migration of *Caracaraienses* which gained momentum (Figure 5).

⁶ The figure for the rainy season consists of data for the month of July, whereas that for the dry season refers to the month of January

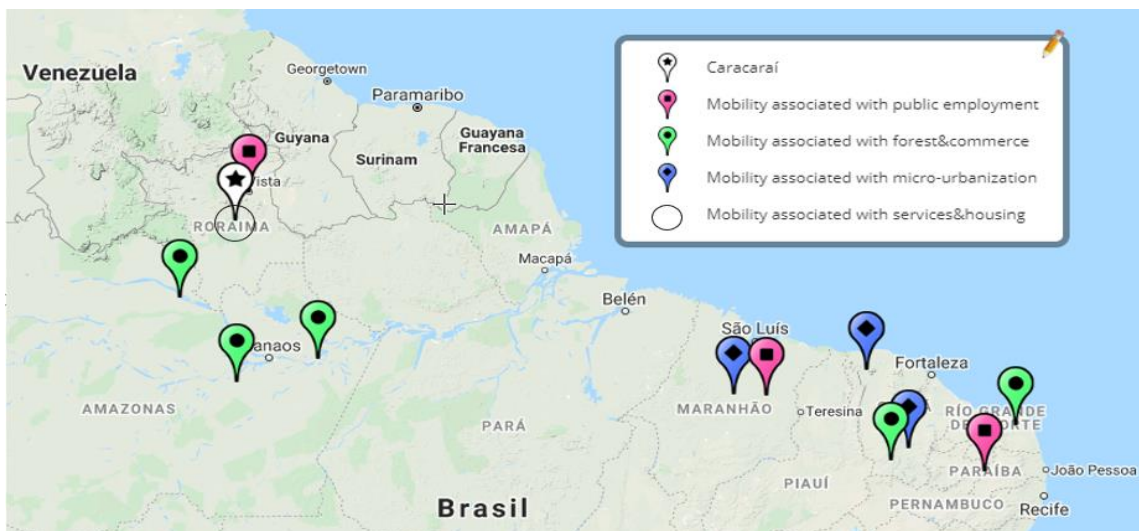
Figure 5. Migration in Caracaraí by year and type of migration, 1950–1999



Source: Interview data (2019)

Several patterns of mobility flourished among locals and migrants, whereas others vanished during the 1950s–1990s. These patterns were associated with changes in the societal structure of the town, as explained in Section 6. The following discussion expands on the exploration of these mobility trends (Figure 6) and the return and non-migration patterns.

Figure 6. Caracaraí and its principal communities of origin, by type of mobility



Source: Interview data (2019).⁷

⁷ The map was created using the website scribblemaps.com.

5.1 *Mobility dynamics*

5.1.1 Mobility associated with forest and commerce

Circular mobility tied to extractive activities has traditionally been part of the livelihood strategy of *Caracaraienses* and small communities along the *Rio Branco* and, therefore, concerned all segments of the population (I2, I5, I15). Apart from extractive workers who were settled in the rain forest to extract local products, the fishermen settled on the banks of *Baixo Rio Branco* were also attracted to the town due to the presence of merchants, the larger fish market and the port in Caracará. These mobility patterns were circumscribed to communities in the *Baixo Rio Branco* and the State of Amazonas.

In addition, the mobility of extractive workers was heavily tied to other migration patterns: first to seasonal dock workers and then to traders and merchants. Respectively, these groups introduced income-generating activities in the (un)loading services and established trade networks, involving the population of Caracará in modest capitalist activities and segmenting the labour market. By the late 1970s, these mobility patterns faded, as increasing economic opportunities allowed extractive workers to look for employment in the newly established enterprises (I14), take a chance in artisanal fishing (I5) or remain in public administration.

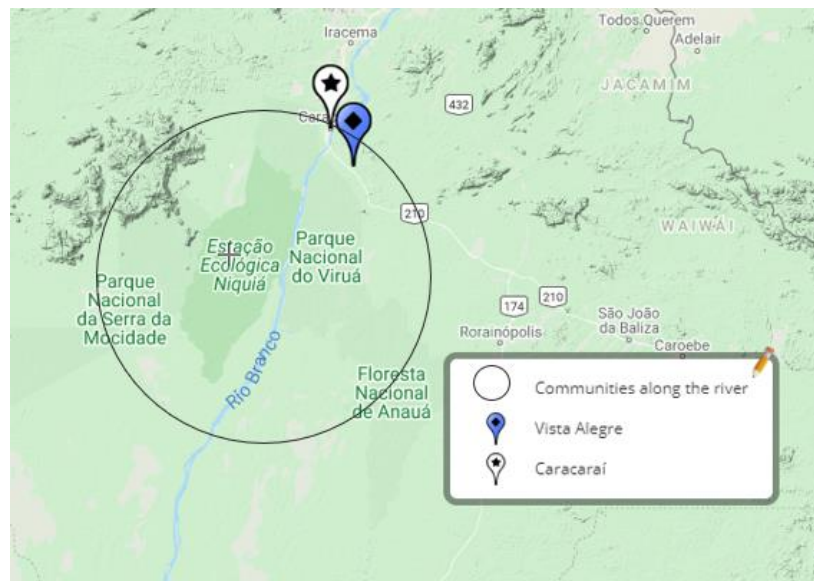
Until the mid-1960s, the presence of migrant women was predominantly tied to seasonal migration, as they moved almost exclusively as spouses following the dynamic river-based commerce (I12).

5.1.2 Mobility associated with micro-urbanisation processes and the provision of basic services and public employment

Given the poor soil quality in Caracará and its maritime functions, governmental development policies focused on the urban planning of the town, especially during the 1970s. This way, spontaneous migrants, primarily from North-Eastern Brazil, arrived in Caracará just as the community was transforming into a town with political representation, economic potential and technological investment. We then observe a diversification of the geographical origins of migrants, which was not limited to communities on the banks of the river and the neighbouring State of Amazonas; rather the migration system of Caracará expanded to attract migrants from more-distant locations (Figure 6). Interesting differences emerged in the adaptation strategies of this group: apart from looking for a temporary job on the construction sites, they also opened small local stores, snack bars and lodgings (I2, I3, I11, I12, I17, 19), illustrating an entrepreneurial spirit often observed among (international) migrants (see Thomas and Inkpen 2013). From the late 1960s onwards, single women with previous migration experience also arrived in Caracará from North-Eastern Brazil and the neighbouring State of Amazonas (I3, I8, I17).

Further, the construction boom and the expanding role of the state attracted migrants from the interior of the municipality (Figure 7), encouraging voluminous rural-urban migration during the 1980s. The active role of the state i) attracted migrants from the interior of the municipality who were looking for stable employment in the expanding public administration, ii) encouraged commuting dynamics between nearby settlements – such as Vila Vista Alegre – and Caracará, given the increasing education services in town and the public transport services facilitating circulation, and iii) attracted individuals settled along the banks of the river due to the provision of housing and basic services, such as electricity, water and plumbing.

Figure 7. Caracará and communities involved in rural-urban migration and non-migratory mobility⁸



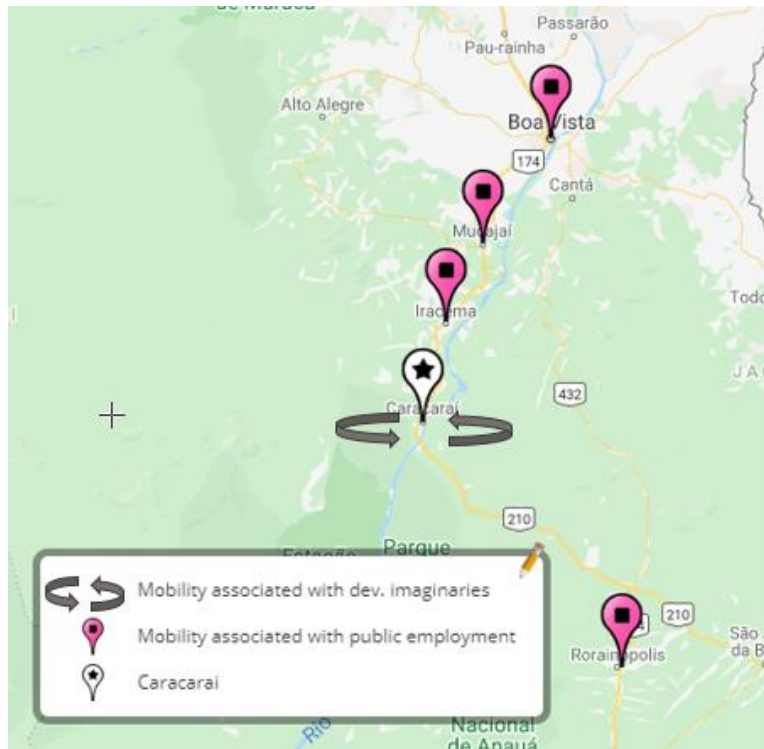
Source: Interview data (2019).

5.1.3 Mobility associated with life aspirations and imaginaries

Social transformation processes in the 1990s (see Section 6.2) triggered an intensification of non-migratory commuting and out-migration patterns (Figure 8). First, public servants started settling in Boa Vista, the capital city of the State of Roraima, and commuting to Caracará, due to the greater provision of services and the higher quality of education (I17). This shows that infrastructure advancements (Zelinsky 1971) and aspirations for a more urban lifestyle partially absorbed the settlement of migrants. Secondly, some individuals emigrated from Caracará looking for public employment in nearby towns such as Rorainópolis, Iracema or Mucajaí (I7). Finally, in the 1990s, during a period of economic uncertainty, the livelihoods of many who had lost their jobs became precarious. However, imaginaries of the development potential of Caracará and expectations for an economic recovery led to their aspirations to remain (I12), triggering their engagement in ‘traditional’ extractive activities, such as the hunting of animals (I5, I17). Thence, many engaged once again in mobile lifestyles, commuting between the rainforest and the town, hoping for a development boom in the near future (Figure 8). The mobility patterns linked to the return of micro-scale extractive activities in the 1990s differed from previous circulation patterns tied to extractivism. Extractive workers, rather than settling for three months in the forest, engaged in daily commuting between the town and the rainforest; these dynamics are represented by arrows in Figure 8.

⁸ Caracará attracted migrants from small settlements which are difficult to pinpoint on a map. The circle represents the approximate locations of the various communities. The map was created using the website scribblemaps.com.

Figure 8. Caracaraí and the principal communities of origin and destination in the 1990s, by type of mobility



Source: Interview data (2019)⁹

5.1.4 Return migration

Returnees generally indicated an affective attachment to Caracaraí and the desire to contribute to the town's development (I6, I9). The promotion of development in Caracaraí is the responsibility of the governing authorities; however, according to my participants, the authorities have no real interest in such development (I2, I6, I9, I10, I12, I17, I19, I20), which is why some of the returnees considered that they should have the responsibility to promote the development of Caracaraí by sharing the skills they gained elsewhere (I6, I9). This interviewee put it this way:

I was born and grew up here. I won some national prizes out of here... So I had everything [I needed] to stay in another city, in another place. But this is the city where I was born... The people here need the knowledge that I have acquired so that they can understand and comprehend our history, our city, our village (I6).

Even though their willingness to contribute to the town's development had a significant impact on migrants' decisions to return, the presence of family members was also a relevant consideration (I18, I20): 'Caracaraí is home, everything, my family is here' (I20).

5.2 Non-migration

Given that the population of Caracaraí is primarily composed of internal migrants, non-migration dynamics are harder to explore, particularly among the elderly. Older non-

⁹ The map was created using the website scribblemaps.com.

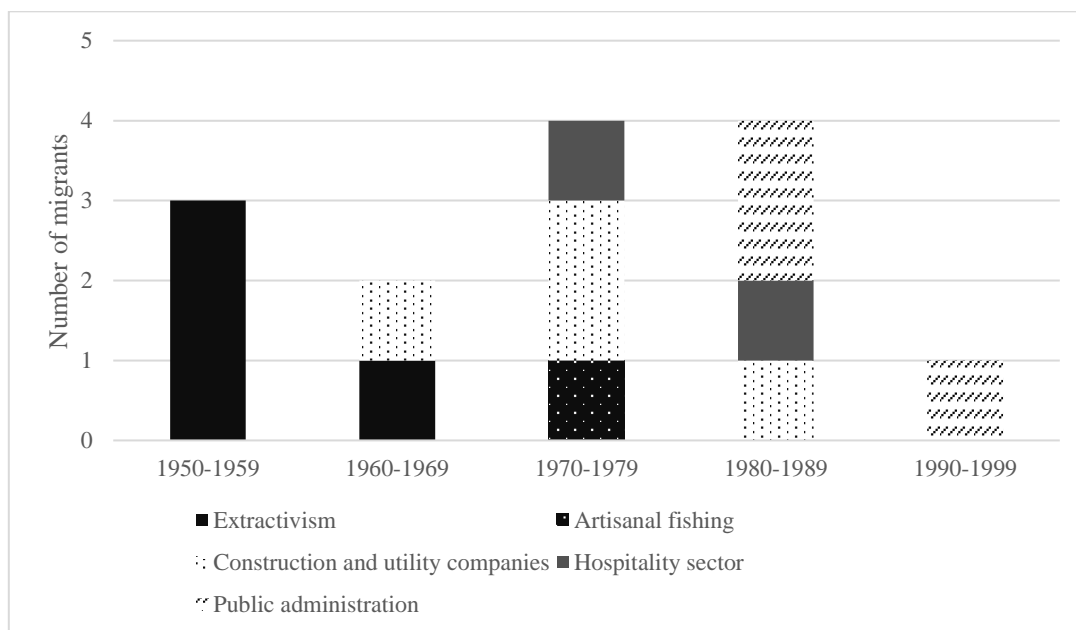
migrants in the sample were able to secure an income-generating job when the economic and political structure of Caracarái started transforming during the mid-1960s to 1970s; this generally meant that there was economic stability in the town, access to retirement benefits (I10) and older non-migrants being better-off than the rest of the population (I14). First, they complemented extractive activities with these jobs to later on either secure a position with one of the companies (I10 worked for 27 years in a sewerage and water supply company) or in the Town Hall (I14), which absorbed circulatory patterns to the interior of the municipality.

Non-migration dynamics were particularly interesting in the 1990s. This decade witnessed economic uncertainty and the overcrowding of economic activities. Concurrently, the organisation of the government structure underwent important transformations (see Section 6.2). However, imaginaries of the development potential of Caracarái – that is, the perception of how Caracarái *could* and *should* be – shaped the desire to stay put; thus many remained, hoping for a development boom.

6 Understanding Caracarái’s social transformation, 1950s–1990s

Caracarái experienced major political transformation under the Brazilian military administration (1964–1985), when the state expanded its presence through bureaucratic functions and the provision of infrastructure networks to control its territory in the Amazonas region. Simultaneously, migration diversified, attracting migrants from a broader geographical scope who worked in the new occupations which emerged in the construction and hospitality sectors and the public administration of the town. Figure 9 presents an approximate representation of the migration year and the occupational field of the migrants arriving in Caracarái. This shows the expansion of the local economy during the 1970s and the decline in attractiveness of and the diminishing demand for traditional economic activities such as extractivism.

Figure 9. Distribution of migrants according to their occupational field, 1950–1999



Source: Interview data (2019).

To analyse the social transformation occurring in Caracaraí and its impact on the mobility patterns of the town, the 1950s–1990s timeframe is divided into two aspects of change with mobility effects:

- the late 1950s–1970s, a period characterised by state-led infrastructural development and micro-urbanisation processes, when we observe the inflow of temporary workers and spontaneous migrants and the emergence of new socio-economic models; and
- the 1980s–1990s, a period associated with the expansion of the state as the provider of services and public work and with fluctuations in the population’s life ambitions; it is also a time when we first observe rural-urban migration from settlements along the river, inflows of skilled public workers and, later, commuting patterns and the return of ‘traditional’ non-migratory mobile livelihoods.

6.1 Urbanisation processes, economic diversification and the migratory aftermath of state-led infrastructure, 1950s–1970s

During this period, migration diversified in terms of the migrants’ geographical origins and the duration of the flows, due to two factors: i) the state, aiming to integrate Roraima into the national economic system, promoted a micro-urbanisation process, establishing infrastructure projects which introduced income-generating jobs in construction and urban-planning companies; and ii) the entrepreneurial spirit of North-Eastern migrants drove the emergence of a small hospitality sector in Caracaraí, furthering the restructuring of the town’s extractive economy.

In the State of Roraima, the expansion of state-led infrastructure projects was partially the result of the unsuccessful first agricultural colonies, such as *Fernando Costa* – close to Caracaraí – and *Brás Dias de Aguiar*, established in Roraima in the mid-1940s (Hemming 1994). These planned agricultural colonies were designed to attract internal migrants, primarily from North-Eastern Brazil, in the hope that they would form self-sufficient communities. Despite subsidising migration, the retention of these settlements was low, partly due to the lack of assistance and infrastructure networks (Barbosa 1993; Diniz 2002; Diniz and Gonçalves Lacerda 2014). Thence, the geographical location of Caracaraí and its role as a commercial hub led to an extensive urban planning process and to the consolidation of the town as an administrative hub for Southern Roraima. The state-led projects impacted on the population in various ways.

First, the state expanded its role as a promoter of infrastructure and established public tenders to expand the infrastructure of the town. Among the changes conducted we find: i) improvements in the structure of the port; ii) the construction and improvement of the roads BR-174 and BR-210, linking Caracaraí with Boa Vista and with Southern Roraima’s municipalities, respectively; and iii) the construction and paving of the streets and the first advancements in the development of a sewerage and a water supply system and the provision of street lighting (I10, I11, I15). After the construction of the basic infrastructure of the streets, new companies arrived during the mid-to-late-1970s to provide an electricity and water supply to the town. These construction works lasted for an average of three to five years, meaning that, by the early 1980s, the infrastructure developments were already finished. They triggered big changes in the structure of the town. Before their establishment, Caracaraí was ‘all bush’ (Figure 10; I4, I3, I10, I11, I15) whereas, by the mid-1980s, the town was enlarged, the old area of the town improved and new sections constructed from scratch (Figure 11); these sections comprised a new city hall, schools and a hospital (Figure 11 Section A), as well as the opening of parcels of land for the construction of houses (Figure 11 Section B).

Figure 10. View of Caracará in the 1950s



Source: Unknown, provided by Prof. Petronio, Caracará.

Figure 11. Overview of the structure of Caracará

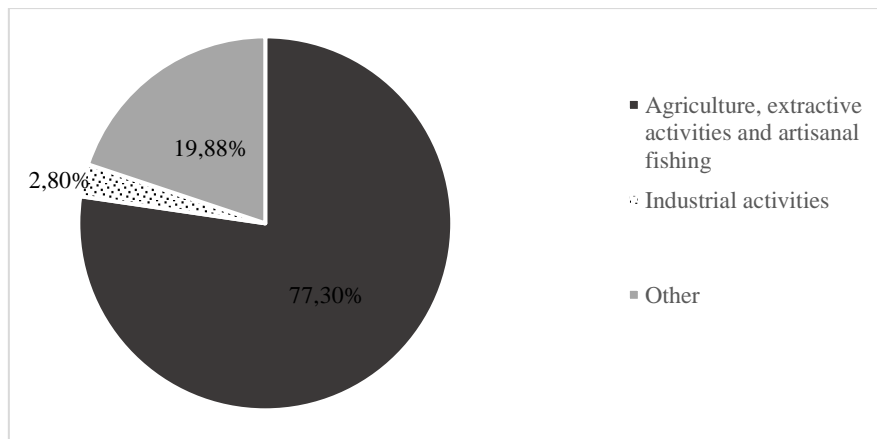


Source: Map data © 2020 Google; modified by the author

Secondly, the economic structure of the town transformed from being primarily an extractive economy to a tertiary economy highly dependent on the construction and the service sectors. In this manner, income-generating opportunities arose – initially with the ‘opening’ of road BR-174 from Caracaraí to Boa Vista in 1964 and then in the national construction companies in charge of the urban planning of the town. Apart from servicemen and high-skilled military officers who were trained as engineers (I10), civilians were also involved in the manual opening of the road, fundamentally using axe and sickle (I4, I9, I10); individuals already settled in Caracaraí were also employed by the companies.¹⁰ This benefited the local population, who were able to secure income-generating, stable employment. An example of this is Interviewee 13, who worked as a topographer on the opening of BR-174, or Interviewee 4, who was a cook for the construction crew.

Consequently, living and working conditions improved, as workers involved in extractivism and small-plot farming gained access to income-generating employment. The local population embraced these new employment opportunities, and voiced their discontent regarding the traditional ways of life, deemed increasingly unstable: ‘We did not have a normal job’ (I14). In this manner, however, traditional circular mobility patterns tied to extractivism weakened. As the town’s economic structure expanded, it was accompanied by a change in the lifestyle and occupational aspirations of local residents, who aimed for more secure and stable employment (I4, I12, I14, I19). The importance of this occupational shift is significant if we consider that, in 1960, extractive workers, artisanal fishermen and peasants comprised 77.3 per cent of employees (Figure 12).

Figure 12. Distribution of workers in 1960 (%)



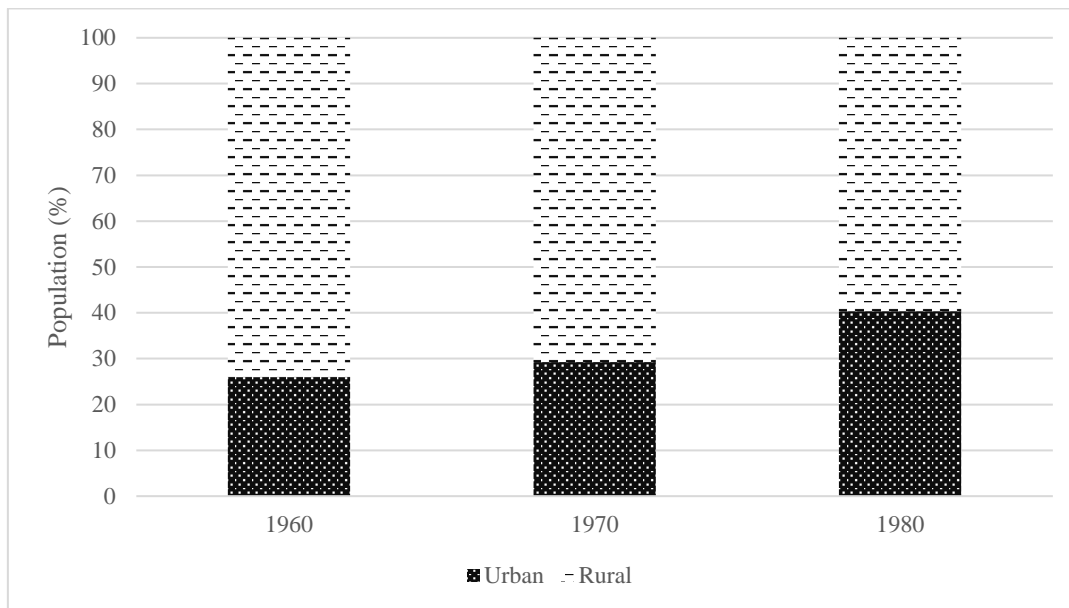
Source: Demographic Census of Brazil; IBGE (1960).

Finally, these processes fostered urbanisation, linked not only to internal migration from other Brazilian states but also to the arrival of rural municipal residents to town (Figure 13). While, in 1960, just 25.99 per cent of the population resided in an urban area, by 1980 the number had increased to just over 40 per cent.¹¹ Through this process, the living conditions of the population improved significantly as basic services such as water and light became gradually accessible to them (I11, I16).

¹⁰ For the most part, however, companies usually brought in their own groups of workers.

¹¹ This figure might seem low but Caracaraí is a large municipality which includes small rural villages that made up most of its population.

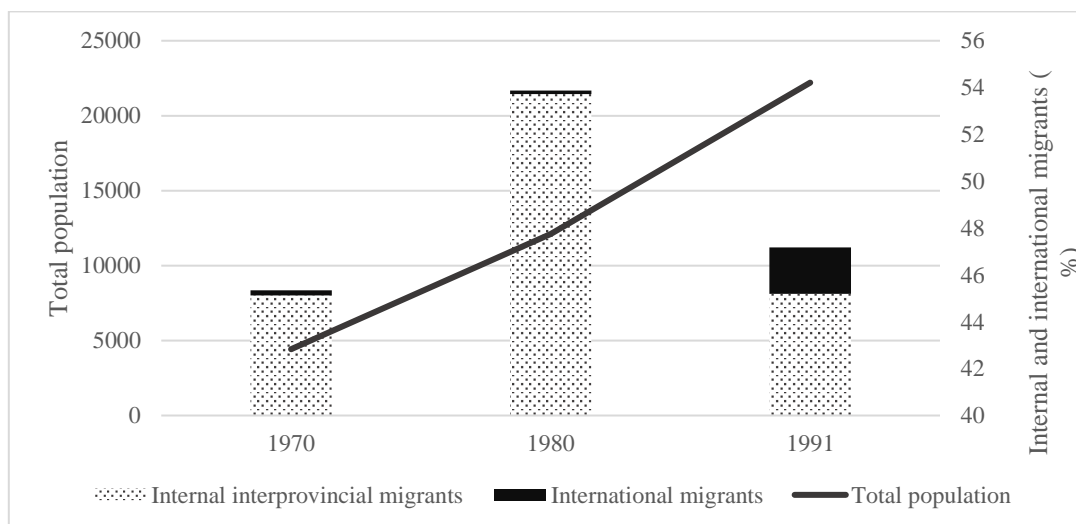
Figure 13. Distribution of the population in urban and rural areas, Caracaráí, 1960–1980



Source: Demographic Census of Brazil; IBGE (1960, 1970, 1980); Diniz and Gonçalves Lacerda (2014).

These evolving conditions were linked to three forms of migration: first, internal in-migration from the interior of the municipality; second, that of temporary, waged workers in the construction companies; and, third, spontaneous internal migration from North-East Brazil and the State of Amazonas. Demographic censuses show an increase in internal inter-provincial migration during the 1970–1980 period, alongside increasing international migration¹² in the early 1990s (Figure 14).

Figure 14. Internal and international migration to the municipality of Caracaráí,¹³ 1970–1991



Source: Demographic Census of Brazil; IBGE (1970, 1991).

¹² Despite the increase in international migration, the interview data do not provide insights.

¹³ These data comprise the whole municipality of Caracaráí, including the town as well as the interior of the municipality.

These mobility patterns differ from the previous migratory system circumscribed to the river-based economy and to the extractive activities in terms of geographical origins, duration of the flows and reasons for migrating. First, the number of individuals circulating along the *Branco* river and temporarily settling in the rainforest declined. A rapid global shift in the demand for extractive products, the establishment of more-productive large plantations in the State of Amazonas in the 1980s (Zuidema 2003: 99) and the strengthening of environmental policies (Mori 1992) made extractive activities unsustainable in the late 1970s; concurrently, the increasing employment opportunities in Caracaraí offered more secure and stable positions. Extractive workers and those involved in the fur trade adapted by migrating to Caracaraí (I5, I14). Circulatory mobility gave rise to long-term migratory dynamics, and migrants adapted by settling in Caracaraí, leaving behind traditional lifestyles and taking advantage of the wage differentials.

Secondly, the migration of waged workers continued; however, they shifted away from a heavy dependence on river-based commerce and towards manufacturing and construction industries due to the micro-urbanisation process and the subsequent expansion of the town's infrastructure.

Finally, spontaneous migrants, primarily from the neighbouring State of Amazonas (71.53 per cent) and North-Eastern states (27.92 per cent) also arrived in town (IBGE 1970), as the boom in the construction sector, the growth of Caracaraí's population and the inflow of workers attracted these entrepreneurs (I6, I9, I11, I12). The latter migrated due to the precarious conditions in North-East Brazil, where land concentration and degradation hampered the livelihoods of peasants. We observe that these spontaneous migrants planned to leave behind a life of hardship and poverty (I1, I2, I20, I13) and to obtain an income-generating job (I1, I2, I8, I17). Migrant networks in Caracaraí eased the migration of these individuals to town (I1, I8, I12, I18), and the fact that Roraima was a federal territory encouraged the migration of some who considered that the facilities and assistance for settlement would be greater than in other places (I1, I5).

Migrants, who primarily came from an agricultural background, adapted and some obtained temporary work on construction sites through their social networks (I2, I11). Others opened small local stores, snack bars and lodgings (I2, I3, I11, I12, I17, I19). The entrepreneurial spirit of North-Eastern and Amazonian migrants further expanded the employment opportunities in town and altered the socio-economic structure of Caracaraí, as a small hospitality sector emerged. Interviewee 12 provides a good example to illustrate this: she rented an inn in 1976 and decided to build a hotel of her own in the same year. Interviewee 19 also illustrates this entrepreneurial spirit: after a one-year contract with a construction company, he decided to stay and opened a snack bar, in response to the presence of workers constructing the roads, houses and streets.

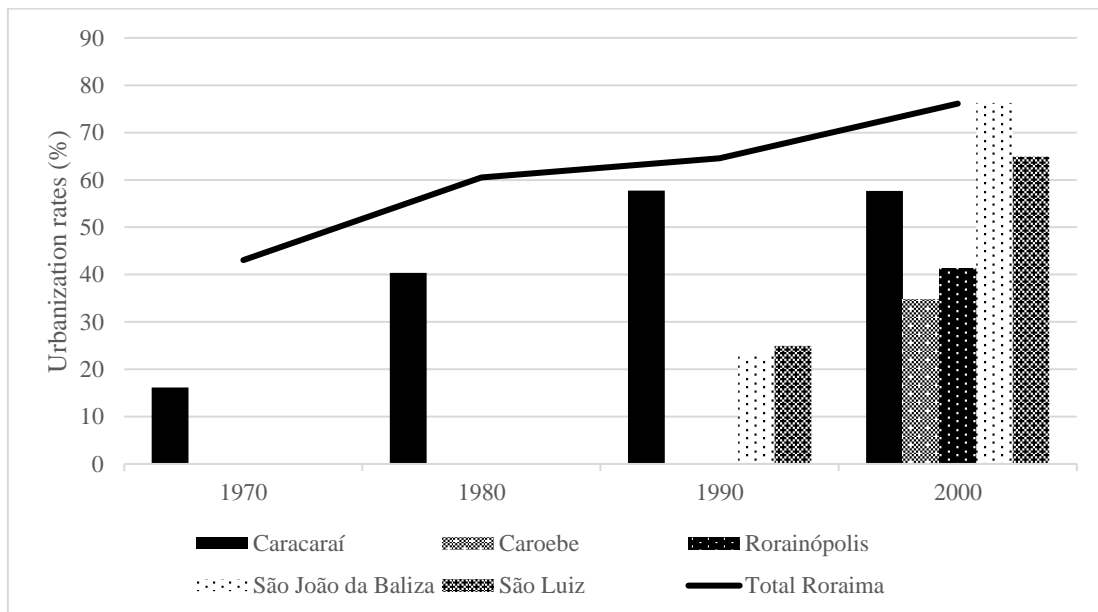
Thus, the geographical scope of the flows expanded, as well as the segment of the population migrating to Caracaraí. Prior to state-led development, inter-provincial migration to Caracaraí was limited to circular patterns of waged dock workers and merchants tied to the river-based commerce. The expansion of the state triggered the spontaneous migration of unskilled peasants from more-distant places and involved more-diverse segments of the population.

6.2 The state as a provider and further migratory diversification, 1980s–1990s

In the 1980s and 1990s, Roraima was characterised by rapid population growth and an expanding urbanisation process (Diniz and Gonçalves Lacerda 2014; Figure 15), and by a territorial division process which began in the early 1980s. These increases occurred at a higher rate in the settlements of Southern Roraima, e.g. São João da Baliza, São Luiz

or Caroebe, where the governmental agency *INCRA* (National Institute for Colonization and Agrarian Reform) focused on opening agricultural settlements in the mid-1970s, in particular along the newly constructed road BR-210. For this, they attracted farmers, especially from Maranhão, financed their passage, provided them with a plot of land and eased their access to bank loans, all with the objective of populating the areas (I1, I2, I19). This siphoned away Caracarái's dynamism; in fact, the golden period of Caracarái's economy ended with the completion of the urban planning process at the beginning of the 1980s, leading to an economic and social slowdown that was partially alleviated by the expansion of the state as a provider of public services and jobs.

Figure 15. Urbanisation rates in Caracarái, Southern Roraima municipalities and the State of Roraima, 1970–2000



Source: IBGE (1970, 1980, 1991, 2000).

The increasing state involvement led to ambiguous migration effects. As soon as the construction boom stimulated by the government ended and the direct provision of public employment decreased, the population turned back to 'traditional' extractive activities in the hope of future development. The role of the state also transformed the lifestyle aspirations of the population, leading to new circulatory patterns to local hubs at the end of the 1990s.

6.2.1 The state as a provider of services and public work

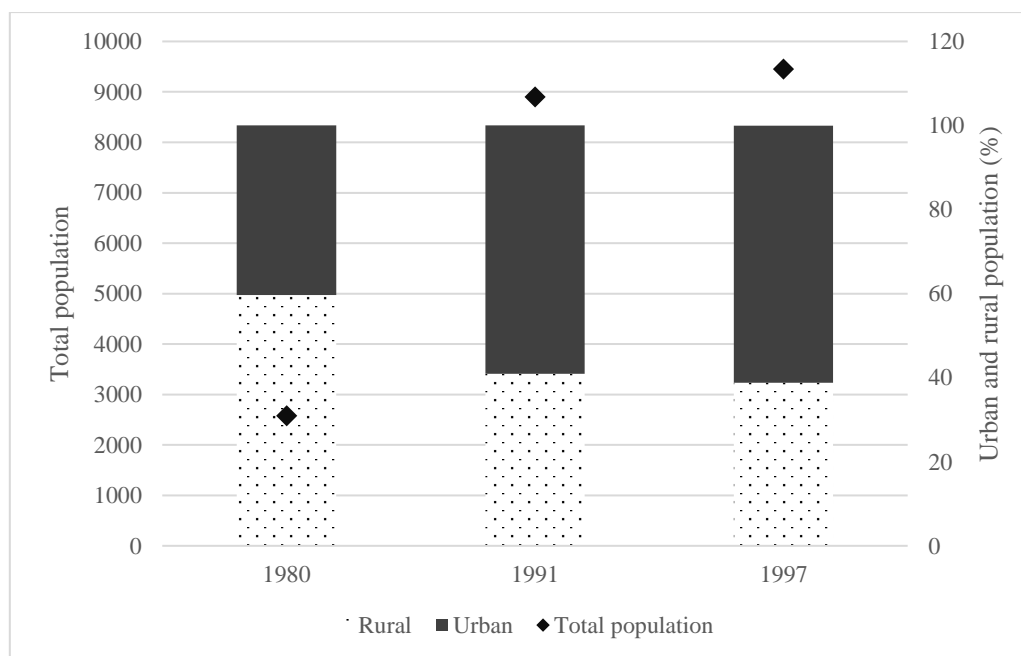
The presence of construction and utility companies had a positive impact on the city budget as these companies were subject to taxes on the circulation of goods and services (I2, I9). Individual citizens, together with self-employed workers such as fishermen, were not (and are not!) subject to paying taxes. The presence of companies made Caracarái stand apart from other smaller and more rural settlements, which did not have the potential to collect taxes and, therefore, solely depended on the budget of the federal government for the provision of public services (I13). As a result, in Caracarái, the public administration began enlarging its operations by increasingly supporting public schooling (I16, I18) and the construction of a basic infrastructure, such as outpatient clinics,

transport services and housing. However, in the late 1980s, the Territory of *Rio Branco* was transformed into a Federal Territory, which reduced the budget provided by the Federal Government and had a direct impact on the local economy and employment creation opportunities.

First, infrastructural developments triggered recurrent transport services for farmers and children in nearby settlements such as Vila São Jose or Vila Petronia. The improvement of transport connections facilitated the selling of cultivated products on bigger markets, contributing to the gradual success of agricultural settlements (I8, I14). Concurrently, transportation services were also extended to children from small settlements, such as Vista Alegre, thus facilitating their access to primary schools in Caracaráí (I16; Figure 7). These services led to short-time, non-migratory mobility patterns in town, illustrating the indirect effect of state actions on mobility dynamics.

Second, the enlargement of the town, following the construction of new sections (Figure 11), was tied to migration flows from small settlements along the banks of the *Rio Branco*, as actions directed towards promoting migration were carried out during the 1980s. Local authorities provided boats (I5) and housing (I8, I10, I16) to migrants, who were attracted to town because of the provision of basic services, such as electricity, fresh water and plumbing (I11, I16). The provision of housing was not limited to incoming migrants, as residents of Caracaráí could also apply for plots of land and enlarge their properties (I8). These processes concentrated people in the urban nuclei of the town, triggering an urban growth of 20.87 percentage points from 1980 to the late 1990s (Figure 16; I19).

Figure 16. Distribution of the population in urban and rural areas, Caracaráí, 1980–1997¹⁴



Source: Demographic Census of Brazil; IBGE (1970, 1991); Diniz and Gonçalves Lacerda (2014).

¹⁴ There are no data for the total population in 1980; those shown reflect the total population for 1970.

The provision of services and housing might also have attracted migrants settled in the agricultural openings in the interior of Roraima. Even if these settlements did not target Caracaraí due to its poor soil fertility and the maritime function of the town, migrants who did not do well in the settlements migrated and settled in Caracaraí (I2, I5). In fact, the retention of these settlements was low (Barbosa 1993; Diniz 2002; Diniz and Gonçalves Lacerda 2014); thus we can hypothesise, in the absence of records, that migration from these agricultural settlements to urban nuclei was common (cf. Diniz 2002: 82). Interviewee 5 notes that the lack of governmental assistance, the difficulties of making the soil more productive and the absence of fertilisers and agricultural machinery led to the migration of peasants from the agricultural settlements in the towns of Southern Roraima, who ‘Sold their lots and came to Caracaraí. What did they do here? They began to work in fishing too’ (I5).

Third, state expansion also involved the establishment of a patronising structure. The population gained the right to vote when the Territory of *Rio Branco* transformed into the State of Roraima in 1988. With such a transformation, the population started voting for politicians who were offering material items, such as food or hammocks (I1), but who had no real interest in the development of the town (I2, I6, I9, I10, I12, I17, I19, I20). In this vein, it was quite common to attract people to work in the municipalities to get their votes (Barbosa 1993; I2).

Fourth, the transformation of the Territory of *Rio Branco* into a state involved the implementation of an open, public competition to obtain employment in the public administration, which replaced the previous appointment system for public servants. The public administration offered stable work opportunities, as well as regular income-generating jobs in a town where other economic activities were overcrowded. The opening of state public competitions implied the potential emigration of *Caracaraiense* to other municipalities, such as Rorainópolis, Iracema or Mucajaí (I7) and *vice versa*, and the migration of workers throughout the country through federal-level civil-servant exams. Municipal-level civil-service exams attracted individuals from the interior of the municipality and contributed to their migration to the town:

The municipality also began to carry out these competitions, which absorbed a lot of the workforce who migrated from the countryside. [They went] from fishing and working in the fields to public service (I5).

The transformation of the *Rio Branco* territory into a state and the implementation of an open, public competition system also affected the livelihoods of the local residents. Previously appointed public servants working for the territory in the Town Hall were transferred to departments controlled by the Federal State (*Unión*), which implied higher salaries (I14). The livelihoods of the public workers of the *Unión*, with their stable, higher salaries, improved, whereas those of many other public workers tied to state and municipal funding became precarious again as they lost their jobs in public administration. Of these, some migrated to larger cities, such as Boa Vista, while others stayed in Caracaraí either because one of their relatives retained their job or because they preferred to return to their previous activities such as fishing and hunting (I5, I17). Their rationale was tied to the expectation that the town’s economy would recover (see Section 6.2.2).

Finally, the improvement of infrastructure networks illustrates that technological advancements partially absorbed the settlement of migrants, as non-migratory mobility absorbed potential migration (Zelinsky 1971). The end of the paving of the road in the late 1980s/early 1990s eased the commute between Caracaraí and Boa Vista (141km),

leading to regional commuting. Skilled migrants from larger urban nuclei, in contrast with migrants from the interior of the municipality, started commuting between the two towns, rather than settling in Caracaraí, thus absorbing potential migration:

The public sector comes here then leaves for Boa Vista. Lives there. Public servants, like judges, prosecutors, probation officers. They drive here every day and leave. When I came, everyone [lived] here, and it was harder [to move] because there was no road (I17).

This contrasts with the mobility transitions expected for urbanised frontier settlements, in which skilled individuals employed in tertiary sectors are expected to stay put, whereas unemployed individuals in a more precarious situation are more likely to circulate in search of employment (Diniz 2001). The case of Caracaraí shows that migrants from larger urban nuclei often engage in commuting dynamics of approximately 140km, which can be explained through a personal preference to remain in larger urban spaces that devalue peripheral or rural lifestyles.

6.2.2 State absenteeism and development imaginaries

The transformation of *Rio Branco* from a territory into a state implied a decline in the budget received from the Federal Government. Concurrently, the role of the state shifted as the open, public competition system decreased the state's power to employ individuals directly without the need for examinations and the departure of the utility companies translated into a decline in the taxes collected by the Town Hall (I1, I11). These patterns lessened the ability to provide public services and employment in construction and the public sector. For the local population, this meant fewer employment opportunities, higher unemployment and economic uncertainty (I1, I10, I11). While some migrated to Boa Vista or to southern municipalities in the State of Roraima, development imaginaries prevented a culture of emigration. In fact, the golden period experienced by the older generation during the 1960s–1980s shaped images of how Caracaraí could be and framed hope for the development potential of the town, as Interviewee 12 summarised:

With the construction of the road [and the establishment of] stores, supermarkets, butcheries [and] restaurants, the town grew. Later on they left and the impact was felt in the town...the development has been so slow...We are still here because we believe in the town, [there are those] who believe [in the town]; but [there is] only deception, because the town does not get developed (I12).

In fact, the urbanisation process and the economic restructuring during the 1970s triggered a more dynamic lifestyle, shaping people's aspirations. Apart from the population growth and the urban planning process, the economic structure of Caracaraí experienced important reverberations, from extractive to a more complex industrial and service economy. Additionally, the active role of the state in previous decades strengthened perceptions about the development potential of Caracaraí, which contrasted with the 'lethargic' lives of the population in the 1990s who observed the transition of Caracaraí from a dynamic commercial hub to a place of passage. These processes framed the imaginaries of the population about how Caracaraí *could* and *should* be. In this manner, expectations that the city would grow prevented higher volumes of emigration and encouraged the return of others:

[I returned] because I believe that I can also help. Well, because we see that people arrive here and walk away, I have roots here; I have a love for the city, I dream of seeing it changed, developed (I9).

Thus, some decided to stay put – primarily locals and those without educational achievements. Among these, some returned to unstable and precarious activities, such as extractivism, hunting and fishing (I5, I17) – thus engaging in non-migratory mobile lifestyles, commuting between the forest and the town. In addition to hope and attachment to place as determining retaining factors, the business ownership also discouraged the re-migration of North-Eastern and Amazonian entrepreneurs, who saw their properties gradually losing value and started feeling stuck in Caracaraí (I12, I19).

7. Migration as part of social transformation: explaining and elaborating on frontier migration

Explanations for the processes presented earlier are, to some extent, grounded in a number of migration theories. Migrants from the interior of the municipality of Caracaraí displayed an interest in obtaining income-generating jobs with construction companies and in the small hospitality sector of Caracaraí, following the assumptions of neoclassical economic theories (Harris and Todaro 1970). At the same time, the restructuring of the economy from extractive to industrial sectors partially reduced the number of extractive workers, diminishing traditional circular activities and shaping adaptation strategies. Reverberations on the traditional economic structure of Caracaraí triggered the migration of extractive workers to the town, where they joined the waged labour force in the construction sector, conforming to the basic principles of historical-structural theories (Massey *et al.* 1993). These processes also conform to frontier migration evolution-stage models, as the consolidation of Caracaraí through its advancement in infrastructure and communication lines and the establishment of capitalist forces attracted both skilled and unskilled, and short- and long-term migrants from wider geographical origins, weakening, at least initially, any circulatory movements, in contrast to previous pioneering stages.

The case of Caracaraí also reveals that the expansion of the state, first as a promoter of infrastructure networks and then as a provider of services and jobs, was a determining factor shaping people's life aspirations and stimulating imaginaries about development and satisfactory lifestyles. The expanding role of the state shaped perceptions about the 'good life', which departed from traditional subsistence forest-based activities, framing imaginaries about Caracaraí's socio-economic potential and how the town *could* and *should* be. In a context of socio-economic downturn, memories of the dynamic economy of Caracaraí made people believe that the town's economy would recover (I12, I17). Thence, past imaginaries of the town and future hopes prevented the emigration of some, despite their lack of a safety net. Caracaraí presents, then, a departure from New Economics of Labour Migration models which suggest that, when security funds or access to paying jobs are unavailable, families will adopt migration as a strategy to generate savings (Stark and Bloom 1985; Taylor 1999). The livelihoods of those who stayed either improved greatly due to the security of federal jobs – which decreased feelings of relative deprivation and prevented migration to urban hubs – or dropped back again into the traditional, precarious extractive activities, all the while hoping for a development boom.

Despite the economic uncertainty and the unemployment of many, we do not observe a culture of emigration but, rather, an intensification of non-migratory

commuting patterns, strengthening the feeling of a dormant economy and seeing Caracará as a place of passage.

Thus, the rapid intervention of the state drastically altered Caracará's mobility patterns, contributing firstly to the decrease of circulation dynamics and the increase of migration flows tied to increasing employment opportunities before then stimulating non-migratory mobility and immobility, due to the provision of public work and future 'development hopes' respectively. Additionally, we observe that regional commuting patterns absorbed migration to Caracará, proving the hypothesised mobility transition by Zelinsky (1971: 233) that migration lessens with improved means of circulation.

What does this mean for the theorisation of frontier migration? The case of Caracará shows that the expansion of the state can trigger immobility, which partly departs from the endpoint of mobility transition theories that migration aspirations will be increasing with development, especially when life ambitions are not met by local opportunities (de Haas 2010; Skeldon 2019). During the 1990s, we observe an intensification of commuting and out-migration patterns; however, we also see, in a period of high economic uncertainty, strong desires to stay put. The active presence of the state in earlier decades framed collective imaginations of the socio-economic potential of Caracará, altering residents' perceptions of the desired life. Thence, Caracará shows a *reversal* of migration aspirations regarding development. This, in a period when life aspirations were not being met by local opportunities, triggered neither a desire to migrate nor a culture of emigration. Rather state expansion framed the perception of the population about the development potential of the town, increasing their aspirations to remain, and shows that collective imaginaries of the 'good life' influence mobility.

8. Conclusion

This article set out to examine the mechanisms that changed a traditional peripheral frontier society in a period of deep social transformation with the objective of understanding how change in societal structures affects mobility patterns. Two main periods can be identified: the 1950s–1970s – when state-led developments led to the fading out of traditional non-migratory mobility patterns and to the gradual diversification of migration in terms of geographical origin and the composition of migrants – and the 1980s–1990s, when the expansion of the state as a provider of services and public work initially increased the migration of skilled public servants and rural-urban migration while, at a later stage, further improvements in infrastructure networks and the changing role of the state triggered regional non-migratory commuting and traditional circulation dynamics.

Mobility and immobility configurations in Caracará can be understood as an interaction between certain evolving social transformation processes: (i) changing life aspirations towards more stable and less mobile livelihoods, which made extractivism an increasingly insufficient livelihood activity; (ii) the restructuring and expansion of the local economy, which undermined traditional livelihoods based on extractive activities with the consolidation of waged labour in the construction and utility sectors and the expansion of stable jobs in the public sector; (iii) the expansion of the state, as a provider of services and public employment; and (iv) past memories of Caracará that framed development imaginaries – that is, the perception of how the town *could* and *should* be – leading to aspirations to stay and to particular adaptation mechanisms such as once again falling back into extractive activities. These latter, together with artisanal fishing, remained important determinants in shaping mobility and immobility: they lost some

relevance during the ‘modernisation’ of the economic structure but provided alternative employment during harsh economic periods for those wishing to stay in Caracarái.

In general, the state and its activities proved to be key actors shaping migration decision-making. First, the perception that facilities and assistance for settlement were greater in Federal Territories encouraged migration from North-East Brazil. The active role of the state in the (micro-)urbanisation process of Caracarái led to economic reverberations in town and to a restructuring of the economic system from extractive to industrial and service sectors; this fostered wage differentials between Caracarái and the more peripheral settlements of the interior of the municipality, and between Caracarái and North-East Brazil, promoting further migration from more-distant geographical sites. The provision of services and public employment also triggered rural-urban migration patterns and commuting dynamics from nearby settlements, proving the importance of the indirect effect of governmental non-migration policies in the mobility decisions of the population. Finally, the active role of the state during the 1960s–1980s framed residents’ perceptions of the development potential of Caracarái. Despite continued corruption and the lack of investment from the 1990s onward, expectations of an economic recovery in the short-term stimulated the desire to stay, preventing higher emigration rates during a period of socio-economic downturn. This shows how the expansion of the state shaped (im)mobility dynamics in a very particular manner in the frontier town of Caracarái. Indeed, we observe a *reversal* of migration aspirations in regard to development: during a period of socio-economic slowdown, when life aspirations were not being met, some individuals, instead of migrating, decided to stay put. This not only contrasts with Zelinsky’s (1971) hypothesis of mobility transitions but is also counterintuitive, as we would expect migration in a context where there are gaps between life ambitions and local opportunities (de Haas 2010).

Therefore, in addition to economic, political and technological factors, (im)mobility is also associated with past imaginaries and notions of the ‘good life’. This study provides insights into how collective imaginations influence mobility. The role of the state shifted ideas of how life *could* and *should* be, altering people’s perceptions of the town and making them believe that a development boom was possible in the near future.

Indeed, the study reveals valuable evidence of how mobility patterns transition, highlighting that development is a non-linear phenomenon. The development of the economic structure of Caracarái did not permanently alter the traditional lifestyle of the population; rather, ‘traditional’ extractive activities remained an important safety net in a context of socio-economic hardship. Circular mobility was, traditionally, part of the livelihood of the population in Caracarái; during the transformation in the 1960s–1970s the change was, therefore, that circular mobility, which served initially as a strategy to sustain a person during unstable, temporary employment, finally faded out. Yet, extractive activities started gaining momentum again during the 1990s, when an economic downturn and a less-active governmental role in the direct provision of public employment left many in a precarious situation. Rather than migrating to an industrial centre, some decided to return to their previous livelihoods prior to the state-led development. The co-existence of ‘modern’ and ‘traditional’ socio-economic structures remains an important feature of Caracarái and emphasises that the differentiation of societies into modern vs traditional cleavages is actually artificial and does not account for the complexity of certain communities. This shows that, in addition to economic differentials, (im)mobility is also associated with the cultural imaginings of a desired life.

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