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**Owners of the cane: The creation and continuity of an
agro-industrial elite in northeastern Brazil**

Matwychuk, Margo Lyn, Ph.D.

City University of New York, 1992

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A

OWNERS OF THE CANE:
THE CREATION AND CONTINUITY OF AN
AGRO-INDUSTRIAL ELITE
IN NORTHEASTERN BRAZIL

by

MARGO LYN MATWYCHUK

A dissertation submitted to the Graduate Faculty
in Anthropology in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of Doctor of
Philosophy, The City University of New York

1992

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July 31st, 1992
Date

Eric R. Wolf
Chair of Examining Committee

9/16/92
Date

Dubmas Jones
Executive officer

Professor Mario Bick
Professor May Ebihara
Professor June Nash
Supervisory Committee

The City University of New York

Abstract

OWNERS OF THE CANE:
THE CREATION AND CONTINUITY OF AN
AGRO-INDUSTRIAL ELITE
IN NORTHEASTERN BRAZIL

by

Margo Lyn Matwychuk

Advisor: Professor Eric R. Wolf

This dissertation examines the impact of global and national transformations on the organization, relations and strategies of landowning elites in Northeast Brazil. The premise is that major changes in the organization of wealth and power are transmitted to particular regions of a national economy/society through the actions and responses of regional elites. The impact of economic and political shifts at the level of the nation and of the world system are seen to be mediated by shifts in elite strategies, shifts that have involved alterations in the mix of relevant resources and in the relations of local elites to other regional groups and interests.

The impact of these shifts on the sugar industry in the northeastern state of Paraíba, Brazil serves as the basis for this examination. I look at the processes of capitalization, industrialization, and modernization of the industry and to the attendant changes in the socioeconomic structure and relations of power. The historical development of Paraíba's *usinas* from the end of the last century until the 1980s is discussed. I explore the founding of the

state's *usinas*, their ownership and development histories, and their role in shaping the local physical and social environment.

In discussing the utility of the concepts of local or regional elites and elite families, I focus on the families of *usina*-owners, or *usineiros*, in Paraíba. Here I am concerned with the historical and contemporary continuities and modifications of these families and their relations with the state and other hegemonic interests. I also seek to uncover some of their behaviors and practices which have influenced their reality and expression as an elite presence. Processes and strategies of elite social, political, and economic organization are discussed primarily in relation to members of one particular *usineiro* family. Their relations and activities vis-à-vis other elite sectors and the local labor force are seen to have brought about realignments in the local power structure. The implications of these realignments for agro-industrial elites, for their position in the contemporary social and political system, and to the present distribution of power are also addressed.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

In the pages that follow I carry on a 'cultural' tradition that is perhaps the most satisfying while at the same time one of the most difficult tasks we face at the end of the graduate student experience -- that of acknowledging and paying homage to those individuals who have been our sources of inspiration, strength, and intellectual development. The exceedingly long road to completion that is characteristic of the anthropological endeavor and the personalistic nature of its academic requirements mean that each of us are the beneficiaries of a long line of inherited tradition, both intellectual and personal. Consequently, we all know of lists that have inadvertently omitted the acknowledgement of significant elders, age-mates, and kin. I expect that I will also commit that unfortunate oversight. To those of you who know that your name belongs here yet it is lacking, I ask your forgiveness. My debt to you will be obvious.

Financial support for this long endeavor has come from a variety of resources. My 1986/88 dissertation research in Brazil was funded by a research fellowship from the Wenner-Gren Foundation for Anthropological Research, a dissertation improvement grant from the National Science Foundation, by a Canada Student Loan, and through the generous support of my mother. My 1983/84 Brazilian research was funded by a

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In Brazil, my debts are immense. With the passage of time, someone will surely escape my memory at the moment. *Eu senti tanto*. In 1983/84, I travelled to Brazil with an institutional affiliation with the Universidade de Brasília arranged by Professor Otávio Velho. Those who made my first experience in Brazil possible and enjoyable are too many to acknowledge. I asked a lot of them and gave very little. Here I would like note my particular indebtedness to Rosa Francisca Duarte Fuzetto, Elizabeth Higgs, and Kenneth Erickson for their emotional and practical support which allowed me to survive my first several weeks and months in Brazil. The members of the 1983/84 research team -- Dr. Daniel Gross, Dr. Nancy Flowers, Jonathan Poor, Maria José Dias Monteiro, Graciela Barbero, José Giacomo Baccarin, and Jaqueline Neves -- contributed a lot to this experience as did many other people in São Paulo, Sertãozinho,

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If contemporary models of modern society are reliable, I am one of the fortunate few to have found myself surrounded and encouraged by a large family which provided me with unfailing support and a firm sense of who I am and where I came from. My nuclear family, composed of my father, William Matwychuk, my mother, Lorraine Sigvaldason, and my sister, Alana Matwychuk, have been my most consistent

pillars of strength, sources of understanding, and wellsprings of inspiration. My father, who gave everything to his family and to see his daughters educated -- a luxury he never had the opportunity to pursue himself -- has been in my thoughts and in my heart for years. His job in the armed forces gave us the opportunity to experience a variety of different lifestyles. He and my mother's unfailing belief in the power of education and the richness of cultural diversity perhaps made anthropology my destiny. Their struggles to overcome the inequalities they began their lives with, to confront power differentials (embodied in such explicit symbols in the armed forces), and to challenge injustices in the communities in which they lived, made power a natural subject matter for both my sister and myself. My greatest wish is that my father could have lived to see his wife and daughters expand this struggle into new areas and to share in the celebration of those triumphs.

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My extended family could also constitute an anthropological treatise in itself -- my father was one of six children, my mother one of nine. Because of circumstance and geography, my effective family has been my maternal one. Although I have grown away from them over the years, the ethnic and political heritage of my father's family weigh heavily upon me. I am proud to be the grand-daughter of Ukrainian immigrants to Canada and am especially proud of my grandfather's Josef's early attempts to shake up the foundations of Canadian society and demand a more socially

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To our Katie, we both say thank you for your unconditional love.

To my Mother,
In memory of my father
and Debbie Valgardson Sackney.

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NOTE ON FOREIGN LANGUAGE USE

In the body of the text, I have italicized all usages of any Portuguese or other foreign language term. All Portuguese italicized terms are defined more fully in the Glossary. All terms, with the exception of personal and company names, follow contemporary Brazilian spelling conventions. I have also followed the Latin American convention of referring to families without the addition of the plural form: for example, the Ribeiro Coutinho family is referred to as the Ribeiro Coutinho rather than as the Ribeiro Coutinhos in contrast to the standard English-language usage of the Matwychuk family becoming the Matwychuks. I recognize that this makes the reading somewhat awkward, nevertheless, I have chosen to follow what my Brazilian informants suggested.¹ All translations from Portuguese of quoted material are my own. I do not note this in the text.

¹ The tradition in Brazilian Portuguese would be to signify the family with the phrase 'os Ribeiro Coutinho' -- 'the' (plural) implying family rather than an individual ('o' or 'a'.)

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

A. Introduction

This dissertation examines the impact of global and national transformations on the organization, relations and strategies of landowning elites¹ in Northeast Brazil (see Figure 1). The premise is that major changes in the organization of wealth and power are transmitted to particular regions of a national economy/society through the actions and responses of regional elites (see e.g., Chilcote 1990; Hansen and Parrish 1983; Lomnitz and Perez-Lizaur 1987; McDonough 1986; Schneider and Schneider 1983a). The impact of economic and political shifts at the level of the nation and of the world system are seen to be mediated by shifts in elite strategies, shifts that have involved alterations in the mix of relevant resources and in the relations of local elites to other regional groups and interests (Balmori, Voss and Wortman, 1984; Becker 1983; Johnson 1985; Levi 1987; Lewin 1975; Lomnitz 1982).

¹ I do not use the term elite in the restricted sense common in some anthropological elite theory (see e.g. Schneider and Schneider 1983b:169). Rather, I use the term in much the same way as defined by McDonough (1986:5) as "a generalized powerholding group within a society, ... [with] the ability to execute and impose choices on others." Although such a definition requires that the 'power' of an elite be established first and foremost, in the case of Northeast Brazil, I would argue that inclusion in the local, regional or national dominant class or bourgeoisie, presupposes such 'power.'

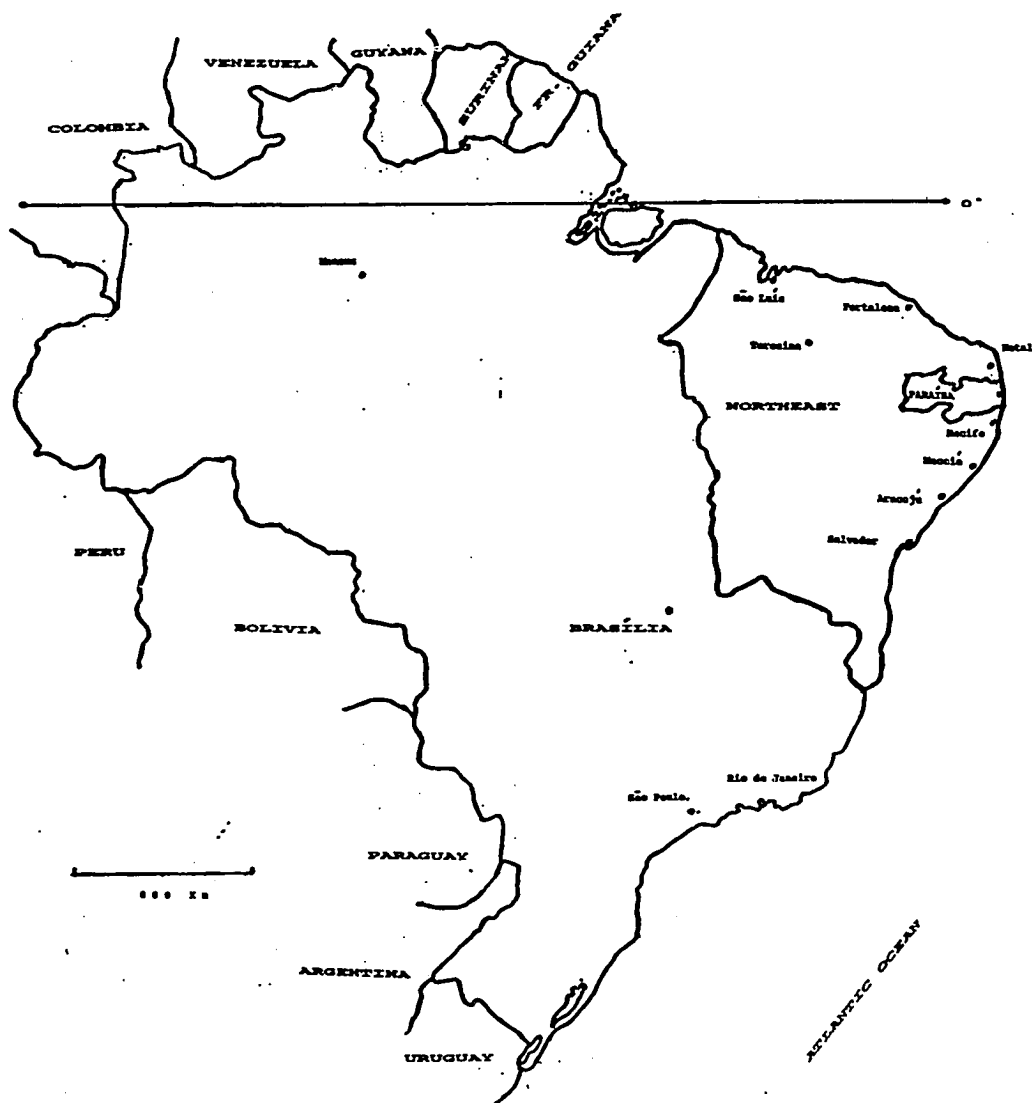


Figure 1. Brazil and the Northeast

In the chapters that follow I explore the utility of this proposition. Two themes orient the study. The first of these relates to the impact of changing political and economic conditions on members of an established or 'traditional' dominant class. I look at the processes of capitalization, industrialization, and modernization and to the attendant changes in the socioeconomic structure and relations of power. The second theme of the discussion relates to the utility of the concepts of local or regional elites, elite families, and dominant classes. This theme is approached from two different, but related, angles. On the one hand, I am concerned with the historical and contemporary continuities and modifications of elite groups and in their relation to the state and other hegemonic interests. On the other hand, I seek to uncover some of the behaviors and practices which have either encouraged or limited the reality and the expression of an elite presence.

Developing these themes involves combining two kinds of inquiries which are commonly pursued separately in Latin American research. These are: 1. studies of strategies and relationships (such as networks, alliances, coalitions and kin ties of elites) which are seen to maintain or reproduce the system (see e.g., Balmori et al 1984; Harris 1975; Levi 1987; Lewin 1987; Lomnitz 1982; Zeitlin and Ratcliff 1975) and 2. studies of structural contradictions (such as class, class conflict, regional disparities, relations of

production and landowning patterns) which emphasize conflict and change (see e.g., Chaloult 1976; Chilcote 1990; Cohen 1989; Evans 1985; Goodman and Redclift 1982; Johnson 1985; Oliveira 1981; Portes 1985; Wolf 1982).

Recent studies of class structures and intra-class relations have documented significant changes in the national power structure of Brazil (Alvarez 1990; Bruneau and Faucher 1981; Bursztyn 1985; Chilcote 1990; Evans 1979; Oliveira 1981; Palmeira 1979a). These changes have resulted from an increasing concentration and centralization of capital, from shifts in the primary locus of capital accumulation, and from changes in the role of the state. As a result, in part, of these processes, the Brazilian Northeast has undergone major transformations in its social and economic structures and in its relation to the national political economy and world market. The impact of these changes on the regionally significant sugar and alcohol industry and its controlling families has been given limited coverage.² These changes manifest themselves in the organization and operation of elite family networks, in their investment and productive strategies, and in regional and inter-regional intra- and inter-class relations and alliances.

² The topic has been given somewhat more attention in Brazil (see, for example, Bradley 1977; Palmeira 1979a; and Sorj 1980).

To analyze the political and economic history and contemporary relations of an agrarian elite, I look at the histories and activities of the families which own the sugar and alcohol producing factories in the northeastern state of Paraiba. The strategic position of large sugar and alcohol producers in linking agriculture and industry and the historical preeminence of large landowners in local and national politics make this economic sector important for viewing regional change. At various points in the study, I narrow the focus to one specific extended family of factory owners -- the Ribeiro Coutinho -- which serves as a case study for the examination of significant events, processes, and responses. Although marked by their own specific idiosyncracies, this extended family represents a strategic choice because: 1. it has been economically active in the sugar industry during most of the history of the modern sugar factories; 2. its various members own a significant number of the state's sugar and alcohol producing establishments; and 3. its family members have been active in regional politics for much of this century.

In focusing on one particular wealthy and prominent family or on families in general, my questions are: 1) what has been the continuity of the family and family members over time as an economic and/or political force in the region; 2) how has this continuity been maintained; 3) is the extended family coherent in a form which could influence

its potential power and significance as a regional elite; 4) what has been the extent of the family's power locally in contrast to other competing interests; and 5) to what extent does the family's power transcend local functional domains and provide access to nonlocal strategic resources? The compiling of individual, family, and factory histories is intended to serve as a lens with which to look at: 1. the interplay of class interests and processes of social and economic change such as agrarian reform, proletarianization, and shifting national and regional power relations and alliances and 2. the impact of a changing political economy on the activities, organization and strategies of resource investment, allocation and control of elite families. To the extent that economic, social and political change in Latin America depends upon the consent, involvement and reactions of such elite groups, this study begins to address the strategic, but little understood, aspect of how a regional and national economy and society respond to global transformations.

B. Background to the Study

1. Brazil and the Northeast

Brazil in the 1980s and 1990s offers an excellent locale for examining how changing economic and political forces affect regional elites and traditional powerholders. On the political level, a resurgence of political activity

and political parties has accompanied the return to civilian rule after twenty years of military control. Faced with immense and seemingly insurmountable economic problems, the new civilian governments have been cautious and frequently ineffectual. Their task is great -- to ensure continuing economic growth while fulfilling the people's aspirations for greater democracy and equality (Dassin 1986). As in much of the rest of South America and particularly in the Southern Cone, economic change in Brazil since the 1930s has involved a shift from primary reliance on agricultural export production to a rapidly expanding industrial and financial base. National financial/industrial elites in association with international interests and capital and a strengthened national government have set in motion a process of concentration and centralization of capital (see Evans 1979; Johnson 1985; Oliveira 1981). In addition to its directorial role, the Brazilian state has greatly expanded its entrepreneurial role as well (Trobat 1983).

Despite the predominant emphasis on industry and finance, however, agricultural production has retained an important place in the Brazilian economy particularly as a generator of foreign currency crucial for repayment of the massive debt which accompanied industrial growth. Agricultural growth was accomplished primarily through two contradictory processes. In the southern and central-south regions of the country, in particular, but in parts of the

Northeast as well, agro-industry and new agribusinesses have come to predominate (Nunberg 1986; Saint 1981). In the North and Central-West, agricultural growth proceeded through the opening up of new 'frontiers' with 'traditional' systems of production (Bunker 1985; Goodman 1977; Moran 1981; Smith 1982). Agriculture also had a role to play in the country's response to the world oil crisis of the mid-1970s. In an attempt to lessen Brazil's reliance on imported fuel, in 1975 the government instituted the National Alcohol Program (PROÁLCOOL) (see Barzelay 1986 and Erickson 1981 for histories of the program). Through loans, grants, subsidies, and fiscal policy, the Program encouraged the expansion and introduction of sugar cane production (other crops, such as manioc, were also encouraged) in most parts of the country for the production of alcohol. Large, technologically-advanced distilleries grew up alongside archaic sugar mills. Cane fields overran large sections of the countryside, incorporating both food producing lands and previously 'unutilizable' areas.

The impact of PROÁLCOOL has been most noticeable in the southern and central-south regions of the country where it cemented the area's preeminence over the historically significant sugar-producing Northeast. However, the effect of PROÁLCOOL on the Northeast has not been minor. In fact, it contributed to the 'rebirth' of what was by many accounts a dying or decayed industry. Since the first plantings of

sugar cane in the coastal *zona da mata* 400 years ago by Portuguese colonists, sugar has been one of the mainstays of the Northeast's primarily exported-oriented agrarian economy. The cyclical nature of single commodity oriented production has often brought the region to the brink of disaster (Aguilar 1985; Andrade 1980; Leeds 1957; Oliveira 1981). The current drop in world oil prices and the Brazilian government's retreat from the Alcohol Program have created new challenges for the regional economy.

While most of the Northeast remains primarily agricultural, the region had begun to lose its competitive edge over agrarian production by the 1930s. This is especially true with regard to northeastern sugar and alcohol production, as the hegemonic center of production shifted from the Northeast to the Center-South and as new actors and new forms of interest articulation emerged (see Nunberg 1986). The reason for the subordination of northeastern sugar producers cannot be seen to lie simply in their failure to modernize and diversify. In fact, during the first half of this century, a small number of capital-intensive factories or *usinas* successfully pushed the small, labor-intensive mills (*engenhos*) out of the competition. The once dominant *senhores de engenho* became *fornecedores* -- private suppliers of cane to the large *usinas* -- or tenant farmers and sharecroppers on *usina* land (frequently land they had lost to the ever-encroaching

usinas). The *usineiros* (*usina*-owners) became a new dominant class faction in the region -- a faction that was both industrial and agricultural.

The Northeast as a region remains one of the areas of Brazil with the most extreme disparities in wealth and living standards. A combination of a shortage of available land, rapid urbanization, and relatively high birth rates has contributed to severe poverty, malnutrition, and infant mortality. The extreme socioeconomic differentiation of the population has its roots in the patterns of colonial settlement and development of the region. The enormous land grants by the crown to prominent individuals and the establishment of large plantations and agricultural enterprises left most of the population with no access to land or resources and produced a highly stratified social system. The various schemes advanced in the last fifty years or so to ameliorate the region's internal disparities as well as the disparities between the Northeast and other regions of the country have accomplished little if anything. In fact, they have often only intensified the inequalities and contrasts. The northeastern elite, if not fabulously wealthy by North American standards or in comparison to some elites of central-south Brazil, are obscenely rich in comparison to the majority of northeasterners.

2. Paraíba and the Usineiros

Paraíba, one of the smallest states in terms of area and population, is situated in the center of the bulge which forms the Northeast coast of Brazil (see Figure 2). Bounded on the east by the Atlantic Ocean, on the north by Rio Grande do Norte and on the east by Ceará, Paraíba has been most influenced by its southern neighbor, Pernambuco. Although it has its own unique features, the state of Paraíba can, like much of the Northeast, be divided into three distinct ecological and sociocultural zones (see Figure 3). The *zona da mata*, or narrow coastal strip and its fertile river valleys, has been monopolized since Portuguese colonization by plantation agriculture. In Paraíba, sugar cane first developed the region. With rises and falls in the sugar industry, various other cash crops or cattle ranching have intruded now and then. Since the 1950s, however, sugar cane has dominated the area. Nearly all of the state's *usinas* and distilleries are to be found in this zone. The *zona da mata* is also home to the region's ever expanding large urban centers which provide much of the labor force for the sugar and alcohol industry and to the state's nascent industries.

Heading west from the *zona da mata*, one enters the *agreste*, the transitional zone between the humid coast and the semi-arid interior. This area was traditionally given over to the cultivation of food crops, cereals, fruit,



Figure 2. The Northeast

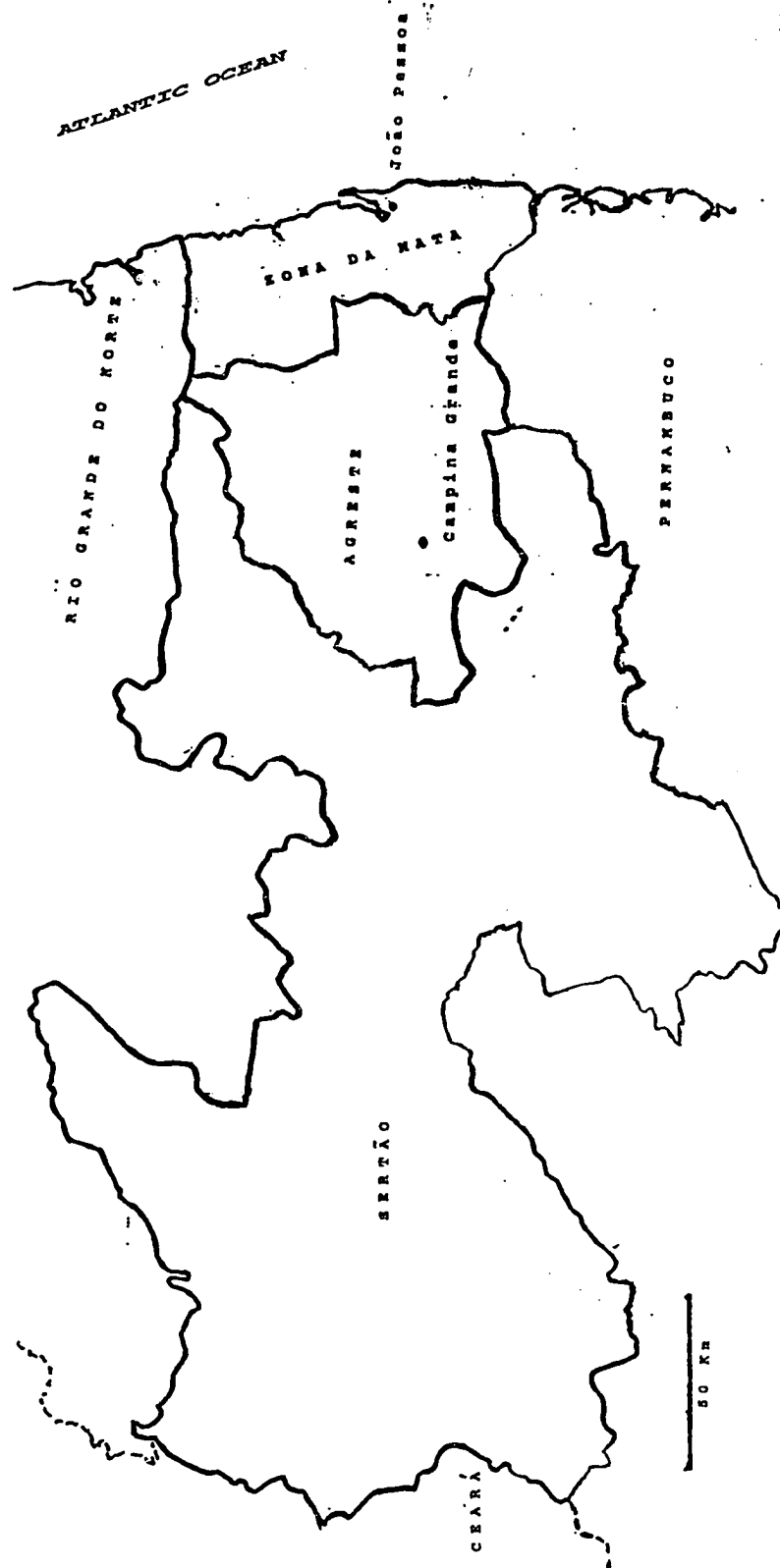


Figure 3. The Ecological and Sociocultural Zones of Paraíba

cotton and cattle. Here the land tenure was more variable. The original small peasant properties settled by free laborers, runaway slaves, and ex-slaves from the cane fields were eventually joined by large cotton, cattle, and coffee estates. Although the *agreste* continues to hold most of the state's peasant producers, this population has rapidly declined as a result of increasing competition from expanded cattle operations, mechanized market gardening, agribusiness, and now cane for the new alcohol distilleries.

The third zone -- the *sertão* -- covers the majority of the state and is the region most associated with popular conceptions of the Northeast both within southern Brazil and outside the country. It is the region of the Northeast subject to periodic droughts and devastating famine and death. Settled first for stock raising, cotton production also became an important activity during the nineteenth century. Environmental factors as well as low labor needs has given this region a much lower population density than elsewhere in the Northeast. Sharecroppers and subsistence farmers on large estates continue to predominate in the countryside although urbanization has been a factor in the *sertão* as well. Serving primarily as service centers for their surrounding regions, some urban centers have also developed industrial enterprises based on textiles or leather products.

In the state of Paraíba as a whole, the industrial and service sectors have grown in the last two decades. Nevertheless, by 1985, almost 50 percent of the population was still active in agriculture -- this was a decline of approximately 15 percent since 1970. From 1970 until 1985, Paraíba's service sector increased around 10 percent -- to about 37 percent -- while industrial employment experienced a 5 percent increase -- to 14 percent (Governo do Estado da Paraíba 1985:74). Agricultural land remained (and remains) highly concentrated: in 1985, farms of less than ten hectares comprised almost 67 percent of all properties but accounted for only 7 percent of the total area; only 5.4 percent of all properties measured more than 100 hectares but held 65 percent of all land (0.3 percent of the total properties were over 1000 hectares in size and held 22 percent of the land) (Governo do Estado da Paraíba 1985:86).

All of the *usinas* in Paraíba fall within the latter category -- most of the state's *usinas* own at least 10,000 hectares of land. While most members of this agro-industrial elite reside in the state capital of João Pessoa, their central economic activities are located north and west of the city in the large and fertile river valleys which run west to east through the *zona da mata*. These lands were first home to hundreds of small sugar mills. By the middle of this century, few mills remained -- the only evidence of their previous existence is the occasional crumbling

smokestack, chapel, slave quarters, or manor house found in the midst of cane fields. In their place are the *usinas* composed of a central industrial complex -- usually containing the factory, an old big house and other administration housing, some workers' housing, the old family chapel and perhaps one or two fundamentalist churches, a general store, warehouses, machine shops, offices, a bar and luncheonette, and perhaps a clinic and social center -- and their agricultural properties. These properties, numbering at least ten or more, also usually have an administrator's home, some worker's residences, a general store/bar, and occasionally a one-room schoolhouse.

Paraíba currently has seven *usinas* and nine new alcohol distilleries (see Appendix I). Although some data was collected on the distilleries -- most have been built by families and business interests from outside the state -- it is the *usinas* and their owners that form the main focus of this study. The current *usinas* operative in Paraíba (and their founding dates) are as follows: São João (1888), Santa Rita (1910), Santa Helena (1917), Santana (1922), Tanques (1927), Monte Alegre (1929/1940), and Santa Maria (1931). All of the factories changed ownership at least once; therefore, none of the current owners were the original founders of the *usinas*. At the time that these factories came into the hands of the families that currently own them, the associated heads of the families (and the possession

date) were, respectively: João Ursulo Ribeiro Coutinho (1914), Flávio Ribeiro Coutinho (1922), João Ursulo Ribeiro Coutinho (1925), Flaviano Ribeiro Coutinho (1925), Aguinaldo Velloso Borges (1951), Fernandes de Lima brothers (1940), and Solon Lyra Lins (1952). All of these family heads were born within the state and various of their family members have held important roles in the economic, financial, administrative, political, and social sectors of the state. The *usineiros'* cross-cutting economic and political interests and their strategic position as a link between extensive agriculture and intensive industry, the peasant and the proletarian, rural laborers and factory workers, and the rural and the urban, makes them ideal for examining shifting class and power relations in this century.

C. Conceptual Framework

1. Dominant Class Factions: Traditional and Modernizing Elites

Social science research has generally portrayed the traditional power structure of Latin American countries as composed of a ruling class and political elite at the apex, disenfranchised masses at the bottom, and an amorphous middle stratum.³ The composition of the ruling class or

³ The growth in numbers (or simple existence) of a middle stratum since the 1950s was considered by some social scientists to foreshadow the decline of elite prerogatives and to herald the advent of 'democracy.' It is more common today to conclude that the middle stratum is more likely

elite is typically conceptualized as having shifted from agrarian powerholders to modernizing commercial/ industrial/financial elites in association with a centralized, bureaucratic state (Topik 1987). Influenced by the example of European social history or the experience of a limited selection of Latin American countries (e.g., Mexico or Peru), a central antagonism has been postulated between: traditionality and modernity (Nash 1963); 'new elites' and old, land-based elites (Rostow 1971); middle sectors and landed oligarchy (Furtado 1965); ideological backwardness and a new order that is anti-oligarchic and anti-imperialistic (Cardoso and Faletto 1979). Thus, as Zeitlin and Ratcliff (1975:9) have aptly summarized, "otherwise antagonistic theories of development in Latin America frequently share...the common assumption that there are, in fact, two distinguishable upper or dominant classes" and that, not only are the interests of these two elite factions contradictory, but one must eventually triumph over the other.⁴ Contemporary class research locates the hegemonic faction in an association of national industrial/finance capital, international capital and state

than not to depend for its existence on serving the elite and preserving the status quo (see McCann and Conniff 1989:x-xi for a review of changing perspectives on the Brazilian 'middle class;' see also Hansen 1977).

⁴ See McCann and Conniff (1989) for an overview of studies of the relations among elite factions, middle sectors, masses, and the state in Brazil.

capital -- the 'triple alliance' (e.g., Evans 1979, Johnson 1985; Oliveira 1981). Within this research, two significant theoretical and empirical issues have only begun to be investigated. These are: 1. the position of landowning or agro-industrial factions in the social, political and economic structures; and 2. the significance of regional power structures.

Most recent research points out the challenge presented in the last 50 years or so to regionally-based power structures such as the oligarchic control historically exercised by *caciques* or *coroneis* by the administrative consolidation of nation states, and by the extreme centralization of economic activity in principal cities and corporate organizations. The suggestion then is that although elites from such regions as the Northeast may retain some local power, their influence does not extend to matters of national significance. The extent of their power at the local level has been questioned as well. Some researchers, however, take a more flexible view. Chilcote (1990), for example, while recognizing the pervasive force of the 'triple alliance' also suggests that many regional elite families in Northeast Brazil successfully adapted to new conditions. In the last thirty years, they came to participate in a 'new colonelism' characterized by "the dominance of the ruling family over mercantile interests and the investment of merchant capital together with state

credits in new industry, usually tied to the processing and maintenance of agricultural products" (Chilcote 1990:310).

In anthropology, with its traditions of concern for society's powerless and its preference for participant observation, the number and quality of studies of the ruling classes or elites continue to be limited. Because of their focus on and association with peasants, rural workers, or the urban poor anthropologists have concerned themselves more with relations between the ruling classes and the masses than with the ruling class itself. Anthropologists have emphasized the domination by rural landowners over their peasants, sharecroppers, tenant farmers and workers through patriarchal ties of dependency and through their position as 'broker' to the larger society (Schmidt et al 1977; Strickon and Greenfield 1972; Wolf 1966). The extra-economic relations between employer and employee which are broken down in the process of increasing reliance on wage labor and 'rational' economic practices as well as the advent of new forms of domination controlled by the state (i.e., the armed forces, national police and judiciaries) are presumed to have severely limited the independence of regional elites (Harris 1956; Hutchinson 1957; Forman and Riegelhaupt 1970; Johnson 1971; Palmeira 1979; also see Gross 1973; Soifer and Howe 1982 for a conflicting assessment). Like class approaches in general, these studies stress conflictual relations both horizontally and

vertically as well as change in the composition of the dominant elite faction.

On the other hand, the continuing dependence of many Latin American countries on primary production has led some researchers to rethink the position of landed or agrarian elites in the dominant class structure (e.g., Chilcote 1990; Frank 1969; Johnson 1985; Stavenhagen 1968; Zeitlin and Ratcliff 1975). While little empirical research has been done, the main propositions advanced by this work are: 1. considerable national variation in the position of agrarian elites exists stressing that each case must be analyzed separately; 2. the degree to which and the means by which agrarian factions become subordinated, destroyed or absorbed also vary; 3. the extent of linkages between dominant class factions and their shared interests may have been overlooked; and 4. the way these variations have been resolved historically constitutes a major component of both intraclass and interclass relations and of the political organization of the society.

2. Dominant Class Connections: Kinship, Networks, Alliances

The alternative perspective on inter- and intra-class relations emphasizes processes and relations which tend to produce stability or consensus and reproduction of the system (e.g., Lomnitz 1982; Zeitlin and Ratcliff 1985).

These studies investigate the social, cultural, kin, economic and/or political linkages among dominant class factions. While some of the historical studies among this group reproduce the old elite/new elite dichotomy, they tend to pay less attention to conflict and reach similar conclusions to those who do not recognize the old elite/new elite distinction. These conclusions are: 1. the strategic significance of intra-class linkages for the maintenance of dominant class factions; 2. the necessity for flexibility in organization and strategies in the face of changing political and economic conditions; and 3. the importance of kinship and family as both a strategy and an organizational principle for the elite and as a perspective for elite research (Chandler 1972; Hansen and Parrish 1983; Harris 1975; Levi 1987; Lewin 1975; Marcus 1983a; McDonough 1986; Schneider and Schneider 1983a, 1983b).

The issue of the elite family and its contribution to economic and state development has recently become an increasingly popular area of study in many of the social sciences (see Kuznesof 1989 for a review of recent studies). Following an almost exclusive concern for the nature and functions of kinship among the poor, many of these studies are simply attempting to close the gap in relation to our knowledge of elite kinship, marriage and inheritance practices, household organization, family life and gender roles (e.g., Levi 1987; Lewin 1987; Lomnitz and Perez-Lizaur

1987; Smith 1984; Stein 1957; Wagley 1964; Willems 1953). Some of these studies explore the internal and external dynamics of elite families as strategies for consolidating, maintaining or expanding family wealth, power and prestige (Balmori, Voss and Wortman 1984; Lewin 1987). Others examine the role of the elite family and their interests in fomenting, or more often, in hindering, economic development and modernization (Faoro 1984; Leal 1986; Saragoza 1988; Walker 1986). In relation to rural or land-based elite families, in particular, discussion has revolved around whether these families are antithetical and antagonistic to the industrializing, centralizing needs and concerns of modern nation states.

In a few disciplines, notably history, belated attention is at last being given to the role and position of female members of elite families despite the scarcity of reliable ethnohistorical data. Of general concern in this literature has been the position of women in Iberian families and the function of gender in elite families. Lomnitz and Perez-Lizaur (1987), as well as Walker (1986) emphasize the 'centralizing role' of women for family solidarity. Another major concern relates to spheres of female power or subordination. Stolcke (1984) and Mallon (1986) fall on the side of those who see patriarchy and the subordination and seclusion of women as pivotal while Wilson (1984) and Metcalf (1983) argue that consideration should

also be given to inheritance practices which ensured women access to some property and which provided them with expanded roles within the family structure. Although anthropologists have gone much further than many other social scientists in providing gender studies with an acceptance and legitimacy within the discipline, it has yet to produce a substantial body of literature on elite women. This study does little to remedy this deficiency.

3. Elite Research

Although elite studies is a relatively new field of interest in anthropology, anthropologists have had, at the very least, an intuitive model of elites. As I noted above, this model grew out of most anthropologist's concentration on the poor and dispossessed in various parts of the world. In the case of Latin America rural society, in particular, the anthropological perspective on elites was overwhelmingly derived from peasants who existed in relation and in subordination to agrarian elites. More often than not, we turned to peasants for our understanding of the elites in their society. The irony of our bottom-up perspectives of the elite is that we have tended to ignore the fact that it is no more appropriate to study the elite from the view of the peasant than it is to present the peasant according to the understandings of the elite. Furthermore, it is disingenuous to look at the elite from the bottom-up because

the anthropologist is not a peasant -- no matter how much he or she may begin to feel like one in the context of elite research.

Although fraught with new and unique challenges, anthropologists need to begin to cultivate new ground in elite research -- one which locates elites within their own subjective understandings and strategies while at the same time delineating the objective factors which condition and constrain elites in particular historical junctures.⁵ Marcus (1983c:30) is instructive in this regard when he writes,

[i]n their internal concerns and relationships, elites, as distinct from nonelites, are directly involved in defining the boundaries of social systems and institutional processes within them. Although other kinds of subcultures in their internal activities also reflect the workings of larger structures, elites by definition are the only subcultures that consciously organize themselves to directly encompass larger structures. Thus any study of elite culture forces the ethnographer at the same time to deal with

⁵ Some advancement towards these goals has been accomplished in the last decade. See for example the articles included in the volume edited by Marcus (1983); Marcus' (1992) recent collection of articles on dynastic families in the United States; McDonough's (1986) rich study of the elite families of Barcelona; and an excellent study of the role and relations of intellectual 'elites' in modern Ireland (Sheehan 1990).

larger system processes and how elites both
subjectively and objectively figure in them.

While a focus on the internal organization of elites "can be seen as an important attempt to provide holistic analyses of complex societies from a focus on small-group processes," (Marcus 1983b:22), a focus on particular elite families and kinship is facilitated and justified under particular historical junctures where, as Marcus (1983b:21) points out, "elite groups are composed of family-based factions rather than diffuse networks or associations of individuals not otherwise rooted in a basic organizational element of social structure." A similar point is made by Bourdieu (1976:123) when he claims that "there definitely was a cleavage between the mass of the peasantry and an 'aristocracy' distinguished not only by its material capital but also by its symbolic capital, which was measured by the value of its entire kin on both sides of the lineage and over several generations; by its style of life, which respected the values of honor...; and by the social respect it commended."

Not only is the elite family and elite familial organization important to the socioeconomic and political organization of many societies, but the study of elite families can also reveal a new and different perspective on societal transformations -- processes that, in anthropology, have traditionally been analyzed from the perspective of the peasant or the worker. As McDonough (1986:203-4) argues,

the [elite] family synthesizes divergent levels of social and economic organization. It reflects the impact of changes at many levels upon the power groups of a local society, while it encapsulates reaction to such changes. As such, the elite family is an ideal vehicle for complex comparisons in modern societies.

McDonough (1986:204) goes on to defend the view that elite families must be seen as "interlocking collectivities..., as agents in opposition to the state or as representations of the interaction of local interaction of local economies with world political economies." It is a conclusion of this study that, although state and national political structures impinge upon and constrain the regional elite and the family-based economy of Brazil's Northeast, elite families have also had an important role in defining the nature of the region's articulation with national and international economies and in defining the structures and relations which characterize the region.

Since the middle of this century, these northeastern elite families have confronted new challenges to their abilities to reproduce themselves. These challenges arose to a large extent as a result of nation-wide processes of centralization and concentration of capital, increased urbanization and industrialization, and expansion of a powerful, capitalist state. These processes have impacted on

other regional elite and perhaps on elites in general. The particular development path taken by the Northeast and its position in relation to other regions of the country have also meant distinct challenges for the northeastern elite. When confronted with earlier challenges to their hegemony and reproduction, Paraíba's agrarian and industrial elite developed new strategies and new relations. A similar response occurred among Paraíba's *usineiros* over the last forty years. What these new strategies were and to what extent older, traditional strategies were still viable constitute a major part of this research. How did those strategies change over the past forty years? Are they still viable today? Moreover, what do these responses suggest might be the fate of Paraíba's *usineiros* in the next forty years?

D. Setting and Data Collection for the Study

Data for the following study were collected during the course of two fieldwork projects in Brazil -- an eight month visit from June 1983 to January 1984 and another from November 1986 until June 1988. In 1983 I had gone to Brazil to participate as a research assistant in a study designed by Professor Daniel Gross, then of Hunter College of the City University of New York, investigating the impact of Brazil's alcohol program in various regions of the country. After a month in the city of São Paulo, three months were

spent in the highly industrialized and capitalized interior of the state of São Paulo. Following this, four months were spent in Santa Rita, Paraíba. The goal of the research was to study the impact of PROÁLCOOL on local populations and local economies and social structures. In these two field sites, the research was focused on two particular factories -- Usina Santa Eliza in Sertãozinho, São Paulo, and Usina São João in Santa Rita, Paraíba -- and their labor forces. Data were collected on the two factories, on the regions in which they were located, and primarily with various classes of workers associated with the enterprises. A standardized questionnaire and interview protocol were utilized in the survey of households and worker histories of approximately fifty workers in each region.⁶ During this period I spent at least one day a week in the fields with cane cutters to make contacts and then visited individuals in their homes. I also participated in local and regional events of relevance to factory and field workers: I collected data and spent time with various worker organizations -- including unions, community and church groups, and university associations.

⁶ The data collection in Sertãozinho, São Paulo was shared with Jonathan Poor, a fellow graduate student at the City University of New York. In Brazil, the other members of the project included Dr. Nancy Flowers, co-director with Dr. Daniel Gross; Maria José Monteiro, Northeast coordinator; José Baccarin, Goiás research; Jaqueline Neves, Pernambuco site; Graciela Barbero, Paraná usina; and Jonathan Poor, Mato Grosso site.

In 1986 I returned to the Northeast of Brazil to conduct dissertation research. With the exception of short periods of library and archival research in Recife, Pernambuco; Natal, Rio Grande do Norte; and Rio de Janeiro, Rio de Janeiro, the bulk of this twenty-month period was spent in Paraíba and research was conducted primarily in the capital city of João Pessoa. In addition, participant observation, including among church and workers' groups, was conducted in Santa Rita and in neighboring regions. I did not practice participant observation with *usineiros* in the sense of living in their homes, sharing in their daily round of activities, or participating in their social and family lives. Some contact and interviewing with this group were realized through visits to rural factories, urban offices, and limited attendance of urban social events. A significant part of the fieldwork was spent at and with the owners and employees of Usina São João (see Appendix II).

The bulk of the research, in any case, is historical and was conducted in the libraries and government offices of João Pessoa. At the private library of Odilon Ribeiro Coutinho or the libraries of the Institute of Geography and History of Paraíba, the municipal libraries of João Pessoa and Santa Rita, and the library of the Federal University of Paraíba, I explored the published literature on the state, as well as local newspapers and magazines dating to the beginning of this century. Information was collected on the

sugar industry, political and economic issues, and on individuals affiliated with the sugar industry and the founding families. Further library research was conducted at the Fundação Joaquim Nabuco in Recife, Pernambuco and in Rio de Janeiro at the National Archive, the Brazilian Institute of History and Geography, the Institute of Sugar and Alcohol, and at the National Library.

For several months, I spent my mornings at the Junta Comercial -- the state registry for commercial establishments -- in João Pessoa. Here I combed the files of all of the *usinas* as well as the new distilleries and other companies owned by family members. Dating back to the founding of the companies, these files contain the official minutes of all of a company's meetings and provide information on ownership, participation, loan applications, company plans, investment strategies, land purchases, and so on. Data on the *usinas*, distilleries, and on official policy relating to the industry were also collected at various offices of the Institute of Sugar Alcohol during both the first and second field trips. The Institute's publication Brasil Açucareiro was also consulted for information relating to Paraíba's *usineiros*.

Data on elite family membership and connections were collected in consultation with family members, knowledgeable locals, and by way of published biographies and family histories.

E. Outline of the Study

Chapter One of the dissertation places the research in its areal and theoretical context. The first sections set out the major research questions and provide an overview of the historical and contemporary conditions in northeastern Brazil which are of relevance to these questions. Two important issues in the study of elites or dominant classes are set out: the position of agrarian and regional elites in the modern nation-state, and strategies of reproduction of dominant class factions. A brief review of the literature relevant to these themes is provided.

Chapter Two deals with the historical development of the *usinas* at the end of the last century and with the problems of development, modernization, and industrialization in a classic 'underdeveloped' region. The founding of Paraíba's first *usina*, Engenho Central São João, is provided as a case study in the origin of the Northeast's contemporary socioeconomic and power structure and in the 'development of underdevelopment.'

In Chapters Three and Four, I provide a discussion of Paraíba's sugar industry in this century. In Chapter Three, I explore the influences on and responses by the industry to local, national, and global processes. The founding of the state's *usinas*, their ownership and development histories, and their shaping of the local physical and social

environment are discussed. Chapter Four provides a discussion of the labor force utilized by the *usinas* while at the same time completing the picture of the socioeconomic and power structure in place in the region.

Chapter Five makes use of another case study -- this time of the Ribeiro Coutinho family -- to examine processes and strategies of elite social organization. Here I explore the significance of marriage, property, inheritance, and gender in the creation and trajectory of an elite while at the same time probing the social and cultural construction of kinship among the elite.

Chapters Six, Seven, and Eight continue the theme of elite strategies and responses. In Chapter Six, I provide a discussion of elite activities and alliances in local and national politics. Within the context of the discussion of twentieth-century state politics, political parties, and political actors, I also address the issues of intra-class politics, elite factions, and elite relations. In Chapter Seven, inter-class, rather than intra-class, relations becomes the dominant theme with a focus on the relations between *usineiros* and their workers and on the conflicts leading up to the military coup of 1964. It is suggested that the events of this period were instrumental in bringing about a realignment of inter-class relations and in the local power structure. The form that this realignment took and its significance in the 1980s is the subject of Chapter

Eight. The implications of this transformation for agro-industrial elites, for their position in the contemporary social and political system, and to the present distribution of power are addressed finally in Chapter Nine.

CHAPTER TWO

THE FOUNDING OF ENGENHO CENTRAL SÃO JOÃO:

A Case Study in Northeastern Industrialization

A. Introduction

In 1875, the Brazilian government passed the first act in favor of the industrialization of sugar production (Rodrigues 1946:82). Law 2687 sought both to protect and transform the country's ailing sugar industry which was suffering the effects of high production costs, low productivity, a shortage of capital, a declining share of the world market, and intense competition from European sugar beet production. Endurance and expansion were to be achieved through the creation of large, technically advanced and capital intensive central sugar mills built in the midst of private cane fields which would supply the independent factory with sugar cane. The program was founded on the belief that a division of labor between the agricultural and industrial spheres would promote the 'modernization' and 'rationalization' of each sector of production. Eisenberg (1977a:85-86) summarized the underlying ideology as follows:

each plantation could devote its resources solely to agriculture, thus facilitating improvements such as the use of fertilizers, irrigation, and mechanization. The planter would not need to maintain and improve his mill; in fact, he could

abandon it. The central mill owners, on the other hand, could devote all their resources to the industrial sector, improving the mill through capital investments. They would not need to invest in cane growing. The results would be cheaper cane and cheaper, more competitive sugar. The central mills would encourage a more economical use of land and labor. The cane growers would have sufficient capital to work more of their land. The mill owners would expand mill capacity with their increased capital and would demand more cane. The result would be more area under cultivation. Central mills also could encourage a cheaper labor supply. Each plantation owner's total labor demand would decline by the number of workers discharged from the mill and not reemployed in growing cane. Similarly, each central mill owner would employ only enough workers to operate his mill. In addition, both planter and miller would use part of the money saved to make technological improvements, which in many cases were capital-intensive and labor-saving. The workers rendered idle by these changes would then exert downward pressure on the wage level.

As such, the central mills program represented an ideological shift from sugar production as a presumed

extension of agricultural activity to a conscious attempt to transform sugar making into an industrial activity.¹

In this chapter,² I provide a history of the implantation of one of these central mills in the state (at the time, province) of Paraíba. I am interested here in the larger conditions which precipitated the capitalization of the sugar industry, the direction that this capitalization and industrialization took, and the processes that hindered these attempts at modernization. The difficulties which local entrepreneurs and governments faced in their attempts to transform the sugar industry and ultimately, the socioeconomic structure of Brazil's Northeast persist as obstacles to regional development today as well.

¹ This process went hand in hand with government recognition and control of *sociedades anônomas* -- joint stock companies.

² The data for this chapter was collected primarily at the National Archives in Rio de Janeiro. A catalogue of documents relating to the central mills and *usinas* is available (see Arquivo Nacional 1979). Further information was available in various of the collections of laws (Arquivo Nacional 1882; Arquivo Nacional 1885); among the Junta Comercial company reports housed at the Archives (Arquivo Nacional, Junta Comercial 1883, 1896, 1899-1904); and in the early almanacs of the state of Paraíba (Estado da Paraíba 1908, 1911, 1913, and 1915). Eisenberg (1977a), Perruci (1978), and Reis (1977) all contain excellent data on the founding of the *usinas*, particularly in Pernambuco. Galliza (1979, 1980), Mariz (1978), and Lewin (1987) are the best sources for the early economic history of Paraíba that I am aware of.

B. Usina Central São João

Usina Central São João, the modern Usina São João, was the first and only central mill ever built in the state of Paraíba. Located in the municipality of Santa Rita in the fertile Paraíba River Valley, it is also the oldest *usina* in operation in the state. The history of this sugar factory begins with a government concession to Francisco Carneiro da Cunha, João Evangelista Carneiro da Cunha, and Luiz Monteiro Caminhoá provided by Decree 8451 of March 11, 1882. The two Carneiro da Cunhas were both civil engineers and members of a large extended family that was prominent in both Pernambuco and Paraíba. In Paraíba, members of the Carneiro da Cunha family had been especially active in politics during the nineteenth century, counting among themselves ten Provincial Deputies, four Federal Deputies, one Senator, and two Provincial Presidents. Anisio Salathiel Carneiro da Cunha formed part of a group which had received the first government concession to build a railway linking the capital with the interior. This concession, however, was later transferred to the Conde D'Eu Railway Company Limited which was organized in London in 1875 (see Carneiro da Cunha 1910; Estado da Paraíba 1911; Galliza 1979; Odilon 1984). As a contrast, Eisenberg (1977a) reports that in Pernambuco many of the concessions for central mills were either to existing small mill owners (*senhores do engenho*) or to foreign

companies. Elsewhere in the country, however, concessions were frequently granted, at least in the first instance, to urban-based engineers.

Eisenberg (1977a) argues that concessions were most often requested for speculative ends with little or no intention of actually building a mill. This appears to have perhaps been the case with the Paraíba concession as well. Despite their attempts at capitalist ventures, the Carneiro da Cunha were essentially civil servants, politicians and urban professionals. Caminhoá, who was most likely a native Pernambucano, was also primarily a career civil servant. Soon after the concession was granted he became the state-appointed Fiscal Inspector for the Second District of Engenhos Centrais, which included Paraíba. As a result of this appointment he had to forfeit his right to the concession because of conflict of interest.

The government concession for what was to become known as Engenho Central and/or Usina São João provided for the guarantee of interest of 6 percent per year on capital of 500:000\$000 or 500 contos de reis.³ The contract specified "the construction of a central mill and its parts, for the fabrication of sugar by means of improved equipment and

³ A *conto de reis* equalled one million reais, the monetary unit in Brazil until 1942. One *conto* was written 1:000\$.

processes."⁴ The mill was to have the capacity to grind 200,000 kilograms of cane daily and to produce, at the minimum, one million kilograms of sugar during a one hundred day harvest. The contract also allowed for the organization of a joint stock company and the raising of capital outside the country while noting that in such a situation, payment of the interest would be made through the Delegate of the National Treasury in London. Almost immediately, the grantees requested and were granted permission to expand their original plans for the Paraíba central mill.⁵ The guaranteed capital was raised to 700:000\$000 or 700 contos and the factory's capacity was raised to 300,000 kilograms of cane to be milled daily with a harvest production of 1,800,000 kilograms of sugar.

On April 7th, 1883, according to Decree 8925, the concession for the central mill was transferred from Luiz Monteiro Caminhoá to an unidentified Count of Barral.⁶ A later report by the regional fiscal engineer notes that in

⁴ Coleção dos Leis do Brasil, Decreto N. 8451, 11 de março de 1882.

⁵ Coleção dos Leis do Brasil, Decreto N. 8568 de 10 de Junho de 1882.

⁶ An investigation of newspapers and archival materials from this period failed to provide much information on the role and eventual failure of the Carneiro da Cunhas and Caminhoá to realize the construction of the proposed factory. A 1910 biography of Francisco A. Carneiro da Cunha, however, credits him with drafting the original plans for the factory and he does appear as a minor shareholder in the founding company (Carneiro da Cunha 1910).

his position as a fiscal engineer for the government program, Caminhoá was ineligible for a concession and was forced to give it up.⁷ Elsewhere it is noted that later in the year, approval was given for the transfer of the concession to the 'Companhia de Engenhos Centraes nas Provincias da Parahyba do Norte e Sergipe' (Barros 1889).

From here on the history of the founding of the factory is somewhat better documented. The 'Companhia de Engenhos Centraes nas Provincias da Parahyba do Norte e Sergipe' was organized in 1883 by Manoel de Mendonça Guimarães. Little is known of Guimarães. An engineer from Rio de Janeiro and a brother-in-law of Augusto Galvão, Fiscal Inspector of the Provincial Treasury of Paraíba, Guimarães had in 1882 made two requests for concessions for the construction of central mills in the provinces of Sergipe, Alagoas, and Pernambuco. His first request of March 11, 1882 proposed the construction of six central mills in Pernambuco. The second request, of July 17, 1882, was for three central mills in Alagoas and two in Sergipe. It appears that Guimarães was never granted a concession for any of these requests.

Later, in recounting the formation of the company, Guimarães repeatedly complains about his difficulties in attracting investors. Since these complaints are to be found in petitions to the government for time extensions due to

⁷ Arquivo Nacional, Engenhos Centrais, Ref IA⁸1, Pasta 12, Document 2.

construction delays, they are somewhat suspect. On the other hand, the failure of many of the concessions to result in functioning factories suggests that the whole central mills program was not the success nor the attraction that the government had hoped it to be. An 1889 report on the program notes that while concessions had been granted for 87 central mills, only 12 were under construction or functioning.

Manoel de Mendonça Guimarães did eventually get his company formed at the end of 1883. The statutes of the company were filed with the Commercial Council of Rio de Janeiro on November 22, 1883. These papers specify that the company was organized

for the development of the cultivation of sugar cane, in the *municípios* of Larangeiras, Sergipe and the Capital, Paraíba, and for improvement in the making of sugar through the use of modern and efficient equipment and processes. For these purposes, there will be built two Central Mills as per the concessions provided by the government by Decree 8407 of 11/2/1882 to Engineer Joaquim Machado Fagundes de Mello [the Sergipe factories] and by Decree 8451 and 8568 of 11/3/1882 and 10/6/1882 to Engineers Francisco Antônio Carneiro da Cunha, João Evangelista Carneiro da Cunha and Luiz Monteiro Caminhoá.⁸

⁸ Arquivo Nacional, Junta Commercial, Caixa L. 21.

The capital of the company was fixed at 1,500 *contos*, representing 7,500 shares each worth 200\$000 or 200 *milreis*. Guimarães is recorded as the founder of the company and is appointed director-president. He was not, however, the company's largest shareholder. The major shareholder, with 13.33 percent of the shares, was Honório Augusto Ribeiro, a self-defined businessman from Rio de Janeiro. Four other individuals each held 11.67 percent of the company. These were three agriculturalists, presumably rural landowners, from Vassouras, São Paulo -- the Baron de Santa Maria, Baron de Oliveira Rôxo and Raymundo Breve Oliveira Rôxo -- and an engineer and agriculturalist from Rio de Janeiro, Honório Gomes de Paiva Coutinho. Together, these five individuals controlled 60 percent of the company. Adding to this the 6.74 percent held by Guimarães and similar proportions held by Francisco Tavares Bastos, a Portuguese businessman living in Rio de Janeiro and José Cardoso de Moura Brazil, a medical doctor and property owner from Rio de Janeiro, 80 percent of the company was owned by eight individuals. The rest of the shares were divided among 28 minor shareholders, the majority of whom were Brazilians living in Rio de Janeiro. Among the minor shareholders were Francisco Antônio Carneiro da Cunha, one of the original grantees of the central mill concession, and engineer José Dias Maynard, the first general manager of Engenho Central São João. The first directorate of the company was composed of Guimarães,

Honorio Augusto Ribeiro and Honorio Gomes de Paiva Coutinho. Despite successive changes in the name of the company, these majority shareholders continue as the principal actors in Paraíba's central mill during its first twenty years of existence.

Prior to the actual founding of the company, Guimarães had travelled to Europe to secure loans for the purchase of the necessary materials and equipment for the construction of the two factories. In London, he allegedly negotiated a loan contingent on government approval of the company's plans and statutes. Whether this was actually the case or not is unclear. A subsequent change in legislation and the failure of the government to approve the company and the plans until 1885 are, however, the recurring reasons given by Guimarães for construction delays. It is just as possible that his loan negotiation never existed, was never finalized, or fell through for other reasons.

Nevertheless, with the prospect or pretence of a European loan, Guimarães returned from Europe and began organizing his company in early 1883. By the end of the year, he had succeeded in attracting share subscriptions totaling 1,500:000\$000 (or 300:000\$000 more than the capital given guaranteed interest by the Government concession). This does not, however, signal the success of his venture. Subscribers were only required to put 10 percent down at the formation of the company which gave the company an initial

operating capital of 150:000\$000. Although somewhat conflictual, various reports attest to the difficulties experienced by the company in raising a good part of the capital. A 1886 request for an extension by the company reports that they had had great difficulty in raising more than 300:000\$000 within the country -- the amount that they calculated was necessary for the purchase of land, laying the tramway, and other basic foundation work for the two factories.

Later reports, in fact, reveal that they never raised this amount. An August 1887 government reply to the company's request for payment of the interest owed reports that, by the end of June 1887, the company had raised only 234:500\$000 within the country. This amount included the original 150:000\$000 provided by the shareholders plus a 3:000\$000 advance payment by two shareholders on their second installment with the remainder raised through the issuance of discounted letters.⁹ A subsequent request for the interest owing for the second half of 1887 notes that an additional 33:500\$000 had been raised, again through advance payments by two shareholders. What this implies, then, is that four years after the founding of the company, a call for the second ten percent had not yet been issued or had not been heeded by the majority of the shareholders. Other evidence also suggests that the majority of the shareholders

⁹ Arquivo Nacional, Engenhos Centrais.

never contributed more than their initial ten percent. Given the extensive construction delays and the many profitless years that followed the eventual functioning of the factories, the company was repeatedly forced to rely on new loans for necessary capital.

Although a complete listing of all the company's loans was not available, a partial accounting can be gleaned from various documents. The company's first debt was secured within Brazil at the time of the constitution of the company on November 15, 1883. This debt of 150:000\$000 was raised through the shareholders' first down payment of ten percent of the total capital. An additional 25:000\$000 was raised at the end of 1886 through discounted letters at the Banco del Credere in Rio de Janeiro. During the first half of 1887, an additional 59:500\$000 was raised in a similar manner. By early 1888, the company's internal debt had increased an additional 175:500\$000 through the issuance of more discounted letters and through payments of the second ten percent by some shareholders totalling 97:000\$000 (that is, 53:000\$000 less than it should have been).

Several conflicting reports were consulted in trying to unravel the company's external debt. Various company letters fault the government's delayed approval of the company's plans and statutes for the failure of the loan agreement supposedly reached in London in 1883. Another letter reports that negotiations nearing completion in Antwerp were halted

when the government revoked the company's guaranteed interest payment status by Decree 9640 on September 11, 1886. On the other hand, an August 1886 government report states that Guimarães negotiated a loan in London with a Mr. Williams in February of 1886. This report also notes that this loan had been very difficult to obtain because of the failure of an earlier loan agreement in London (possibly the 1883 negotiations). The Journal do Commercio of August 25, 1886 confirms this loan negotiation, reporting that "the Companhia de Engenhos Centraes nas Provincias da Parahyba do Norte e Sergipe had contracted a loan in London for £80,000 and that they were also issuing a second mortgage in debentures for £14,000." Reference to this London loan, however, is not made in the company documents that were available, nor specifically in the company's accounts presented in request for payment of the interest owed them by the government. It may be that this negotiation eventually fell through as well or that it was tied in some way to the loan negotiated the next year in Amsterdam.¹⁰

A loan was negotiated in Amsterdam on January 20, 1887 with the banking concern of Westerdorp and Company. The total of the loan was 1,032,000 Dutch Florins, equivalent to £86,000 Sterling or 764:454\$000 réis. This money, raised through public bonds, was deposited with Westerdorp and

¹⁰ This latter option is a distinct possibility since the name of Mr. Williams continues to appear in connection with the company's banking concerns in Europe.

Company on February 2, 1887. Reference is also made to another loan of £2,200 obtained from the English Bank of Rio de Janeiro in November 1887. This 'loan' was considered an advance on the interest to be paid by the government in March of 1888 and was destined for interest payments on their loan in Europe. The amount was paid to David Abraham Foster and Richard von Rees, purportedly Westerdorp and Company representatives in London. Since this amount does not appear in their later debt accounting, it was presumably paid off as soon as they received the government reimbursement for interest payments.

With an internal debt of 410:000\$000 and the external debt of 764:544\$000, the company's total debt at the end of 1887 was 1,174:544\$000 or £132,713.3.¹¹ In considering this huge debt, it must be remembered that it would be ten months before the Paraíba mill began functioning and more than a year before the Sergipe mill finally went into operation. No other information was encountered on loans taken out during the first years of operation of the factories. Nevertheless, it is quite likely that further capital would have been necessary since the major part of the European loan had only covered the first installments on equipment bought in Europe and as pointed out previously, the company does not appear

¹¹ Taking Eisenberg's (1977a) average rate of 23.1d/1\$000 or £.09/1\$000 for the years 1886-90 would change these figures substantially. The £86,000 loan would equal 955:555\$555 and the total outstanding debt would thus be about 200 *contos* higher than reported.

to have been extremely successful in raising the capital from their shareholders back in Brazil. Company minutes and reports apparently were not filed or were missing for much of the first ten years of the factories' operations, so further details are not available.

Company minutes were again available for the year 1896.¹² At this point the name of the company had been changed to 'Companhia Industria e Construção' although the same major players are present. These minutes report that the company had recently taken out a new ten year loan to pay off their debts with the Banco de Credito do Brazil. The directors were now proposing to take out another loan with which they planned to consolidate their outstanding internal and external debts. They further noted that the company had experienced problems in the past in servicing their debts and that the company still could not function independent of foreign capital. On the other hand, they were optimistic that the financial situation of the company was changing for the better. The directors also proposed that the performance of the company could be facilitated by an expansion of the company into other more lucrative activities. A sugar

¹² Further government reports on the factories were unlikely at this point since the company had forfeited its guaranteed interest status on the Sergipe mill soon after its opening and on the Paraíba factory by Decree 930 of July 5, 1892. Thus, in the 1890s, neither of the factories fell under government jurisdiction although internal changes and decisions within the company would still be covered by laws relating to *sociedades anônymas*.

refinery was proposed as a viable and logical extension of their current activities and for this, they sought permission to negotiate a new loan in Europe to pay off their existing debts, and to begin construction of a refinery in Rio de Janeiro. The directors proposed securing a loan for £250,000 or 1,041:666\$666 according to their calculations.¹³ The complete breakdown of the proposed loan was as follows: outstanding foreign debt, £59,000; outstanding internal debt, £24,000; needed working capital, £28,000; capital to build the proposed refinery, £84,000; and capital to service the loan, £55,000. These minutes end with permission being granted for the company director, Manoel de Mendonça Guimarães, to attempt to finalize a £250,000 loan in Europe.

At this 1896 meeting, the shareholders had also approved a change in the name of the company to 'Companhia Assucareira Parahyba-Sergipe,' although again, the same directorate remains. Company minutes were available for another meeting in 1899 -- no mention is made at this time of any further loan negotiations or of any new loans having been secured. The next available minutes for this company are for a meeting in 1904. Here, the directors report that a loan for £150,000 was secured in Europe in May of 1902 which

¹³ Eisenberg (1977a) gives an exchange rate of 8.3 d/1\$000 or £0.034/1\$000 in Rio de Janeiro for the period 1896-1900. At this rate, the £250,000 would be a substantially higher 7,352:941\$176.

was somewhat below their earlier expectations. As such, and while reporting a recent three and a half year crisis in the sugar industry which was compounded by having had to implement 'costly' reforms in both of their central mills, they propose applying for yet another loan, this time for 1,500 *contos* or £79,500.¹⁴ Again they stress the need to find an alternative source of revenue and report that the company's financial situation, which has been dismal to date, will soon improve with the imminent opening of a refinery in Rio. As a testament to their increasing reliance on the refinery at the expense of the two northeastern sugar factories, they propose and approve yet another change in the name of the company, this time to 'Companhia Assucareira.'¹⁵

If these reports are reliable, the outstanding debt of the company in 1904 was approximately £ 230,000. Quite obviously, the refinery did not provide the guarantee of financial success that they were hoping it would. At some point after 1910 (probably around 1912 or 1913), the company defaulted on its loans with Westerdorp and Company in

¹⁴ The pound rate was calculated using Eisenberg's (1977a) figure of 12.7 d/1\$000 or £0.053/1\$000.

¹⁵ From this point on, no other company minutes were found until the factory is bought by João Ursulo Ribeiro Coutinho in 1914. Other sources have reported that further name changes may have taken place. These include Companhia Geral de Melhoramentos do Rio de Janeiro and Cia Açucareira da Paraíba. I found no evidence to support these claims. The latter name, however, may simply represent the breakup of the patrimony of the Cia. Assucareira.

Amsterdam which repossessed the two northeastern factories put up as collateral. In 1913, the management of Engenho Central São João was taken over by João Ursulo Ribeiro Coutinho. The following year, João Ursulo Ribeiro Coutinho bought the factory from its creditors and it continues to be run by his heirs today.

C. The Failure of the Central Mills Program

In looking more closely at these first decades of the factory, we can see more fully some of the problems confronted in this attempt at directed economic development and change. Many of these problems were symptomatic of the government program and of the industry in general. As reported above, one of the basic underpinnings of the *engenho central* program was the assumption that modernization of both the agricultural and industrial segments of the sugar-making process would be effected through a separation of the two processes. That is, it was believed that more capital and expertise could be devoted to each segment when the owners and/or managers were only concerned with one of each of the two strategic parts. Thus, if the competition for capital and time from the agricultural component was not present, the industrial sector could and would improve, allowing for greater efficiency and productive capacity. Similarly, it was assumed that farmers or sugar growers/planters would spend

more time and money improving their cane plantings, developing greater yields and qualities of sugar cane, and paying greater attention to soil fertility if they were not diverted by industrial sugar-making.

As a result, a government concession for a central mill included specific regulations setting the relationship between the central mills and the cane suppliers. Contracts with cane suppliers, or *fornecedores*, had to be formulated and approved by the government before final approval to proceed with the construction of a factory could be given. Such was the case with the factory to be built in Paraíba as well.

At least one contract between the directors of the Companhia de Engenhos Centraes nas Provincias da Parahyba do Norte e Sergipe and *fornecedores* from Paraíba was reached in 1884.¹⁶ This agreement specified both the individual suppliers and the amount of cane they were to supply for each of the five harvest years of the contract. In addition, the contract set out the price to be paid for the cane, depending on its quality and condition; payment schedule and late payment adjustments; and the responsibilities of the company such as the construction of railway lines, bearing

¹⁶ As this was the only contract available in the National Archives, it is unclear whether others existed as well. It may be that one contract was sufficient to satisfy the needs of a concessionaire's contract with the government and as such, no others were filed. Factories may have formed less formal contracts with individual local suppliers as is the case today.

the costs of transport of a pre-loaded wagon to the factory and providing suppliers with loans at 7 percent a year.

The suppliers contracted to the Companhia de Engenhos Centraes nas Provincias da Parahyba do Norte e Sergipe included eight sugar mill owners, one owner of a farm, one renter of a sugar mill and one renter of lands. The properties involved were Engenhos Capellinha, Cotovêllo, Cidreira, Tibiry, Santo André, Vigaris, Cadesco, São José, Cangúls, and Una as well as Sitio Torre. The contracts averaged around 3,000,000 kilograms per year with the largest being for 5 million kilograms and the smallest for a million and a half.

In a petition to the government dated October 18, 1884, the contracted suppliers pleaded with the government not to cancel the company's concession since such a move would be extremely detrimental to the state's sugar producers.¹⁷ They bolstered their argument with the claim that most of them had already dismantled their mills in anticipation of supplying cane to the factory for the 1885/86 harvest. This was probably an exaggeration since the 1884/85 harvest would have just begun and it is doubtful they would have foregone it. Furthermore, given the experience of central mills in neighboring provinces, one would have expected a more

¹⁷ Arquivo Nacional, Engenho Centrais IA⁸¹; Folders 9 and 10.

cautious approach. Other central mills had experienced notorious construction delays or construction frequently never got off the paper. Earlier experiences with widely varying cane prices should have also encouraged mill owners to, at least, maintain the option of re-activating their mills. As Eisenberg (1977a) has shown for Pernambuco, mill owners cum suppliers rapidly learned to keep their mills functional as an alternative to potential low prices offered by the central mills.

The petition from the suppliers also argued that the central mills were necessary given the imminent end of slavery (eventually proclaimed May 13, 1888). Their argument was that since their mills were labor intensive, the labor shortage created by abolition would destroy their operations and force them into the position of cane suppliers in any case. Again, their argument appears somewhat over-stated. While the debate still rages, convincing arguments have been made for the negligible impact of abolition on the labor supply in parts of the Northeast, and particularly for the sugar industry (see for example Eisenberg 1977a; Galliza 1979; Galloway 1971). The reasons for this were varied and will not be discussed in depth here. In the case of Paraíba, three factors appear particularly significant. First, given the many years of decline in the sugar industry, by 1888, mill owners owned few slaves -- they had not had the capital to replace aged or deceased slaves while more money could be

made selling their slaves to southern coffee planters than through the use of their labor. Second, the infamous 'Drought of 1877' had driven thousands from the scorched and ravaged interior of the province to the coast. As Vidal (1945) recounted,

the *sertão* turned into a desert and even the *caatinga* did not escape a notable depopulation...and even in parts of the *brejo* one could register the race for the coast. The result of this migration was a great gain for the *varzea*...If it had not been for the refugees, the *varzea* would have continued to feel the violent crisis of the freedom and escape of slaves.

Third, given the precarious economic situation of the province, there were few options available for workers and ex-slaves simply became an even cheaper wage labor force for the planters and central mills in a labor oversupply situation.

This alleged enthusiasm on the part of suppliers for a central mill in their midst was probably ambivalent. It is true that the fortunes of Paraíba's mill owners had been declining for years. They had seen their position fall with successive drops in sugar prices and with the decline in both Brazil's and sugar cane's contribution to the world sugar market, and their position had also fallen in the province vis-à-vis the cotton oligarchy. Without the capital

or contacts necessary for the upkeep, repairs and technological improvements on his mill, the strapped mill owner might at least hope for some, rather than no, profit.

On the other hand, as earlier events in other states had shown, and as did occur in Paraíba, this receptivity to central mills on the part of mill owners was often short lived. In fact, one of the original contractees to the Paraíba central mill ultimately refused to sign the contract in 1884 objecting to the conditions which he felt were prejudicial to the suppliers. And, soon after the central mill finally began functioning in 1888, another two suppliers became extremely critical of the arrangement and eventually sued to have their contract with the central mill dismissed.

The criticisms of these *fornecedores* were basically a repeat of those of *fornecedores* in other states and would anticipate many of the complaints of *fornecedores* today. Primary among these was the complaint that, as suppliers, they had no input into the quantity of cane to be supplied to the factory daily nor control over when cane would be picked up, thereby leading to protests that cane was often left lying in the fields until it lost much of its juices and could, therefore, incur penalties imposed by the factory.¹⁸ Similar grievances extended to the lack of

¹⁸ Decisions of this kind were probably made to some degree by personal relations and favoritism.

regulation of the days in which cane would be needed as well as the specific time at which cane would be picked up since it would be necessary to keep a worker waiting at the spot to load the cane. As is still common today, disagreements over the weighing of the cane by the factory were also frequent. Other complaints grew out of their lack of control over the production process and over the price paid for cane. Work stoppages in the factory due to breakdown or other factors could seriously endanger the financial situation of a small cane supplier.¹⁹ Some suppliers also felt penalized by the practice of contracting cane at a set price at the beginning of the harvest which prevented them from reaping any of the benefits of a fluctuating market and saddled them with the burden of unexpected increases in the cost of growing cane.²⁰

¹⁹ On November 10, 1888 about a month after the Paraíba factory began functioning, the large roller for the first grinding of the cane broke, shooting pieces off in all directions and damaging parts of the walls and roof. The accident closed down the mill for a few days and when it reopened it had to function with just the smaller second roller at a reduced capacity (Gazeta da Parahyba, 11/11/1888, p. 3; Barros 1889). This was partially responsible for the major shortfall in the factory's first production season. Several other major shutdowns were reported as resulting from buildups of *bagaço* inside the factory. According to the Government Inspector, Barros, this was the result of the company's failure to construct the government approved furnaces which would have allowed the burning of wet *bagaço*. The system installed in the factory required that the *bagaço* be dried before it could be burnt thereby taking up space for extended periods of time.

²⁰ A report by Government Inspector Barros (1889) supports these complaints by showing the discrepancy in the cost of growing cane and the government-legislated price for

All of these criticisms were rooted in a fundamental error of the program. This was that the *fornecedores* had few means to ensure that the factory lived up to their side of the bargain. They could, of course, withhold the contracted cane but this would ultimately penalize the small supplier more in the long run particularly as this potential option encouraged many factories to grow their own cane. The government was not viewed as an ally of the suppliers nor as particularly concerned with their situation. The central mills program, in fact, had basically ignored the needs and problems of the agricultural sector. The implicit assumption was that 'modernization' of agricultural practices and techniques would be a necessary and automatic response to the increased efficiency and requirements of the central mills. Only late in the program did these assumptions begin to be questioned and only well into this century would the government legislate support for cane suppliers.

A final and less articulated source of grievance among suppliers surfaced shortly after the program began and would foreshadow a fundamental change in the social organization of the countryside. The establishment of central mills began a process (which solidified with the expansion of *usinas* in the twentieth century) of relegating many of the *ex-senhores do engenho* to a much lower economic, political, and social position. As simple suppliers of cane, frequently dependent

cane to be paid by the factories.

upon central mill owners and *usineiros*, suppliers often became only slightly glorified sharecroppers -- a poorer cousin, both figuratively and literally.

Not that all complaints originated with the *forneceadores*. The central mills had their grievances about the system as well. These dealt primarily with the lack of control over a regular cane supply. *Forneceadores* could (and did), at times, withhold their cane to mill it themselves if they did not like the price paid by the central mill. Factory owners and managers also complained that they could not control the quality of cane delivered to them and felt that the *forneceadores* had not improved the cane's quality as had been expected. Since in these first years, the price paid for cane was set in advance of the harvest season, the central mills were limited somewhat in their ability to adjust cane prices on the basis of quality or drastic changes in the price of sugar. They did, however, make liberal use of their right to charge penalties or apply deductions for a variety of infractions for the cane delivered.²¹

Other difficulties plagued the central mills program and the more general attempts to modernize the sugar industry in Brazil. Various documents from the period report the concerns of the industry, such as: the lack of

²¹ This practice is still common in the cane industry today and is frequently a source of conflict between *forneceadores* and the *usinas*.

technology in both the agricultural and industrial sectors resulting in low productivity; high production costs and inferior quality; tax burdens, restrictive financing, and a general capital shortage; poor infrastructure, particularly roads, railways and ports; and the need for education and training of personnel. Although the advent of the central mills and *usinas* did not bring about an end to these concerns, the period in which these first modernization attempts took place added its own difficulties.

One of the first obstacles to building the factory in Paraíba is detailed in a report by Fiscal Inspector Rego Barros in 1889 and in several of the petitions by the company for extensions. This was the problem of transport which contributed to the three year delay in the functioning of the central mill. The final contracts approved in Europe specified that the first shipment of construction materials would be sent in June 1887 to be followed by a final shipment in September. The first shipment eventually left Antwerp in July and arrived on August 31, 1887 to confront the deficiencies of the port in Paraíba. The depth of the port was the first major hurdle to be overcome. In the directions which Director Guimarães sent to his agent in Europe, he cautioned that

Care must be taken in insuring that the freight contract specify the length of the stay in the port. This is one of the points of doubt that

always arise after the ships reach their destination. It is necessary to ensure that a sufficient waiting period is set. For the port of Parahyba. It is especially indispensable that the sailing papers specify the cost if the ship must wait around, since it often happens that after anchorage, the ship may get sucked into the point, because of the mud at the bottom of the river...For the ships which brought the materials for the construction of the Conde d'Eu railway, there arose some doubts and some of the captains refused to anchor and only did so after being paid more.²²

Ships of lesser draught (15 feet or less) could anchor at the dock and load cargo directly into awaiting rail cars. Unfortunately, this was not possible in the case of the steamship which brought the materials for the central mill since another report states that "the 'Carbisbay' could not anchor because of the shallowness of the river at the Custom's dock, or any other dock, to allow the unloading of the materials" and as a result "the unloading was very difficult and slow because of the distance to the dock from where the ship anchored...."²³

²² Arquivo Nacional, Engenhos Centraes, IA⁸¹; Pasta 22; Document 2.

²³ Arquivo Nacional, Engenhos Centraes, IA⁸¹, Pasta 22, Document 3 and IA⁸¹; Pasta 22; Document 1.

Similarly, at the port of Sergipe, the materials for the company's other factory had to be unloaded from the ship to launches which then transferred the materials to the mouth of the Sergipe River and the railroad terminal. Loading the materials into the rail cars was also a problem due to the inability of the crane to lift anything over two and a half tons. For the heaviest pieces, as well, special rail cars were necessary to deliver the machinery to the construction site 15 kilometers away. Freight costs on the Conde d'Eu railway were extremely elevated and would later pose a problem for the transport of cane to the factory and sugar to the coast.

Once the factory went into operation, new problems arose. Manufacturing defects and a bad layout of the factory contributed to the inefficiency of the productive process. A manufacturing defect was responsible for the breakdown of the first grinding wheel after a month of operation. As mentioned previously, this accident destroyed parts of the building, shut down production for a few days, and meant that the factory had to operate at a reduced capacity for much of its first year.

Barros first inspected the completed factory in September 1888. After discovering numerous inconsistencies between the completed factory and the plans approved by the government, he recommended that approval for the factory to begin operating not be given, that their guarantee of

interest payments be suspended, and that they be given a reasonable time period in which to modify the construction in line with the original plans. While he was awaiting his orders, the factory did begin functioning without government approval on October 9, 1888. Finally, on October 27, Barros received a memo from the Ministry recommending that he set a date for the inauguration of the factory. He was advised to report on the factory's start-up, following which the ministry would decide whether or not the factory was to be approved regardless of the deviations from the approved plans. In response to this memo, Barros scheduled the inauguration of the factory for November 8, 1888. Despite his subsequent dismal report on the state of the factory, approval was not denied as he recommended.

The report by Barros (1889) is a detailed description of the setup, operation, faults, and potential problems of both the industrial and agricultural sectors of the factory. In concluding his description of the industrial sector, Barros (1889) declares,

it is evident the waste of space in the factory.

The plan that was adopted is not in the least practical for a sugar factory, once again discrediting these companies. ... It is an embarrassment that, after the sad results that have marked the *engenhos centraes*, we have not learned something from this experience and we are

still building *engenhos* today which at first glance show evidence of a lack of economy of personnel, of energy and of the impossibility of proper control over the jobs, requiring modification as soon as the construction is completed.

In addition to the structural and technical problems, the industrial sector was also hampered, according to Barros, by administrative disorganization and a poorly trained labor force.²⁴

Barros concluded his report by criticizing the central mills program for its negligence of the agricultural sector. For the program to be successful, "it is not only necessary to extract a greater quantity of sugar from the cane so that the industry can prosper and successfully challenge the

²⁴ An interesting aside here is that in the early 1890s, Barros was hired as general manager at first the company's Sergipe factory and then at the Paraíba factory. During his tenure he was awarded shares in the company as part of his remuneration. In 1899, however, a special meeting of shareholders was held to cancel the donation of the shares "Since it is well known that engineer Francisco do Rego Barros did not live up to the expectations of the general meeting of 1890 which authorized the transfer ... in recognition of his supposed services and that further, he caused considerable damages and losses to the company whether in his position as Manager of the Riachuelo Engenho in Sergipe or of São João in Paraíba; we propose the donation is without effect and consider revoked the authorization for that donation, which thus becomes non-existent. This is possible since the donation had never been legally validated, such as through a notary public, insinuation or through payment of the respective tax" (Arquivo Nacional, Junta Comercial, Companhia Assucareira Parahyba - Sergipe, 1899-1904).

threat of the sugar beet; it is also necessary to improve plantings, that is, to make the same quantity of land produce a higher quantity of raw material and at a lower cost than today" (Barros 1889). To do so required improvements in cultivation, irrigation, drainage, fertilization, and cane varieties. According to Barros, these improvements would be facilitated if central mills owned and cultivated their own land or provided sharecroppers with the capital, seed, and machinery to work it. This recommendation recognized that no mechanisms existed to give agriculturalists access to capital to improve cultivation and reduce costs.²⁵ Nor did the prices paid for cane adequately cover the cost of production thereby discouraging producers from further investments.²⁶

Most of the improvements recommended by Barros were never implemented by the company at Engenho Central São João. Sugar prices had been falling since the mid-1880s and would continue to fall or remain low until the 1920s. Brazil's declining share of the world sugar market, minimal

²⁵ As Galliza (1979) reports, rural credit and mortgage institutions were absent while usurers charged up to 80 percent annual interest rates.

²⁶ Barros (1889) reports that "by the medium price of 1887, which was 86 réis for a kilogram of sugar, and the 1888 price of 85 réis here in the Recife market, an agriculturalist would receive for each tonne of cane 3\$420, an amount insufficient to cover the costs of production. It is well known that the cultivation process in current use results in a cost on the average of 4\$000 to produce a tonne of cane -- how can you sell what costs 4 for 3.5?"

increases in internal consumption, and overproduction caused in part by the advent of central mills and *usinas* contributed to low or negligible profits in the sugar industry. The 1896 company minutes reported that no earnings had yet been paid out and that the company still could not operate independently of foreign capital.

Faced with the need to increase revenues, the directors offered shareholders two solutions: "we can adapt certain improvements (already studied) in our existing factories which would allow an increase in the extraction of sugar and a decrease in costs of production, or, alternatively, we could explore an industry connected to and complementary to ours; that of refining sugar, for which we have a good base in the sugar that we produce."²⁷ Brazilian export sugar had traditionally been further refined within the importing countries while sugar for internal consumption had been a lower quality white sugar. Changing local tastes and the increasing importance of the internal market made sugar refineries attractive for sugar producers. In recommending investment in a refinery over their existing factories, the directors argued that,

given the tendency of the states to increase their earnings, we should only put new capital into the central mills after we have obtained certain

²⁷ Arquivo Nacional, Junta Comercial, Companhia Industria e Construção, 1896.

favours from the State governments of Paraíba and Sergipe. In addition to this, we should wait until the Parliament takes some resolution to the demand for help from the sugar industry which would then allow us to proceed on some of the recommendations for improvements in the central mills.²⁸

With approval from the shareholders to negotiate further loans in Europe for the construction of a sugar refinery in Rio de Janeiro, the owners effectively turned their backs on their northern factories. Although the company reports in 1904 that it was forced to make some improvements at both its factories in 1902 or 1903 -- they do not specify what these improvements were -- they do not appear to have involved a major expense on the part of the company. It is at this point, as well, that the name of the company is changed to Companhia Assucareira given that "our principal factory will be the refinery in Rio de Janeiro."²⁹ The refinery was to begin operation by the end of March 1904. Whether it did actually go into operation is unclear. I found no further records for the 'Companhia Assucareira' at the National Archives. It is possible that the records were lost or that a new name was given to a company

²⁸ Arquivo Nacional, Junta Comercial, Companhia Industria e Construção, 1896.

²⁹ Arquivo Nacional, Junta Comercial, Companhia Industria e Construção, 1904.

representing the refinery. It is my guess, however, that the refinery did not prove to be highly successful.

In any case, the 'Companhia Assucareira' continued to maintain Engenho Central São João until 1912 or 1913. The few references available to the factory in the preceding years were on the whole favorable. A 1908 entry in the state almanac reported that "in the period June 1906 to March 1907, the factory produced 2,160,000 kilos of sugar which is reputed to be of the finest quality. This industry is growing greatly and will guarantee the future prosperity to the Company."³⁰ The 1913 almanac continued this positive tone, reporting that the Engenho Central São João was a "notable establishment because of its productive capacity and the efficiency of its modern equipment."³¹

Although the Federal government had retreated from the Central Mills Program, local state governments began to take a more active role in encouraging the development of agro-industry. In Paraíba, for example, the Legislature passed a law in 1907 which authorized exemptions from all state taxes for a period of 15 years to any cloth or sugar factory which establishes itself in the state.³² Despite continuing

³⁰ Estado da Paraíba, Almanack 1908, Pp. 116-17.

³¹ Estado da Paraíba, Almanack 1913 p. 16

³² Estado da Paraíba (1916) Actos dos Poderes Legislativo e Executivo.

reports that the local sugar industry was experiencing a decline, a second factory, Usina Cumbe, was founded in the Paraíba Valley in 1910 by a local industrialist/merchant suggesting that the industry continued to hold some attraction.³³

D. Conclusion

The end of the nineteenth century had seen the application of large amounts of capital and new technology to Brazil's sugar industry in an attempt to both salvage and enrich the industry. Despite these attempts, the first decades of the twentieth century were, in general, a difficult time for the sugar industry in Paraíba and several of the new factories changed ownership several times. This situation, as well as the increasing debt of the 'Companhia Assucareira' and the shift in focus to the Rio refinery probably led to the company's bankruptcy in 1913. Engenho Central São João was repossessed by its European creditors, Westerdorp and Company -- including Richard Von Rees, Herman Karlo Westerdorp and others. Local newspaper accounts predicted the closing of the factory and the consequent serious economic challenge to the financial health of the state resulting from the loss of export taxes and jobs. Local cane planters and suppliers, in particular, were faced

³³ A third factory was built at the end of the decade and five more factories would be built in the 1920s.

with the possibility that their cane would go unharvested. After repeated calls for a solution, the "Governor of the State joined forces with the Ministry of Agriculture to find a solution to the case" (Galliza 1980:190). Following negotiations and state encouragement, the central mill was leased to a group of local agriculturalists headed by João Ursulo Ribeiro Coutinho. The following year, in 1914, the government provided a reduction of 50 percent on the transfer of property tax³⁴ and the central mill and its adjoining lands became the property of J. Ursulo & Companhia -- with majority shares held by João Ursulo Ribeiro Coutinho and his wife, Helena Pessoa de Melo Ribeiro Coutinho; minority shares held by his brother, Flávio, and sister, Otaviana Coutinho Ribeiro, and capital from João Maximiano de Figueiredo, an outside investor without voting rights. Usina São João remains in the hands of the family today.

The fates of Manoel de Mendonça Guimarães and the other original investors in Engenho Central São João are unknown. The story of their role in the founding of the factory as well as the stories of other factories does however challenge the common assumption that it was primarily foreigners who instigated the transformation of the sugar industry in Brazil. On the other hand, in the face of both a scarcity and an unwillingness on the part of national

³⁴ Estado da Paraíba, Actos (1915), Law 397 of October 5, 1914.

capital and the limitations of national industry, this transformation was dependent on foreign capital, foreign technology and foreign machinery, including foreign railroads. As such, despite the attempts to industrialize Brazil and particularly, the countryside, the advent of the first central mills and *usinas*, in fact, reinforced the expanding international division of labor and entrenched the agricultural orientation and the monopoly of sugar in the Northeast -- thereby reversing a process of diversification that had been prompted by the declining fortunes of the sugar industry.

On the other hand, the sugar factories were not without effect on the political economy of the state. In fomenting the penetration of industrial capitalism into the countryside, important structural changes in the local society would follow. The tendency in the literature cited above to overemphasize the distinction between *engenhos centrais* and *usinas* has contributed, in part, to the view that the modernization attempt was a failure. If the separation of the agricultural and industrial sectors was the defining feature of and paramount to the modernization process, then it is argued that modernization and (by implication) change were not implemented.³⁵ The *usina* and its owner, the *usineiro*, are simply larger versions of the

³⁵ The subtitle of Eisenberg's (1977a) book, Modernization Without Change, implies such a perspective.

engenho and the *senhor do engenho*. On the other hand, in taking the government sponsored factories and privately funded *usinas* as merely variants of a similar process of industrialization, capitalization, and technological change, the impact of this process, regionally and nationally, becomes more evident. Paraíba, at the beginning of the twentieth-century, was witnessing new relations of production and a new class structure. This provided the basis for the formation of the elite that I explore in future chapters.

CHAPTER THREE

PARAÍBA'S SUGAR INDUSTRY IN THE TWENTIETH CENTURY

....Usina, a história do Santa Rosa arrancado de suas bases, espatifado, com máquinas de fábrica, com ferramentas enormes, com moendas gigantes devorando a cana madura que as terras fizeram acamar pelas várzeas. Carlos de Melo, Ricardo e o Santa Rosa se acabam, têm o mesmo destino, estão tão intimamente ligados que a vida de um tem muito da vida do outro. Uma grande melancolia os envolve de sombras. Carlinhos foge, Ricardo morre pelos seus e o Santa Rosa perde até o nome, se escraviza.

José Lins do Rêgo, *Usina*, p. 2

A. Introduction

Throughout the waning years of the nineteenth century, sugar cane cultivation had continued to decline. Sugar and alcohol production were reduced and prices had fallen drastically. Despite repeated calls for technological improvements, little had been accomplished. Steam power had replaced animal or water power in a few mills, but with little impact on productive capacity or the quality of the product. Battered by repeated infestations and droughts, the abolition of slavery, falling prices, and competition from both within and without the country, sugar producers and the government were scrambling to withhold the tide of foreclosures. This chapter¹ discusses the impact of the

¹ Data for this chapter were culled from a multitude of sources. Information on the economic history of the state is from Galliza (1979), Lewin (1987), and Mariz (1978) as well

expanding international and national division of labor on Paraíba's sugar producers and describes the strategies that they have followed this century.

The end of the nineteenth century had witnessed the increasing integration of new industrial technologies by the British-linked sugar producers in countries such as Cuba, Puerto Rico, Santo Domingo, and Jamaica. The resulting increased production and lower productive costs as well as Europe's sugar beet production modified the international division of labor and seriously challenged the competitiveness of Brazilian sugar on the world market while drastically lowering world sugar prices. In response, Brazilian sugar producers, particularly those in Rio de Janeiro and São Paulo, became increasingly dependent on the internal market and exports fell from a high of 133,000 tons

as from newspaper accounts. For the early history of sugar production in Paraíba, see Vidal (1945) and Mariz (1978) and in the Northeast, see Andrade (1971, 1980), Melo (1975). General trends and issues of concern in the Northeast sugar industry were culled from a survey of the IAA publication, Brasil Açucareiro, from the early 1940s until the 1980s, from newspaper accounts, and personal interviews, while further information on these issues and on the Institute of Sugar and Alcohol was available in Nunberg (1979, 1986). Histories of Paraíba's *usinas* and the families that built them were re-constructed from a variety of sources, including Andrade (1959), Andrade (1957), Dé Carli (1985), company records housed at the Junta Comercial in João Pessoa, and personal interviews. Production figures for Paraíba's *usinas* were provided by the Institute of Sugar and Alcohol. The discussion of the National Alcohol Program is based on Barzelay (1986), Erickson (1981), and miscellaneous data collected during the 1983/84 research project while data on Paraíba's distilleries were gathered at the Junta Comercial in João Pessoa.

in the period from 1891 to 1900 to a low of 40,000 tons for the 1930s. Given the much higher population densities, greater reliance on local consumption was much more feasible for the southern producers than for the northeasterners. Despite Brazil's overall poor performance in the world market, northeastern producers were forced to continue to rely on sugar exports to survive. Without a competitive advantage, however, this became increasingly difficult.

Throughout the last decades of the nineteenth century and the first decades of the twentieth century, numerous meetings among sugar producers, agricultural specialists and government officials led to calls for improved cane varieties, agricultural and industrial innovation, expanded financial support, and national and regional protectionist policies. Few concrete results were initially forthcoming. The movement towards central mills and *usinas* discussed in Chapter Two was the first concentrated, albeit mostly unsuccessful, attempt to revive the industry. Although *usinas* eventually predominated in nearly all of the sugar producing regions of the country, their financial status has usually been tenuous and their presence controversial.

B. From *Engenho* to *Usina*

Usina, quoted at the beginning of this chapter, brings to a conclusion the series of novels which comprised José Lins do Rêgo's 'sugar cane cycle.' Completed in 1936, as his

family's ancestral lands in Paraíba succumbed to the expanding *usinas*, the novel chronicles the closing of one chapter in the history of the state and the region and the opening of another. For northeasterners as diverse as Freyre (1946), Rêgo (1973), and Vidal (1945), no event so tragically and longingly symbolizes the region's loss of power, wealth, and influence as the demise of the *engenhos* and their replacement by the *usinas*. As Vidal (1945:57) laments,

ruin had taken control of a zone where sugar cane had been cultivated for centuries; where sugar created a civilization; where sugar constituted a noble tradition which was influential in the structural composition of the Brazilian character. In this there is no exaggeration. Since the earliest times, the Northeast always prided itself on having founded an industry basic to its progress. It was sugar which created a regional aristocracy. It was sugar that had facilitated the splendor of the *donatário*. Finally, it was sugar which determined the fundamentals of a 'tradition.'

For twentieth-century northeastern intellectuals -- the offspring of this inherited tradition -- the region's sugar mills and their traditions were living memories of their privileged childhood, the dusty and sun-baked visions of

their careless and carefree summer vacations (the 'Summers of My Content' in the stories of José Lins do Rêgo). For most, during their adulthoods, the demise of the *engenho* -- its cold smokestacks and its ravaged buildings -- was a powerful and too visible mockery of their family's fall from grace and grandeur, and of their own diminished status in the larger scheme of things within the social, political, and economic life of the region as well as the nation. Industrialization, and especially rural industrialization or capitalization of the 'agricultural' sector, came to signify for them both the necessary salvation of their birthplace and the eradication of their 'birthright' -- an affirmation of, and an attempt to return to, their region's past glories. In short, it spelled a negation of the recent changes which had marginalized their position in the local social hierarchy.

Despite these reservations and critiques, well into the twentieth century and even today, Paraíba is and was primarily agricultural -- its main products were cotton, sugar, tobacco, coffee, cattle, and various subsistence products. Sugar production was little developed and had been progressively losing ground to cotton. With the exception of Engenho Central or Usina São João, all sugar in the state was produced in small mills: *engenhos* or *bangüês*. Some of these had yet to make the transition to steam power and were still powered by animals or water. A 1910 county by county

report gives details on 141 functioning mills in nine of the major sugar producing *municípios*. Of these, 65 were powered by steam, 73 by animals, and 3 by water. Nearly all produced *rapadura*, a crude raw block sugar, while a few produced unrefined brown sugar (Tavares 1909). Refined sugar, of poor quality, was produced only at a few refineries in the city and at Usina São João.

On the other hand, many old mills no longer functioned. Newspaper and government reports show that a significant portion of these were now in the hands of a new generation, the children of deceased *senhores de engenho*. Some of these individuals reported to me that they were not attracted to an increasingly difficult and less advantageous rural existence and saw better opportunities elsewhere, particularly in the cities, or chose not to resolve the conflicts inherent in partible inheritance in the face of reduced prospects. Others saw a greater advantage in the conversion of the property to other uses, particularly as cotton and coffee came to dominate the export market. A fair number of those mills described in the report above were processing both cane and cotton while others raised cattle in addition to growing cane.

Andrade (1971) has argued that at the beginning of the century debts to factory owners by mill owners who chose to sell their cane to the *usinas* rather than process it themselves continued to mount and eventually led to the loss

of property and the demise of the mill owning class in the Northeast. According to Andrade (1971), these individuals were forced into civil or public service jobs in the cities or became rural administrators and hence employees of the factories. Since Paraíba only had one sugar factory at the time -- and it operated sporadically -- it seems unlikely that this was a major factor leading to the closure of mills at the beginning of the century. Conflicts reported in the press, however, leave little doubt that indebtedness and inability to prevent incorporation, exacerbated by the depression, were important factors in the demise of mills in the 1930s and 1940s in Paraíba. In any case, the fact that mill owners turned to the factories for loans or advances only reinforces the view that sugar mill owners were approaching financial ruin. The financial problems of the majority of Paraíba's mill owners are further suggested by the fact that no mill owner in the state succeeded, without other commercial or industrial activities, in converting a sugar mill into a factory.

The story of the sugar mill owner during the first decades of the twentieth century appears to be one of a significant decline in both profits and prestige in the face of increasing international and national competition, outdated production techniques, adverse climatic conditions, and new political orientations, rules and strategies (such as the demise of the rural paramilitary reward system and

the advent of 'democratic' politics), which made sugar cane cultivation a second-class activities and sugar mill owners second-class persona. Given Paraíba's tenuous identification with sugar cane, there was little to discourage property owners from choosing cotton, coffee, or tobacco over unreliable and unprofitable sugar cane or setting their sights on the expanding and increasingly profitable civil service. It is not surprising that, throughout the first decades of this century, sugar production was no longer presented as the financial backbone of the state. Newspapers, agricultural associations, and government agencies devoted much more attention to cotton production and other fledgling industries.

C. The Troubled Return of Sugar

Hope for the Northeast sugar industry came first as a result of World War I. The destruction of European agriculture during the war created a brief boom for sugar producers elsewhere. International shortages and high prices stimulated new attempts at modernization and expansion. Brazilian producers were initially slow to respond -- higher world sugar prices were tempered, particularly within the Northeast, by the collapse of credit, falling exchange rates which made imported machinery unprocurable, and by natural disasters.

Despite these obstacles, the increase in the price of a kilogram of sugar from a low of \$086 in 1874 to a high of 1\$064 in 1924 (Denslow 1987:17), provided *Paraibanos* with the incentive to re-open some of the boarded-up mills and to implant new sugar factories.

In Paraíba, no less than seven new sugar factories were built during the 1910s and 1920s. This vastly increased the state's productive capacity which had previously been limited to one factory -- the financially-troubled Usina São João. Usina São João, itself, had undergone modification and expansion several times since it was built in 1888 (see Chapter Two). The previous owners had last updated and expanded São João at the beginning of the century. In 1914, its new owner was again forced to invest in improving the factory.

Two new factories were built during the teens: Cumbe in the *município* of Santa Rita and Bonfim in Sapé (see Figure 4). Neither were initially successful. Cumbe, founded in 1910 by an urban businessman, had three different owners by the early 1920s. Bonfim, built by a renowned politician and mill owner in 1917, appears not to have begun functioning until 1920. Soon after, in 1925, it was bought by the owner of Usina São João who closed it down for several years for technical improvements and expansion.

Of the five factories built during the 1920s, only two survived, albeit with changes of ownership, while the other

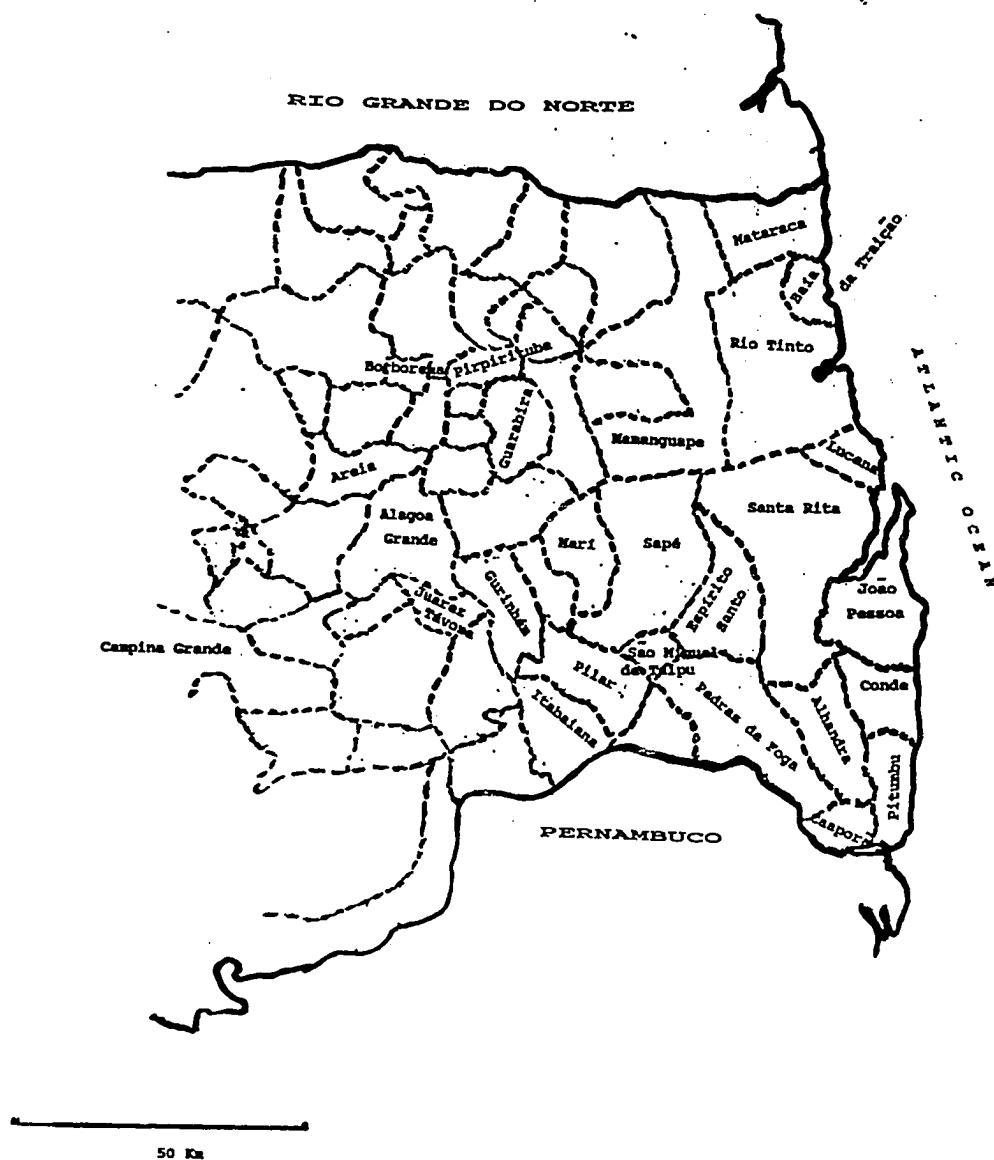


Figure 4. Selected *Municípios* in the Zona da Mata and Agreste

three functioned only for a few harvests. Usina Espírito Santo, built in the *município* of Cruz do Espírito in 1928, succumbed to both financial and natural disaster. With financing primarily from his wife's inheritance and the support of his Ribeiro Coutinho in-laws, Adalberto Cruz Ribeiro was unable to salvage his river-bank factory after two years of heavy flood damage. Usina Espírito Santo closed in 1930, was eventually dismantled, and its lands incorporated into the expanding Usinas São João and Santa Helena owned by João Ursulo's sons.

The most publicized failure involved the case of Usina São Gonçalo, located in the *município* of Santa Rita. While a history of the founding of this factory was not available, a 1932 legal battle involving the factory was amply documented. According to newspaper accounts of the period and a published legal treatise on the case,² São Gonçalo was probably founded somewhat before 1928 by Antônio da Silva Mello on the site of the old 'Engenho Uno.' Although Tavares (1909) lists Antônio as the owner of the mill, the legal case makes clear that this property had belonged to his first wife, Maria Augusta Galvão. With her death, the property was inherited in part by her children. Without

² See Antônio Botto de Menezes (1933) O Caso da Usina São Gonçalo: Acção de Annullação do Contracto Hypothecario (Contestação, treplica e Razões finaes, pelo bacharel Antônio Botto de Menezes, advogado do cel. Antônio Mendes Ribeiro, Incidentes Pertinentes à Demanda). Recife, PE: Typ. Diario da Manhã.

going into all the details of the case -- the machinations were immense -- suffice it to say that in 1928, Antônio requested permission from a local judge to mortgage the property in the name of his minor children, arguing that, without the resources to keep the factory going, it was threatened with imminent closure. With permission granted, Antônio used the factory as collateral to secure a loan of 600 *contos de réis* in Recife from Coronel Mendes Ribeiro. The money was supposedly used to expand the factory, buy new machinery, and increase the sugar cane plantings. Four years later, and after having paid no interest payments on the loan, a public scandal erupted when the loan came due. At this point, a son and son-in-law of Antônio -- as representatives of Antônio's still minor children -- brought suit, arguing that the loan agreement be annulled on the basis that Antônio should never have been given permission to mortgage the factory. Furthermore, due to unsound investments and mismanagement, Antônio, they argued, had acted contrary to his responsibilities as executor of his children's estate.

The case and the media's coverage of it dragged on for over a year and prompted unsolicited commentary from a variety of the state's elite. Unfortunately, for both Antônio and his children, the suit was settled in favor of Antônio Mendes Ribeiro. Required to repay the loan and the accumulated interest, Antônio and his children became

incorporated as A. Mello & Filhos Ltda in 1934, paving the way for the sale of the property. Usina São Gonçalo continued to produce sugar, alcohol and *aguardente* until the end of the 1936/37 harvest before closing permanently. Soon after, the factory was dismantled and the property incorporated into the patrimony of the sons of João Ursulo Ribeiro Coutinho.

Another failed factory of the 1920s for which little information was available was the short-lived Usina Santa Alexandrina on the Gramame River, south of the capital. Apparently the project for the factory was begun around 1926 by a widow and her partner on a dairy farm they rented from a third person. Although they never registered a change in activities with the state, by the 1929/30 harvest, Usina Santa Alexandrina was producing small quantities of sugar. In the thirties, the widow's partner was replaced by her son and the factory processed one more cane harvest before going out of business. In 1940, mother and son dissolved the company and the equipment for the factory was sold to a group of Paraibano brothers who transferred the factory to the site of the current Usina Monte Alegre in Mamanguape.

The two semi-successes of the 1920s were Usinas Tanques and Pedrosa. The latter was built in 1922 on the site of Engenho Velho in the *município* of Santa Rita. Within three years, however, the property was up for sale. Initially spoken for by the owner of Usina São João, he then passed on

his purchase option and financed the purchase of the factory by his brother in 1925. Taking the new name of Usina Sant'Anna or Santana, the property has remained with this family until today.

Usina Tanques, located further into the interior in the *município* of Alagoa Grande, experienced several changes in ownership as well. It was founded in 1927 by Zenayde Holmes & Cia Ltda, a consortium of brothers and partners. By 1941, only one of the original shareholders remained. In 1950, this shareholder incorporated the property with his wife and children prior to its sale to a wealthy *Paraibano* family -- the Velloso Borges -- with interests in ranching, industry and commerce throughout the country. One branch of this family continues to run the factory today.

Only three more sugar cane factories were ever built in the state -- Usina Santa Maria in 1931 in Areia, Usina Monte Alegre in 1940 in Mamanguape (the transplanted Usina Alexandrina) and Usina São Francisco in 1946 in Pirpirituba. The founder of Santa Maria died soon after the factory went into production and although his widow and heirs owned the property until the 1950s, the factory itself was run by a company with its headquarters in Rio de Janeiro. The current owner, Solon Lyra Lins, originally a mill owner, took over the property in 1952.

The last sugar factory built this century, Usina São Francisco, first produced sugar for the 1947/48 harvest on

lands bought by three Ribeiro Coutinho brothers -- sons of Ursulo, one of the least successful brothers of the first generation (see Chapter Five). The machinery and equipment for the complex came from a factory in Pernambuco which had closed in 1946. By the mid-1950s, São Francisco was owned by one brother and his family and was experiencing extreme financial difficulties. A cash shortage prevented the factory from operating during the 1956/57 harvest, at a great financial loss to its cane suppliers. The factory succeeded in reopening the following year but, deep in debt, it was closed in 1959. A successful, factory-owning uncle eventually bought the property and incorporated it into his family patrimony.

The end of the nineteenth century and the first decades of the twentieth century, therefore, represent a transformation -- more complete in some parts of the country, less complete in others -- in the organization and relations of sugar production and consequently, in the social structure of rural Brazil. Many scholars have argued that in its most extreme forms, this transformation was characterized by the replacement of slave labor by wage labor, that is, by the displacement of 'paternalistic,' feudal-like relations by capitalistic relations of production; by the destruction of the old rural aristocracy of the mill owning class and their replacement by the urban-based capitalistic factory owners; and by the predominance

of capitalistic objectives not just in the commerce of sugar but in its production as well.

The implications of this 'capitalization of sugar production' were extensive. For Melo (1975), it marked the end of patriarchal society, of the influence of the Catholic Church, relations of *compadrazgo*, seigniorial protection and assistance, the subordination of small towns to the rural elite, and the rural character of the region, while simultaneously imposing a more rigid and oppressive system of stratification. For states like Paraíba, however, this transformation has been effected unevenly, intermittently, and perhaps even incompletely.

Nevertheless, as we have seen, the first thirty years of the twentieth century witnessed a radical change in the structure of the local sugar industry. Instead of the one factory at the beginning of the century, the state appears to have reached its maximum capacity with nine factories scattered around the *zona da mata* producing refined sugar. With the exception of sugar mills which produced crude sugar for the populations of the interior, most of the state's sugar was now produced in these capital intensive agro-industrial complexes. The fact that many of them failed or were sold several times and that only seven sugar factories operate in the state today, points to the financial difficulties that these factories encountered (see Figure 5). For the state's sugar producers attempting to compete in

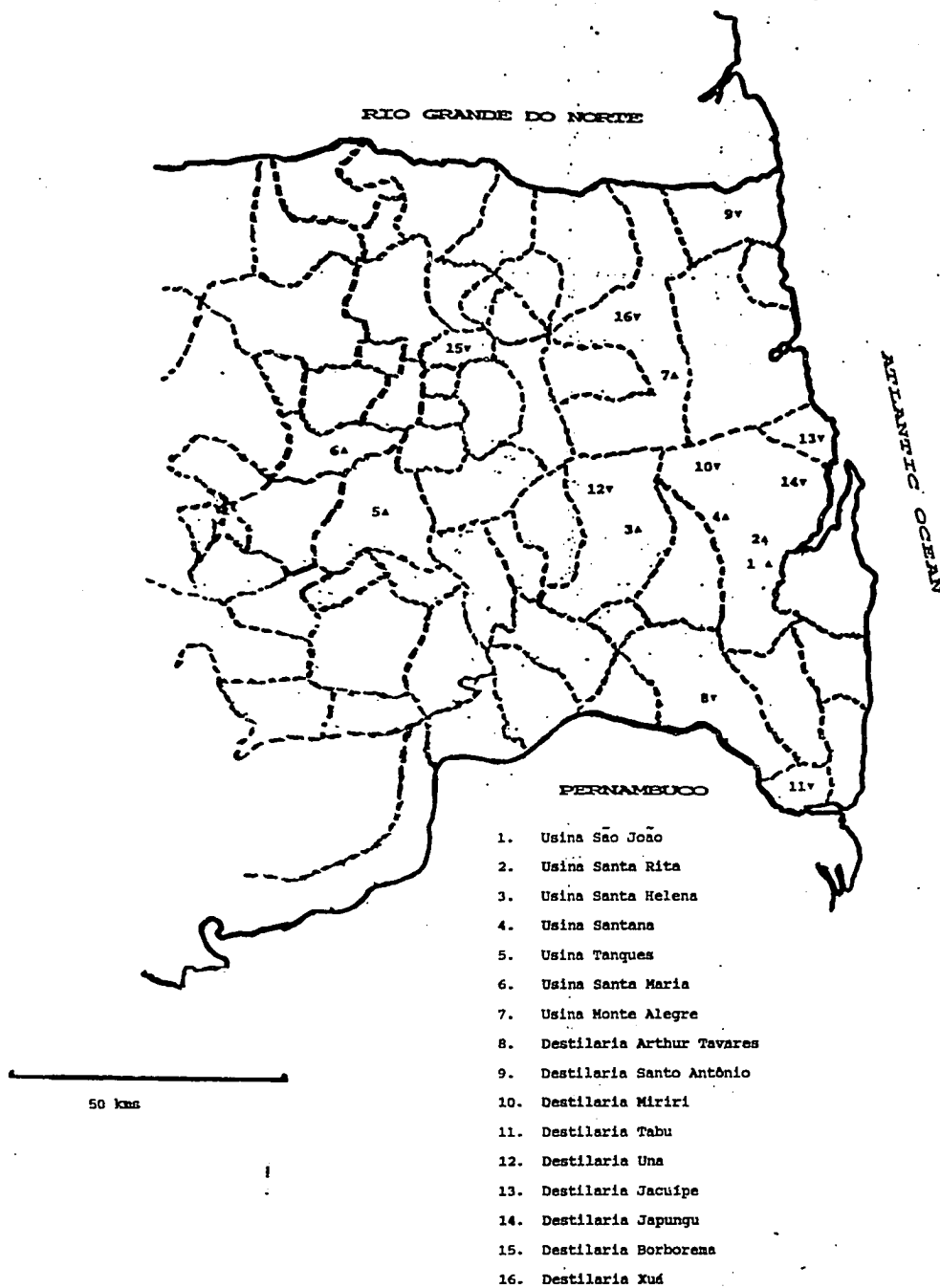


Figure 5. Paraíba's Usinas and Destilarias

either the national or international sugar markets, technological improvements and increasing capital investments became imperative. This required access to large cash reserves and, therefore, limited the installation of factories to a small segment of northeastern industrialists.

As a result of the increasing need for capital, the 1920s and 1930s constituted a period of extreme difficulty for the sugar factories of the Northeast. The hardest hit states were those that had dominated sugar production in the last century: Pernambuco, Bahia, and Rio de Janeiro. The economic crisis of the 1930s, in particular, led to the demise of many old and new factory owners as a result of the financial burdens they had assumed in the preceding decade. With coffee production in decline, São Paulo landowners increasingly switched to sugar production. By the 1930s, the state had become the country's most successful sugar producer, satisfying both national and international demands for sugar. The old sugar producing regions of the country had been up-staged and marginalized. Encouraged by the government's earlier attempts to rescue the São Paulo coffee industry, producers in these regions increasingly called for government intervention in the sugar economy.

Prior to this, direct government intervention in the economy had been more or less discouraged. The failure of the central mills program and the founding of *usinas* were symptomatic of the *laissez-faire*, free-market philosophy of

the early industrialization period. Despite increasing hardships, there had been few calls for interventionist policies. Late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century discussions of the problems of agriculture and of sugar cane, in particular, had laid the blame primarily on the failure of practitioners to rationalize and modernize production and more strongly, on the timidity and short sightedness of national financiers whose capital and investments were crucial for the industry's survival and revival.

The oldest agricultural interest group in the country, for example, was the 'Agricultural Aid Society of Pernambuco' which was organized in 1872 by a group of concerned mill owners (Cavalcanti 1972:44). While formed to study and defend the interests of agriculture in general, its initial activities were directed to organizing a 'practical' agricultural credit association which would offer an alternative to "the inadequate 'genuine' agricultural credit associations which were 'merely' capitalistic, whose primary interests were the continuation of elevated interest rates and who were indifferent to the burdens of those receiving loans" (quoted in Cavalcanti 1972:44). More importantly, agricultural establishments were hampered in the securing of loans at this time by a myriad of regulations concerning liens on agricultural properties and the difficulties of assessing mortgage values on rural

lands and their slave populations. Although the Aid Society failed to establish a rural credit institution, the issue came to dominate the frequent meetings, congresses and conferences of agriculturalists held during the first decades of this century.

In addition to concerns over the scarcity of capital and access to financing, organizations and associations were formed to promote technological advancements in agriculture, to address the increasing conflicts between suppliers and producers, and to analyze possible ways to regulate and coordinate production regionally. More and more, government agencies and officials were called upon to provide suggestions and solutions. Some of the earliest government activities had involved supplying new seed varieties and setting up experimental stations for seed and machinery demonstrations. Several agricultural schools were begun. The principles of cooperativism were advocated by a variety of groups including the National Agricultural Society (1897), the Union of Agricultural Syndicates of Pernambuco (1906), the Sugar Coalition (1909), the Federation of Cooperatives of Agricultural Credit of Pernambuco (1915), the Agricultural Congress of Northeastern Brazil (1923), the Sugar Producers Cooperative of Pernambuco (1928), and the Congress of Cooperative Credit (1928). As Cavalcanti (1972:46) reports for Pernambuco,

there had always been problems and cyclical crises in the selling of the state's excess sugar production. The commerce of sugar had typically been handled by commissioners, representing individual mills and factories, who negotiated sales to warehouses and exporters for the national market.... Limited by their lack of infrastructure to handle large operations, good harvests always caused disorganization and frantic attempts to sell the product on the international market where prices were always lower than nationally. The existing organizations did not adequately attend to the interests of the sugar producers. The measures to improve the market came to be known as the 'Sacrifice Quotas.' Organization of commerce was seen as the only means to 'equalize' participation in the sacrifice.

Few, if any, of these marketing and credit cooperatives were successful. Nor had there been much success in improving agricultural productivity, in attracting skilled labor to the region, or in resolving conflicts between suppliers and producers. The majority of these undertakings had been, in fact, immediate reactions provoked by specific problems and disasters. Consequently, they were abandoned and fell into disarray with the passage of the specific crisis.

For northeasterners, another, more fervent issue came to dominate discussions during this period. This was the simultaneous effective and affective economic marginalization of the region. The reality of the region's diminished national significance first struck a painful blow with northeastern sugar producers in 1877. In response to the deepening agricultural crisis, particularly among sugar producers, in October 1878, the Emperor and his Agricultural Minister invited representatives from the southern states of São Paulo, Minas Gerais, Espírito Santo, and Rio de Janeiro to an agricultural congress. No northeastern representative was invited to attend despite the fact that the Agricultural Minister was himself a northeasterner. "In anger, northeastern sugar producers organized their own Agricultural Congress in Recife, for October 1878 as well, and turned down the government's belated offer to participate in and publish the congress proceedings" (Cavalcanti 1972:52). This event marked the beginning of a proliferation of regional interest associations, geared specifically toward regional problems and concerns, and to the identification of a 'Northeast problem.'

As noted above, with increased competition from sugar producers in the central-south regions of the country and the Northeast's continued economic reliance on sugar, the 'Northeast problem' could only worsen. As Nunberg (1979:53) recounts

northeastern sugar producers ... were growing increasingly fearful of the expanding productive power of the São Paulo producers. By the 1930's, Center-South producers were benefitting from structural economic advantages such as the recent diversion of capital from coffee to sugar planting after the 1929 market collapse, lower transportation costs and the proximity of a large consumer market, the predominance of large modern milling facilities, and a more favorable topography and climate. Thus, they were able to produce sugar more efficiently and cheaply, and soon they became a serious threat to northeastern dominance in the industry. It was becoming clear that without some form of government intervention to protect the non-competitive producers, São Paulo would soon overtake the Northeast in sugar production and threaten the economic survival of the industry and indeed of the region itself.

As a result, both northeastern producers and the federal government came to see direct state intervention in the sugar economy as both necessary and desirable.

D. Interventionism: The Institute of Sugar and Alcohol
Barbara Nunberg's (1979) State Intervention in the Sugar Sector in Brazil: A Study of the Institute of Sugar

and Alcohol cited above is a detailed history of the creation and performance of the Institute of Alcohol and Sugar -- the government agency established in 1933 to oversee the sugar industry. While a variety of factors prompted its conception, including as Nunberg (1979:1) points out, "the Vargas regime's program of increased State participation in the economy," the protection of the Northeast sugar industry from southern encroachment was a high priority. In fact, as Nunberg (1979) shows, there has been a continual debate both within academia and within the industry itself over whether the function of the agency, in relation to the Northeast, was primarily conservative and protectionist or socially reformist and transformative. Nunberg (1979:262-68) concludes that, overall, it performed both functions and was inspired by both goals. In her estimation,

the Institute of Sugar and Alcohol was from the very beginning an organization with ambivalent goals and functions. It was not merely a regulatory agency per se which later became coopted by its clientele; rather, it was deliberately established to serve as both an agent of State control and intervention of the sugar industry and, conversely, as an articulator of private sugar sector interests within the *getulista* political system as a whole.... It would

be more accurate to view the IAA as an institution with partially contradictory functions; that of State regulator and that of interest group representative. At various times in its history one or the other of these organizational goals was dominant, but they were both part of its essential character (Nunberg 1979:266).

It is not my aim here to reproduce Nunberg's (1979) or other discussions of the history and policy implications of the Institute of Sugar and Alcohol. For an in-depth understanding of the Northeast' economy and northeastern social structure and social relations, however, it is important to reiterate three tendencies within the IAA discussed by Nunberg (1979). First, there has been a progressive abandonment of policies directed at fomenting social change in the countryside (Nunberg 1979:263). Second, the initial interest and administrative domination of the IAA by northeasterners has given way to greater control over the institute by the Center-South sugar elites (Nunberg 1979:269). And third, there has been an increasing centralization of economic and political policy-making at the top of the state apparatus and a gradual loss of power of the IAA as an important bureaucratic agency (Nunberg 1979:273-74).

The earliest and most direct effort on the part of the federal government, through the Institute of Sugar and Alcohol, to tackle rural social issues was more defensive than offensive. In an attempt to prevent the extinction of small and medium-sized cane producers -- ranging from sharecroppers and peasant producers to ex-mill owners and urban-based farmers and land speculators -- by the ever-expanding sugar factories and with the implicit purpose of encouraging the development of a rural middle class, the Estatuto da Lavoura Canavieira was passed in 1941. The basic provisions of the Statute were:

that a specific quota for each grower be fixed and regulated by the Institute itself, thus removing discretionary control from the *usineiros*. It guaranteed the grower a percentage of the increase which might result from the expansion of sugar production, and it prescribed a given percentage of cane which must come from independent growers, in order to preserve their numerical status (Nunberg 1979:67).

As such, it was, in Nunberg's (1979:73) words, "a desperate attempt to maintain the status quo, to preserve the quickly disappearing breed of independent grower from extinction." While the plan may have succeeded to some extent in slowing the tide engulfing the cane supplier, it was, in fact, IAA policies -- particularly those concerned with stabilizing

cane prices -- which had initially prompted sugar cane factories to lessen their reliance on the cane of suppliers. This began a process, still common today, of expansion of agricultural production and increasing concentration of land by the usinas. Furthermore, despite this nod to the socially disadvantaged, no concerted attempt was ever made by the Institute to extend protection and benefits to the sugar industry's rural and industrial workers. Moreover, there were determined efforts on the part of the Institute to sabotage the agrarian reform efforts which would have benefitted this class (Nunberg 1979:264). As Nunberg (1979:268) concludes:

although the impact of these different groups [peasant laborers, small independent growers and producers] on Institute decision-making tended to vary somewhat over time, in general, it was clear that the main beneficiaries of IAA policies were the producers. Thus, when conflict occurred, the Institute's conservative rather than reformist inclinations proved dominant.

Individuals from Pernambuco, Alagoas and Rio de Janeiro, the country's three 'traditional' sugar producing regions dominated the presidency of the Institute of Sugar and Alcohol throughout its history. Along with them came a large proportion of the agency's personnel and a corresponding partiality toward northeastern producers. This

partiality included generous subsidies and intervention and support for financially-troubled northeastern factories in an attempt to at least postpone the eclipse of the region's industry by central-south producers. According to Nunberg (1979:270), however, the effects of these policies were to

lull the Northeast into a false sense of security from which it became increasingly difficult to awake in later years.... Inevitably, as most IAA officials had always predicted, the Center-South could be contained no longer, and it faced a northeastern competitor whose vitality has been sapped by, among other things, the IAA's spoon-feeding policy.

Thus as Nunberg goes on to note, by the late 1960s, the phase of Northeast domination of the IAA had come to an end and central-south elites had increased their access to IAA decision-making processes. The result was that

[b]y the 1960s, São Paulo dominance in the sugar industry was a fait accompli, and the IAA spent the subsequent years trying to accommodate this new power balance and to turn around its traditional policy of northeastern protectionism. The Institute sought to reverse its paternalistic approach to the development of the northeastern sugar industry by initiating a program of modernization which would improve the Northeast's

ability to compete against Center-South producers
(Nunberg 1979:271).

As we shall see below, however, most of these
'modernization' schemes, as well as others purportedly
geared to remedying the region's extreme social inequalities
and poverty, again served the function of protectionism and
further aided the rural entrenchment and consolidation of
northeastern *usineiros*.

While northeastern sugar producers were losing control
over the Institute of Sugar and Alcohol, the Institute's
control over sugar policy was itself being progressively
whittled away. This was part and parcel of a more general
process of centralization of economic and political policy-
making at the top of the state apparatus which impinged upon
the prerogatives of most of the country's interest
associations, bureaucratic agencies, and institutes. Under
the post-1964 military regime, in particular, centralization
policies, justified in the guise of national integration and
security, abounded. As a result, the IAA's role in setting
national sugar prices was reduced, their control over the
country's national alcohol program was usurped and they were
continually challenged in their control over sugar exports
(Nunberg 1979:273-74). Having been progressively weakened
and marginalized over the years, the Institute of Sugar and
Alcohol is now slated to be disbanded by a new set of

policy-makers intent on slashing government spending and promoting privatization and a free-market economy.

E. Paternalism, Protectionism, and Consolidation of the Northeast Sugar Industry

From the inception of the IAA until the present, regardless of whether one wishes to argue that sugar policy was ultimately geared to be conservative or socially reformist, the end result can only be seen as having intensified the concentration of land and capital in the sugar producing areas of the Northeast. A more detailed examination of the history of sugar production in Paraíba in this century confirms the essence of Nunberg's (1979:282) statement that "both private and public actors, are, after all, committed to an agro-industrial policy which emphasizes large-scale, capital-intensive, highly mechanized production with a growing concentration of land-holding."

1. The Case of Paraíba

Usina-based sugar production experienced its greatest impetus in Paraíba during the 1920s. As discussed above, five new factories were built in the state during the decade: Santana, São Gonçalo, Tanques, Espírito Santo and Santa Alexandrinha. This brought the total number of factories in the state to eight. Although production figures for sugar produced in Paraíba were not available for the

early part of the 1920s, the total amount of sugar produced in Brazil doubled from just over 5 million sacks of 60 kilograms in 1925/26 to over 10 million sacks in 1929/30. In Paraíba, sugar exports (a fraction of the state's total production) ranged from a high of 163,206 sacks in 1927/28 to a low of 50,000 sacks in 1924/25. For the second half of the 1920s, sugar produced in Paraíba's *usinas* increased from 90,000 sacks in 1925/26 to over 200,000 sacks by the end of the decade. Moreover, Paraíba's share of national sugar production increased from 1.7 percent in 1925/26 to 2.9 percent in 1928/29 only to fall to a low of 1 percent a decade later.

Sugar production in Brazil in general was stimulated by a steady increase in the national price paid for sugar. From an average price of \$086 per kilogram in 1874, sugar reached an all time high of 1\$064 in 1924. However, in the Northeast in particular, the stimulus to sugar was a response in part to several devastating droughts which had battered the region's agricultural economy and more specifically the economy of the northeastern interior. A 1922 report in the almanac of the state of Paraíba details the efforts of the Brazilian president, Epitácio Pessoa, a *Paraibano* native, to aid the "martyred region of the Northeast" (Estado da Paraíba 1922:157). These emergency efforts were directed primarily at the cotton and cattle producers of the interior of the state -- Epitácio's homebase -- and involved the

construction of transportation networks and irrigation works to ameliorate the effects of droughts as well as various measures to protect and cushion cattle producers from outside competition. The federal emergency program did, however, include an accord with the Banco do Brasil to provide loans to cotton, coco, rubber, matte and sugar producers. This aid was directed primarily at large landowners since applications for loans required proof of land title and relevant tax payments.

This endeavor to provide even limited support to the sugar industry only underscored another major concern of sugar producers. This was the inadequacy of existing sources of credit for agricultural and industrial investment. The issue of credit was a major concern at the First Agricultural Congress of Northeastern Brazil held in Recife in 1923 and prompted another meeting in Recife five years later of the First Congress of Cooperative Credit.

While credit in the region remained limited or non-existent, the earlier attraction for sugar production was soon tempered by falling cane prices in the last half of the 1920s. This decline was instigated in part by the overproduction which followed on the heels of the rapid expansion in productive capacity. In Paraíba, these factors came together in the shift in ownership of three factories in the 1920s -- Santa Rita in 1922 and Santana and Santa Helena in 1925 -- as well as the demise of the two factories

built at the end of the decade -- Espírito Santo built in 1928 and closed in 1930 and Santa Alexandrinha built in 1929 and closed in 1931.

By the early 1930s, declining prices, overproduction, the absence of credit and the larger world economic crisis had led the Brazilian sugar industry into the throes of a serious decline. In Paraíba, total sugar production fell throughout the early years of the decade. Only in 1935 did the state's total output reach above the average level of the last 5 years of the 1920s -- reaching almost one half a million sacks in comparison to the 1926-30 average of 370,000 sacks. A similar trend is present for *usina*-based sugar. Here production fell erratically throughout the decade from a 1928/29 high of 228,000 sacks only to rise to a new high of 326,412 sacks at the decade's end. Moreover, during this period, Paraíba's share of Brazilian sugar production fell from around 2.3 percent in the last five years of the 1920s to an average of 1.6 percent.

Declining profits in the sugar industry were reflected as well in a drastic decline in the salaries of rural workers during the 1930s. By 1934, the wages for seven categories of rural workers had fallen to an average of 84 percent of their 1924 levels. Of the seven occupations, only a carpenter experienced an increase from his 1924 level (a 10 percent increase) while a foreman, on the other hand, was earning only 38 percent of his 1924 wage.

The impact of the crisis was also borne to a large extent by the owners of *bangüês* or *engenhos*. The share of the country's sugar produced in *usinas* increased from one-half in 1929/30 to almost three-quarters in 1939/40. Although equivalent figures were not available for Paraíba, the usurpation of sugar production by the *usinas* in the state appears to have taken place at a much slower pace. In the interior of the state in particular, the small *bangüês* producing *rapadura* continued as the major suppliers of sugar to the local populace until fairly recently. In the coastal regions of the state, however, few *engenhos* or *bangüês* withstood the onslaught of the *usinas*. In the case of Usina São João, for example, Andrade (1959:128) reports that nine of their sixteen agricultural properties or over 50 percent of their total 1950s area of 23,567 hectares were acquired between 1933 and 1938. Furthermore, sugar production at this *usina* was 32 percent higher during the five year period from 1934-39 than it had been in the preceding five years.

The industrial sector of Usina Santa Helena had undergone improvements which closed the factory for three years in the early 1930s. This presumably required an expansion in cane plantings as well. Although sugar production was slow to takeoff once the factory reopened, a respectable increase of 17 percent in average yearly production was posted for the five year period from 1934-39 over the preceding five year period.

The examples of Usinas São João and Santa Helena, however, are in contrast to the other *usinas* in the state. With the exception of Santa Maria in which production increased a slight 6 percent in the last half of the decade, sugar production at the other *usinas* actually declined anywhere from 9 to 50 percent. And in contrast to the succeeding decade and to other industrial establishments in the country, the productive capacity and output of Paraíba's factories remained low. In 1939/40, for example, although Usina São João had a fairly high output with almost 140,000 sacks of sugar per year, the other five *usinas* in the state were producing anywhere from just under 6,000 to 65,000 sacks of sugar. As noted above, both Espírito Santo and Santa Alexandrina had ceased operation in the early 1930s and São Gonçalo produced its last sugar in 1936/37. The only *usina* to be built in the 1930s, Santa Maria, had passed much of the decade with a median of slightly less than 5,000 sacks per year although by 1939/40 it had raised production to over 15,000 sacks.

The preceding figures could lead us to propose that the initial impact of the creation of the Institute of Sugar and Alcohol in 1933 on sugar production in Paraíba was negligible. The fact, however, that Paraíba sugar production and cane plantings did increase during a period of excessive stockpiling, falling prices, and limited industrial capacity would suggest that the IAA had, at the very least, a

stabilizing effect on regional production. More importantly, the IAA formalized a policy of encouraging the application of cane cultivation to alcohol production. This flexibility in the use of raw materials helped Paraíba's producers to weather the crisis in sugar demand and value. As a result, alcohol production in the state rose from 176,029 liters in 1930/31 to 325,879 liters in 1933/34. Again, this increase was less the result of intensified production than a consequence of the fact that four rather than only two factories were now producing alcohol.

After fluctuating widely for much of the 1920s and 1930s, with World War II, sugar prices in Brazil finally stabilized and began a consistent rise after 1938/39. From a national average of Cruzeiro (Cr) \$ 37.19 a sack in that year, sugar rose dramatically to Cr\$ 119.98 in 1946/47. In partial response to this trend, the sugar industry in Paraíba experienced one of its fastest periods of growth during the 1940s. The area of the state planted in sugar cane increased from around 13,000 hectares in 1942/43 to approximately 35,000 hectares at the end of the decade while the tonnage of cane harvested increased from slightly more than half a million tons in 1942/43 to almost a million and a half tons in 1946/47. Sugar production based in the state's *usinas* showed a dramatic increase as well. The total productive capacity of the *usinas* rose from 1,683 tons of cane ground per 24 hour period in 1937/38 to 2738 tons in

1947/48. The state's seven *usinas* produced 638,638 sacks of sugar in 1948/49 as opposed to 220,953 sacks in 1938/39. Much of this growth occurred in the first half of the 1940s. From 1939/40 to 1943/44, the state's sugar production increased on the average 86 percent. Usina Santa Helena's five year average was 164 percent above the previous five years while Usina Tanques was 159 percent higher. During the last half of the 1940s, production increased less dramatically although the state showed an average 46 percent increase over the previous five year period. Only Usina Santana posted a negative growth rate during the later half of the 1940s while Monte Alegre expanded production 132 percent. Moreover, during the period from 1938/39 to 1945/46, Paraíba's share of Brazil's sugar production increased from 1 percent to 3.4 percent before declining again.

By the 1950s, with the revival of sugar beet production in Europe and cane production in other areas, Paraíba's sugar industry was again moribund and in need of a massive revitalization. With the exception of the last two or three years of the decade, the amount of sugar produced by the state's *usinas* remained essentially unchanged. At the same time, company records from this period report an increasing reliance on IAA and bank loans to update and expand the industrial and agricultural sectors as well as to finance the *entresafra* or period between harvests. Usina Tanques'

company minutes, for example, report that in 1951 they had applied to the IAA for financing in the amount of Cr\$ 5 million to reform and modernize the industrial and technical sections of the factory. Presumably this loan was obtained from the Agricultural and Industrial Department of the Bank of Brasil in 1953 and guaranteed by the company's agricultural real estate. In 1954, they approved a Bank of Brasil loan of Cr\$ 2 million for *entresafra* costs and new machinery against the upcoming harvest; in 1958, a Cr\$ 4 million loan from the Bank of Brasil for amplification of the factory; and in 1959, another Cr\$ 3 million to purchase trucks to transport cane from the fields to the factory.

Similar loans were reported in the company minutes of Usinas Monte Alegre, São João and Santa Helena. All loans mentioned were from the Agricultural and Industrial Department of the Bank of Brasil. The majority of the loans granted to Usinas São João and Santa Helena were purportedly for investments in the agricultural sector, such as irrigation, water control, fertilization, "to maintain the cultivation of sugar cane, stabilize the harvests and bring equilibrium between the agricultural and industrial sectors."³ Although no loans are mentioned in the company minutes, Usina Santa Maria is also reported to have

³ Minutes of the February 12, 1959 meeting of the shareholders of Cia. Usinas São João and Santa Helena. João Pessoa, PB: Junta Comercial.

undergone a massive industrial refurbishing in 1952 when its ownership changed hands (Andrade 1957:46).

Despite this borrowing frenzy, two surveys of Paraíba's *usinas* by researchers from the Instituto Joaquim Nabuco in Recife in 1957 and 1959 resulted in a bleak picture of the state's agricultural and industrial capacity (see Manuel Correia de Andrade[1957] and Gilberto Osório de Andrade[1959]). The 1957 study concerned itself with the *usinas* located on the Mamanguape River system -- a relatively new area for *usinas* in the state. The four *usinas* there: Tanques, Santa Maria, Monte Alegre, and São Francisco, had been built in 1926, 1931, 1940 and 1948 respectively. At the time of the survey it was noted that each of the factories was in the process of expanding their cane fields at the expense of other commercial crops such as cotton and sisal and of subsistence crops such as manioc, corn, squash, and beans (Andrade 1957:38-41). With the exception of Usina São Francisco, the other *usinas* were assessed as having ample lands to expand cane cultivation even further. São Francisco, on the other hand, had not expanded its fields to any significant degree since it was founded ten years earlier although it was supposedly undergoing a complete reform. In fact, São Francisco closed permanently the following year and much of its lands and equipment were sold off to the owner's more successful Ribeiro Coutinho cousins.

Although the 1957 Fundação Joaquim Nabuco survey reported that the remaining three *usinas* in the Mamanguape River system had the potential for growth, it was also noted that they suffered from outdated industrial equipment, inadequacies in water and energy resources, and the absence of chemical and agricultural technicians. As a result, production at the Mamanguape *usinas* ranged from only 200 to 350 tons of cane ground a day while the industrial and agricultural earnings were low. Despite these negative reports, sugar production at both Usinas Tanques and Monte Alegre had increased considerably in the 1950s. The average annual yield at Monte Alegre was 19,347 sacks in the 1940s and 48,745 sacks in the 1950s. At Tanques, the average yield had gone from 7,208 sacks in the 1940s to 23,344 sacks in the 1950s. Only Santa Maria showed a decline in production over the 1940s.

The subsequent report on the *usinas* in the Paraíba River system also presented a bleak picture (Andrade 1959). At the time of the study, São João was milling 1200 tons per day; Santa Helena 1000 tons, Santa Rita 250 tons and Santana 200 tons. The latter was reported to be the most rudimentary of the four with "enough cane to produce 60-70,000 sacks of sugar per year but given the state of the equipment [was] only producing about 50,000 sacks per year as well as 250,000 liters of alcohol" (Andrade 1959:116). Santa Helena and Santa Rita were purportedly undergoing modernization of

their industrial components while Santana was encouraged to follow suit. Santa Rita, it was noted, had an excess of cane and could double production simply by pushing its existing machinery or could triple production through updating.

Santa Rita, in fact, had posted a lower average yearly yield in sugar production for the 1950s: 61,084 sacks as compared to 64,393 sacks per year in the 1940s. The other three *usinas* had experienced slight increases over the 1940s: São João, 211,530 sacks per year against 187,629 in the 1940s; Santa Helena, 152,721 sacks versus 106,704; and Santana, 35,277 against 30,976. These modest increases in sugar production in the 1950s beg the question of the extent to which the reported bank loans were applied to modernization and expansion of sugar cane cultivation and processing.⁴

It is unquestionable, however, that from the 1950s until the present, the level of financial support available to sugar producers has been important to the continuity of northeastern producers. Beginning around 1958 with the GTDN (the Working Group for the Development of the Northeast) and in 1959 with the creation of SUDENE (the Superintendency for the Development of the Northeast), northeastern sugar

⁴ Several recent scandals in the region attest to the fact that monies are frequently diverted from their intended purposes. Totti (1985) recounts the tale of one *Paraibano* rancher and *usineiro* trucking a single herd of cattle from farm to farm in advance of leaked visits from bank inspectors.

producers have been beneficiaries of federal and state programs designed in general terms to ameliorate the disparities between the Northeast and the Center-South. That the benefits accrued to *usineiros* were often at odds with the stated goals of these programs and, in fact, it could be argued, entrenched and intensified regional disparities, has been well documented (see, for example, Chalout 1976). These contradictions were, in part, a result of the continuing power and influence of the northeastern elite and the Brazilian elite in general; in part, the consequence of deficiencies and irresponsibilities in the bureaucratic design and administration of these programs; and an outcome of a dependent status both within the Brazilian nation and the larger world system.

Celso Furtado's GTDN policy objective of reduced regional disparity was to be achieved in the Northeast through the modernization of agriculture, industrialization, self-sufficiency in food production, a national colonization policy, irrigation, and the rationalization of sugar cane production to free good lands for other products in the *zona da mata*. Ultimately, the goal was to free lands through technological inputs without prejudicing sugar production while absorbing the excess population from the semi-arid regions and expanding the production of basic food stuffs. In other words, the Northeast sugar industry was again to be supported and encouraged but this time, not through

simplistic attempts to delay the inevitable, but through transformation. As Nunberg (1986:56) points out, until the 1960s, "...one of the IAA's principal institutional goals [had been] to delay the effects of the natural superiority of the Center-South sugar industry...[with the result that the] IAA managed to preserve many inefficient northeastern mills that might have failed without government intervention." After 1964, new concerns

meant instead that the entire system of production and administration of the sugar sector would have to be transformed to meet competitive world-market standards [and] priority placed on increasing the efficiency of both agricultural and industrial production units....The state undertook a massive modernization program and attempted to alter its long-standing policies of subsidizing noncompetitive producers (Nunberg 1986:59).

Initially, in an attempt to address the extreme economic imbalances and the potentially explosive social environment of the Northeast, regional development schemes were geared to structural changes that would benefit all sectors of northeastern society. As I discuss below in Chapter Seven, however, any plan which threatened to erode the prerogatives of the regional elite while extending social, political and economic benefits to the region's masses was rigorously opposed by the sugar producers. For

example, a plan formulated in 1966 by GERAN (Grupo Especial para a Racionalização da Agroindústria Açucareira do Nordeste) "to modernize sugar production while simultaneously instituting land reform in the Northeast" (Nunberg 1986:67) met with such resistance. The two basic goals of the coordinating agency were:

- 1) the modernization of sugar cane refining and cultivation through technological development, utilizing such methods as irrigation and mechanization to improve agricultural yields per hectare, thus liberating inefficiently used land;
- and 2) the structural agrarian reform of this liberated land for diversification of crop cultivation and for more equitable distribution among small farmers (Nunberg 1979:115-16).

"Despite its essential emphasis on technical rationalization, GERAN provoked *usineiro* opposition by virtue of its redistributive implications" (Nunberg 1986:88n). Although the IAA had originally encouraged the creation of GERAN, soon after its establishment, "IAA became convinced by pressure from its own *usineiro* constituency of GERAN's potential subversion of land tenure patterns in the Northeast. As a result, the IAA managed to withhold a substantial portion of GERAN's funding until 1969, by which time the group's demise was virtually assured (Nunberg 1986:88). Moreover,

[these] unsuccessful efforts to tie socially progressive land reforms to technical modernization led the state to omit social considerations in its next attempts at modernization in the 1970s. The IAA's solution to production problems was thereafter to be strictly technocratic (Nunberg 1986:67).

As a result, the increasing industrialization and mechanization of sugar production in addition to the passage of the Rural Labor Statute in 1964 which extended labor laws and benefits to rural workers intensified the expulsion of the region's resident laborers, sharecroppers and tenant farmers, and thereby fueled social tensions.

By the end of the 1950s, Paraíba's *usinas* were producing a total of between 700,000 and 800,000 sacks of sugar a year. Ten years later, production had grown slowly to nearly a million sacks. By the end of the 1970s, it had more than doubled, reaching 2,406,719 sacks in 1978/79. One could assume that a substantial part of this increase resulted from improved extractive and refining processes since the amount of cane milled increased only minimally over that of the 1950s: an average of 1,447,062 tons in the 1950s against 1,461,453 tons in the 1970s. Company minutes for the 1960s record ample loans from the IAA and the Banco do Brasil for both agricultural and industrial development. Usina Tanques, for examples, reported that a loan was

obtained in 1965 to buy new grinders which would allow their factory "to absorb all of the agricultural production of the *bangüês* and *aguardente* factories existing in the region with a visible improvement in the industrial earnings of the factory."⁵ Prior to the breakup of the family enterprise in 1968, the meeting records of Companhia Usinas São João and Santa Helena recorded a total of Cr\$442 million in loans during the 1960s primarily to cover agricultural investments and higher salaries.

Paraíba's *usinas* were further enriched during the 1960s through the passage of a federal law which allowed exemption from taxes on the reassessment of the value of corporate reserves and property for businesses under the jurisdiction of SUDENE. As a result, in 1964 the capital worth of Tanques was increased from Cr\$ 7 million to 800 million; Monte Alegre, from 60 to 600 million; Santa Maria, from 50 to 350 million; São João and Santa Helena, from 165,200 million to 2.2 billion; Santana, from 20 to 815 million and Santa Rita, 30 million to 1.2 billion. Similar reassessments and the application of monetary correction precipitated by inflationary devaluations allowed Paraíba's *usinas* to further increase in value throughout the 1970s and 1980s.

Government support for the sugar industry during the early years of the military regime was inspired by both

⁵ Minutes of the September 1965 meeting of the shareholders of Usina Tanques S/A. João Pessoa, PB: Junta Comercial.

political and economic concerns. In the most simplistic terms, in the political arena, the military was seeking to reward their presumed most loyal supporters -- the agrarian elite -- while at the same time, coopting an increasingly vocal and dissatisfied rural labor force.

Economically, the military regime was intent on fueling industrial growth by way of an increased emphasis on export crops. Brazilian sugar exports, which had averaged 5.2 percent of total sugar production between 1935 and 1956, 14 percent between 1957 and 1959 and 17.8 percent in 1965, rose to 41.8 percent of production by 1974 (Nunberg 1986:57,85). Fortunately, the world price paid for sugar was in ascendancy as well. The windfall profits which accrued to the IAA's export fund flowed into the state-directed modernization program of the sugar industry. Nunberg (1986:72) reports that "between 1973 and 1975, the special export fund disbursed U.S. \$4.3 billion."

In 1975, however, the world price of sugar dropped and by 1976, the export fund was depleted (Nunberg 1986:71,72). The balloon of euphoria of Brazil's 'economic miracle' would come crashing down on all sectors of the sugar industry just as it blanketed other economic domains. In the aftermath of this eruption, the potential perils facing the country's sugar industry and in particular, northeastern producers, were unmasked. As Nunberg reports, the paradox of export-induced modernization was that "such a policy posed

heightened risks of vulnerability and dependence -- precisely the conditions that state intervention had sought to mitigate when it first began in the 1930s" (1986:58-59). 'Modernization' had exacted a huge price from all sectors of Brazilian society.

Despite falling world prices for sugar, the oil crisis of the 1970s again encouraged expansion of the cane fields. As the area planted in cane grew, the area given over to food crops declined and real estate values soared. "Between 1972 and 1982, the area planted in sugar cane throughout Brazil rose from 1.35 million hectares to 3.36 million hectares" (Nunberg 1986:79-80). Similarly, in the *Litoral* coastal region of Paraíba, sugar cane plantings expanded from 14,342 hectares in 1973 to 48,768 hectares in 1980 (Mendes Filho 1983:103). In the case of Paraíba, this expansion took place at the expense of sisal, cotton and subsistence crops in particular. The Northeast came to rely increasingly on imported foodstuffs. As Nunberg (1986:80-81) writes, "[t]he reduction of land planted in food crops was an uncomfortable outcome for a regime whose official policy was to increase food production as a means of controlling inflation."

Sisal, cotton, and foodstuffs were crops of elevated lands and the *tabuleiras* -- the sandy escarpments bordering the fertile river valleys -- which were generally worked by *moradores*, sharecroppers and tenant farmers. In the chapter

that follows I discuss how a variety of factors operated historically and at present to both maintain and encourage a peasantry and small family farmers in the face of increasingly highly capitalistic activities. On the other hand, the incorporation of these lands into sugar production did contribute to an acceleration of the depopulation of the countryside and encouraged a greater reliance on temporary, non-resident labor in the cane fields. Proletarianization and urbanization of the rural labor force have now become standard features of Paraíba's sugar cane industry.

Field and factory hands were not the only ones affected by the increasing mechanization and expansion. In 1959, Andrade had argued that the historical importance of cotton production in Paraíba had given the state a distinctive character vis-à-vis its more sugar cane-oriented southern neighbor of Pernambuco: "the survival, until today, of the *fazenda* and the *lavrador* in the lower Paraíba valley resulted in part from the 'democratization of cotton'.... Cotton had made small and medium property owners less vulnerable to modern de-ruralization and proletarianization" (Andrade 1959:125). As the economic importance of cotton and later, sisal, declined, many of these landowners became cane suppliers to the state's *usinas*. They were further encouraged by the passage of the Estatuto da Lavoura Canavieira in 1941 which guaranteed suppliers a fixed quota at specified *usinas*. Designed in part to protect small and

medium-sized growers, thereby fomenting a viable rural middle class, the statute also acted to create a buffer group between *usineiros* and landless cane workers. In the post-1964 scheme of things, however, cane suppliers appeared to have lost their usefulness. With little access to the "special financing packages, subsidized interest rates, tax exemptions, [and] fiscal credit" (Nunberg 1986:85) available to *usineiros*, the rural middle class of cane suppliers were frequently at a loss to forestall the sale or transfer of their lands to the expanding *usinas*. Increasingly marginalized in the regional sugar industry, cane suppliers have become one of the most vocal and reactive groups in today's rural society (see Chapter Eight for a discussion of their political activities). Thus, as Nunberg (1986:68) has argued, "the IAA's [modernization] policy helped erode the position of certain social classes in the sugar sector while enhancing the standing of others."

By the late 1970s, however, *usineiros* also had to confront an increasingly precarious future. Despite the phenomenal investments in modernization, Brazilian and particularly, northeastern, sugar was still not competitive in the world market and low world sugar prices tempered exports further. Moreover, the place of both cane and beet sugar on the world market were rapidly being challenged by sugar substitutes such as high-fructose corn syrups (see

film documentary Starving for Sugar).⁶ The accelerating world economic crisis had contributed to spiralling inflation and interest rates. Today many *usineiros* are hard pressed to continue payments on the loans contracted under the modernization program and the specter of defaults and bankruptcies has become commonplace.

F. The National Alcohol Program

The financial difficulties of some *usineiros* were ameliorated by the advent of the federal National Alcohol Program instituted in 1975. PROÁLCOL was prompted by the world energy crisis and was an attempt to lessen Brazil's reliance on imported fuel (see Barzelay 1986 and Erickson 1981 for histories of the program). The Program, through loans, grants, subsidies and fiscal policy, encouraged the expansion and introduction of sugar cane production (other crops, such as manioc, were also encouraged) in most parts of the country for the production of alcohol. Large, technologically-advanced distilleries grew up alongside old factories as *anexas* or alone as *autonomas*. The impact of PROÁLCOL has been most noticeable in the south and central-south regions of the country where it has reinforced "the transfer of regional dominance of sugar production from the Northeast to the Center-South" (Nunberg 1986:66). Nunberg

⁶ June Nash (personal communication) notes that there are parallels here to the case of African cotton where it was called the 'Mother of Starvation.'

(1986:80) reports that "through 1983 the Center-West received 43.5 percent of all project financing for alcohol distilleries, 30.8 percent went to the Southeast, and only 3 percent went to the Northeast."

The effect of PROÁLCOOL on the Northeast, however, has not been minor. In fact, it may well have contributed substantially to the ability of the northeastern *usinas* to weather, at least initially, the extreme crises of the last fifteen years. *Anexas*, in particular, allowed producers some flexibility in shifting the allocation of the raw material from one finished product to another depending on supply and demand. As such, a distillery annex was an attractive solution for the besieged northeastern producers. In Paraíba, five of the seven existing *usinas* eventually took the opportunity offered by the program to add distillery annexes to their sugar factories. Although several of these *usinas* initially intensified simple alcohol production in their decades old small distilleries, all subsequently added the modern distillery complexes approved and funded by PROÁLCOOL. Only the owners of Usinas Tanques and Monte Alegre have not yet added alcohol distilleries to their factories or become involved in the program at other sites. As a result of the addition of annexes, Paraíba's *usinas* have expanded their cane fields substantially.

Although the addition of a distillery offered certain advantages to a sugar producer, it also carried with it

certain disadvantages. As I discuss in Chapters Six and Nine, since the government provided lines of credit, rather than outright grants to build distilleries, the added financial burden eventually ruined several families. Another significant concern relates to the increasing loss of a company's ability to act independently and to keep their business concerns private. The construction of a distillery annex intensified governmental intervention into the sugar industry. Potential alcohol producers had to submit applications for governmental approval. Factors which were scrutinized included the principals' financial status and other business activities; the extent of their landholdings; their contracts with current and potential cane suppliers; the physical, administrative, and financial state of their present operations; and so on. Once a distillery annex was in place, governmental quotas would determine how much of their cane could be applied to alcohol production and how much could be applied to sugar production, how much alcohol they could produce or sell in any particular year, how much they could sell it for, and to whom. These were similar regulations to those which had controlled sugar production since the advent of the IAA but those regulations had become lax and were easily circumvented. Participation in PROÁLCOL represented greater outside scrutiny of and input into one's business activities. As a result, some *usineiros*

chose not to participate in the program. Others had their applications rejected.

By 1988, the program had also led to the construction of nine *autonomas* or autonomous distilleries in Paraíba (see Figure 5). Only two of these distilleries were built by families that were primarily *Paraibanos* and both were members of the Ribeiro Coutinho parentela. Destilaria Una was founded in 1977 by Cassiano Ribeiro Coutinho (one of the seven sons of João Ursulo and an original shareholder in Usinas São João and Santa Helena), his wife, and six children, on lands in the Sapé region that the family had held for years. The other 'native'-owned distillery, Destilaria Borborema, began alcohol production in 1985 although the company that owned the property was originally constituted in 1974 presumably with plans for a distillery in place although approval delays meant that they spent several years involved in *aguardente* production, cattle ranching, and leasing out of their agricultural properties and machinery. This distillery is owned by the children and heirs of Flaviano Ribeiro Coutinho, owners as well of Usina Santana, a sugar and alcohol producing annex. The distillery was built on the site of the long abandoned Usina São Francisco, a short-lived sugar factory built by Otávio Ribeiro Coutinho, the son of Flaviano's brother Ursulo.

The other seven autonomous distilleries were all built by northeasterners whose central economic interests were

based in Pernambuco or Bahia. The first² was built in 1974 by Giasa: Gramame Industrial e Agrícola S/A, a joint stock company with majority shares held by Usina Central Olho D'Água of Pernambuco, Usina Estivas of Rio Grande Norte, and the Tavares de Melo family to which these two *usinas* belong. The Tavares de Melo family, although based today in Pernambuco, had economic interests in the state of Paraíba since the last century. Their property in Rio Grande do Norte had been briefly owned by João Ursulo Ribeiro Coutinho's son Luiz Inácio in the 1950s and 1960s. Shares in GIASA were also held by the estate of Henrique Vieira de Albuquerque Mello of São Miguel de Taipu, Paraíba, a relative of the famous Pessoa politicians of Paraíba and the Pessoa *usineiros* of Pernambuco. Part of the land on which the distillery was built appears to have been owned by members of this family while the rest of land was likely owned originally by the Tavares de Melo family and used to supply cane for their *usina* in Pernambuco.

Destilaria Santo Antônio, built in 1976, was owned by another family of traditional Pernambucano sugar industrialists and kin of the Ribeiro Coutinho. This was the Pessoa de Melo family of Aliança, owners of Usina Aliança, and in-laws of João Ursulo Ribeiro Coutinho and João Crisostomo Ribeiro Coutinho. The majority of the lands comprising this property appear to have been bought from a

variety of owners by family members in 1976 and 1977, some with loans from the Banco Nordeste do Brasil.

The Cavalcanti de Moraes family of Pernambuco, owners of that state's Usina Central Nossa Senhora de Lourdes, built two distilleries in Paraíba. The de Moraes family has a long history in the sugar industry of Pernambuco as owners of *engenhos*, *usinas*, and distilleries. Its most famous member nationwide is José Ermirio de Moraes, owner of Votarantim, one of the country's largest and most successful corporations. Destilaria Miriri was founded in 1976 while Destilaria Jacuipe was founded in 1980. The property comprising both enterprises appears to have been bought around the time that the distilleries were being built.

The Lungren family, owners of Usina Nossa Senhora Maravilhas in Pernambuco, of the Rio Tinto textile factory in Mamanguape, Paraíba, and of various national concerns including the Casas Pernambucanas department store chain, built Destilaria Tabu in 1977. Their company, Agro Industrial Tabu Ltda, was founded through the incorporation of the commercial firm of Herman & Axel Lungren, a ranching and farming operation based at Fazendas Tabu, Caaporã and Pitambu, Paraíba. On these properties, the Lungren brothers had raised cattle, grown sugar cane (primarily for sale to their *usina* in Pernambuco), and coconuts. The bulk of the land was acquired by the brothers from the estate of their father, Guilherme Alberto Lungren in 1957.

The two other distilleries in existence in 1988 were associated less with particular regional families than with managerial-run joint stock companies. Destilaria Japungu was initially held mainly by Agrofertil S/A, an industrial and commercial fertilizer concern based in Cabo, PE, but owners as well of part of the land on which the distillery was built. Lesser shares were held by Paraíba's Usina São João and a host of minor shareholders. Soon after the distillery began functioning, Usina São João, unable to come up with additional financing, gradually pulled out of the company. Increasingly, financing was provided by Conepar: Cia Nordeste de Participações, based in Salvador, Bahia which eventually came to control the company equally with Agrofertil. Conepar was an investment company controlled by the Calmon de Sá family of Bahia who were major shareholders as well of one of the country's largest commercial banks, Banco Economico. By the time of my research, another Calmon de Sá holding company, Economico S/A, had taken over the shares of Conepar. Both Economico S/A and Agrofertil were buying up neighboring lands and incorporating these properties into the company. It is interesting to note here that Destilaria Japungu had a reputation in the state of being the most efficiently-run and technologically-advanced distillery, precisely because it was not perceived as being the domain of one particular family and its daily management was left to hired technicians rather than family members.

For many *Paraibanos* involved in the sugar industry, it represented a new organizational structure and management style -- a symbol of a new modernity.

Little information was collected on the state's ninth distillery or its owners since it only began production at the end of the research. According to the reports filed with the Commercial Office in João Pessoa, the ownership of the company changed hands several times following its incorporation in 1977 and prior to initiating the construction of the distillery. By 1983, an engineering and architectural firm founded in 1964 in Rio Grande do Norte had come to control Agro-Industrial Xuá Ltda. This company, Engenharia e Arquitetura Ltda (ENARQ), was controlled by several engineers, northeasterners from either Paraíba or Rio Grande do Norte. It is likely that they had taken on responsibility for either building the distillery or acquiring official approval for the project. By the conclusion of the research, it was unclear whether this enterprise was, in fact, a major new distillery for the state or perhaps a micro-distillery, reports of which have appeared now and then in the press but which were otherwise unverified.

The PROÁLCOOL program, in general, has become a source of great debate within the country and particularly within the new regime's commitment to privatization. Alcohol production had been highly subsidized to maintain its price

below that of gasoline and with the current drop in world oil prices, the subsidies appear foolhardy for a deeply indebted economy. Alcohol producers, on the other hand, continue to argue that the price paid for their product is not adequate to cover the costs of production. Over the last several years, in protest, producers have limited production to such an extent that extreme shortages occurred and the general population's commitment to the program was shaken. Although the 1991 Gulf War likely returned a measure of support to the program, it is debatable whether it is in the nation's best interest to spend so much on Brazil's small minority of automobile owners. Moreover, the increasing investment in distilleries appears to be a particularly risky strategy for regional development. Distilleries do not have the flexibility of annexes and are, therefore, wholly dependent on continued public and governmental support for the program.

G. Conclusion

Mintz (1985:68), in discussing the impact of an expanding international division of labor in the last century, writes that "the Anglo-Caribbean sugar industry, the oldest in the empire, had to choose between stagnation and expensive, large-scale expansion...." Although northeastern mill and *usina* owners did not practice the same degree of absentee ownership nor did they have the same access to foreign capital as was common in the Caribbean,

some similarities did exist in the organization of labor and in the impact of world competition at the beginning of this century. The ability to survive this transformation was conditioned to a large extent by a family's ability to "successfully underwrite and incorporate large-scale technical improvements" (Mintz 1985:69). But as Mintz notes, it was also dependent upon their ability "to contain and to supplement the labor power of the 'potential' peasantry" (Mintz 1985:69). How they accomplished this is the subject of the following chapter.

The decades of development programs which followed and which were designed to modernize and capitalize the sugar industry as a means to ameliorate the 'Northeast Problem,' succeeded primarily in enriching an elite and impoverishing the masses of rural workers. The general trend in the cane growing areas of the Northeast in this century has been one of concentration and consolidation of land, wealth and power. PROÁLCOOL has only intensified this pattern. In the last decade or so, the *zona da mata* of Paraíba has become more, not less, dependent on sugar monocropping. Less and less land is available for basic food production or for landless laborers. Conflict and violence over land, particularly between small producers and the new distilleries, is again on the rise. On the other hand, the social structure of the state has not been completely immune to change and current political liberalization. This means

that new challenges exist to the traditional elite monopoly over the exercise of power. As a result, it is much more difficult now to predict what the next decade or so holds for the various classes involved in this struggle to define the future of the Northeast. These are some of the questions which I will return to in Chapters Eight and Nine. In the following chapter, I discuss the impact of this restructuring of the economy on labor.

CHAPTER FOUR

THE ORGANIZATION OF LABOR IN THE SUGAR INDUSTRY

A. Introduction

In discussing the industrial and capitalistic nature of the Caribbean sugar industry during the last century, Mintz (1985:57-58) writes,

the linkage between Caribbean slaves and European free laborers was a linkage of production and hence also of consumption, created by the single system of which they were both parts. Neither group had much to offer productively but its labor. Both produced; both consumed little of what they produced. Both were divested of their tools. In the views of some authorities, they really form one group, differing only in how they fit into the worldwide division of labor others created for them.

In questioning age-old divisions between pre-industrial colonies and industrial European colonizers, Mintz suggests that the organization of a sugar plantation's labor force is a crucial element in its definition as agro-industrial rather than simply agricultural. Mintz (1985:55) goes on to argue that "both in its labor forms and in its organization, then, the plantation is an oddity....If it was not

'capitalistic,' it was still an important step toward capitalism."

Having discussed the technical and financial development of Paraíba's sugar industry, this chapter¹ provides a discussion of the historical and contemporary labor arrangements common in Brazil's sugar industry. What forms of labor were common during the preceding century when *engenhos* dominated the landscape? What changes took place with the development of the *usinas*? What relations existed or exist between the owners and their workers? What do these arrangements suggest about the owners' ability to dominate and control their labor force as well as their localities and their state? Responses on the part of labor to this domination and control are explored more fully in Chapters Seven and Eight.

B. Labor in the Early Years

As was noted earlier, although sugar cane production colonized the Northeast and continues to dominate much of

¹ The data for this chapter include Andrade (1980), Galliza (1979), Galloway (1979), Melo (1975), and Sorj (1980) on the pre-emancipation labor force in the Northeast. Sources for data on northeastern labor in the twentieth-century include Andrade (1980), Garcia (1983), Melo (1975), Sigaud (1979), and Sorj (1980). Information of specific relevance to temporary wage laborers can be found in Casagrande (1983), Goodman and Redclift (1982), and Saint (1981). Data specific to Paraíba's *usinas* are to be found in Andrade (1959), Andrade (1957, 1971), and Rodrigues (1956). Further data on Paraíba's workers were collected through participant observation with workers in 1983/84 and through general news reports.

the *zona da mata* and parts of the *agreste*, it was never the sole economic activity nor was it always its most dominant activity. Since the beginning of Portuguese colonization of the region, other exploitative relations, besides sugar mills, were also present. These included *fazendas* or farm-like establishments producing sugar cane for sale to neighboring *engenhos* or producing basic foodstuffs such as manioc, maize, beans, fruits, and vegetables necessary to sustain the plantation system. Livestock, essential to a plantation's existence and to the growing urban centers, also occupied some areas of the *zona da mata* although cattle raising was concentrated in the more arid and less fertile *agreste* and *sertão* (Andrade 1980:58). Cotton production, always occupying an important place with cattle raising outside of the river valleys where cane did not do well, later came to offer a significant challenge to sugar cane. In the southern regions of the Northeast's *zona da mata*, cocoa or tobacco would come to be the chief export product with the latter also occupying an important place in much of the *agreste* as well. Although the principal concern here is the labor force involved in the cultivation and processing of sugar cane, it is important to remember that Paraíba differed somewhat from its northeastern neighbors in its greater economic diversity (see Chapter Three; Lewin 1975; Galliza 1986).

The first sugar cane *engenhos* set up in the river valleys of Brazil's Northeast initially relied for their labor force on locally enslaved native peoples or on natives brought as captives from Maranhão. Enslaved Africans, imported to Brazil from the beginning of Portuguese settlement, soon came to outnumber natives in the actual work of tending the cane fields and running the mill. Even at that, Galloway (1971:594) points out that the "relative importance of slavery varied enormously from one part of the *zona da mata* to another." Some *senhores do engenho* owned around 50 to 60 slaves while a few, particularly those in the *Recôncavo* of Bahia and on the southern coast of Pernambuco, may have each owned several hundred. Galloway (1971:594) reports that in Paraíba in the mid-nineteenth century some *engenhos* averaged around eleven slaves, while others averaged only slightly more than six slaves. Galliza (1979:134) writes that by the 1880s, most sugar mills in the state had only between one and six slaves. The high cost of acquiring and maintaining slaves was a prohibitive factor in a capital-scarce economy.

As a result, various types of 'free' laborers also came to play an important role in the production of sugar. Galloway (1971:593) notes that with the exception of the large slave owning plantations of Bahia and Pernambuco where the employment of free men was limited, "elsewhere in the *zona da mata*, plantations were generally smaller, with fewer

workers, and free men formed a significant part of the labor force." In addition, he goes on to point out that with the reduction of the slave trade in the mid-1800s, slaves became extremely expensive, difficult to obtain, and it was often more profitable for slave owners from the Northeast to sell their slaves to southern plantation owners. Galliza (1979:111) reports that in 1852, the slave population in Paraíba averaged 13.3 percent of the state's total population; by 1872, the slave population had fallen to 5.7 percent. In 1852 alone, at least 13.2 percent of the slave population had been officially sold outside the state (Galliza 1979:114).

Free laborers, of course, had always worked at the more technically advanced tasks within the mill -- as sugar masters, boiler-room workers, sugar purgers, stokers and box-makers, or as overseers in the fields. These individuals were often of European descent. Free Indians or mulattoes from nearby communities were more frequently employed as day laborers during the labor-intensive harvest. Andrade (1980:56), for example, reports that "the free Indians ...devoted themselves to gathering, hunting and modest agriculture of manioc and beans, and consented, at times, to work for awhile [for neighboring plantations], inasmuch as they would be promised sugarcane brandy or some other strong drink." Others were contracted to work on a plantation for a

set period of time or were employed full-time in all phases of production on the smaller *engenhos* and *fazendas*.

Not all plantation land was given over to the production of sugar cane, either. In the Northeast, sugar cane was (and still is in many cases) planted on only a fraction of the plantation's land with the rest in forests, pastures, unusable or underutilized land, orchards, vegetable crops, and various other usages. Slaves and, more commonly, free laborers were responsible for the production of agricultural foodstuffs that were necessary to feed the plantation population. The major part of this kind of work was done by *moradores*, families living on plantation land in various kinds of tenancy relations. The importance of this category of plantation resident is well attested to in the literature (see Andrade 1980; Dean 1976; Melo 1975; Reis 1977; Saint 1981).

1. *Moradores/Trabalhadores*

Melo (1975) summarizes the main types of *morador* arrangements found in the Northeast. On the one hand were those he labels the 'non-bound' -- the *pequenos colonos* or independent producers who lived on the margins of the plantations. In return for clearing a patch of forest or for patrolling the unexploited boundaries of the plantation, they were allowed to build a small house and cultivate a plot of land for their own subsistence and perhaps for sale

in the local markets. They owed nothing else to the plantation owner and their ties to him were minimal, at least until the landowner felt a need for the land they occupied or for the labor they afforded.

The other main category included those *moradores* -- the *sobras de terras* -- who were linked and subordinated in some way to the plantation in that they had to compensate the landowner for use of the land. This could be through payment in labor or in cash. In the latter case, the *morador* was called a *morador de foreiro* and he was technically a renter or leaser with or without a formal contract. Although former slaves and wage laborers were occasionally *foreiros*, this arrangement, since it necessitated access to cash, was more likely to involve a fairly successful small producer, a *fazenda* owner or even an individual who owned his *engenho* as well but who was short of land. These individuals were at times called *lavradores* and will be discussed more fully below.

Contracts which involved exchanges of labor could ideally be of two types. The *morador de cambãozeiro* was required to work a set number of days per week or year for the plantation owner in exchange for a plot of land. Reminiscent of the *corvée* system common in much of the Spanish Americas, it was relatively uncommon on the plantations of the Northeast of Brazil (Melo 1975:38). Much more common, even during the slave era, were *moradores de*

condição or *moradores/trabalhadores* who provided wage labor for the plantation, the amount of which varied from season to season. In addition to wages, they also received from the plantation a plot of land, often a house as well, and perhaps a variety of services or benefits such as periodic medical care, schooling, religious instruction, loans, and an influential patron. This category of laborer was to become extremely important in the post-emancipation period.

2. *Lavradores*

The sugar cane growers or *lavradores*² mentioned above have their origins, according to Melo (1975:35), in the colonial *sesmaria* or land grant system and in the government's interest in developing a rural 'middle' class. In return for a royal land grant, a mill owner was required to buy cane from small producers who did not own their own mills. The presence of numerous *lavradores* was an asset as well to the mill owners since it reduced the amount of their capital invested in slave labor. By relying on independent

² The use and meaning of the term *lavrador* varies from one region of Brazil to another and from individual to individual within any particular region. It may be used in the most general sense of a farmer -- regardless of whether the individual farms his/her own land or someone else's. In this sense, any individual who grows sugar cane to supply it to an *usina* could be considered a *lavrador*. In the Santa Rita region of Paraíba, use of the term was more restrictive. A supplier who was more or less independent was labelled a *fornecedor* while a *lavrador* was more commonly an individual who rented or sharecropped land belonging to an *usina* or *fornecedor*.

growers for sugar cane or on sharecroppers who supplied and were responsible for their own laborers, the mill owner avoided much of the capital investment and loss involved in maintaining a slave labor force.

Unlike the *senhores do engenho* who constituted a fairly distinct class in the plantation social structure, *lavradores* comprised a much less cohesive, although numerically large, group. In general, there were two main types of *lavradores*: those who were landowners and those who rented land from the *engenho*. Those who rented land from a millowner were obliged to send their cane to the owner's mill to be crushed. This arrangement usually took the form of sharecropping whereby the *lavrador* turned over anywhere from one-half to two-thirds of his crop as payment to the landowner. At other times, a *lavrador* may have received a piece of land rent-free for a set period in return for clearing the land, planting cane, and putting up buildings which eventually became the property of the landowner. In either case, the life of a landless *lavrador* was frequently very simple. A small sharecropper with few slaves may have had to work the land himself and the majority of his capital was tied up in slaves, animals and tools. He seldom had a formal contact with the landowner and thus could be forced off the land with little notice or compensation.

Lavradores who owned their own land were somewhat better off since land, although a fairly cheap resource

according to most accounts, comprised part of their capital assets. While some landowning *lavradores* were fairly wealthy -- these were often the relatives of mill owners who may have owned numerous slaves -- the majority owned quite modest establishments and were frequently in a dependent relationship with a mill owner due to past obligations or loans.

The precarious position of the *lavrador*, whether as landowner or sharecropper, is evident in Galloway's (1971) discussion of the impact of abolition on the sugar cane economy of the Northeast. Given that slaves were a major source of wealth for the *lavradores* and that the "*lavradores*' position depended to a large extent on their ability to provide labor through the ownership of slaves," abolition severely affected their economic, political, and social position in the society (Galloway 1971:604). Melo (1975:35) also reports that around this time, a complaint was brought by *lavradores* to the Agricultural Congress in Recife regarding the oppressive and unjust subordination of *lavradores* to the *senhores do engenho* and a request was made for formal recognition of "the importance of their participation relative to the quantity of cane that they contributed per harvest." Unfortunately cane suppliers would have to wait until 1941 before legislation was passed which specified their rights and benefits (Melo 1975:36). Abolition, as well as the replacement of *engenhos* by the

agro-industrial cane factories of the late nineteenth century, would eventually bring about the almost total demise of this heterogeneous 'class' in the rural economy of the Northeast.

C. Labor and Cane Supplies in the Twentieth Century

While most authors on the subject agree that abolition did not cause any major immediate transformation in agrarian organization in the region, it, combined with the simultaneous development of the sugar factory, did mark the beginning of a new phase in the sugar economy of the Northeast (see Melo 1975:40 and Galloway 1971). One of the first problems to be dealt with concerned maintaining a sufficient labor force in the region. Freed from their bondage, many of the former slaves headed to the nearby towns and cities to find work, into the interior, or to the unexploited peripheries of the cane zone in search of a small piece of land. Sugar producers were faced with two options to ensure a labor force. On the one hand, they could attempt to encourage immigration to the area as had been successfully accomplished on the coffee plantations in the south of the country. This, in fact, was a possibility discussed at the 1878 congresses of the Society for Assistance to Agriculture. Such a policy was never actively pursued in the Northeast. It is unlikely that it would have met with much success since the promise of land, not wage

labor, was what had attracted new immigrants to southern Brazil. The other alternative available to sugar cane producers was to create a dependent labor force that had no alternative but to seek work in the local sugar cane fields and mills. This option was (and is) pursued primarily through a policy of increasing land accumulation and concentration. Until quite recently, it was also supported by limiting the economic diversification of the region.

As was discussed in the previous chapter, individual *usinas* continued throughout this century to expand their properties into surrounding lands. Whereas under the old *engenho* system, a mill owner had relied to some extent on small growers for their cane supplies, since the demise of the central mills program, *usineiros* preferred to grow their own cane and to limit the processing of cane grown elsewhere. With the development of private rail networks and improvements in the regional transportation system by mid-century, it was not uncommon for an *usina* to encompass perhaps ten to fifty former *engenhos*. The displaced independent growers were either forced into the cities or became sharecroppers on *usina* land.

1. *Lavradores*

Sharecroppers or *lavradores* became quite common in the region. Family labor as well as the addition of a family or two of *moradores/trabalhadores* was sufficient to handle the

harvest. All sugar cane was brought to the *usina* to be processed and the grower received payment corresponding to fifteen to fifty percent of the value of the cane delivered. Andrade (1980:90) reports that in the 1950s, one *usina* in Paraíba had more than 60 growers while another had almost a thousand. Such arrangements allowed *usinas* to continue to amass land and to guarantee their cane supply while freeing them of the responsibility of securing and supervising a labor force for work in the fields. Most of these sharecroppers were not much better off than their *moradores/trabalhadores* or the earlier sharecroppers found on the *engenhos*. The price paid for cane was set by the *usinas* which also took responsibility for weighing it and calculating discounts. In addition, their 'contract' with the *usina* could be terminated by the *usina* at any time, thereby denying them their livelihood as well as causing financial loss from any crops not yet harvested and from material improvements which they had made on the property. It was this category of laborer, in fact, which would suffer the most severe losses as a result of changes begun in the late 1950s.

2. *Fornecedores*

Not all growers, however, were sharecroppers. Some old mill owners or large landowners had held onto their own land and even amassed more. On this land the owners employed

their own *moradores/trabalhadores* to grow cane which was then sold to various *usinas* in the region. Called *fornecedores* or suppliers, their position strengthened after government legislation was passed in 1941 requiring *usinas* to crush the cane of those without their own factories. In more recent times, government financing to *usinas* has become conditional upon a *usina* buying a set percentage of cane from local *fornecedores*. Andrade (1980:90) reports that in the late 1950s and early 1960s, *fornecedores* typically supplied an *usina* with nearly fifty percent of their cane. Today the official proportions are forty percent *fornecedor* cane, sixty percent *usina* cane.³

While not usually as wealthy or as socially prominent as *usineiros*, a successful *fornecedor* had to hold quite extensive properties and could be fairly well-off. These individuals were frequently close kin to the *usineiros* -- their less successful cousins perhaps -- or were urban professionals who sought a secure investment in land. At times *fornecedores* formed quite powerful lobbying groups. Over the years they have succeeded now and then in convincing state governments to implement policy contrary to the interests of *usineiros*. Today, *fornecedores* and

³ There are, however, a variety of strategies available to circumvent these requirements. One of the simplest involves setting up various family members as *fornecedores* to an *usina*. Other strategies are directed toward discouraging or destroying independent *fornecedores* -- these include late payments to *fornecedores* or delaying the handling of suppliers' cane.

usineiros are represented by different organizations and are frequently in conflict with each other over quotas, pricing, payment schedules, and access to financial resources. In their relations with field laborers, however, *fornecedores* and *usineiros* follow similar strategies and confront similar problems. Thus, despite their differences, faced with protests from the region's wage laborers, small producers, tenant farmers, sharecroppers, and migrant workers, *fornecedores* and *usineiros* are more likely than not to present a common front based on common interests.⁴

3. *Moradores/Trabalhadores*

As noted above, with the abolition of slavery the most common type of laborer on the sugar plantations of the Northeast was the *morador/trabalhador*. Ex-slaves were 'offered' the opportunity of remaining in the countryside on a small plot of land belonging to the *usina* in return for field or factory wage labor. As such, *moradores/trabalhadores* were ideally both wage-laborers and peasant farmers. Initially, *moradores* might be required to work only one or two days per week for the *usina* although with the post-World War I boom in the sugar industry wage labor requirements were extended. By the 1950s, it was more common for *moradores* to work 12 hour days, six or seven days

⁴ See Chapter Eight for a discussion of the increasingly militant activities of *fornecedores* against land reform and their affiliation with the UDR.

a week, for extremely low wages. The original attraction of the *morador/trabalhador* arrangement -- access to a subsistence plot -- was blunted since the *morador* was left with virtually no time to cultivate his plot. As a result, he was forced to allocate more and more of his⁵ meager wages to the purchase of foodstuffs. In such circumstances, the *morador/trabalhador* had become, in effect, a wage laborer living on *usina* lands (Melo 1975:106). In some cases a *morador* is required to pay rent for his/her accommodations (most common today), in others not -- particularly if he/she is an old and loyal employee. Today it is extremely unlikely for a *morador* to even have access to a plot of land -- the cane fields often come right to the doorstep of a *morador's*

⁵ The masculine form is used here intentionally. Originally, wage labor was required of the male head of a *morador* household. His wife and children had few responsibilities to the landowner and even fewer rights if the household head died or left the family -- his wife and children would be forced to leave the *usina*. Women were viewed as wives and mothers first and foremost. (A sociological study [Rodrigues 1956] conducted at Usina São João in the early 1950s described the various 'womanly' activities and instruction available to occupy wives while their husbands were at work. These included sewing, nutrition, hygiene, and childcare classes.) By the 1980s, due to labor shortages, all members of a *morador's* household, with the exception of the few children in school, were expected to work for the *usina*. In some cases these individuals received their own wages for their labor; more frequently, their earnings were attached to the household head's. Although potentially a much more exploitative relationship, the current practices, nevertheless, offer more security to female-headed households. A single woman and her children may occasionally be given the chance of remaining as employees of the *usina*. (For a similar discussion of women's work roles elsewhere in the Northeast see Aguiar [1980].)

home or *moradores* may be housed "in isolated [residential] developments which often resembled the old slave quarters" (Melo 1975:107).

Although the *moradores/trabalhadores* were ideally free wage laborers -- able to sell their labor to the highest bidder and move freely around the region -- there were many mechanisms available to keep laborers tied to one particular *usina*. The phenomenon of the factory store was a common means to this. *Moradores/trabalhadores* were encouraged, and frequently required, to shop at a general store, or *bodega*, run by the factory. Here goods were available on credit or in lieu of wages. Prices in these *bodegas* were frequently inflated and the *usina*-appointed or employed manager had the final word on all outstanding balances. In addition, workers could receive cash advances from an *usina* administrator or foreman which were also deducted from future wages. As a result of these practices, it was common for *moradores/trabalhadores* to become tied to a particular *usina* through outstanding debts. As such, they lost their mobility and freedom to secure better employment (had it existed in the state).

For *senhores do engenho, usineiros, and fornecedores*, the *morador/trabalhador* labor arrangement had many distinct advantages. Foremost among these was that the *morador/trabalhador* provided "a permanent source of labor for the producers and... [were] a major convenience to the

owner" (Melo 1975:109). By the late 1950s, however, various factors came together to discourage the use of *moradores/trabalhadores*, thereby contributing to the often noted process of the proletarianization of the country's rural labor force. There remains much debate in the literature as to the exact causes of this process (see Saint 1981; Dias 1978; Melo 1975; Sorj 1980; Casagrande 1983). In relation to the sugar cane producing areas of the Northeast, four factors appear to stand out: 1) more extensive and intensive capitalist penetration of agriculture; 2) changed agricultural land-use patterns; 3) increased seasonality in the demand for rural labor; and 4) revised labor legislation governing rural workers.

D. Proletarianization and The Rural Worker

The process of the capitalization of sugar cane production and of changes in land-use patterns have been addressed elsewhere. Here one should be reminded of the fact that the *usina* system in particular served eventually to intensify the already close relations between agriculture and industry. That is, agriculture came to be even more directly included in the industrial production process through the use of industrial products and materials (fertilizers, herbicides, fossil fuels, heavy machinery) and also as a producer of raw materials for industry (*bagaço* for the paper industry, *vinhoto* for fertilizer) (Sorj 1980:11).

In addition, the sugar-producing agro-industry has always been and continues to be intimately tied to external markets. While external demands and competition made the sugar industry confront the need for increasing capital investment, internally there was also pressure to 'modernize' the countryside through increasingly rationalistic means. Import substitution policies and/or pressures for increased export revenues also made Brazil's sugar industry crucial to the country's development schemes since the 1950s.

Changes in land-use patterns were also part and parcel of the modernization schemes of the 1950s and 1960s -- as they are today. Pressure to expand capital-intensive agriculture led to the introduction of new crops and to the exploitation of new areas -- many of them previously worked as subsistence properties by *moradores* or sharecroppers. The application of fertilizers, herbicides, and irrigation allowed previously unsuitable lands to be planted in sugar cane. The *usineiro* could increase his cane harvests without having to buy new lands or dramatically increase transportation costs (Melo 1975:112). Where sugar cane was not feasible, cash-producing sisal, pineapples, silk and shrimp farms, or cattle ranches replaced subsistence crops and *moradores*. Mechanization also reduced the need for and value of labor power. Increased seasonality in the demand

for rural labor meant that fewer *moradores* were needed or had activities to occupy them year round.

The most important factor leading to the elimination of *moradores/trabalhadores*, however, appears to have been the passage of the Statute of Rural Workers in 1963. Prior to this time, rural workers had been excluded from labor legislation regulating minimum wages, vacation pay, working hours, severance pay, pensions, and a variety of medical and social welfare benefits available to urban workers since the 1940s. As enforcement of the Statute became more effective, there was "a corresponding strong tendency ...on the part of employers to reduce their resident labor force (and consequently their legal obligations) and increase the use of temporary wage laborers" (Saint 1981:102). Faced with greater financial responsibilities and higher costs and alarmed at what they perceived to be a direct challenge to their traditional authority and independence, *forneceiros* and *usineiros* preferred to rid their properties of *moradores/trabalhadores*, sharecroppers, tenant farmers and *lavradores*.⁶ In the face of an absence of other employment opportunities, *usineiros* were creating, at the same time, a reserve labor force and an abundance of underutilized agricultural land which would be waiting in the wings some

⁶ Landowners were also fearful of the related proposals for agrarian land reform. If and when land reform might go through, they preferred to have few resident workers who might make claims to their lands (see Chapter Seven for further discussion of these issues).

years later when PROÁLCOOL came into being. *Usineiros* were more concerned with the threat of expropriation of land and its reassignment to residents of various kinds than with income loss related to leaving lands vacant. Monopolization of land may be as important now as it was in the past as a means of creating a dependent labor force. As well, ownership of land, regardless of its use, continues to constitute an important status marker and a hedge against inflation which outweighs its actual material value for the upper and middle classes of much of the Northeast.

Rather than *moradores/trabalhadores*, *fornecedores* and *usineiros* have come to rely increasingly on urban-based wage laborers who are contracted through middlemen and therefore not their legal responsibility. These urban-based wage laborers are referred to by a variety of terms in the literature, each emphasizing different aspects of their labor relationship. One of the most frequently used labels is *bóia fria* -- literally, 'cold meal' -- which refers to the fact that workers cannot return home for the traditional mid-day meal. The pejorative implications of the term has led rural workers to shun the designation although *bóia fria* continues to be used by academics, activists, and the media. Gomes da Silva (1975 in Saint 1981:92) provides one of the most general definitions of a *bóia fria* as "a salaried rural worker residing outside the agricultural property, who may or may not be properly registered so as to receive labor

legislation and security benefits; who is paid on a piecework, task-completed or daily basis; and who generally travels some distance each day to his place of work, usually by truck." Casagrande (1983:139) restricts the use of the term to a rural worker residing in an urban or suburban area and who is contracted by a middleman who pays the wages and provides transportation. Other common labels are *ambulantes* (walking, moving, unstable, unsettled) and *volantes* (shuttle-cock, footboy, flying, unsettled). These terms emphasize the mobility and detachment of rural workers while another common designation, *avulsos* (detached, loose, unconnected), makes reference to their job insecurity. Other regional labels include *clandestino* in reference to their frequent unregistered status; *trabalhador alugado*, one who is rented or temporary, and *trabalhador da rua*, a worker living on a street and not in the countryside. It is probable that the variety of terms available to refer to these wage laborers reflects regional and local variations in their condition of employment and social standing rather than simply vernacularisms. Saint's (1981) excellent survey of the *bóia fria* literature, based primarily on research in the state of São Paulo, attests to the wide variety of labor arrangements subsumed under the term *bóia fria* or its variants.

Since all of these labels carry derogatory connotations, and are seldom used by the workers themselves,

I have chosen to use the more generalized term, rural worker or *trabalhador rural*, to refer to individuals employed in the agricultural component of sugar production.⁷ The label rural worker perhaps best covers the various phenomenon of rural wage laborers in Brazil's sugar cane industry. While the majority of these workers live in local villages, towns, or cities, a minority still live on small rural properties as owners, sharecroppers, tenants, or squatters. In any case, their work sites are usually located a fair distance from their homes thus requiring workers to be transported to the fields where they remain for the day. The most common means of travel is by a truck which may be owned by the *usina*, by a private contractor, or by a team supervisor. A few of the more progressive *usinas* have begun to use buses and some of the smaller factories expect their workers to arrive on foot or by bicycle.

Who the rural workers work for is another factor that varies from *usina* to *usina* and even within one *usina* depending on the task or the time of the year. In the state of São Paulo where sugar cane production is a fairly recent although widespread industry and where workers' rights have

⁷ A *trabalhador rural* could, in fact, refer to any individual who works in agriculture or in the countryside in general -- a non-wage earning peasant, a small farmer, a tenant farmer, *morador*, or any type of rural worker. In the following discussion, however, I restrict the use of the term to the various forms of rural proletarians found in *usina* fields.

been more strongly implemented, it is not uncommon for workers at the larger *usinas* to be employed by the *usina* and supervised by an *usina* employee. In this case, a worker's pay check comes directly from the *usina*. In the Northeast, in contrast, neither workers nor their supervisor/contractor (*empreiteiro*) are typically employed by the *usina* directly. The *empreiteiro* may have an informal contract with a *usina* to provide a team of workers, he is paid for the work his people do, and then pays his workers as he sees fit.

Workers employed directly by an *usina* are more likely to be registered than those who work for an *empreiteiro*. Registered workers in the state of São Paulo are generally somewhat better off than unregistered workers who are more likely to live in rented housing on the periphery of towns and have few material possessions. In the Northeast, among field workers, only *moradores/trabalhadores* are likely to be registered. The rural workers are seldom registered. They are often recent migrants from the countryside to the urban areas who are forced to find makeshift accommodations in the shanties bordering the towns. Compared to many of the long-term townspeople and particularly in comparison to the registered workers in the south, they are extremely poor and marginalized.

Whether a worker is registered or not has little impact on the tenure of his/her employment. Some of the larger *usinas* keep at least a part of their workforce year round

while other employ teams of workers for anywhere from a few days to the end of the harvest only. The extent of an *usina's* properties and the size of its *morador/trabalhador* population -- related to some degree to the age of the *usina* -- are important factors in this regard. In the Northeast, for example, where holdings are not that extensive but most older *usinas* still have several hundred *moradores/trabalhadores*, the majority of the rural workers are unemployed during the *entresafra*, or between harvests. The newer alcohol distilleries, on the other hand, with few or no resident workers, employ some rural workers year round. As their *morador/trabalhador* populations decrease and their use of rural workers increases, year-round employment for rural workers should increase at many of the *usinas* in the Northeast. Faced with a perceived shortage (by *usineiros* and *fornecedores*) of reliable and skilled field workers, there is some possibility that in the future that more rural workers will be registered and employed directly by a *usina* in an attempt to tie workers to particular establishments.

In Paraíba many rural workers had been *moradores/trabalhadores* or *lavradores* on the region's plantations at an earlier time. Some left the plantations on their own for the 'benefits' of the city while others were forced off the land by landowners. In either case, they tended to reappear as the unemployed or underemployed on the peripheries of towns and cities with few opportunities for

employment besides temporary wage laborer in the cane fields. As Graboïs and Aguiar (1983) show, this does not just occur in the cane producing regions of the Northeast. Their study of tobacco workers in the western *sertão* of Paraíba also revealed that *ex-moradores* constituted a good part of the temporary wage labor force in tobacco production (Graboïs and Aguiar 1983:27).

Another labor source, used to a greater extent by *usinas* and *fornecedores* in the southern cane regions of Brazil, is that of migrant labor. In São Paulo, for example, teams of male workers may be brought by the *usinas* or by private contractors from Minas Gerais for the duration of the harvest. Some of these workers are peasant farmers in their home state. The relatively high wages offered in the cane fields of São Paulo attract them to the region despite the poor accommodations and working conditions they face. As a result of the relatively low wages paid for field work in the Northeast -- usually minimum wage at best -- work in the cane fields does not hold the same attraction. Nevertheless, in some parts of the Northeast, migrant work on the coast is one of the few ways small producers have to supplement their cash income. During their slow season, between the planting and harvesting of their own crops, various family members may join others from the region and travel to the coastal sugar plantations looking for work. Saint (1981:96) reports that in São Paulo and Minas Gerais, temporary wage labor

provided, on the average, forty percent of the annual income of small farm families. Garcia's (1983) comprehensive study of small producers in Pernambuco shows the historical and contemporary importance of supplemental wage labor for the region's peasantry. For many of Garcia's informants, it was common practice for one or two family members to seek daily work on large and medium establishments nearby. This allowed them to return home every evening. Garcia (1983:70-71) refers to this type of labor as *trabalho alugado*. Given the relatively large number of peasants living on the periphery of the cane regions in the Northeast, this form of temporary labor has been fairly common.

The terms used in the Northeast for workers in a situation common to the Minas Gerais workers in São Paulo are *corumbis* or *curau*. These terms refer to workers who travel a great distance to secure temporary wage labor -- remaining away from their homes for some weeks or months. Again, it is not the whole family which is involved in wage laborer but perhaps only the father and his teenage sons. Coastal wage labor becomes particularly attractive for *sertanejos* during years of prolonged drought. The lower labor needs and wages in the Northeast, however, limits the use of this labor form.

The involvement of peasants in temporary wage labor -- either on neighboring lands as a more or less regular supplement to their agricultural activities or at some

distance from their homes as an occasional cash-generating activity -- is of significance for two reasons. On the one hand, as Saint (1981:96) points out, the 'survival' of Brazil's peasantry has been contingent to a large extent on their ability to find temporary wage labor to supplement their subsistence activities. Thus despite the general trends nationwide of increasing urbanization and de-ruralization, "the Brazilian small-family farm has demonstrated itself to be remarkably resilient and adaptable" (Saint 1981:96). Sorj (1980:120) also notes that "Brazil's rural population has not only increased in the past decades, although at a rate less than that of the urban population, demographic predictions suggest that this process will continue."

E. Conclusion: Differentiation and Divergence of the Labor Force

The other important aspect of peasant participation in sugar cane production is the resultant diverging interests which exist among the rural workers. Part and parcel of the immense variety of labor arrangements subsumed under the term rural worker, diverging interests and needs distance peasants in particular from others for whom wage labor predominates. For example, the demand for registration by workers is frequently the issue of greatest concern for non-peasant rural workers. Among peasant laborers -- *corumbis* or

trabalhadores alugados -- registration is not usually a burning issue. These individuals may already be registered with the government as independent small producers and they have no interest in being registered as wage laborers. Access to cheap land, land reform programs, and high prices for their produce are for peasants the important issues. Full-time wage laborers, on the other hand, are, in addition to registration, concerned with formalized work contracts, shorter work weeks, government subsidized, low-priced foodstuffs and housing, off-season employment, and so on. Mintz (1964:xxxvii), in fact, stressed the same point for Cuba when he wrote that,

the rural proletariat becomes culturally and behaviorally distinct from the peasantry. Its members neither have nor (eventually) want land. Their special economic and social circumstances lead them in another direction. They prefer standardized wage minimums, maximum work weeks, adequate medical and educational services, increased buying power and similar benefits and protections.

The ideological and material distinctions between the two groups of rural workers of course work to the benefit of the sugar producers as does the existence of the rural workers themselves. In addition to the factors noted above, which precipitated the expulsion of *moradores* of various

kinds, the flexibility provided by a large reserve labor force is crucial to the success of an industry which has greatly fluctuating seasonal labor needs. Under present conditions, it is much more economically efficient for sugar growers and producers to pay wages to temporary laborers than to support a resident labor force with its attendant responsibilities. The recognition of this fact led Saint (1981:96) to suggest that much of the recent literature on the rural workers errs in presenting this form of labor "as a transitory social phenomenon within a broader process of rural proletarianization." In other words, he argues that the eventual outcome of current trends will not be a complete reliance on an urban-based labor force which secures year-round wage labor in the sugar cane fields of one locale -- as was the case in urban industrial areas where factory work became a way of life. Rather, one would expect an increasing reliance on a rural worker labor force marked by diverse and often contradictory needs and goals.

On the other hand, landowners cannot always count on the difficulties peasant workers and full-time wage laborers face in overcoming their ideological differences and joining forces against their employers. The Peasant Leagues of the 1960s represented just such a challenge to the traditional prerogatives of cane growers and producers. In that particular case, peasants and proletarians did come

together⁸ with such strength that only military force and a change in the ruling elite coalitions could resist their power.

The social movements of the 1960s also revealed that significant other changes were taking place in the Northeast as well. No longer dependent simply on each other or on their employer-patrons, rural workers could also rely on varying degrees of support from the country's churches, labor unions, agricultural federations, intellectuals, political parties, and international human rights organizations. Although the 1964 military coup effectively repressed those supports, there is some evidence to suggest that these forces are regrouping. The rural elite may have to devise alternate ways to dominate wage laborers, including perhaps increasing registration and full-time employment, if they are not to lose all political influence to other, particularly urban-based, elite groups. The alternative available to them and the potential for their success are topics which are discussed in more detail in Chapters Seven and Eight.

⁸ Unlike elsewhere in Latin America and even Brazil, in Paraíba, neither ethnic nor racial distinctions were a stumbling block to uniting laborers.

CHAPTER FIVE

THE RIBEIRO COUTINHO:
A CASE STUDY IN ELITE SOCIAL ORGANIZATION

Marriage unifies; inheritance
separates; property endures
(Leach 1968: 11)

A. Introduction

In this chapter¹, I propose to rely on family and personal histories to explore some of the strategies and potentialities used by one particular parentela or kindred for economic and political survival. More specifically, this chapter focuses on the strategies related to such standard anthropological concerns as kinship, marriage, and inheritance to explore the cultural construction of these practices and categories as representative of both the subjective and objective realities of elites.² A focus on

¹ The genealogy and biographies of the Ribeiro Coutinho family were constructed through interviews with family members and other informed locals and from published biographies including Lima (1964), Maia (1977), Melo (1988), Odilon (1985), Ramos 1987, and Zenaide (1982), from published local and regional histories, including Dé Carli (1985), Maia (1985), and Odilon (1984) and from company records and the social pages of local newspapers.

² I intentionally do not address racial or ethnic considerations in this study. I would agree that racial discrimination is very marked in Brazil, particularly within the 'upper' classes, and likely would play a role in the selection of marriage partners, composition of social networks, or recognition of illegitimate children. In the case of Paraíba's elite, however, I would argue that class is an over-riding consideration. Paraíba's bourgeoisie class was, and still is today, overwhelming white. Of course,

the internal organization of elites "can be seen as an important attempt to provide holistic analyses of complex societies from a focus on small-group processes" (Marcus 1983b:22). More importantly, a particular focus on elite families and kinship is facilitated and justified under particular historical junctures where, as Marcus (1983b:21) points out, "elite groups are composed of family-based factions rather than diffuse networks or associations of individuals not otherwise rooted in a basic organizational element of social structure." Although state and national political structures impinge upon and constrain the regional elite and the family-based economy of Brazil's Northeast, a focus on elite organizational strategies as an appropriate level of research orientation appears justified.

In exploring the significance of marriage, property, inheritance, and gender in the creation and trajectory of a political and economic elite, this chapter focuses on the Ribeiro Coutinho kindred of Paraíba. From the founding conjugal pair of the last century until today, three to four

racial discrimination does have something to do with this. But the fact remains that within the exclusive and restricted domains of elite social interaction, there were (and are) few, if any, non-whites present to be a consideration. Furthermore, Paraíba is quite unlike Bahia in its racial composition. I would suggest that Bahia, which is often considered a 'typical' northeastern state with its pronounced African cultural and physical influence, is fairly distinct from northeastern states such as Paraíba, Rio Grande do Norte, or Ceará. *Paraibanos* will frequently comment on the large number of 'pretos' that they saw on trips to Bahia or Rio de Janeiro.

generations of the family have come to adulthood. Life and career history data, from both primary and secondary sources, were collected for approximately one hundred and twenty members of the kindred as well as their spouses. The political activities of these individuals are presented elsewhere. Following a discussion of the founding couple and their children, the bulk of the chapter focuses exclusively on one branch of this family. This particular branch represents one of the family's most 'successful' group of individuals and as such, its members' 'stories' are part family history, part state history, and part local legend. More importantly, their stories are carefully constructed and guarded public testimonies of and models for proper and respected elite behavior and ideology. I have tried to temper those 'official' accounts without unduly resorting to unsubstantiated gossip. In addition, given that kinship is socially and culturally constructed, I am well aware that I do not have a complete family genealogy nor would it have been strictly possible to obtain one. In particular, the illegitimate sons and daughters of the family's male members are probably numerous and virtually unrecorded. I have but two exceptions to this pattern -- one, where the biological father chose to 'recognize' an illegitimate son through property transfer and a second where an illegitimate son turned to the courts to legally challenge the disposition of property. I suspect as well, particularly for the earlier

generations, that socially 'insignificant' family members, particularly females, have been lost from the collective memory and family lore. Further, methodological difficulties meant that I was never able to systematically verify the 'completed' genealogy (see Appendix II).

B. The Origin of the Ribeiro Coutinho in Paraíba

Like many of the families discussed in this study, the roots of the modern Ribeiro Coutinho kindred are to be found in a successful mixture of agriculture and commerce, strategic marriages and numerous prodigy, individual successes, personal tragedies, and the conjuncture of larger political and economic forces, all necessitating processes of expansion, consolidation and retrenchment.

The history of the family in Paraíba and the patronym Ribeiro Coutinho³ begin in the 1870s with the union of *Coronel* João Ribeiro da Silva Coutinho and Anna Maroja Ferreira de Castro (see Figure 6). Born in 1837, João Ribeiro Coutinho, as he came to be known in Paraíba, was the son of an undistinguished and now forgotten sugar mill owner from the northern sugar region of Pernambuco. Presumably with the leverage of his small inheritance in moveable

³ See later in this chapter for a discussion of the significance of naming practices, in particular, the retention of the Ribeiro Coutinho surname from generation to generation. Here, as elsewhere in the dissertation, all personal names provided are the real names of living or deceased individuals.

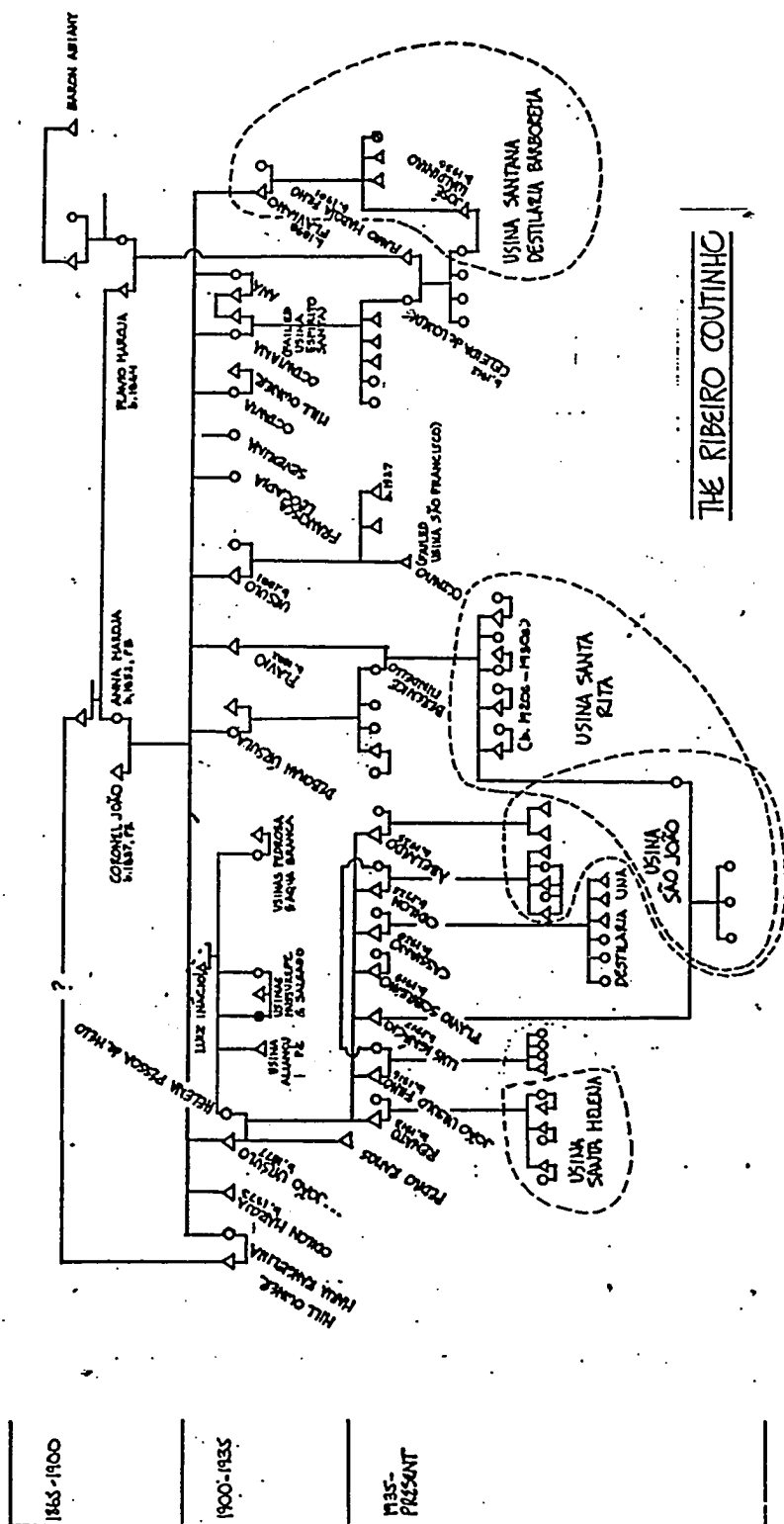


Figure 6. Selected Members of the Ribeiro Coutinho Kindred

property and his kin connections in Pernambuco, João contracted an advantageous marriage with a woman from a successful and well connected ranching family from the Pilar region of Paraíba. Anna, born in 1852 to Manoel Ferreira da Silva Maroja and Francisca Leocádeia Pereira de Castro, brought her new husband home to Fazenda Chaves where *Coronel* João aided his father-in-law in his cattle operation and increasingly in his expanding cotton activities. João and Anna eventually inherited this property and it was here that their children were raised. After they had passed their agricultural properties onto their children, João and Anna spent their later years living in the town of Sapé running a hotel.

Anna's younger brother, Flávio Maroja, achieved significant prominence in the state, and his connections to the Ribeiro Coutinho family would be reinforced through the marriage of one of his sons to a grand-daughter of Anna and João. As was traditional with many of the prominent families at the time, Flávio earned a medical degree from the Faculty of Medicine in Bahia. After a short stint as an army doctor, he returned to Paraíba where he became a highly respected doctor and hospital director. His marriage to Maria da Purificação Carneiro da Cunha, a descendent of a long line of state and federal deputies, senators and local governors, likely contributed to his own political successes as state deputy and vice-president. His sons and grandsons have

continued the tradition of combining politics and medicine, with the addition of minor sugar cane cultivation for rum production and as cane suppliers to *usinas*.

The combination of medium-scale rural production, professional occupations, and local political office-holding make members of the Maroja family a local, rather than regional, elite. In the small local county seats, they form part of the political and economic elite, given the physical absence in these towns of the families of large factory owners and industrialists. Although they seldom socialize with their politically and economically dominant cousins, the ties between the Maroja and the Ribeiro Coutinho have not been completely severed. The males, and more recently, the females, of the Maroja family, have benefited from the support they have received from the Ribeiro Coutinho which has allowed them and their allies to engage in politics in the *municípios*. In return, they have been instrumental in protecting the local interests of the Ribeiro Coutinho. In addition, Maroja women have played a role similar to the Bañuelos Gómez women in Lomnitz and Perez-Lizaur's (1987) study of a Mexican elite family -- that of the guardians of culinary arts and family recipes. Few, if any, significant social events among the Ribeiro Coutinho would be celebrated without the famous sweets and *salgadinos* made by Maroja women.

The beginnings of the Ribeiro Coutinho rise to predominance in the state of Paraíba were undoubtedly aided by the important political and social connections provided by Anna's family, particularly those of her brother Flávio. Her inheritance of her father's ranch, Fazenda Chaves, was also fortuitous. Located in the *agreste*, the transitory zone between the sugar-producing coast or *zona da mata* and the semi-arid *sertão*, this was one of the regions where cotton would become 'king' in the last half of the nineteenth century. The combination of cattle, cotton, and their factorage, in addition to a constant accumulation of new agricultural properties, ensured that the children of João and Anna were, on the whole, given a good start.

1. The Children of João and Anna

João died in 1929 at the age of 92. Anna died in 1941 at 89 years of age after having given birth to 17 children and raised 12. Not all of João and Anna's children or their descendants remained within the state nor did they all become members of its political and economic elite. The descendants of their daughters in particular have played a minor role in the state and their kin ties with the dominant Ribeiro Coutinho are minimal and subordinate. Two of the seven daughters (Francisca Leocadia and Severina) never married. Another two (Maria Rangelina and Octavia) married fairly unsuccessful local mill owners, one of whom was

possibly a maternal cousin (Francisco de Melo Castro). Another daughter (Deborah Ursula) married a military officer and politician (José Francisco de Lima Mindêllo) from a professional family then based in the capital. He had important kin ties to the state's political elite. With the notable exception of Deborah and José's daughter Berenice who married her mother's brother, Flávio (discussed below) none of their descendants have been particularly successful.

The other two daughters (Ana and Octaviana) married two brothers -- educated urban professionals from Pernambuco who were attempting to establish themselves in the agricultural sector.⁴ Ana died during pregnancy, leaving no descendants; her widower later remarried into a traditional sugar producing family in his home state. Octaviana's husband was a lawyer. With his wife's inheritance and the financial and technical support of his brothers-in-law, he attempted to become an *usineiro* in Paraíba. In its second year of operation, his factory was destroyed by flooding of the Paraíba River. Again with the aid of his brothers-in-law, he went into local politics, representing the state as a federal deputy and senator and returned to his legal practice.

The descendants of this branch of the family, while known locally, have not been particularly notable. One

⁴ They were the sons of a school teacher and grandsons of a Portuguese fisherman.

daughter married an urban surgeon and university professor, another a federal civil servant. One son went into cattle raising and another is a chemical engineer. The most prominent line in this family stems from a daughter (Celeida de Lourdes) who married Flávio Maroja Filho, her maternal grandmother's brother's son (her MoMoBrSo). Her husband was a doctor, county mayor, and agriculturalist. More importantly, one of their daughters (Helena Maria) married *usineiro* José Waldomiro Ribeiro Coutinho, also her maternal grandmother's brother's son (her MoMoBrSo or conversely, her FaFaSiSoSo).

The sons of João and Anna and their descendants have been, in general, better educated, economically more successful and/or accorded much higher status, both locally and regionally, and at times, nationally. After obtaining a law degree, the oldest son Odilon, who took his mother's family name Maroja, was set up on lands south of the family ranch in Itabaiana. He became involved primarily in cattle breeding, cotton production, and banking. He eventually amassed extensive holdings and dominated his region politically. In 1947, he associated with two of his brothers to found the Commercial and Industrial Bank of Paraíba. Never having married, his lands and wealth passed on to his brothers and their children at his death in 1953.⁵

⁵ It is unknown if Odilon Maroja had any children out of wedlock or if they might have received part of his legacy.

Another son of João and Anna, Ursulo, attempted to follow a similar economic strategy but did not distinguish himself either financially or politically. He spent most of his life on his family's ancestral lands as a rancher and cotton producer. Like his brother, João Ursulo, he also married a woman from their father's birthplace in Pernambuco. His wife (Serafina Pessoa) may, in fact, have been related to João Ursulo's wife. One of Ursulo and Serafina's sons, Octavio, briefly owned an *usina* in the state in the 1950s but eventually lost it. Another son, while continuing to work his father's lands and operating in county politics, also established a factory producing cotton surgical products. His sons have carried on these activities. These individuals and their cousins are essentially not integrated into the more prominent Ribeiro Coutinho social spheres or interact with them in the subordinate status of sugar cane suppliers.

The three remaining sons of João and Anna (João Ursulo, Flávio, and Flaviano) became prominent sugar cane factory owners in the state and their descendants are, on the whole, important members of the state's political and economic elite. Flávio trained as a doctor and interned in the Amazon before returning to the state and the sugar industry. Married to his sister's daughter, Flávio initially associated with his older brother, João Ursulo, when he purchased his first factory. Flávio eventually came to own

Usina Santa Rita -- a factory João Ursulo had originally negotiated to buy for himself. Although he remained the general director of the factory throughout his lifetime, Flávio was first and foremost a politician. He held a variety of public and political offices, most notably state and federal deputy, vice-president of the state, and eventually state governor in the 1950s. In association with brothers Flaviano and Odilon Maroja, his sons and his nephews, Flávio was a partner in the late 1940s in the Bank of Commerce and Industry which the family later sold. At the time of his death in 1963, the sugar factory remained the main family asset and was inherited jointly by his widow and six children. At the time of the research, over twenty-six family members held voting shares in the factory and a major family and legal battle over the company's future direction was in process.

Flávio and Berenice's six children have structured their lives less around the family factory than many of their cousins. The oldest son Francisco Leocadeio married a woman from the south of Brazil and associated with his father-in-law in a branch of the family's clothing factory which was set up in Paraíba. Daughter Ana Rita married her cousin Luiz Inácio. Their daughter, Berenice Helena, was one of three members of this family to intermarry with their Pessoa relatives from Pernambuco. She married her first cousin once removed (her FaMoSiSo). Flávio's son João

Crisostomo married Helena Pessoa's brother's daughter (his FaBrWiBrDa). Their son, Flávio Neto, has just returned from several years working for the huge conglomerate Votorandim in São Paulo to direct Usina Santa Rita. Flávio's daughter Francisca Ninosa, married into the powerful Bezerra de Melo family of Pernambuco,⁶ cousins of the Pessoa de Melo.

Another brother, José Painho, married locally and had no children. Flávio's other daughter, Berenice Maria, never married.

Flaviano, the other *usineiro* in the family, acquired his factory through arrangement with his older brother João Ursulo as well. Trained as an agronomist, he was also involved in cotton and banking. Unlike most of his brothers, he appears not to have become involved in state politics despite the fact that he married into a family with a long history of political activities in the state. He married Celeste Teixeira de Vasconcelos, daughter of ex-Governor José Teixeira de Vasconcelos and great-granddaughter of Baron Marau.⁷ Several of Flaviano's sons were and are active office holders. At Flaviano's death in 1977, his widow, two

⁶ The Othon Bezerra Group controls two *usinas* in Pernambuco, one *usina* in Alagoas, and two *usinas* in Rio de Janeiro. In addition, they are major shareholders of the Othon hotel chain, with luxury hotels throughout the country and the world.

⁷ Her grandfather and great-grandfather, had owned Engenho São João in the middle of the nineteenth century. Her grandfather had married his sister's daughter, therefore Celeste was descended from the Baron through both her paternal and maternal grandparents.

surviving sons and the family of a deceased son⁸ were the beneficiaries of a sugar factory and distillery, an agricultural processing and export concern, 6 ranches, 1,500 head of cattle, urban properties in Paraíba and Pernambuco, and shares in one of Rio de Janeiro's famous beachfront hotels.⁹ Only one of his sons (José Waldomiro) is actively involved in their business concerns in Paraíba on a day-to-day basis. The other son divides his time between state politics and cattle ranching activities in northern Brazil. A legal suit initiated by an illegitimate son against Flaviano's heirs was settled in 1990 in favor of the illegitimate son. Whether the plaintive was or is successful in collecting his share of the patrimony, however, is another matter. Although this case came to light after the research was completed, its significance should not be ignored: it reveals the declining political influence of the family and/or the existence of new moral standards in the society which could have a significant future impact on family inheritance strategies and sexual practices.

⁸ An unmarried daughter had died earlier at age 49 leaving her equal shares in the family's companies to her brothers.

⁹ This listing came from media reports of the legal case brought by an illegitimate son claiming rights to the family property. As such, it is more likely that the family interests have been under-estimated rather than over-estimated since these are the interests discovered by the plaintive -- an often difficult and impossible endeavor.

Flaviano's sons all married locally. The oldest son, Flaviano Filho, married a lawyer, the daughter of a middle class urban professional. Another son, José Waldomiro, married a Maroja cousin (his FaSiDaDa or his FaMoBrSoDa). Their brother, Marcus Odilon, married a lawyer and a journalist.¹⁰ Her father, a medical doctor, had been mayor of Campina Grande in 1930 and a State Deputy in 1947 for the Brazilian Workers Party (PTB).

C. João Ursulo Ribeiro Coutinho and His Descendants

Although he died long before his brothers, João Ursulo was the individual who pioneered the family's entry into sugar production and served as the bridge for the entrance of his brothers into the sugar industry as well other economic activities. Born in 1877, João Ursulo initially followed the path of his older brother Odilon Maroja. With a law degree in hand, he settled on his own cotton and cattle ranch in the Sapé district near the coastal cane fields. After having expanded his operations to include cotton mills and export activities, at the age of 35 he contracted an advantageous marriage with the daughter of a renowned mill owner from his father's birthplace in Pernambuco. The descendants of this *Pernambucano* family, with the names Pessoa de Mello, Bandeira de Mello, Carneiro da Cunha,

¹⁰ She writes the social column for one of the local newspapers.

Pessoa de Queiroz, and Bezerra de Melo would come to dominate sugar production in the states of Alagoas and Pernambuco, while also expanding into Rio Grande do Norte, Paraíba and Rio de Janeiro. The Ribeiro Coutinho have reinforced their ties with these families through marriage alliances in all succeeding generations.

The year after João Ursulo brought his young wife back to Paraíba, the financially troubled Usina São João was repossessed by its European creditors who threatened to close it down -- a situation which greatly disturbed the state government of the time (See Chapter 2). João Ursulo agreed to lease it for a year and bought it the next. Although current family members deny the significance of his marriage alliance, it is likely that his new wife's resources (dowry) and connections were instrumental in his new economic venture. This premise is suggested, in part, by the inclusion of his wife's name on the original contracts filed at the Commercial Records Office in the state capital. Brazilian civil law mandated marital community property, but the husband had the legal right to administer his wife's property. It was not common practice at this time to explicitly note the wife's share in official records. The fact that Helena Pessoa de Melo Ribeiro Coutinho is recorded as a founding shareholder in the new company would give weight to the premise that she contributed substantially to its inception. Also down-played in the 'official' family

recounting of João Ursulo's purchase of the factory was the presence of a brother (Flávio) and a sister (Octaviana) as shareholders; a substantial short-term loan from a Rio de Janeiro-based lawyer and politician; and a concession from the state government for tax-exempt status for a period of fifteen years; the family version is that he bought it for 800 *contos* partly on time payments.¹¹

Usina São João together with his cotton and cattle operations, became João Ursulo's springboard to an expansive financial empire composed of sugar factories and extensive rural and urban real estate. In the field of sugar production, he continued to buy up or acquire, through

¹¹ Odilon (1981:33) reports that João Ursulo's purchase of Engenho Central São João in 1914, marked the return of the family to the property which had been taken from it by the crown as punishment for Amaro Gomes Coutinho's -- it's owner and their ancestor -- revolutionary activities in 1817. Although Amaro had owned the property and did lose it after being charged with revolutionary activity in the Revolt of 1817 (he lost his head as well), there is no evidence, however, to substantiate the family's claims to kinship with Amaro. Earlier in the same presentation, Odilon (1981:22) reports that little is known of Amaro Coutinho's origins or whether he was a *Paraibano* from Santa Rita or from another *município*. Since their Coutinho surname arrived in Paraíba from Pernambuco with João Ribeiro Coutinho around 1870, the claim to descent from Amaro is suspect. Marcus Odilon could, however, claim for himself a familial connection with the property. After Amaro lost the property, it ended up in the hands of the Baron Marau and later his son. The Baron and his son were great-great-grandfather and great grandfather of Marcus Odilon through his mother, Celeste Teixeira. Since Celeste, her husband, Flaviano Ribeiro Coutinho, and their children were never shareholders in Usina São João, it is difficult to see this as any sort of homecoming. The claim to descent from Amaro, then, might be interpreted as genealogical embellishing.

various legal and extra-legal means,¹² rural properties for cane cultivation and ranching. In 1922 he negotiated to buy the twelve-year-old Usina Santa Rita but eventually passed the purchase option to his partner and brother, Flávio, who then left Usina São João. Three years later he acquired his second factory, the small Usina Bonfim, which he immediately closed down for expansion and modernization. This became Usina Santa Helena -- today, in the hands of the children of his son Renato. In 1928, João Ursulo sought a third factory, purchasing the six-year-old Usina Pedrosa or Santana, but then selling it to another brother, Flaviano. A history of the family reports that João Ursulo was pressured into this sale by his head-strong mother who argued that "you already have a factory, even, a very good factory. Flaviano has just graduated and doesn't have any plans. Transfer the agreement to him, and when he can, he will pay you" (Dé Carli 1985:529).

¹² The tragic character of the ruthless and scheming *Coronel Juca* in José Lins do Rego's novel *Usina* was purportedly based on João Ursulo. It must be kept in mind, however, that the author had a somewhat biased view of *usineiros* since his family was one of the ranks of dispossessed mill owners, unable to compete in the face of the ever expanding *usinas*. Nevertheless, several reports in the media in the 1930s allude to on-going land conflicts initiated by João Ursulo before his death. One of João Ursulo's sons also developed a reputation in the 1960s for his ruthless appetite for land and violent repression of rural laborers and labor movements (see Chapter Seven). His battles for land extended to his brother's as well. In 1982, it was reported that an armed standoff had developed between Usinas São João and Santa Helena over the ownership of 400 hectares of land (see *A União*, 1982:8).

João Ursulo's wife, Helena, died in 1927 soon after giving birth to their seventh son. João Ursulo immediately remarried but only after ensuring that his estate would go only to his sons -- a fortunate provision as João Ursulo died suddenly three years later at the age of 53 without having completely consolidated his financial empire. His estate passed on to his seven legitimate sons who were still minors under the tutelage of their uncle Flávio. Local rumors have it that Flávio moved to further expand his own empire through the incorporation of his nephew's property -- causing a family breach which has never been completely resolved. As a result, the protection of the minor's interests fell to their Maroja relatives -- their maternal grandmother's family -- and an elder illegitimate, but recognized¹³, brother (Pedro Ramos).

Pedro Ramos Coutinho, João Ursulo's oldest known son, was born at his father's ranch in Sapé. He eventually inherited agricultural property from his father and became a cane supplier to his half-brothers. For a time he managed one of his half-brothers' sugar factories in the state of Rio Grande do Norte while he continued to amass other agricultural properties in Paraíba. His widow and children

¹³ Mario Bick (personal communication) suggests that race may be an issue in the public recognition of illegitimate children. Although I have no data to substantiate his supposition, there may be some truth to it. Pedro Ramos' daughter, who I met, would definitely be categorized as a *branca* or a *galega* -- local terms for very fair-skinned and fair-haired individuals.

continue to supply Usina São João with sugar cane and attend large family gatherings where they play the dutiful role of 'client-cousins' and have been rewarded with the naming of a fourth generation Ribeiro Coutinho after Pedro.

João Ursulo's legitimate sons attempted to continue the expansionary plans of their father. Renato, the oldest son, became responsible for his brothers and the family's economic interests upon completing a degree in agronomy in 1934. He initially concentrated on reforming and expanding the two Paraíba factories and their associated agricultural lands. In the 1950s, the brothers began acquiring sugar factories in the state of Rio Grande do Norte -- Paraíba's northern neighbor. The idea appears to have been for each son to eventually have had their own *usina*. This attempt was not successful and the Ribeiro Coutinho eventually withdrew from the three Rio Grande do Norte factories they had bought. Two of these they sold and the other closed down. The upshot of this failed attempt was that Renato, having remained in Paraíba, increased his shares in the company holding the two Paraíba factories. Diverging interests and styles eventually brought the brothers into conflict with each other and particularly with Renato. As a result, in 1968, an acrimonious separation of the two factories took place. Renato and his immediate family became the sole owner of Usina Santa Helena while his brothers retained Usina São João. Over the years, Renato also expanded his cattle

ranching and agricultural holdings, he owned a radio station, newspaper, and a brick factory, and was involved in the commerce of sugar. He participated in and directed various interest associations in both Paraíba and Rio de Janeiro and held political offices at the county, state, and national levels.

In his business activities, Renato seldom formed partnerships outside of his immediate family and within the family businesses, he retained ultimate control until his death. When he set up 'Companhia Agro-Industrial Santa Helena' at the breakup of the two factories in 1968, he held 50 percent of the shares, his wife 20 percent, and each of his three children 10 percent. At this time, his eldest son Carlos Antônio was brought in as a director and it appears that from then on, Carlos was the designated heir. The other positions of director were held by his wife and frequently a trusted employee/manager, and occasionally by his younger son, José Fernando. His daughter, married to an extremely wealthy and powerful industrialist with factories in Pernambuco and Paraíba,¹⁴ seldom participated in company meetings and never held an official position within any of the family's companies -- nor did her husband. Following Renato's death in 1983, 10 percent of his shares were given

¹⁴ Both of Maria Lucia's brothers married women from local, rather 'undistinguished' professional families. Her husband was an industrialist from Campina Grande and along with his brothers owned several industries in the capital as well as agricultural properties.

to Carlos and the remainder passed on to his widow, Maria Anunciada, who became president of the company. As a result of this transfer and unequal reinvestment in the company by the other children, at the time of the research, Maria Anunciada controlled 59 percent of the company, Carlos had 23 percent and 17 percent remained with the other two children. With Carlos and various employees, Maria Anunciada has a major hand in running the company in 1988.

During Renato's lifetime, he and his wife started various other businesses and companies in partnership with their children. However, in the majority of the cases where the company still existed after Renato's death, Carlos and his wife had become the major or sole shareholders. Like his father, Carlos frequently attempted to diversify his holdings, particularly into the production and processing of agricultural products for export. He and his wife started several new companies of their own with bank loans and government regional development resources or in partnership with non-family, outside investors. In general, these ventures have not been successful and by 1988, Renato's descendants -- with the exception of the daughter and her husband -- were dangerously in debt. Although coming from one of the most successful Ribeiro Coutinho branches, they were now in an extremely precarious economic position. Following the conclusion of the research, rumors constantly surfaced that most of the businesses controlled by Maria

Anunciada and her son Carlos were going into receivership. By the end of 1991, the sugar and alcohol-producing Usina Santa Helena had not opened for the 1991/92 harvest.

Following the breakup of Usinas Santa Helena and São João, further segmentation and consolidation reduced the number of family members holding shares in Usina São João. João Ursulo Filho, João Ursulo and Helena's second son, graduated from the Recife faculty with a law degree in 1937 and returned home to business and politics. He contracted an extremely fortunate marriage with Germana Velloso Borges, daughter of Virginio Velloso Borges, pharmacist, founder of textile factories in Paraíba, Rio de Janeiro and São Paulo, banker in Paraíba and Rio de Janeiro, and partner in Usina Tanques. After several years in local politics and participation in the northeastern sugar cane factories with his brother, João Ursulo Filho effectively withdrew from the family business. Although he held positions in the directorate and remained a partner in Usina São João until his death, he seldom attended meetings or took part in the day-to-day operation of the factories. His main economic interests and base of operation lay in Rio de Janeiro. There, in partnership with his father-in-law, he founded the Alliance Bank which was later sold. Following João Ursulo Filho's death in 1972, his shares in Usina São João were briefly held by his widow and children before they sold out.

Since that time their contact with Paraíba and the Ribeiro Coutinho there has been extremely limited.

The alienation of the descendants of João Ursulo Filho from Paraíba's political economy is partially a result of their incorporation into the Rio de Janeiro elite. João Ursulo Filho's widow remarried into a powerful and wealthy southeastern family and his daughter married a member of an extremely wealthy and influential family from Rio de Janeiro, owners of several of the city's major five-star hotels. What contacts they maintain in Paraíba are primarily with their maternal relatives, the Velloso Borges, and with one branch of the Ribeiro Coutinho -- this being one of João Ursulo's brothers who married the sister of João Ursulo's wife. The connection between these two sisters has been reinforced since both maintain apartments in Rio de Janeiro and spend considerable time there.

The third son of João Ursulo and Helena followed an older elite practice of marrying within the family. After a degree in agricultural engineering, Luiz Inácio Ribeiro Coutinho married Ana Rita Ribeiro Coutinho who was both his first cousin and his first cousin once removed (her father, Flávio, had married his sister's daughter, so she was Luiz Inácio's FaBrDa and FaSiDaDa). As a result of this marriage, Luiz Inácio became a shareholder with his father-in-law and wife in Cia Usina Santa Rita, as well as in Cia Usinas São João e Santa Helena with his brothers. In partial

partnership with his brothers, Luiz Inácio bought a small sugar factory in the state of Rio Grande do Norte and attempted to turn it into a larger enterprise which would then become his particular legacy to his children. The attempt did not succeed and the factory was eventually sold to a family of *usineiros* from Pernambuco. The remainder of his life was spent in local politics.

Luiz Inácio died at 51 in 1968. His shares in both Usina São João and Usina Santa Rita passed on to his widow and three daughters. His widow/cousin did not remarry and after ten years of participating in company meetings as the representative of her late husband's and children's interests, she took active control of her own block of shares, leaving her daughters or their spouses to represent their own interests. For the time, Ana was somewhat atypical in regard to her active participation in company business and meetings. Unlike her sisters and women in other companies, she has been a director at the factory owned by her family since 1968. Her daughters followed the more traditional pattern of appointing their husbands representatives of their shares in both companies. Only recently has one of them begun to appear at company meetings as representative of her own interests.

Another son of João Ursulo and Helena, Flávio Sobrinho, never held office within the family company or participated in its day-to-day operation and eventually left the family

business in the mid-1960s. With his brother João Ursulo Filho, he was a banker in Rio de Janeiro. Given his physical and social absence from the state of Paraíba, little information was collected on this branch of the family except that Flávio Sobrinho married an American woman, had no children, and like most of his brothers, died young. He appears to have passed most of his adult life in Rio de Janeiro and had little input into the family business in the Northeast.

The fifth son, Cassiano, also spent much of his life involved in independent activities although he only left Usina São João permanently when PROÁLCOOL offered the opportunity for setting up his own alcohol distillery. Born in 1920, Cassiano earned a degree in agricultural engineering and spent much of his life involved in ranching activities, partly on lands his father and uncle Odilon Maroja had amassed in the Sapé region. His wife, Yedda Régis, was the daughter of a local rancher who built Usina Santa Alexandrinha just south of João Pessoa in the 1929.¹⁵ Cassiano and his wife had six children, all married today and just beginning families.

In 1960, as the major shareholder and in partnership

¹⁵ Yedda's father got most of the structure in place but the factory never went into operation and the parts and equipment were later sold to another Paraíba family who reassembled the factory as Usina Monte Alegre in the *município* of Mamanguape.

with his *concunhado*¹⁶ (his wife's sister's husband) and various other minor shareholders, including some cousins, Cassiano founded a thread and textile factory. Within a few years of operation, however, Cassiano's position in the company gradually diminished as he failed to make new investments in the company. Cassiano's brother-in-law and his family eventually became the sole owners of Industria Textil de Mandacarú until financial problems forced them to give it up in 1980.¹⁷

Increasingly in bad health in the late 1970s, Cassiano began to withdraw from the partnership with his brothers at Usina São João. He and his wife invested in a variety of enterprises which would form the bases of his children's legacy. The first of these was an alcohol distillery built on the family's ranch lands in the *município* of Sapé. The company that developed this property was composed of Cassiano, his wife and five of his six children and the husband of his sixth child. Cassiano held 44 percent of the company while his wife, children and son-in-law each had 8 percent. The company was originally directed by Cassiano and

¹⁶ A *concunhado* in this case is a co-brother-in-law, a wife's sister's husband. The connection must be through siblings.

¹⁷ At this point, the factory was temporarily taken over by a consortium supported by the government and managed by a brother of a son-in-law of Cassiano. Two years later, the government handed the factory over to its operators who have failed to keep it in constant operation.

two of his sons, while the administrative council was composed of Cassiano, another son, and his son-in-law.

Three years later, while the distillery was still being built, the company was run by Cassiano, his wife and three sons. A year later, the three sons were directing the company, Cassiano's shares had gone down to 36 percent, his wife's had increased to 18 percent, the daughters' shares (and one son's) had actually gone down to 7 percent due to reduced investments (the daughters had further reduced their shares by each giving their husband 2.5 percent). Two sons had increased their percentages slightly to 9 percent. In 1982, the largest shareholder became Una Participação e Administração Ltda, an investment company owned by the family and eventually controlled by Cassiano's wife, Yedda. At this time, Cassiano Filho resigned as a director as did two of his sisters who were replaced by their husbands. One daughter, Helena, continued to actively participate in administering the company although her husband is also personally involved as Industrial Director. In late 1986 Yedda took over the company in association with her children, particularly with her son Paulo Germano and his wife.

Cassiano died during the course of the research and most of his shares in the distillery were taken over by his wife. While all the children retained shares in the company, Paulo's proportion had increased. Along with his mother, he

had come to play a predominant role at the distillery. Paulo, without his wife, was also sole representative of another company acquired with his parents from their Maroja cousins in 1982. This was a mineral water source and bottling operation. Again with parental participation, another brother, Marcos, had organized a real estate agency and construction company. The other children remained minor participants in the distillery and investment company controlled by their mother. While it is still too early to say, it appeared at the time of the research that Paulo was being groomed as the 'designated heir' of at least the distillery portion of the family patrimony.

João Ursulo and Helena's sixth son, Odilon, has remained most closely associated with the family's first sugar factory in Paraíba and has diversified his economic interests to a lesser extent than his brothers. Born in 1923, he obtained a law degree from the Faculty in Pernambuco. Although Odilon has spent all of his life as an *usineiro*, he considers himself, first and foremost, an intellectual, writer, journalist, literary critic, and most importantly, a disciple of and successor to his old friend and mentor, writer Gilberto Freyre.

Odilon married his brother's wife's sister -- a daughter of another local elite family (the Velloso Borges) with interests in agriculture, commerce and industry. Odilon and Solange have three sons, two of them recently married

and beginning their own families. His wife and his sons spent a good part of the last 30 years outside of the state, particularly in Rio de Janeiro. One of the sons married the daughter of a wealthy family from Rio de Janeiro while the other married a woman from a less distinguished family from São Paulo. Now that the two youngest sons have become more actively involved in the running of the Paraíba sugar factory, they have set up their primary households in the state. Their mother has returned to the region with them. The oldest son, still unmarried, divides his time between the state, the South, and his ranching interests in the north of the country.

Odilon, himself, has never spent extended periods of time in Paraíba. At the time of the separation of the two factories, a new administrative manager was brought in to run Usina São João and since that time, the day-to-day operation of the factory has been left to this hired, trusted individual and hired industrial and agricultural specialists. In the early 1960s, before the breakup of the two factories, Odilon had moved to the state of Rio Grande do Norte to start his own sugar factory. It was there that he first held political office. It was there also that his nationalist sentiments led to his support for national ownership of energy resources which resulted in the creation of PETROBRÁS -- the national petroleum company -- and to his founding of an electrical company. Although he did not

retain control of this company or the sugar factory for long, he has continued to maintain a home and until recently, to carry on his political activities in Rio Grande do Norte.

Odilon also maintains homes in Brasilia and Rio de Janeiro where he also owns a small publishing company. With the exception of his far-flung real estate holdings, his primary source of income remains the factory in Paraíba. With the implementation of PROÁLCOOL, Odilon expanded the distillery annex at Usina São João and briefly associated with some investors from Pernambuco in the construction of a new alcohol distillery for the state. He has since withdrawn from this venture. While he has managed to increase his shares in Usina São João to 51 percent, the heirs of two brothers (Abelardo and Luiz Inácio) still retain 36 percent and 8 percent respectively. To date, Odilon has not passed on any substantial shares to either his wife or sons. Although he has successfully pressured at least two of his sons to give up their other interests -- one was an economics professor Rio de Janeiro -- and devote themselves to the administration of the factory and its business, he has yet to allow them to fully participate in the decision-making process. Through his majority position and with the aid of his long-time, trusted general manager, he continues to control the finances, profits, and direction of this company. This has led increasingly to conflicts with his

sons and nephews and increasing resentment and alienation on their part.

Abelardo, the youngest of João Ursulo and Helena's seven sons died in his early 40s, just before the breakup of the two factories. When the transaction was completed a few months later, his shares in Usina São João were held by his widow for his two young sons. Abelardo's widow remarried into a family of a long line of politicians and ranchers from the state's *sertão* -- her new husband, his brothers, father, uncles and great grandfather had traditionally allied themselves with the more conservative branches of the Ribeiro Coutinho family.¹⁸ For most of the boys' youth, their interests in Usina São João had been intermittently asserted by their step-father. Now enrolled in university, these two are being pressured by their mother to attempt to wrest control of their shares and their profits from their uncle. As well, they are being groomed to administer the vast urban real estate assembled by their mother and step-father.

D. Strategies of Elite Social Organization

In the context of twentieth-century political and economic change, the Ribeiro Coutinho constituted a 'new elite' in the state of Paraíba in the sense of being: 1) a

¹⁸ Despite this association with a powerful, local political elite, it is telling that Abelardo's widow retains her first husband's surname.

family whose male line was without significant blood ties to the state's 'old' political and economic elite (although this did not prevent them from 'inventing' such ties); and 2) in forming part of a new economic class faction which came to occupy the pinnacle of the agrarian and urban social structure. While intimately linked to a new phase in the political and economic development of the state, they did not initially alter their social organization to any significant degree nor lessen their reliance on family-based factions.

In the early years of this century, before the advent of large private or state development banks and governmental development incentives, access to investment resources was to a large extent dependent upon family and personal networks. Ownership of land, although not the major capital investment of a sugar factory owner, was important especially as a means of denying its access to others and therefore ensuring a source of cheap labor. As various scholars have argued (eg. Brett 1990; Dumont 1977), heritable land, as moveable property, is closely associated with kinship and relations of power and control among people. In a highly non-egalitarian social system with little opportunity for social mobility and a lack of significant economic alternatives, familial control over individual members was compounded.

This control was directed to a large extent to ensuring that marriage alliances served the needs of the family rather than the individual per se. Here we can follow Bourdieu (1976:124) in seeing marriage as "an institution that had a direct bearing on the improvement, conservation or dissipation of a family's material and symbolic capital...[and] one of the mainstays of both the dynamic and static elements of the entire social system." *Coronel João*, the founding patriarch of the Ribeiro Coutinho in Paraíba, for example, gained both material and symbolic capital with his marriage to Anna Maroja. His son João Ursulo's marriage to Helena Pessoa de Melo brought him capital to invest in a sugar factory as well as important connections to the regional sugar industry. The marriage of João Ursulo's sons to two sisters from a wealthier and more socially prominent family served the same purpose. Throughout the early years of this century, the marriage alliances formed by the Ribeiro Coutinho sons, in particular, served on the whole to improve the family's material capital or at least to conserve it -- in the case of Flávio's marriage to his sister's niece.¹⁹

While one of the primary goals in the marriage of sons appears to have been directed toward new sources of capital,

¹⁹ In the latter case, however, it could also be argued that Berenice's parents were improving the potential capital of their descendants through the marriage of their daughter to a more successful member of the family.

somewhat diverging interests emerge in the marriages of daughters. In families with sons as potential heads of the family businesses, daughters were more likely to be 'married off' to individuals with the resources to maintain a minimal standard of elite lifestyle. This practice is seen most clearly in the circumstances of the marriages of João and Anna's daughters at the end of the last century.²⁰ Similar strategies appear to have operated in this century as well - for example, in the marriages of many of the great-granddaughters of João and Anna. The result of these practices was that many of the females lines were lost to the de facto Ribeiro Coutinho family living in Paraíba and in the process the pool of potential claimants to the family's economic, political, social, and symbolic capital was limited.

A second common strategy in families with an adequate pool of sons or limited means was for some of the daughters to remain single. Although the family had to bear the cost of maintaining such women during their lifetime, family capital was not dissipated on in-laws and future generations. In the past, these spinster daughters frequently entered religious orders -- as did a daughter of Flávio Maroja and two daughters of Deborah Ursula Ribeiro

²⁰ It might also be argued that in the interest of conserving the still limited wealth of the family for the sons, the daughters were not provided with sufficient resources to attract men of more substantial means.

Coutinho Mindêllo.²¹ Today, it is more common for these women to remain within the family home, providing care and support for parents and playing a limited role within the family businesses.

A third strategy in the marriage of daughters characterizes families without sons. Here the concern appears not to be to 'lose' claimants or to attract material capital, but to attract labor or administrative skills for the family enterprise. In such cases, sons-in-law are valued for the roles they will play within the company or in ensuring the family adequate representation in state and local politics -- those that are preferred have training or experience in administration, agronomy, engineering, and political activities. Aguinaldo Velloso Borges, owner of Usina Tanques and father of four daughters, successfully followed such a strategy, as did Luiz Inácio Ribeiro Coutinho and his cousin Ana Rita (parents of three daughters) and Ana Rita's brother Francisco Leocadeio (father of seven daughters). It is not surprising that among these examples, the sons-in-law are all from fairly modest families, economically and socially. At marriage, they were given control of part of their wives' shares and given

²¹ Among the Ribeiro Coutinho kindred there were no family members who entered the priesthood. They did, however, have affinal relatives in religious orders early in the century. Prior to the end of the last century, it was much more common for an elite family to have at least one son ordained. This individual often served the plantation family as their resident or 'uncle' priest (Freyre 1970:294).

positions as industrial director, agricultural director, financial director, etc. Without the resources to set out on their own, they are easily subordinated to the demands and directives of their fathers-in-law. The obvious pertinence of their lower status was in contrast to cases where a son-in-law was of much higher status than his wife's family.²² In the case of Renato's daughter, Maria Lucia, her husband held no shares and played no role in the company. Although Flávio's son-in-law Renato Brito Bezerra de Melo did begin to hold shares in Usina Santa Rita in the 1970s (after his father-in-law's death), he did not appear as a director of the company until the mid-1980s when major conflicts began to surface over the future direction of the company; his wife and one of her sisters were at odds with their brothers and sister. With the greater opportunities today for women to become educated and to actively participate in and even run their family's businesses, one might predict a lessening of such marriage strategies.

The symbolic capital provided by marriage alliances was just as, if not more, important than material considerations. It is not surprising then that until recent times, the majority of the Ribeiro Coutinho sought marriage partners from within the state or from the state's dominant southern neighbor, Pernambuco. As Bourdieu (1976:123n)

²² In both of the examples that follow, sons were also available to take on business responsibilities.

points out, "[i]n the case of local marriage, the social value of the partners is known. Marriage to outsiders whose social value is unknown is considered cheating." For the Ribeiro Coutinho, as newcomers to the state and to the region's political and economic elite, relations of affinity to families with pre-existing symbolic capital served them well. Although these marriages functioned as alliances -- linking the Ribeiro Coutinho to important families in Paraíba and in the sugar industry -- their relevance to the descent principle of kinship should also be noted. The marriage of both male and female members of the Ribeiro Coutinho to individuals whose roots reached deeper into the state's history and into earlier elite families gave legitimacy to later generations' claims of descent from the state's authentic and valued blood lines.

Having established themselves, both materially and symbolically, with the necessary horizontal and vertical connections to the state and the region, marriages with locals became less important. Thus among the younger generations of Ribeiro Coutinho, we find more instances of marriages to individuals from outside the region: from São Paulo, Rio de Janeiro, Paraná, and so on. Having formed vertical and horizontal business and political connections outside the region obviously also helped in expanding their available marriage pool. There is no doubt that these trends stem in part from the greater mobility of the present

generation of young people, the decline of parental control, and perhaps, relatedly, a greater emphasis on wide ranging leisure activities. On the other hand, it is tempting to envisage these exogamous marriages as serving new functions for new needs. The declining importance of the Northeast in the national political economy and the declining fortunes of northeastern elites requires new connections, new expertise, and new sources of capital.

Symbolic capital was served as well by the ambilineal nature of the bilateral Brazilian kinship system. As Lewin (1987:133) has noted,

...the family's 'cutting edge' depended on individual recognition. The range of kinship, the 'family' one chose to recognize, in other words, depended in part on a characteristic common to all bilateral systems: their capacity for recognizing kinship according to specific behavioral contexts.

Such a system allows the admittance of socially significant affinal and fictive bonds as well as consanguines, while also acknowledging the kindred's fluidity. For example, while a continuity from small mill owner to *usineiro* may have been true for at least some of Pernambuco's sugar aristocracy, the example of Paraíba suggests that the appearance of continuity may be more correctly viewed as an elite strategy -- as a cultivation of a tradition -- rather than an elite reality. This can be seen, for example, in the

Ribeiro Coutinho claims to a genealogical history in the state as descendants of the earlier owners of Engenho São João (Amaro Coutinho and the Baron Maráu).²³

Although bilaterality was of considerable utility in providing genealogical depth and breadth, as well as respectability and fluidity, one cannot ignore the patrilineal bias that colors genealogical reckoning and structures the transfer of property. The patrilineal inclination is seen most concretely in naming conventions. Since João Ribeiro da Silva Coutinho's arrival in the state, all direct male descendants, with the exception of Odilon Maroja and to some extent Marcus Odilon, have maintained the Ribeiro Coutinho patronym and eschewed, for the most part, inclusion of their mother's father's name. In the case of Odilon Maroja, we might suppose that acknowledgement of the Maroja connection was of significance for the first born son in an environment where the Ribeiro Coutinho name was not yet well known.²⁴ Here matrilineal descent, rather than

²³ In a similar manner, there is the tendency in the recounting of family histories to minimize economic activities which intervened between a family's ownership of a mill and later ownership of an usina. While it is true that João Ursulo's grandfather owned a mill in Pernambuco and Agualdo Velloso Borges' father owned a mill in Paraíba, it was not through these activities that the Ribeiro Coutinho or Velloso Borges became *usineiros*. Minimizing this discontinuity allows the families to claim membership in the region's sugar aristocracy.

²⁴ Marcus Odilon tends to leave off his Ribeiro Coutinho surname in his political activities and in his writings. One might surmise that in these personae he would rather not be associated with the state's *usineiros*.

patrilineal descent, carried more value. Throughout most, if not all, of the twentieth century, the use of the Ribeiro Coutinho surname, has provided its holder with significant social capital. Among the descendants of the female lines, however, it is instructive to note the infrequency of the use of the Ribeiro Coutinho patronym. Excluded from the social spheres and economic activities of other Ribeiro Coutinho by the inferior marriages and reduced inheritances of their mothers, they are excluded as well by naming conventions.

As was noted above, the social and cultural construction of kinship was of concern as well in reducing competing claims to the family's wealth and limiting the dissipation of the family's resources. Just as relevant individuals and family branches could be incorporated into the creation of the family's historical memory, other individuals and branches which had little to offer in the way of economic, political or social capital could be 'lost' from the collective memory. And those who were 'lost,' most often than not, were the female descendants except in cases of necessary or valuable sons-in-law. The shallow descent and segmentation characteristic of the Brazilian kinship system served to some extent to insure that the family group did not overextend their available resources. Until recently, the most expendable members have been the daughters and this has revealed itself in a general

devaluation of the female lines. Family histories invariably highlight male members and their activities while omitting female members.²⁵

In a system of partible inheritance, the family's agricultural lands and the sugar cane factory operated, on the one hand, to hold together the family's intergenerational core. At least in principle, all children began life with equal shares in their family's factory. On the other hand, with increasingly limited resources (land is finite and new factories are restricted by government), strategies to limit the number of heirs were necessary. While endogamous marriage strategies (such as cousin, uncle-niece or aunt-nephew), appear to have been preferred to a greater extent in the last century when land and slaves were the primary economic assets²⁶, segmentation and/or diversification can serve similar functions in an environment where land is no longer readily available and sugar production appears to have reached its maximum capacity. In some cases, where segmentation has not occurred

²⁵ I came across several calls for a life history of João Ursulo's wife, Helena Pessoa de Melo, "an admirable woman who requires a chapter herself" (Melo 1988:1), but none has yet to be written. More telling is the fact that a family mass is held every year in the chapel at Usina São João in memory of João Ursulo but not in memory of Helena. Moreover, João Ursulo is buried at the foot of the chapel's altar; Helena's remains are in Pernambuco.

²⁶ Mario Bick (personal communication) suggests that endogamous marriage may be less a strategy than a simple result of a pool of potential partners limited by economic, political, social, and racial concerns.

and diversification has been limited, as in the case of Flávio's family, competition over increasingly smaller pieces of the pie threatens the cohesion of the family.

Ownership histories of sugar factories in both Paraíba and Pernambuco suggest that continuity in ownership is dependent to a large extent on a core family's ability to limit the claims of collaterals and to consolidate ownership around an ever decreasing pool of members.²⁷ As Lewin (1987:143) put it, "cohesion and fragmentation therefore were opposite sides of the same coin of family survival and perpetuation." One way continuity and control are accomplished is through fathers (and today mothers are well) failing to turn over shares to their children and grandchildren until forced to do so through ill health or death. Another strategy is to cultivate a designated 'heir' -- one member of the family who is encouraged to take on more shares and responsibilities in the company -- while the other children's responsibilities and shares decline. When resources are available, however, family diversification can be a more powerful strategy. Heirs marginalized from the family's landed property may be set up in other enterprises; encouraged to develop marketable skills as doctors, lawyers, administrators, agronomists, or architects; or in the case of females, 'married off.'

²⁷ Dé Carli (1985)'s history of Pernambuco's *usinas* provides innumerable examples of the loss of *usinas* by families unable to limit the pool of claimants.

E. Conclusion

Despite these continuing processes of segmentation, consolidation, and diversification among the families that control the sugar cane factories in the Northeast today, these families have not been immune to Brazil's increasingly precarious economic environment. Northeastern sugar producers are still highly dependent upon government subsidies to sugar and alcohol and on investment capital channeled through the regional development agencies. Ample evidence exists of the increasing strain both on these families' resources and on their ability to retain their patrimony. The apparent inability of many of the region's *usineiro* families to take sufficient advantage of the government's national alcohol program to build autonomous distilleries and the increasing number of bankruptcies attest to their economic decline. While *usineiros* continue to play an important political role in the Northeast, it is a much more limited role than they had in state politics prior to the mid-1960s. The political activities of the state's *usineiros* during the first part of this century are described in the next chapter. Their more recent political endeavors form part of Chapter Eight.

CHAPTER SIX

AGRO-INDUSTRIALISTS AND TWENTIETH-CENTURY POLITICS

They called themselves the men of good
when in truth they were the men of
goods.

Odilon (1965)¹ Poder, O Alegria
dos Homens, p. 42

A. Introduction

As I discussed in Chapter One, many of the central concerns in the study of politics in Latin America relate to the role and positions elites in general, and more specifically to the role and position of a particular elite group or faction. Of concern has been the long history of elite political domination, shifts in the loci of elite control or of competition among various elite factions for control, as well as challenges to elite control from groups traditionally excluded from local and national politics. Significant emphasis has been placed as well on the changing role of the state and on its relationship to the various elite factions. A major concern here has been the challenge presented to regionally-based power structures such as the

¹ Marcus Odilon is the name that Marcus Odilon Ribeiro Coutinho, a son of Flaviano Ribeiro Coutinho and a shareholder in Usina Santana, uses for his published works. In the body of the text, I reference his writing as Odilon (1965), rather than Ribeiro Coutinho. Odilon Ribeiro Coutinho, on the other hand, refers to his cousin Odilon, a son of João Ursulo Ribeiro Coutinho.

oligarchic control historically exercised by *caciques* or *coroneis* by the administrative consolidation of Latin American nation states and by economic centralization. For anthropologists, in particular, these processes have led to an interest in the nature of regional and local political organization and to the impact of socioeconomic change on the power and position of regional elites.

In the discussion that follows, the political activities of members of the Ribeiro Coutinho family and other *usineiros* serve to delineate some of the processes and events which condition the roles and positions of a particular elite segment. The families, for example, illustrate the potential for capital formation which existed in Paraíba during the early years of this century, how this potential was intimately connected to the changing role of the Brazilian state, and how economic power translated into political influence and authority. The assembling of the Pessoa political machine which predates the political rise of the Ribeiro Coutinho is a particularly revealing example of the administrative consolidation of the nation state and the process whereby connected families tapped into this process for their own political and economic interests. The activities and behaviors of members of both of these groups are instructive of the degree to which political debate in

Paraíba lacked an ideological dimension² and was essentially of an intra-elite nature.

In this chapter³ I begin the discussion of these issues as they pertain to the state of Paraíba and its sugar agro-industrialists with a historical description of state politics, political parties, and political actors up to 1960.⁴ Within this, I include information on the formal political activities and offices of the state's *usineiros* while emphasizing the relation of the sugar producing elite to other elite sectors in the state. The repercussions of

² It is this lack of an ideological dimension which makes it virtually impossible to describe what the 'positions' of the various political parties or factions were or are. In very general terms, disagreements may develop over such issues as state/local autonomy or central control, free or regulated markets, parliamentary or republican governments, nationalized energy programs or free enterprise, subsidies for agriculture or subsidies for industry, etc., but neither parties nor individuals have been consistent in their stand on particular issues. As such, in the discussion that follows I do not attempt to associate particular parties or factions with particular positions. With the obvious exceptions of such parties as the Communists, I do not believe that members of these groups could themselves delineate an agreed upon position -- the multitude of communist parties and factions and their frequent internal conflicts shows that even here there are major disagreements.

³ Lewin (1975, 1987) is the only systematic study of turn of the century politics in Paraíba. For the political history of Paraíba and the actions of its politicians in since the 1920s, I have relied on Blondel (1957), Costa (1986), Feitosa (1982), Maia (1980), Maia (1976, 1977, 1985), Mariz (1987), and Odilon (1965, 1984, 1985).

⁴ While political office holding is not the sole or most reliable indicator of political power, it does, at the very least, suggest an individual or family's potential for influence or control.

Vargas' *Estado Novo* and the subsequent consolidation of national political parties on state politics, political careers, and family-based politics are important concerns. In the subsequent chapters I focus on the factors leading up to the imposition of military rule and its aftermath. In Chapter Seven, inter-class, rather than intra-class, relations become the dominant theme with a focus on the relation between *usineiros* and their workers and on the issue of agrarian reform and conflicts over land. In Chapter Eight I explore both intra-and inter-class relations in the contemporary period.

B. The Power Structure in Paraíba

With perhaps a few notable and short-lived exceptions, one would be hard pressed to identify particular ruling parentela or *coroneis* who, it could be argued, dominated the state of Paraíba or even particular regions within it to any significant degree. If anything, the history of state politics is best seen as a series of shifting coalitions and power-seeking compromises. The Pessoa political machine which dominated many aspects of the state during the first two decades of this century and which so impressed Lewin (1975 and 1987) as evidence for a 'politics of family,' was perhaps a brief exception representing a specific historical juncture, or overstated on the part of Lewin. As Lewin herself has shown, the Pessoa parentela was not hegemonic

even in its base *municípios*. It relied to a great extent on the support of other families, factions and coalitions, and it remained at the apex of power only briefly.

Pessoa predominance during the 1910s and 1920s can be seen as a consequence of the expedient intersection of a variety of factors. These included: the association of the Pessoa with the increasingly important cotton industry during those years; the expanding importance of the interior regions (as cotton producers and processors) to the economic well-being of the state; the connections provided by the numerous influential Pessoa relatives in the state of Pernambuco; and the existence of several valuable connections at the national level. What is perhaps most interesting about the Pessoa era is the connection that was cemented among *sertanejos* and politics. Most of the families of the interior who entered politics on the Pessoa wave have continued to send sons and daughters into national and state politics. In fact, given the current economics of the interior and its reduced population base, *sertanejos* are highly over-represented as state representatives.⁵ Politics, it appears, is a career of choice for many of the aspiring families of the *sertão*.

In a similar vein, despite personal, familial or local histories which glorify the influence and prominence of

⁵ Candidates for both state and federal office in Brazil do not represent particular ridings or districts. Rather, they are state-wide candidates.

particular historical figures or families, there appear to be few cases in the state's history that could be interpreted as concrete examples of *coronelismo* comparable to that described for other areas of the Northeast (see Chandler's [1972] study of the Feitosa family of Ceara). This is not to suggest that Paraíba was or is lacking in politically significant individuals or families of lasting importance. Rather, as Lewin (1987:73) has convincingly argued, due to the particularities of the state's economic development, "...local power in Paraíba remained spatially restricted and highly segmented.... Political bosses continued to be dependent on the personal alliances cemented by intermarriage that transcended *município* boundaries."

These conditions were particularly evident prior to the advent of the *usinas* when the coastal sugar industry was in decline and "[t]he dynamic peopling of Paraíba's hinterland could be traced directly to the expansion of cereals and cotton in its four interior zones. This trend stood in marked contrast to more populous Pernambuco, where the sugar coast continued to be the most densely populated zone and the state's economic hub until 1930" (Lewin 1987:63). The re-development of the sugar industry following the founding of the *usinas* as well as the growth of coastal urban centers undeniably shifted the state's balance of power away from the *sertão* and more in the direction of the *agreste* and *zona da mata*. On the other hand, this later economic development

was, as we have seen, dependent to a large extent on state support and subsidies and corresponded to the increasing centralization and consolidation of the country's political and economic activities.

As a result, some scholars have chosen to label contemporary local power arrangements as a form of *neocoronelismo* (eg., Andrade 1985) while others have proposed that the term *coronelismo* itself be refined to distinguish it from earlier forms of local power arrangements and to recognize the increasingly intimate relationship between local and national political and economic power (eg., Leal 1977). As Leal (1977:135-36) pointed out,

it would be wrong, however, to identify the patriarchalism of colonial times with *coronelismo*, which was at its most powerful during the First Republic. It would also be out of the question to give this name to the powerful influence which large economic groups have exercised over the state in modern times. It is therefore not possible to reduce *coronelismo* to a simple (if abnormal) assertion of private power. It is this, but it is not only this. It does not correspond to the golden age of private interest: the system peculiar to this phase, already superseded in Brazil, is patriarchalism, with the concentration

of economic, social and political power in the family group. On the contrary, *coronelismo* presupposes the decline of private power, and functions as a way of preserving its residual content.

Leal's (1977) conception of *coronelismo* is perhaps closest to the political reality of twentieth-century Paraíba: a state with little impact, politically and economically, on the national scene; but frequently a useful pawn in the country's regional power struggles and as a result, a potential benefactor of its own obscurity. In the case of elite families in general or of the northeastern sugar elite in particular, it is clear that a variety of factors have operated within this century to condition or restrict their ability to act or command independently. Whether one fully accepts or not the primacy of state-centered versus society-centered explanations of Brazilian class relations as argued by Cohen (1989), it is clear that the power of the state in Brazil expanded greatly during this century. At the same time, Cohen (1989:8) concludes that, "[t]he Brazilian state elite had the full support of the business elites. In Brazil, as in many countries that had relatively late industrialization, business elites were highly dependent on the protection of the state. They had to rely on the state for a steady supply of capital, for protection from foreign competition, and also to secure the

quiescence of the working class." Here I would add, that among the northeastern agro-industrial sugar elites, this dependency was equally if not more pronounced.

In general terms, this increasing centralization of power as well as the national division of labor has made the Northeast increasingly dependent, both economically and politically. Andrade (1985:202), among others, argues in fact that "the central power's economic policies have gradually increased regional differentiation and as a result, further impoverished the region." For the region's political and economic elites, these processes have been a mixed blessing. The increasing lag between the industrial-financial development of the central-south region of the country and that of the Northeast has, through transfer payments and development schemes, allowed the northeastern economy to maintain itself, to some extent, without substantial local investment. On the other hand, the nature and conditions of these aid programs, in addition to the centralization of power, have reduced the ability of northeastern elites to act independently. At the same time, local political control and participation in party politics become prerequisites for access to financial and institutional resources. If one might argue that in the insular Northeast of earlier times, an individual became a member of a political elite by virtue of his standing as an economic elite -- a political office served as recognition

of an individual's economic standing in the community -- then, in this century, one could also argue that an individual's economic standing was and is dependent to a greater extent on an individual's political standing and connections -- connections not of a provincial nature but to national state institutions and resources.

C. The Twentieth-Century Political Elite in Paraíba

For much of this century, the political elite in Paraíba have been homogeneous in terms of socioeconomic background and political ideology. Political parties and political rivalries were essentially of an intra-elite character. As Lewin (1975:125) notes,

[t]hey were only divided by the question of who should rule. Having no basic desire to overturn either the economic structure,...or to question the elite basis of the social order, these non-ideological politicians saw 'issues' as largely related to disagreements over how to manipulate the formal institutions of law and government in order to seize or maintain power.

While some of the state's politicians remained loyal to one particular party over the span of their political careers, many more were easily swayed into changing loyalties and forming new party affiliations if their chances looked

better elsewhere or if they lost their traditional source of support.

The result of this maneuvering for political office is that it is difficult over time to clearly assign a particular individual and even less so, a specific family, to one particular political party or even political faction. While broad factional and familial associations can at times be discerned, individual personalities, local antagonisms, and wider political connections often meant that old bedfellows -- even those born under the same roof -- became rivals while old rivals joined forces against their previous compatriots. What is not often so clear is the extent to which these intra-familial or intra-factional divergences represented significant underlying cleavages or whether they are better seen as strategies to ensure a family or a faction any political office and therefore a political voice. What is clear, however, is that these rivalries had little to do with fundamental ideological differences.⁶

Among Paraíba's *usineiros*, members of three families -- Ribeiro Coutinho, Velloso Borges, and Fernandes de Lima -- have held important political offices at the local, state and federal levels. Although at times united in political

⁶ In the discussion that follows, a large number of political parties and personalities are discussed while party ideologies are not. Both in the literature on politics in Paraíba and in contemporary political discourse, little or no attempt is ever made to specify a party's ideological stance.

action in their interests as *usineiros*, landowners, rural employers, and so on, these three families were just as often in conflict with each other as political and personal opponents. Moreover, intrafamilial conflicts and rivalries were neither un-heard-of nor unexpected although in historical and contemporary political analysis they are often minimized. In the most general terms, and particularly in popular conceptions, the Ribeiro Coutinho and Velloso Borges have more often than not been allies while the Fernandes de Lima have been their opposition. At various times in this century, in fact, the existence of a Velloso Borges/Ribeiro Coutinho-dominated political faction, designated the 'Grupo de Várzea,' has been reported both in the media and in scholarly works. The reality of such a hegemonic faction rests in part on two assumptions which have yet to be adequately examined: 1) the assumption that as a class faction, *usineiros* are united in their interests; and 2) the assumption of a monolithic '*política da família*,' that is, "de facto rule by the major families which lay behind the formal structure of government at either the local or the state levels" (Lewin 1975:126).

In regard to the former assumption, it would be difficult to argue that *usineiros* had ever been in conflict with one another regarding governmental policy and the general direction to be followed in the development of the sugar industry. While inter- and intra-familial disputes may

have occurred, particularly in relation to the extent of personal investment in the industry, I have no evidence to support substantial intra-class confrontations of an ideological nature among *usineiros* or for that matter, among the state's economic and political elite.

The second assumption of '*política da família*' is evident in Lewin's (1987:73) statement that "[t]rue *latifúndia* emerged only in the sugar zone, where one 'monolithic' family, the Ribeiro Coutinhos, dominated politics. Elsewhere, however, two or three families exercised political influence according to a delicate balance, which land tenure and inheritance patterns eventually rendered precarious." Given the extent of the Ribeiro Coutinho family in the state and the various social and economic positions which they occupy, the degree to which one could argue that, over time, the Ribeiro Coutinho were 'monolithic' or even dominant is debatable.

It is true, however, that a number of family members were omnipresent in state politics particularly in the 1940s and 1950s, and in national politics in the 1960s. In this regard, nevertheless, one must also separate particularly influential and renowned family members from the family as a whole. There is no doubt, for example, that Flávio Ribeiro Coutinho and his nephew Renato, have attained the status of major twentieth-century politicians within the state. On the other hand, we must also keep in mind the bases of these

individuals' support, the reality of family cohesiveness during their political tenures, and the ideological aspects of political and economic power.

1. *Usineiro* Politicians and Party Politics at the Turn of the Century

Although he went by title of *Coronel* João, it appears that the founding patriarch of the Ribeiro Coutinho family in Paraíba neither held office in the state nor was he actively involved in politics. Most of João Ribeiro Coutinho's sons as well as his son-in-law José Francisco De Lima Mindêllo and his brother-in-law Flávio Maroja were, however, prominent politicians. José Mindêllo, husband of Deborah Ursula and father-in-law of Deborah's brother Flávio Ribeiro Coutinho, was secretary of the *Prefeitura* of Itabaiana in 1904 and a state deputy from 1908-15. "With the victory of the *epitacistas*⁷ in 1915, he left politics and moved to João Pessoa where for many years he directed the State Sanitation Department" (Maia 1976:122).

Just slightly older than his sister's sons, Flávio Maroja, first appears in politics around the same time as his nephews, in the second decade of the twentieth century. Flávio Maroja was married to a niece of the Baron Abiahy (Silvino Elvídio Carneiro da Cunha), one of the most

⁷ The *epitacistas* were the political followers or colleagues of Epitácio.

important leaders of the Conservative Party during the Empire and a spokesperson for sugar interests in the *zona da mata*. During the Old Republic (1889-1930), the Baron continued to exert a strong influence on the party until he eventually broke with Venâncio Veira and Epitácio Pessoa -- the rising stars of the party. By this time, however, Flávio Maroja and many of the Ribeiro Coutinho had become strong supporters of Venâncio and later Epitácio. Although the Conservatives lost state power during the 1890s, by the early 1900s, Epitácio's connections at the national level were bringing party members back into political office and increasing Epitácio's control of the party. It was during the period from 1915 to 1930 that, as *epitacistas*, the Ribeiro Coutinho came to constitute a political elite in the state and a force to be reckoned with in the following decades.

During the reign of Epitácio or his supporters, Flávio Maroja served as a state deputy and as the first Vice-President of the state (from 1920-24) under Governor Solon de Lucena, a member of the university educated, second generation, *epitacistas* known as the 'Young Turks' (see Lewin 1987:332-38). Flávio appears not to have held office after the 1920s and died before the 'redemocratization' of 1945. Medicine remained his forte rather than politics: he was director of the Santa Isabel Hospital for almost fifty years; a founder and first President of the Medical and

Surgical Society of Paraíba; an advocate for the founding of a Medical, Pharmaceutical and Dental Faculty in the state; as well as an active member of several other medical and social services agency. His sons and daughters have also been politically active although, to date, only at the level of the *município*. Flávio Maroja's nephews -- the sons of his sister Anna and her husband João Ribeiro Coutinho -- eventually aligned with the *epitacistas* as well and came to hold political offices in the second decade of the twentieth century.

In very general terms, politics under the Empire (1822 to 1889) was contested by two factions, one labelled Conservative and the other Liberal. The Conservatives were represented by two rival factions: one based in the *zona da mata* under Baron Abiahy and the other in the *agreste* and *brejo* and dominated by the Meira Henriques family. Following the overthrow of the monarchy, the Meira Henriques faction left the party and affiliated with the Old Liberals in the opposition while the Conservative party came to be dominated by Venâncio Neiva (from the *brejo*) and Epiácio Pessoa (from the *sertão*). The Liberal stronghold had traditionally been centered in the *sertão* among the cattle and cotton ranching families. During the Old Republic, however, the Old Liberals came to form part of the Republican Party of Paraíba (Partido Republicano da Paraíba, PRP), the opposition party formed by Alvaro Machado and Walfredo Leal. Both Machado and

Leal were born in Areia, as was Venâncio Neiva.⁸ Neiva originally took over the state following the fall of the Empire but with the overthrow of President Deodoro and his replacement by President Peixoto in 1891, the Conservatives fell from grace. In 1892, Machado became Governor of the state and Leal the Vice-Governor. For the next four years, and again from 1904 until 1908, Machado and Leal alternated the two offices between each other. Although it would be twenty-three years before the *epitacistas* took complete control of the state again, the *alvaristas*, as Alvaro Machado's followers were called, and the *walfredistas*, Leal's followers, came to rely increasingly on the *epitacistas* and *venancistas* to stay in power.

By 1905, Epitácio had risen to sufficient prominence at the national level to challenge existing power relations in the state. Over the next several years, alliances among the various factions shifted frequently and rapidly. Lewin (1987:285-286, 303-7, 309-10 *em passim*) reports that a Neiva-Machado oligarchy dominated in 1908, while in 1911, Epitácio and Walfredo agreed on a compromise candidate for governor who had been a *venancista* and then an *alvarista*. In 1913, the *alvaristas* broke with the *epitacistas* who in 1915 broke with the *walfredistas*. At this point, the *epitacistas* took power but were supported by veteran *venancistas* and

⁸ Areia, a small town in the *brejo*, played a predominant political role during the Old Republic.

alvaristas who had broken with the *walfredistas* who were now marginalized. Although some of the Ribeiro Coutinho had been *epitacistas* throughout the fluctuations, other family members had leaned more toward Walfredo and became marginalized with him in 1915. They would only return to political prominence following the fall of the *epitacistas* in 1930.

During this period, as well, some of the Old Liberals who were dismissed or ignored by Machado came to form what could be called a 'true' opposition in contrast to the status of 'official' opposition held by the *epitacista/venancista* collaborators. These individuals came to constitute the 'anti-oligarchic' Democratic Party although, as Lewin (1975:136-37) argues, they were less anti-'oligarchical' and oppositional than simply the 'outs' against the 'ins.' João Ursulo Ribeiro Coutinho, the first Ribeiro Coutinho *usineiro* in the state, ran unsuccessfully for state deputy for the Democratic Party in 1911. Five years later he was reported in the press to be a *walfredista* although Lewin (1975:307n) reports that he frequently corresponded with Epitácio. Although it could be argued that João Ursulo's economic activities provided the foundation for the future economic and political successes of the Ribeiro Coutinho, João Ursulo does not appear to have been prominent in the state, either politically or socially, if one can judge such reputations from media coverage. His

sons, however, would come to hold important local and national offices after 1945.

João Ursulo's older brother, Odilon Maroja, whose highest political office was mayor of the *município* of Itabaiana for one term, commanded much more attention in the press. During the years 1916 and 1917, this was partially the result of his having brought down the ire of the *walfredistas*. For two years, Leal's party paper, the Diário do Estado, carried a series of scathing critiques of the iron-handed tyranny imposed on the *município* of Itabaiana by Odilon Maroja. According to these articles, Odilon Maroja had previously been a *walfredista* but had turned his back on the party and aligned with the *epitacistas*. A later biography of his brother Flávio presents another interpretation of the conflict. According to Maia (1977:75), Odilon Maroja had originally been a *venancista* but by 1915 was a *epitacista* and riding on the coat-tails of Epitácio's statewide victory had wrestled control of the *município* from the incumbent, a *walfredista*. In any case, it appears that the ruthlessness with which Odilon Maroja, in his new position of power went against the defeated faction, was to a large extent responsible for the bad press. With the later exception of his nephew Renato, Odilon Maroja perhaps best exemplified the vision of a strong-handed local ruler evoked by the standard conceptions of *caciques* and *coroneis*. During

the 1940s, he again became a political force to be reckoned with when he joined his nephews in forming the UDN party.

The most politically successful Ribeiro Coutinho in the pre-Vargas years was Flávio, another son of João and Anna's. Not to be confused with his mother's brother, Flávio Maroja, Flávio Ribeiro Coutinho also occupied the office of Vice-Governor or Vice-President of the state in the 1920s. Prior to this, Flávio had begun his political career in association with his brother Odilon Maroja in Itabaiana. Following his medical training, Flávio spent eight years working in Amazônia before returning to Paraíba in 1915. In 1919, he replaced his brother as political chief of Itabaiana. He held this position until 1925 when, as owner of Usina Santa Rita in the coastal zone, his interest in Itabaiana waned. In 1923, while political chief of Itabaiana, Flávio was elected a state deputy for the *venancistas/epitacistas*. His running mates in this election included Heretiano Zenaide, soon-to-be owner of Usina Tanques and João José Maroja, a cousin. By the end of the year, Flávio had given up his seat in the legislative assembly to become the state's Second Vice-President, joining Governor João Suassuna and First Vice-President Walfredo Guedes. The latter had replaced Flávio's uncle Flávio Maroja.

In 1928, Epitácio's nephew João Pessoa became Governor/President of the state and within a very short

period of time he alienated a large percentage of his uncle's previous adherents. Then in 1929 he joined with Getulio Vargas and his disgruntled forces from the southern state of Rio Grande do Sul in opposing President Washington Luis' official candidate for President. President Luis chose fellow *Paulista* Julio Prestes as his successor rather than following the accepted tradition of alternating a candidate from São Paulo with one from Minas Gerais. This affront to Minas Gerais at the same time that Rio Grande do Sul was flexing its political and economic muscles led to the formation of the Liberal Alliance, an opposition slate with Vargas for President and João Pessoa for Vice-President.

In challenging the federal government and the established system, Vargas in Rio Grande do Sul and the Pessosas in Paraíba were following a very risky strategy. Federal retaliation included freezing the state's assets in the Banco do Brasil, calling in their loans and firing all state employees who sided with the Alliance. Rather than engender the risk, many of Eptácio's earlier supporters bolted to the state's paltry opposition which chose to align itself with President Luis. Given the years of collaboration and co-optation among the predominant factions, only one 'true' oppositional line existed. This was headed by Heraclito Cavalcanti, an ex-*walfredista* associate and Odilon Maroja and Flávio's ex-rival in Itabaiana. The past animosities were forgotten and Heraclito, Odilon and Flávio

all became *perrepistas*, supporters of the candidacy of Prestes.

In the elections for federal offices the following year, Flávio ran for Federal Deputy as did several other *ex-epitacistas*. Although Vargas and Pessoa lost their bid for national office, the Liberal Alliance and its candidates declared victory in Paraíba. The Congress, however, nullified the results, and Flávio and his fellow *perrepistas* took office. At the same time, an anti-Pessoa revolt had broken out in the interior of the state among those *ex-epitacistas* slighted by Governor João Pessoa. After a prolonged battle between the rebels and the state forces, known as the Revolution of Princesa, the revolt was finally put down but not before João Pessoa was assassinated by a member of one of the revolutionary families. In Paraíba, chaos ensued and eventually spawned crises elsewhere in the country. By the end of the year, Vargas had overthrown the incumbent Prestes, and the Liberal Alliance and the Revolution of 1930 were proclaimed successes. Flávio Ribeiro Coutinho and his colleagues were now on the political out.

As in the preceding years, however, it was not long before the oppositional *perrepistas* were re-integrated into the political elite. Although it would be some time before the Ribeiro Coutinho came to hold influential offices in the state, they continued to play a role in state politics. They did so by swiftly aligning themselves, in 1934, with the

incumbent governor, Argemiro de Figueiredo. Adalberto Jorge Rodrigues Cruz Ribeiro, the husband of Flávio and Odilon Maroja's sister Octaviana and an *ex-perrepista*, was elected state deputy in 1934. From 1928 to 1930, Adalberto had been the founder and owner, along with his wife, of Usina Espírito Santo. After this enterprise failed he spent the rest of his life in politics and the civil service. At the municipal level, in particular, the Ribeiro Coutinho continued to play an active role. Renato, a son of the now deceased João Ursulo, was elected mayor of Espírito Santo in 1934 while another son, João Ursulo Filho, held the same office in Sapé from 1937-40. In Santa Rita, Flávio Maroja's son, Flávio Maroja Filho, was elected mayor for the first time in 1935 and again in 1947.

The other *usineiros* active in electoral politics during the first three decades of the twentieth century were Antônio Brito Lira, Gentil Lins, and several members of the Zenaide and Velloso Borges families. Although it does not appear that Antônio Brito Lira ever held any important elective office besides sub-mayor of the Capital in 1912, Lewin (1975:300n) reports that Antônio was "[o]ne of the best known businessmen and *capitalistas* in the state [and] ... enjoyed influence in both the Capital and the interior. His regular correspondence with Epitácio testified to his importance in the Party in matters of advice about the Capital...." In addition to running the Paraíba River

transport system that plied goods from the coast into the state⁹ (Lewin 1975:520), Brito Lyra founded Usina Cumbe in 1910. Seven years later he sold the factory to Pernambuco's famous *usineiro*, Tenente Antônio Ferreira do Costa Azevedo, who re-named the factory Usina Santa Rita and subsequently sold it to Flávio Ribeiro Coutinho.

Gentil Lins de Albuquerque,¹⁰ the founder of Usina Bonfim in 1917 -- later Usina Santa Helena -- and a relative of Epitácio, was a mayor of Sapé from 1925 to 1929. The same year that he took office he sold his sugar factory to João Ursulo Ribeiro Coutinho. His initial rise to power appears to be related primarily to his family connections, particularly in their role as *senhores de engenho* and to his support for Epitácio and Epitácio's successor, Suassuna. It is likely, however, that his election to office in Sapé was also related to his ownership of Usina Bonfim.

Zenaide family members were politically active for some time before they founded Usina Tanques in Alagoa Grande in 1927. The family had been principal members of the *meirista* faction of the Conservative Party during the Empire and

⁹ His transport company was later sold to Lloyd Brasileiro (Lewin 1975:520).

¹⁰ According to Maia (1985:46), Gentil Lins was the son of João Lins Cavalcante de Albuquerque and Luzia Cavalcante de Albuquerque. His baptismal godparents were Lourenço Bezerra de Albuquerque Melo and Tereza Augusta Pessoa Lins. Lewin (1987:438-39), in contrast, reports that Gentil Lins was the son of Lourenço de Bezerra de Albuquerque Melo and Maria Olímpia Lins Cavalcanti.

later joined the Old Liberals under Alvaro Machado and Walfredo Leal.¹¹ One of the founding brothers of Usina Tanques, Apolônio Zenaide, was a senator in 1908 and Heretiano was elected a federal deputy in 1934. According to Lewin (1975:528), the family constituted one of the wealthiest landowning and *usineiro* families in Alagoa Grande and one of the wealthiest families in the state.¹²

Although members of the Velloso Borges family would become much more politically influential after 1945, they were known as local party bosses early in the century and had important familial connections with some of the state's most prominent politicians. Anesio Pereira Borges, a *senhor de engenho* and father of the later owners of Usina Tanques, was reported to be head of the *walfredistas* in Pilar in 1916. His brother Manoel, a large landowner, farmer, and rancher, was a noted political boss in the neighboring *município* of Itabaiana. Anesio's son, Virginio, ran for State Deputy for the Democratic Party in 1911 on the same slate as João Ursulo Ribeiro Coutinho -- the father of two of Virginio's future sons-in-law -- and Gentil Lins. At that time Virginio was reported to be a pharmacist. Five years

¹¹ During the 1880s, the *meirista* conservatives, followers of the Meira Henriques family, competed with the *silvinista* conservatives under the leadership of Baron Abiahy and his brother Anísio Salatiel Carneiro de Cunha (Lewin 1975:107).

¹² The economic wealth and political influence of the Zenaide Nobrega family is greatly reduced today. Perhaps the best known member of the family is a local journalist.

later he married Priscilla Freire, a sister of the politician/priest Mathias Freire¹³, paternal grand-daughter of the Baron of Mamanguape, and maternal niece of another politician/priest, Walfredo Leal. Mathias Freire was a state deputy from 1908 to 1915 and President of the Legislative Assembly in 1912 (Costa 1986:138). Walfredo Leal was at various times a federal deputy, state deputy, a senator, President or Governor of the state as well as Vice-President and Vice-Governor. Not surprisingly, then, Virginio and his other brothers, of which there were eight, became noted for a time as ardent *walfredistas*. Along with Walfredo Leal, they eventually made peace with the *epitacistas* and later supported João Pessoa and the Liberal Alliance. Encouraged by João Pessoa to join his ranks, Manoel Velloso Borges, another son of Anesio, served as a state deputy in the late 1920s, was elected a federal deputy in 1934, and appointed a senator in 1935. In the early 1920s, the brothers were principally involved in cattle raising and cotton production and their company, Velloso Borges & Cia was a major exporter of cotton. Soon after, the brothers became the major shareholders in the Tibiry Textile Factory in Santa Rita. A

¹³ Mathias Freire, renown as a poet, politician and educator, was born in the municipality of Mamanguape in 1888. His grandfather, Flávio Clementino da Silva Freire, the Baron of Mamanguape, was a provincial deputy for many years, President of the Legislative Assembly, Senator, and Vice-President of the Province of Paraíba in 1855 (Costa 1986:137-38).

brother-in-law and a co-director of the factory, Edgar Saeger, was mayor of Santa Rita in 1930. The brothers also went on to own a textile factory in Rio de Janeiro and another in São Paulo, an *usina* in Campos, Rio de Janeiro, and the *usina* in Paraíba which they bought from Heretiano Zenaide and his children. One brother, Aguinaldo, eventually became the sole owner of this *usina* while the economic and political interests of many of his other brothers shifted to the south of the country.

By the mid-1930s, the oppositional *perrepistas* had been re-integrated into state politics and the major political figures of the next several decades had begun to make their presence felt. In 1934, Argemiro de Figueiredo, the son of *Coronel* Salvino Figueiredo -- a large landowner from around Campina Grande -- and an ex-*perrepista*, was elected Governor. Ten years later he would become the head of one of the two major factions of the UDN party. In 1937, the various political factions in the state came together to support the candidacy of José Américo de Almeida for President of the Republic. José Américo, another nephew of Walfredo Leal, had been an aide to João Pessoa and had temporarily held the position of Chief of the Revolutionary Government in the north after the 1930 Revolution. He would eventually come to dominate the other major wing of the UDN party. Following Vargas' imposition of the *Estado Nôvo* in 1937, the state government broke with José Américo and fell

in behind Vargas. Argemiro remained in the position of Governor but by 1939 he was forced to share power with the newly created Administrative Department. Flávio Ribeiro Coutinho was appointed a vice-president of the commission. The following year, Argemiro was removed from office, the Administrative Department was dissolved, and Vargas appointed Rui Carneiro Governor of the state. Carneiro would eventually form the PSD party as the primary opposition to the UDN and Argemiro.

2. *Usineiro* Politicians and Party Politics in the Post-Vargas Years

In preparing for a 'redemocratization' of the country in 1945, Vargas created two national political parties to represent his interests. The PSD (Partido Social Democrático) or Social Democratic Party was projected nationally as the party of the political 'ins' or *situacionistas*. In the words of Schneider (1971:51),

[e]ssentially non-ideological in its orientation, the PSD combined the dominant state machines of the post-1930 period, chiefly rural-based, with the businessmen and industrialists who had benefited under the authoritarian interlude from Vargas' increasing orientation toward economic development. A high proportion of the new bureaucratic elite, ... also leaned toward the

PSD, whose ranks were further swelled by those who sought advantage from associating themselves with the administration party in Brazil's patronage-oriented 'cartorial state.'

The other party which Vargas created and which he headed himself was the PTB (Partido Trabalhista Brasileiro) or the Brazilian Labor Party. Created to tap the electoral potential of the growing urban working class, the party "was an effective electoral force only in the major industrial centers" (Schneider 1971:52), that is, primarily in the south of the country.

Organized as the opposition party, the UDN (União Democrática Nacional) or National Democratic Union, brought together a melange of individuals united primarily in their opposition, for whatever reasons, to Vargas. As such, party members ran the spectrum from powerful rural families and factions temporarily on the 'outs' politically to "intellectuals and students, who at that time were intensely anti-Vargas on juridical and libertarian grounds" (Schneider 1971:51-52). Although the party attempted to portray itself nationally as urban and liberal, in reality, its adherents were as heterogenous and its political ideology as vague as that of the PSD. As Schneider (1971:50) puts it, "[p]olicy differences were thus subordinated to emotional issues of *Varguismo*, while personal and regional differences stemming from the *Estado Nôvo* epoch would generally override the

class and interest similarities between the UDN and the PSD and keep the latter in increasingly uneasy alliance with the PTB."

In Paraíba, the initial party alignments and affiliations and the subsequent shifts in these alignments and affiliations attest to a perpetuation of the essentially pragmatic and personalistic nature of state and local politics. The dominant political factions in the state had, on the whole, felt marginalized, if not outright excluded, during the Vargas years. After the heady days of Epitácio's national and international prestige, when the small and insignificant state sent one of its own to the Presidency and another *conterrâneo*, or *Paraibano*, nearly became Vice-President, the increasing centralization of decision making imposed by Vargas and the resultant usurpation of local prerogatives, led many of the state's political leaders into the opposition camp. In testimony, however, to the reality of the state's continuing economic dependence on federal supports and the necessity of high level political connections to ensure this support, gaining a political office and siding with the government in power ultimately took precedence over party affiliations.

In the elections for President in 1945, the PSD and PTB jointly supported Vargas' choice of Eurico Dutra while the UDN selected Eduardo Gomes as their candidate for President. In Paraíba, the incumbent Governor, Rui Carneiro, headed the

PSD while Eptácio Pessoa Sobrinho, a son of the late João Pessoa, led the PTB. The UDN in Paraíba brought together both those who were particularly dissatisfied with Vargas and those who were more specifically dissatisfied with the direction that the country had taken following the Revolution of 1930. Many of these individuals were *ex-perrepistas* although a significant number were also former *epitacistas*. In very general terms, the 'liberal' wing of the UDN was headed by José Américo, João Pessoa's former aide, while the more 'conservative,' reactionary wing was headed by Argemiro Figueiredo.

Although the PSD and PTB coalition was victorious in most parts of the country and their candidate was elected President, in Paraíba, the UDN presidential candidate, Gomes, received a majority of the votes. In addition, the UDN candidate for Governor, Oswaldo Trigueiro, was victorious, as were a majority of their candidates for federal and state offices. The two UDN candidates for the Senate defeated the two PSD candidates; seven of the ten Federal Deputies came from the UDN; and the UDN held a majority in the Legislative Assembly.

As discussed in Chapter 3, Paraíba's *usineiros* had benefited from Vargas' support for the sugar industry and particularly, from the creation of the Institute of Sugar and Alcohol. Flávio Ribeiro Coutinho, remember, had served Vargas during the *Estado Nôvo* as a member of the

Administrative Department. During the 1940s, the sugar industry in Paraíba had experienced one of its fastest periods of growth. While increasingly dependent on federal policy, the *usineiros* were also in position now to begin to exert themselves politically, both as individuals and as an interest group. Despite the backing that they had received from Vargas, the majority of Paraíba's *usineiros* supported the UDN party in the 1940s. In fact, both the Velloso Borges and the Ribeiro Coutinho were among the founding fathers of the party in Paraíba and among the party's first elected officials.

Of the surviving children of João Ribeiro Coutinho, Odilon Maroja was a founding member of the party; Flávio was elected the party's first president, a state deputy, and in 1956, Governor of the state; and son-in-law, Adalberto Cruz Ribeiro, was a party committee member and elected senator on the UDN ticket. Adalberto's son-in-law, Flávio Maroja Filho (son of Flávio Maroja and nephew of João Ribeiro Coutinho) was elected mayor of Santa Rita for the second time in 1947. Flávio's son João Crisostomo held the same office in 1955. Flaviano Filho, a son of Flávio's brother Flaviano, was elected a state deputy in 1958, a federal deputy in 1962 and 1966, and a substitute senator or *suplente* in 1970. His brothers José Waldomiro and Marcus Odilon also held office as mayor of Gurinhém and Juarez Távora respectively. Cousin

Jorge (son of Ursulo Ribeiro Coutinho) also twice held the office of mayor of Gurinhém, the family's ancestral home.¹⁴

João Ursulo's sons were also active in the party: Renato was a member of the party's executive committee, a candidate for Vice Governor in 1950 and a state deputy; João Ursulo Filho, was elected a federal deputy for four consecutive terms; Luiz Inácio was a state deputy from 1950 until his death in 1968; and Odilon, a law student in Pernambuco at the time, was active in the university-based UDN 'redemocratization' movement in 1945. Three of the brothers held the office of mayor of Sapé: João Ursulo Filho in 1937, Luiz Inácio in 1947, and Cassiano in 1955 and 1962.

Virginio Velloso Borges, a shareholder in Usina Tanques and at various times affiliated with the *walfredistas*, *epitacistas* and the Liberal Alliance, was the UDN's Vice-President. Virginio later affiliated with the *américo* wing of the UDN and was their nominee for Vice-Governor in 1947 and a successful candidate for senator in 1950. Heretiano Zenaide, the previous owner of Usina Tanques, was also a member of the Executive Committee of the Party. The only *usineiro* politicians who did not affiliate with the UDN were members of the Fernandes de Lima family -- owners of Usina Monte Alegre in Mamanguape. They began and continued their

¹⁴ Jorge's son Jorge Urçulo would again direct the municipality of Gurinhem in the 1970s and 1980s.

political careers within the PSD or its successors, the MDB and the PMDB.

Throughout the Northeast, as soon as the UDN passed from the opposition to the government, its various factions began to splinter. The two main factions in Paraíba, headed by Argemiro and Américo, had been able to minimize their differences when they could divide the spoils among themselves. When the time came, however, to battle over the major offices, animosities surfaced. In the election for Vice-Governor in 1947 or for Governor in 1950, both factions sought the right to appoint their own candidates. In 1947, the two factions both choose *usineiros*: the *américos* nominated Virginio Velloso Borges and the *argemiros* nominated Flávio Ribeiro Coutinho. According to Odilon (1965:47), in this particular case, a truce was made possible as a result of the mediation of Odilon Ribeiro Coutinho who was Flávio's nephew and Virginio's son-in-law. José Targino, a compromise candidate, was chosen to run for office.

Later in the year when it came time to appoint the President of the Legislative Assembly, Flávio was again the choice of the *argemiros* but the *américos* balked and backed the winning PSD candidate José Fernandes de Lima -- also an *usineiro*. By the time of the gubernatorial elections in 1950, the *américo* faction of the UDN had become a dissident wing and formed a coalition with the PSD and several minor

parties. José Américo was their candidate for Governor and João Fernandes de Lima -- a brother of José above -- was his running mate. The UDN-argemiro slate included Argemiro for Governor and Renato Ribeiro Coutinho¹⁵ for Vice-Governor. The coalition PSD-américos were victorious and the UDN would not return as a major political force until several years later when Argemiro was replaced by João Agripino as party boss.

Over the next decade or so, the various political factions would continue their jockeying for political control -- affiliating at one point with one faction, at another point with a different faction. Now and then, a faction, unable to reach a compromise, would temporarily form a new party, but ultimately they would have to mold a coalition with a pre-existing party if they hoped to gain any seats. As such, the decisive coalitions until the military coup in 1964 were Américo (UDN1) and Argemiro (UDN2) in 1947; Américo (UDN1) and Rui Carneiro (PSD) in 1950; Argemiro (UDN2) and Rui (PSD) in 1956; and Pedro Gondim (PSD/UDN1) and João Agripino (UDN2) in 1960.¹⁶

¹⁵ Odilon (1965), in discussing his older cousin Renato's political performance in the state, refers to him as a consummate *cabo eleitoral* or vote catcher. "Owner of more than 10,000 votes, he [Renato] never held any outstanding public office. He dominates eight *municípios* but does not have any chance of becoming Governor" (Odilon 1965:70).

¹⁶ Gondim had been one of Rui's disciples, a *compadre*, and one of the most orthodox *pessedistas* but he eventually broke ranks with his mentor when Rui moved to support his

During this period and for several years following the military coup of 1964, members of the state's *usineiro* families were politically active at various levels of government. Ribeiro Coutinho and their relatives were associated predominantly with the *argemiro* and later *agripino* wing of the UDN and its successors, ARENA and PDS.¹⁷ Of the older generation, only Flávio Ribeiro Coutinho was still active in politics for part of this period. As noted above, José Américo had come to the office of Governor in 1951 with the support of Carneiro's PSD party. By the election of 1955, however, this coalition had broken apart and neither the UDN factions nor the PSD felt confident of taking the election. As a result, a compromise slate was agreed to: Flávio, of the *argemiro* faction and an adversary of José Américo was chosen to run for Governor while Pedro Gondim, of the PSD, was his running mate.

brother José Janduhy's gubernatorial aspirations over those of Gondim's. Agripino, as was noted above, was Argemiro's replacement as political head of the UDN and a member of a powerful family from the *sertão*.

¹⁷ When local elections were held in 1966 following the military coup, only two political parties were recognized: ARENA (the National Renovating Alliance), the official party, and MDB (the Brazilian Democratic Movement), its official opposition. Rather than taking on the label of 'opposition,' most politicians in the country ran on an ARENA ticket. This frequently resulted in two or three different ARENA slates competing against each other in an election. The PDS should not be confused with the PSD. In Paraíba, the PDS was the successor to the UDN while the MDB or PMDB was the successor of the PSD.

Flávio Ribeiro Coutinho took office in 1956. Why the UDN agreed to support his candidacy is not wholly clear. He had been in poor health for years and was soon to turn 74 years of age. In negotiation with the PSD, the UDN won the right to appoint the candidate for Governor while the office of Vice-Governor fell to the PSD. Given Flávio's poor health, the PSD readily agreed to the arrangement. They were counting on his imminent replacement by his Vice-Governor Gondim, one of their own. Why then did the PSD choose one of their least shining stars for the position? It is possible that none of their gubernatorial hopefuls wanted to risk playing second fiddle to the UDN for however short a period. Or possibly, the PSD had little to say on the matter. Or possibly, the two parties had reached a stalemate and neither party had much say in the matter. The UDN, a controlling voice since 1945 and representative of some of the major economic actors in the state, went with the health risk of Flávio. Gondim was perceived by both the *américo* and *argemiro* factions to be a PSD candidate whom they could control. The PSD, for their part, would have refused a UDN candidate with more staying power than Flávio while a lightweight like Gondim was not likely to be challenged by the UDN.

Flávio, in fact, suffered a debilitating stroke after only 18 months in office and was forced to take a medical leave. Because he did not die until 1963, new elections were

not called, and Gondim remained as an Acting Governor until he stepped down to run for Governor in the 1960 elections.¹⁸ During these years, Gondim began to alienate some of the PSD brass while attracting rank and file members through his liberal use of patronage politics. The 1950s and 1960s, it must be remembered, were the halcyon of national and international development schemes and the influx of developmental funds and the plethora of developmental agency positions served to benefit both the region's economic elite as well as its political and bureaucratic hopefuls. A devastating drought in 1958 only served to amplify Gondim's reach through the transfer of drought funds to local political allies.

Gondim's final break with his PSD patrons came during the nominations for the 1960 elections. Gondim refused to relinquish his gubernatorial aspirations in favor of Rui's brother José Janduhy Carneiro. The stalemate resulted in Gondim leaving the party with a loyal contingent and running as the candidate for the newly formed Democratic Christian Party. In a by now familiar scenario, in return for UDN support, André Gadelha of the UDN was chosen as Gondim's running mate and João Agripino, the up and coming UDN state head, was assured of the support of the state machinery in

¹⁸ The interim Governor was the President of the Legislative Assembly, *usineiro* José Fernandes de Lima of the PSD.

his bid for a senate seat in 1962 (with Gondim's nephew as his *suplente*).

Gondim remains a controversial subject in terms of the political turmoil of the late 1950s and 60s. On the one hand, he was considered and is still remembered by some segments of the population as being the working man's hope. For many others, he was the wolf in sheep's clothing or the *usineiros'* puppet. We will return to his role in the events of the early 1960s in the following chapter. In either case, it seems clear that Gondim had little independent political or economic clout; he was dependent on the economic and political goodwill of others. The UDN party and their allies continued to hold onto to the reigns of power in the state and it was only a matter of time before one of their own returned to the Governorship -- in 1965 João Agripino Filho was to be the last elected-Governor until the return of direct gubernatorial elections in 1982.

Much has been made, particularly among Paraíba's own political analysts, of its tradition of opposition to federal politics for much of this century as well as attempts to extend similar oppositionary characteristics to its two main parties -- the PSD and UDN. From the time the UDN was founded in 1945 until 1964 the governorship of Paraíba was the virtual prerogative of the UDN while at the national level during the same period the PSD and PTB held sway and the UDN served as the official opposition party

(Roett 1978:67). As was noted above, however, the various UDN factions which held power in Paraíba were dependent to a large extent on cross-party coalitions. This situation was not unique to Paraíba. As Ianni (1970:58) put it,

[e]ven after the Constitution of 1946 set up the system of national political parties, the parties generally continued to follow local and regional interests. In many cases the oligarchies continued their predominance but restated their promises and created new techniques for action. An examination of the coalitions between parties that occurred in the various elections after 1945 reveals the multiplicity of possible combinations. The various platforms were never insurmountable obstacles. Parties came to be defined as 'right' or 'left' depending upon their region of the state or country and independent of their definition at the national level.

The absence of substantial policy and ideological distinctions among the parties did not however preclude the designation of such distinctions at all levels of Brazilian society. At the national level, Roett (1978:65-67) concludes that the PSD

attracted the bureaucrats, landowners, bankers, and industrialists who benefitted from the state-directed economic program of Vargas.... Moderately

conservative, although non-ideological, the PSD favored a centralization of power, state participation in economic development, and the continuation and elaboration of the Vargas welfare system.... [I]t represented par excellence the amorphous party of the patrimonial state: pliant, adaptive, nonreformist, and uninterested in social or political mobilization.

The UDN, on the other hand, was united primarily by anti-Vargas sentiments:

Without access to the vast patronage and financial support of the federal government, it survived by keeping alive the antipathy of its members to the political populism of Vargas and his heirs.... A moderate, conservative party, it drew heavily on the liberal professions and intellectuals of the urban areas. Emphasizing individual and democratic liberties, decentralized government, and honesty and efficiency in government, it remained a basically middle class party (Roett 1978:67-68).

These class, policy, and ideological distinctions between the PSD and UDN at the national level depart to some degree from both the fact and the fiction of *Paraibano* distinctions. Blondel, a French political scientist who studied *Paraibano* politics in the 1950s, came to the conclusion that "in Paraíba, one could conduct a complete

study of the political life without mentioning the 'sentimental color' that the parties take in Rio de Janeiro" (Blondel 1957:154). In his estimation, the UDN of Argemiro was a bit of everything although it was born of liberalism, pro-democracy, and anti-dictatorship. Like the UDN of the South and Center-South, it brought together individuals who were anti-Vargas -- in the sense of both pro-'democracy' or those who had been out of power during Vargas' rule. Unlike the south, however, the UDN in Paraíba found its base primarily in the rural areas. More importantly, according to Blondel, its success lay in its 'feudal'-like organization which encompassed the Governor, state political chiefs, and local party cadres (Blondel 1957:137). Argemiro's support grew from his success in bringing behind him the local rural political chiefs as well as an urban segment which still maintained strong ties to the countryside through friends, family and business interests (Blondel 1957:135). As such, Blondel (1957:137) concludes that the UDN addressed itself primarily toward rural problems and issues.

The PSD, sharing power at the time of Blondel's research as a result of its coalition with the *américo* faction of the UDN, owed its traditional lack of success to its failure to build a rural-based political machine similar to Argemiro's and its lack of homogeneity. Its support base was primarily urban and coastal, among the disaffected masses, urbanites without ties to the countryside, and small

property owners in the cane zone. Its minimal rural support came from *municípios* where the political chiefs were poorly organized or where two powerful families had come into competition for the position of political chief (Blondel 1957:142).

Despite their simplicity, Blondel's distinctions between the UDN and the PSD of the 1950s provide some understanding of the party affiliations of the state's *usineiros*. The Ribeiro Coutinhos, allied with Argemiro until he was pushed out of the UDN in 1958, had their roots in the countryside in both Paraíba and Pernambuco as well as in local patronage politics. During their early years in Paraíba (from the late 1800s until the late 1920s) when they were still in the process of consolidating their social and economic position within the state, subordination to state political bosses such as Argemiro would have been both necessary and advantageous. Although urban residents for much of this period, their economic interests were wholly local and primarily rural. As such, Argemiro's emphasis on and support for agricultural development served their interests. By the 1950s, however, the Ribeiro Coutinho were obviously well placed, economically and politically, to take on the role of state political bosses in their own right: various family members owned five *usinas* in Paraíba and three in Rio Grande do Norte; in addition to significant representation to the state directorate of the UDN, Ribeiro

Coutinho were to be found as *prefeitos* of *municípios*, state and federal deputies, and soon in the position of state Governor. Some family members had expanded their economic interests to Rio de Janeiro as well where they were also active politically. This likely afforded important political ties at the national level. Thus, it would appear that the Ribeiro Coutinho may have been on the verge of constituting a new political dynasty -- one that would have been unique at the time for its kin connections.¹⁹

The two other major *usineiro* families in the state -- the Velloso Borges and the Fernandes de Lima -- were also politically active. The Velloso Borges had a longer historical presence in the state and early familial and political ties to some of its more significant political figures.²⁰ As such, they had less need, perhaps, to subordinate themselves to an upstart like Argemiro. Although earlier political allies of and co-founders of the UDN with the Ribeiro Coutinho, they became associated not with Argemiro, but with the *américo* faction of the UDN. Again, Blondel's distinctions lend some insight into this association. In a similar manner to the Ribeiro Coutinho, the Velloso Borges UDN connection can be traced to their

¹⁹ Few other politically significant families in the state had as many family members in elected office.

²⁰ It should be remembered here that the Velloso Borges had important kin and political ties with the *walfredistas* at the beginning of the century as well as with the Baron of Mamanguape and Mathias Freire.

early roots in the state's rural communities and in their system of local political bosses. At the time of the founding of the UDN, however, the major economic activity of the Velloso Borges was the Tibiry cloth factory in Santa Rita -- a semi-urban industrial complex. (Their association with Usina Tanques did not begin until 1951.) The Tibiry factory in addition to their other commercial and industrial activities meant that their economic interests were not uniquely rural nor restricted to the sugar industry. Their support for José Américo may have also been influenced to some extent by kin ties -- Walfredo Leal was uncle to both Virginio's wife and José Américo -- as well as earlier political associations -- both the Velloso Borges and José Américo had turned against Walfredo Leal and supported Eptácio Pessoa.

By the 1950s and 1960s, only Aguinaldo, his sons-in-law and their relatives could be said to still constitute a political faction within the state.²¹ Aguinaldo held office as a State Deputy from 1950 until 1968 as a candidate for the UDN and ARENA. His son-in-law Enivaldo Vaz Ribeiro was mayor of Campina Grande while another son-in-law, Aécio

²¹ Virginio's sons-in-law, João Ursulo Filho and Odilon Ribeiro Coutinho were still active in politics but were not seen as acting in concert with the Velloso Borges although their brother Renato Ribeiro Coutinho was frequently associated with Aguinaldo during the time of the Peasant Leagues.

Pereira de Lima, would later be elected to the Legislative Assembly for ARENA and the PDS (the successor to the UDN).²²

Members of the Fernandes de Lima were also politically active during the 1950s and 1960s but in opposition to the UDN. Affiliated throughout the period with the PSD or its successor the MDB, they were, however, frequently preferential running mates for UDN candidates. Their father had owned land and a bakery in Mamanguape. Upon his death in the early 1920s, his still young sons left Mamanguape for João Pessoa. João and Manuel, the eldest of five brothers, built a bakery in the capital in 1922 and incorporated as Fernandes & Cia in 1924 to run the bakery as well as retail and wholesale merchandizing. They eventually added sugar refining, the importation of flour and the exportation of sugar, to their commercial activities. All of the brothers and some of their sons eventually joined the operation before they gave up the venture and returned to Mamanguape in 1940 to set up Usina Monte Alegre on land they had inherited from their father. As such, the brothers had their beginnings in the commercial sector of João Pessoa before transferring into sugar cane production. Perhaps in this

²² Aécio is the son of Francisco Pereira, a political legend from the state's *sertão*. Ex-mayor of Pombal, state deputy since 1958, one-time Vice-President of the Legislature, Francisco was still an active force in state politics in the 1980s. Two other sons of Francisco are also active in PDS politics: Adauto, a federal deputy and husband of Adalberto Ribeiro Coutinho's widow and Ademar, twice a Federal Deputy for the PDS.

sense they can be seen to fit Blondel's (1957:142) characterization of the PSD as primarily urban and coastal. Perhaps significant as well is the fact that the family does not claim illustrious roots among the state's 'old' dynastic families.

Their entry into politics, the same year they set up the *usina* in Mamanguape, began with the encouragement and support of Rui Carneiro whom they joined to set up the PSD in Paraíba. José Fernandes was the first of the brothers to enter politics as the Mayor of Mamanguape. He held that office two more times -- in 1946 and in 1947. Another brother, Manual, was also Mayor of Mamanguape in 1959 (PSD) and in 1968 (MDB) while Manuel's son Gustavo Sobrinho was elected Mayor in 1982. A third brother, João, was first elected to the State Assembly in 1947 at which time he was also elected President of the Legislative Assembly with the support of the *américo* faction of the UDN while defeating the Governor's candidate Flávio Ribeiro Coutinho. In 1950, João was elected Vice-Governor with Governor José Américo, defeating Argemiro and Renato Ribeiro Coutinho. Through that position he held the post of Governor for eight months. After a four year stint as a director of the Banco do Nordeste, he returned to politics in 1962 as a Federal Deputy.

José Fernandes de Lima, three time mayor of Mamanguape, is one of the state's longest running office holders. He was

first elected to the State Assembly in 1951 and has held his seat ever since. Over the years he has held the position of President of the Legislative Assembly three times, most recently in 1986; Secretary of Agriculture, Transport and Public Works; Secretary of Finance; and Governor for eleven months in 1960 with the resignation of Pedro Gondim. Unlike many of the other *usineiro* politicians, the Fernandes de Lima brothers and José in particular have not engendered political conflicts or animosities. Nor do they appear to have participated in the politics of government jobs common among Rui Carneiro's PSD.

Marcus Odilon, a native *Paraibano*, a son of Flaviano Ribeiro Coutinho and later a politician and *usineiro*, also attempted to delineate the distinguishing characteristics of the various political factions in the state. Although obviously more biased than Blondel's (1957) assessment, Odilon's (1965) Poder, Alegria dos Homens is enriched by the author's intimate knowledge of the political actors he discusses. Written when he was only 26 and with a youthful contempt for state politics and its politicians, Odilon (1965) is as critical of the UDN as he is of the PSD. The UDN is summarized by the quote which opens this chapter: "They called themselves the men of good when in truth they were the men of goods" (Odilon 1965:42). Composed of

politicized families with roots in the Empire,²³ according to Odilon (1965), the UDN brought together the well-worn and wealthy rural *caciques* which Argemiro had first cultivated during the 1930s. As Odilon (1965:82-84) puts it,

Argemiro called to his side the Ribeiro Coutinho, the Gaudêncio, the Nóbrega, the Cunha Lima, the Bezerra Cavalcanti, the Nascimento, the Maia, the Gadelha, the Gonçalves Arante. Good men in the opinion of Argemiro, men of goods in the bank records....The doors of the Palace [the Legislative Assembly] opened for these men, owners of land and of men, as if the Revolution had never come to Paraíba.

Argemiro is presented as surrounding himself with "those who had little to ask for and a lot to give" (Odilon 1965:86). Odilon (1965) goes on to characterize these wealthy members of the UDN as perfectionists in the art of the politics of aid and social assistance: in the giving of shoes, in good conversation, in providing a ride to the hospital or monetary aid (Odilon 1965:70). His cousin Renato Ribeiro Coutinho is presented as a major example of this form of vote-catching (Odilon 1965:75).²⁴ Odilon goes on to argue

²³ The inclusion of the Ribeiro Coutinho as a family with political roots in the Empire is typical of families' re-writing of their history.

²⁴ During Odilon's many unsuccessful political campaigns in the 1980s, similar accusations were directed against him.

that the fall of Argemiro issued from the same source as his rise: the city against the countryside, liberals (lawyers, doctors, journalists, middle class intellectuals) tired of living together with the old politically dominant (Odilon 1965:84).

The *américo* faction of the UDN, according to Odilon, was composed of men of independent means as well but here one finds the man of the city rather than of the countryside. In Odilon's (1965:99) words,

...men who needed a part-time job in life, a place within the IAP [the social security institutes], were *pessedistas*. But men of the city, already retired, the young in school who are not yet looking for a sinecure, the man who lives off his earnings and in the larger cities -- João Pessoa and Campina Grande -- these were always the stuff of *americanismo*.

Likewise, if the UDN factions attracted men of means, the PSD and the PTB, in Odilon's estimation, attracted men looking for a means. PSD politicians, according to Odilon, were known as players of employment politics or *empreguistas*. Rui Carneiro, himself, had come from a family without an important political or economic tradition but had succeeded through making contacts, getting into the 'courts' of others (Odilon 1965:88). He began his political career, in fact, by riding to Rio de Janeiro on the coattails of the

post-revolutionary crowd where he became Cabinet Chief for José Américo who was the federal Minister of Transport and Public Works at the time. Odilon goes on to claim that there were no rural men in Rui's group, his party members were all urban middle class, avid for government employment, for federal jobs. The various social security institutes set up in the state in the 1940s and 1950s were, according to Odilon, staffed almost completely with PSD and PTB party members. The middle class in João Pessoa, then as now, is primarily a class of civil servants²⁵ and as such, the majority of the middle class backed Rui. That which gave Rui his power in the state was also responsible for his decline. According to Odilon, although there still existed supporters with a blind dedication to Rui, by the time of the conflict between Rui and Gondim others in the party "were also now in the position to do favors, give jobs, remove police chiefs and transfer teachers..." (Odilon 1965: 122).

D. Conclusion

In reviewing the political activities of the Ribeiro Coutinho or of other notable *Paraibanos* in the twentieth century, the shifts in the loci of elite control become clearer. From control of plantations or rural properties, their concerns extended out to the control of the local

²⁵ Odilon goes on to report that the UDN had never done much for the middle class and was, in fact, frequently hostile to it.

município or surrounding regions. From here, they entered the wider state and national political arena. In each of these arenas, they came into competition with other elite factions. By the 1950s, however, they were also forced to confront challenges from groups traditionally excluded from local and national politics.

A variety of factors were coming together at the end of the 1950s to confront the character of intra-elite politics and the social organization of state politics in Paraíba as well as elsewhere in the Northeast. The growing power of the central government, the expansion of the civil service, and the attraction of governmental transfer payments and development funds, made politics more competitive, more rewarding, and more appealing to a wider audience. The political parties consolidated by Vargas also gave the country an air of having broadly-based parties of a national scope. This vision is somewhat illusory. Although the more integrated national political system might limit the formation of local familial political units, it can also complement them. And although they may no longer predominate, the personal factions of the first half of the twentieth century have not become completely obsolete.

Inter-class considerations also began to challenge the parochial concerns of the traditional political and economic elite. Faced with an expanding, increasingly urban and heterogeneous electorate composed of civil servants,

industrial workers, and a town-based rural proletariat no longer subservient to their former landlords, the political elite who had dominated state politics since the turn of the century were no longer ensured of their hegemony. Forced to compete with a new group of *cabo electorais* -- including middle class doctors, lawyers, civil servants, and teachers as well as class organizers and religious personnel -- who had more contact with the restless masses, the rural elite sought new strategies and alliances. In addition, Paraíba's *usineiros* were further battered by family squabbles over inheritance and control over their enterprises and diverging economic interests.

When their various attempts at stemming the tide ultimately failed, they dug in their heels, called in the military and turned to armed force. The ensuing twenty-five years of military rule would see a gradual division of state and local powers among the state's traditional political elite, a new class of technocratic administrators, and previously excluded sectors of the society. During those years, the state's *usineiros* were at the side-lines of state and national politics, left to compete regionally for development funds and economic favors. By the 1980s, however, they and their old political partners (or their sons and daughters) were jockeying to return to the fray.

CHAPTER SEVEN

CLASS CONFLICT AND CONFRONTATION IN PARAÍBA

We asked that they come on horseback, that they come by foot, that they come in what ever manner, but come, because the assembly was very important for them. The peasants answered the call -- Antônio Dantas, peasant leader¹

A. Introduction

Since Marx's writings on the development of class consciousness, conflict, and the likelihood of class-based revolutionary activities, the revolutionary potential of peasants and agricultural workers has been debated in the social sciences. Peasant political activity in the estimation of Hobsbawm (1965) was primitive or pre-political. In anthropology, substantial progress toward the examination and recognition of political activity on the part of peasants followed from Wolf's (1955, 1957) early efforts to re-orient peasant studies. In shifting the emphasis from the Redfieldian concern with cultural content to structural components as the basis for peasant typologies, Wolf opened the way for appreciation of the historical specificity and variability of peasant types and peasant politics. Of particular significance in distinguishing variations in peasant types was the

¹ Quoted in Gonçalves (1981:112).

recognition, stated by Wolf (1955:453), that "[t]here have been different types of industry and markets, different types of industrial expansion and market growth. These have affected different parts of the world in different ways. The peasantries found in the world today are the multiple products of multilinear growth."

Structural and historical diversity, then, were of relevance as well to the feasibility, form, and force of peasant political activity. Wolf recognized the inherent difficulty among peasants, given their structural features, of converting "a passive recognition of wrongs to political participation as a means for setting them right" (1971:264), but he went to argue that each appraisal of revolutionary potential must be approached through an awareness of the relationship among political power, economic systems, and ideologies; between control over production and control over people (Wolf 1969). Among modern, post-industrial peasants, the revolutionary potential of peasants is enhanced in situations of demographic crises; ecological crises; crises in power and authority; in situations of the beginning of capitalist expansion; and among peripheral, middle-level or tactically mobile peasants (Wolf 1971).

According to Wolf, however, a progression from peasant rebellion to revolution, "...from a movement aimed at the redress of wrongs, to the attempted overthrow of society itself..." (Wolf 1971:272), is not routine. Without outside

leadership and without discontent and rebellion in other sectors of the society as well, peasant rebellions are often self-limiting, parochial, and anachronistic (Wolf 1971:272). On the other hand, they need not be ineffectual -- peasant rebellions can succeed in reshaping the local or regional social structure if not society as a whole (Wolf 1971:272).

Despite the existence of Wolf's model of peasant types and his call for anthropologists to emphasis the forces and pressures at work, articulating the various levels and relations of production and power, anthropologists, in general, have tended to underestimate the role of peasants and subaltern peoples, in general, as actors.² The legacy of the various development paradigms of the 1970s and 1980s -- for example, Frank's (1966) development of underdevelopment; Wallerstein's (1974) world systems theory; Cardoso and Faletto's (1979) dependency theory -- was for anthropologists to set their sights farther afield in both time and space. On the other hand, the periphery remained essentially passive. Peasants were fundamentally reactive rather than active -- at least in class terms.³ Such a view fit well with the volcanic models of peasant rebellion and revolution.

² Discussions of 'subaltern' peoples or groups have spread throughout the social sciences in the last decade. See, for example, Guha (1982), Bayly (1988), and Vincent (1990:400-402).

³ Recent exceptions to such a perspective include Joseph (1990) and various articles in Eckstein (1989).

Rather than searching for the causes or lack thereof of overt confrontations between the 'powerless' and the 'powerful,' some social scientists began to focus on subcultures of resistance or, in the case of peasants, on what Scott (1986) called 'everyday forms of resistance.' These were activities, behaviors, symbols, and narratives which occupied "the middle ground of peasant politics between passivity and open collective defiance" (Scott 1986:1). Everyday forms of resistance required little or no coordination, planning, organization, or collective action. Furthermore, because of the nature of peasant resistance as "silent and anonymous forms of class struggle," history and social science were not well equipped to uncover them (Scott 1986:9). The lack of an historical record of such acts is encouraged as well by the tendency of the state or the elites involved not to advertise challenges to their control (Scott 1986:8-9).

As important as it is to understand their covert nature, it is equally necessary to recognize that, the parameters of resistance are set not by the 'social ecology' of the peasantry but also by 'institutions of repression'...[and that] [s]wings between formal and parapolitical activity, ...may be due to changes in the intensity of repression (Vincent 1990:404 paraphrasing Scott 1986:28-29).

Although also a difficult task to operationalize, Turton (1986:39-40) correctly suggests that in recognition of the dialectic of everyday forms of resistance and everyday forms of domination, an examination of power should include "the techniques and modalities of both more physically coercive forms of domination and more ideological and discursive forms, and the relation between the two...in which...fear may be a crucial factor" (see also Eckstein 1989 and other articles in the same volume).

Although inter-class politics in the sugar industry of Brazil and in the state of Paraíba are not simply peasant politics, many of the same issues and considerations apply. The concerns of this chapter are with the feasibility and leverage of confrontation and conflict between owners and workers -- whether as peasants, proletarians, or some intermediate form; with the forms of resistance and domination; and with the organizational parameters of that resistance and domination. The discussion is necessarily hampered by the nature of the fieldwork (focused primarily on the elites) and archival data available.⁴

⁴ Data for this chapter comes primarily from published sources. Information on worker's organizations and activities in the Northeast can be found in Chilcote (1972), Foot and Leonardi (1982), Forman (1972, 1975), Galjart (1964, 1965), Goodman (1977), Huizer (1965), Human Rights Watch (1991), Leeds (1964a), Morais (1970), Palmeria (1979a, 1979b), Sigaud (1979), and Sousa (1972), and for Paraíba, in Barbosa (1985), Benevides (1985), Coutinho (1984), Gonçalves (1981), Maia (1985), and Page (1972). On the role of the Catholic Church, see De Kadt (1970), Levine (1981, 1986a, 1986b) and on the experiences of the current archbishop of

A brief overview of the political history of Paraíba might leave the reader with the impression that class conflict and confrontation are recent developments in the state's history. As was discussed in the preceding chapter, politics, in terms of formal political activities, parties, elections, and office holding, was primarily an intra-class activity. With voting rights limited, politics was controlled and contested by the region's agricultural, commercial, industrial, and financial elite, in collaboration with the expanding, primarily public servant and professional 'middle' class. Paraíba's various revolts and 'revolutions' were the outcome of local political competitions or struggles to reassert regional control in the face of the increasing hegemony of central-south interests or national centralization. In such a scenario, the formation of the Peasant Leagues in the 1960s and the explicit inter-class conflict which ensued, appear as anomalous, unpredictable and in need of 'rational' explanations. As a result, debates have raged in the literature as to the nature of the Peasant Leagues: were they truly representative of the class interests and consciousness of the region's working class or were they simply another example, gone astray, of intra-class politics and politicking in a somewhat changed environment.

Paraíba, see Pires (1980). Antônio Dantas, a leader of the Santa Rita League, in the 1960s and a part-time union organizer today, filled in other details for me.

The answer is probably a little of both. In coming to this position, we would do well to remember Scott's (1986) warning that history is written primarily by and for elite purposes and interests. As such, we need to ask to what extent are the available sources adequate for a discussion of inter-class conflict and confrontation in a small and insular state such as Paraíba? As Turton (1986) suggests, discussions of the extent and force of resistance must also take into account the extent and force of domination. Given the power structure at various points in Paraíba's history, to what extent and in what form was resistance possible; what could it accomplish; and what were the attendant responses? Is the situation different today, how and why? These questions are important to any discussion of a regional elite and their ability or lack thereof to influence the development of a region. It is these questions that I address in this chapter.

B. Class Conflict and Confrontation in Paraíba: A Historical Overview

For Brazil as a whole, the historical vision of relatively peaceful co-existence between owners and workers holds although it is tempered to some extent by what Hobsbawm (1965) would call primitive or pre-political movements or activities. These include the occasional recorded revolts and rebellions of the country's native

peoples; various slave revolts and the presence of *quilombos* or run-away slave communities such as the infamous Palmares; the anthropologically-rich messianic or millenarian movements such as Canudos and Joazeiro; instances of social banditry; and folk catholicism and mysticism (see Chilcote 1972 for a typology of Brazilian movements and brief summaries of some of the most noteworthy movements). The models that have guided most discussions of protest movements are principally of the volcanic type: extended periods of peasant passivity interspersed with occasional instances of open, collective defiance. Little attention has yet to be paid to everyday forms of resistance among the country's peasants or rural wage laborers.

In a brief nod to the greater part of the state's population, Octávio (1985:23), in an article entitled "Cultural Evolution and Historical Synthesis," writes that "despite the rigidity of the socio-economic structure, based on *latifúndia* and slave labor, the popular masses have always attempted to participate intensively in the history of Paraíba." In support of this statement, Octávio goes on to cite examples of run-away slaves communities, or *quilombos*, such as Cumbe and Catucá; resistance by the Potiguaras and Cariris Indians; the abolition movement; various forms of messianic movements and banditry; the anti-fascist anti-nazi movements of 1943-45; and the Peasant Leagues of the 1950s and 1960s. With the exception of

messianics, social bandits, or the Peasant Leagues, most of these movements have been described from the intellectual, political, or military perspectives of the state's elites.

The exploits of social bandits such as Lampião, although an integral and important part of popular culture⁵, also form part of elite intellectual, cultural, and political traditions. Lampião, or Virgulino Ferreira da Silva, operated in the far *sertão* of Paraíba, and throughout the Northeast, from around 1918 until his death in 1938. While a hero of the poor -- in the manner of Robin Hood -- Lampião also owed part of his fame and success to his ties with some of the region's elite families. He began his career as a hired gunman for a large landowner, participating in the battles between elite rivals. He was employed by local political chieftains in 1926 to fight the Prestes Column and was awarded the position of army captain for his efforts (Chilcote 1972:261-62). Some of the region's bandits even had kin ties to local *caciques*. Today, the exploits of Lampião and his lover Maria Bonita are an integral part of the international tourist scene -- they are the subject of folk performances, music, and artisan production.

Banditry, messianic movements, religious fanaticism, and so on in Paraíba have been restricted mostly to the arid

⁵ Lampião and other social bandits are frequently the subject matter of the popular *folhetos* or *literatura de cordel* -- stories-in-verse or chapbooks (Slater 1982).

sertão region of the state. Although tales of these movements were known and recounted in the coastal cane and urban regions, and coastal peoples frequently made pilgrimages to interior shrines and sacred sites, little in the way of similar 'pre-political' movements originated in the coastal regions -- except for the very early Indian resistance movements or slave revolts. Here the first movements of a class nature developed in the coastal urban centers among industrial workers.

The earliest class associations in Brazil were religious brotherhoods and mutual aid associations among factory workers and artisans. These could be found well before the nineteenth century. It was not until the second half of the nineteenth century that Brazil's urban proletarians, influenced by their counterparts in Europe, came to organize resistance movements directed toward gaining particular rights for workers.⁶ With the abolition of slavery in 1888 and through more extensive ties to European communists, socialists, and masons, proletarian movements took off. During the 1890s, various branches of the Partido Operário do Brasil (the POB or Worker's Party of Brazil) were organized around the country although the strength of the party was centered in the south among European immigrants. In 1902, another worker's party, the

⁶ The first strike in Brazil occurred in 1858 in Rio de Janeiro (Foot and Leonardi 1982:120).

Partido Socialista Brasileiro -- PSB (the Brazilian Socialist Party⁷) -- was organized. Communist organizers continued to be active in the south until the 1930s. According to Chilcote (1972:268) "one of their early efforts to organize a peasant league occurred in São Paulo State about 1928 in the zones of Sertãozinho and Ribeirão Preto, where peasants, under the leadership of Teotônio de Sousa Lima, marched in protest on the large coffee farms."

In the Northeast, only the state of Pernambuco had a significant urban industrial base and thus proletarian activity in much of the region was in response to developments in Pernambuco. According to the 1920 census, Paraíba had a total of 3,035 industrial workers and 251 industrial establishments (Foot and Leonardi 1982:305).⁸ Of these 251 establishments, 169 were related to textiles, 31 to food, 22 to clothing and millinery.⁹ Most had been founded after 1900 and particularly during the period from 1915 to 1919. More importantly, only four of these establishments had more than one hundred employees while most had only one to nine workers -- the majority of

⁷ The party had no relation to the later Partido Socialista Brasileiro founded in 1947 as a splinter group of the UDN.

⁸ Compare these figures to the state of São Paulo at the time where 83,998 workers labored in 4,415 establishments (Foot and Leonardi 1982:305).

⁹ Sugar *usinas* were not included in these statistics. They were grouped as a separate category.

industrial workers were more correctly artisan or petty commodity household producers rather factory workers (Foot and Leonardi 1982:305). The two largest industrial establishments were the Rio Tinto Textile Factory, founded in 1924 in Rio Tinto and owned by the Lungren brothers -- Swiss immigrants -- and a branch of a *Pernambucano* whale oil concern located near the port of Cabedelo.

Paraíba's limited industrial base did not preclude the development of proletarian organizations nor the appearance of class confrontations. The Centro Protetor dos Operários, or the Center for the Protection of Workers, was formed in Paraíba in 1904 and adopted the program of the Partido Socialista Brasileiro. Some of the associations or unions which existed around 1920 were: the General Union of Workers; the Union of Stevedores; the Society of Mechanical and Liberal Artisan Workers; the Association of Employees in Commerce (Foot and Leonardi 1982:306). Paraíba railroad workers participated in the famous Great Western Strike of 1909. During the period from 1917 to 1920, Foot and Leonardi (1982:306) found reports of sixteen strikes in the state¹⁰ -- most of these took place during July 1917. Involved in these strikes were stevedores, electricians, carters, urban transportation workers, dressmakers, tailors, and workers in factories producing cigarettes, cloth, and foodstuffs.

¹⁰ They also caution that little data was available for the state of Paraíba -- in particular, few copies of papers from the various workers' presses are still available.

Although evidence for Paraíba is lacking, Foot and Leonardi (1982:298) suggest that, unlike the southern proletarian associations, those in the Northeast frequently included expressions of concern for and solidarity with rural workers in their pronouncements.¹¹ Factory workers at the *usinas* of Cabo, Pernambuco were reported to have organized successful strikes in 1919. The same year they also went on strike to extend the eight-hour workday to rural workers as well (Foot and Leonardi 1982:297). Whether similar actions occurred in the cane fields and factories of Paraíba is unknown. Urban industrial unions, however, would become important years later as a training ground for some of the leaders of the Peasant Leagues.

With the Revolution of 1930 and the crackdown on Communism which followed Vargas' imposition of the *Estado Novo* in 1937, these independent proletarian movements in Brazil were quickly extinguished. Many of the immigrant leaders were expelled from the country or lost their jobs. Independent proletarian organizations were replaced by government-regulated worker and employer unions. Rural workers were excluded from Vargas' corporatist state until

¹¹ Although they also report that around 1903 there is evidence that rural workers in São Paulo, in particular, were joining the urban proletarian movements in significant numbers (Foot and Leonardi 1982:254).

1943 -- at which time rural unions would be allowed although few arose before the 1960s.¹²

Prior to the fall of the *Estado Nôvo* in 1945, there appears to have been at least some further attempts to organize rural workers and peasants -- this time by certain sectors of the Catholic Church. Although the Catholic Church in general, and the upper echelons in particular, remained firmly aligned with the country's elite and the status quo at least until the 1950s,¹³ some individuals within the church adopted the more activist thinking of the Catholic Action movements in Europe and North America.¹⁴ As Levine (1981:31) writes, these groups "...attempted to develop explicitly Catholic organizations in many fields, particularly among organized labor and students..." as a defense against the increasing loss of their members. In

¹² Forman (1972:198n62) reports that "in 1943, the Consolidation of Labor Laws extended to rural workers the minimum wage, the right to annual vacations, regulation of the labor contract, provisions regarding the payment of salaries, and the right to prior notification of termination of the labor contract." Seldom, if ever, was this legislation imposed so that these benefits to rural workers are more correctly seen as following from the Rural Labor Statute of 1963.

¹³ Levine (1981:32) notes that the corporatist notions which attracted Latin American politicians in the inter-war years, also found favor with many sectors of the Catholic Church in Latin America as well.

¹⁴ Unlike the earlier movements -- such as folk catholicism, mysticism, fanaticism, and millenarianism centered in the *sertão* -- Catholic Action and the later Liberation Theology remained much more closely aligned to the Church as an institution.

Brazil, the impact of Catholic Action did not really become evident until the 1950s.

C. Class Conflict and Confrontation in the Cane Fields

As was discussed in earlier chapters, the import substitution model which guided Brazilian development from around 1930 until 1964 (Ianni 1970:20) took its principal form in Paraíba as a result of increasing capitalization and 'rationalization' of agricultural production and marketing, in addition to some minimal attempts at industrialization. In the cane regions, in particular, increased capital entered the sugar industry in the form of expansion of cane fields, greater use of agricultural machinery, irrigation, chemical fertilizers and herbicides, technical improvements in the industrial sector, greater emphasis on secondary activities such as cattle raising and the rationalized cultivation of crops for both the internal and external markets. All these factors contributed to the expulsion of resident rural workers and neighboring peasant farmers and to a greater reliance on a seasonal urban-dwelling labor force and contributed to increasing tensions within the region.

At the same time, tensions were also developing further afield among the more or less full-time peasant farmers in the *agreste* which "...was under a constant threat from the expanding *latifúndia* in the coastal lowlands and in the

cattle-raising *sertão*" (Forman 1972:192). It was in these areas, in fact, that the first attempts at rural organization and the first open conflicts with landowners took place. According to Forman (1972:187), these events were "a response to intensified socioeconomic pressures ... pervading the Brazilian countryside along with the spread of a rationalized marketing system" which impacted most directly on the region's peasant producers.

1. The Catholics and the Communists

Prior to the formation of the Peasant Leagues, several other groups had entered the rural areas in an attempt to articulate and direct the discontent of its residents. The two most influential groups, Catholics and Communists, had had long, albeit erratic, histories with rural workers in various parts of Brazil. Although most often aligned with regional elites, some segments of the Catholic Church had brought questions of economic and political structures to the forefront early on. By the 1950s, these issues had begun to be debated more intensively within the Catholic Church. As early as 1950, the bishop of Campanha in the state of Minas Gerais had issued a pastoral letter entitled, "With us, without us, or against us, agrarian reform will come about" and called church personnel, farmers, and rural school teachers to a meeting labeled the *Primeira Semana*

Ruralista (Dé Carli 1987:13). Similar Rural Weeks were held throughout the country during the next few years.

At a meeting of church officials in Aparecida, São Paulo in 1954 the objectives of agrarian reform were determined to be: the just distribution of property; valorization of the human element; attachment of people to the land; stability of the rural family; removal of the obstacles which impede or hinder the acquisition of land and its adequate use; and improvement in the conditions of rural life (Dé Carli 1987:29). The corporatist influence on these processes were still evident in their summation of who was responsible for implementation of the reforms: -- "It is to the Public Power, incontestably, as principally responsible for public negotiations and for generation of the common good, that a large part of the responsibility for Agrarian Reform lays" (Dé Carli 1987:29). The Catholic Church, for example, called for the National Congress to pass basic legislation necessary "according to the larger interests of the country and the legitimate aspirations of rural peoples" (Dé Carli 1987:29). The Church further proposed that federal, state or municipal organs should be responsible for the practical application of the legal decisions and that the recently created National Institute of Immigration and Colonization (INCRA) be given the function of planning and executing agrarian reform projects (Dé Carli 1987:29-30).

According to the report, the Church's role, in line with its moral authority and incontestable influence in rural areas, would be to stimulate and orientate its members. Its bishops and priests would be expected to: gain acceptance for a reform which was approved and desired by the Church; to try to influence large landowners to initiate small agrarian reform experiments on their own lands such as was being attempted in India and China; to indicate those individuals most able to become property owners. In addition, they were expected to patronize¹⁵ colonization experiences in their dioceses or parishes; to convince large landowners to give up a piece of their lands for colonization nuclei; and to collaborate in the preparation of rural leaders (Dé Carli 1987:30).

It was along this latter course that a second trajectory in the Church's involvement in rural areas developed at about the same time. These initiatives took form first among the Juventude Universitaria Catolica (JUC or Catholic University Youth) -- the student branch of Catholic Action (De Kadt 1970). Unlike the top-down policies recommended by the country's bishops, these undertakings were predicated on an ideology of populism and notions of *conscientização*. According to De Kadt (1970:94-98), populism suggested to its adherents an ideological stance

¹⁵ It is unclear here whether the implication was to morally support or financially sponsor such experiences.

characterized by an identification with the dominated sectors of the society, a hostility to any 'manipulation' of these people, and a belief that these sectors of the society were to choose their own economic and political destiny. Populist movements were by necessity made up of and 'led' or guided by intellectuals and students although the ultimate aim was for them to become a tool of and for the people themselves (De Kadt 1970:98). The role of intellectuals vis-à-vis the people was one of *conscientização* or the presentation of certain facts and theories to the people which would serve to awaken the masses to their position in society and to the fact that their position would only improve through activity on their own part. As De Kadt (1970:98) puts it, these intellectual leaders held that solutions to the problems lived by the people must ultimately come from the people themselves, that their [the intellectual's] own ideas and visions, developed in a wholly different milieu, may at most serve as a sounding board for, but never as signposts to, the people.

One such attempt to implement a program along these lines was the Movimento de Educação de Base (MEB or Base Education Movement) -- a church sponsored, government-financed organization which became active in many rural areas in early 1961 (De Kadt 1970:122-48). The most basic aims of the Movimento were to bring education and literacy

to Brazil's rural areas. In this, MEB appears to have had some success. In its other implicit goals, it may have been less successful¹⁶ although this did not prevent the Catholic Church and particularly the National Council of Bishops from adopting similar ideologies and strategies in more recent times -- many of the basic tenets of Liberation Theology are quite similar. MEB's success in bringing rudimentary literacy to an expanded sector of the Brazilian countryside did, however, have an important impact on local political structures. With illiterates excluded from electoral participation, literacy programs threatened to significantly alter the electoral base in many regions. Although evidence for a direct connection between literacy programs and an expanding electorate is lacking, it is interesting to note that in 1945, there were 195,634 voters in a population of 1,561,349 or 11.2 percent; in 1950, there were 346,141 voters for 1,730,784 people or 20 percent (Blondel 1957:73-74), by 1970, the electorate numbered 630,584 out of a population of 2,377,954 or 26.9 percent (Andrade 1986:91).

The Catholic Church was active in one other important arena in the Northeast in the 1950s and 1960s. This was in their sponsorship and organization of rural unions.

¹⁶ De Kadt (1970) attributes the failures to inherent contradictions in populist ideologies, to the difficulties of integrating populist and political activities and ideologies, to the pressures and competition from other groups operating in the rural areas and to the ultimate failure of the movement's leaders to bend their wills to the conflicting wills of the people.

Operating again within the confines and according to the requirements of the existing labor laws, the sponsorship of unions by the Catholic Church increased dramatically after 1962 when the government began to recognize many unions and the Confederação Nacional dos Trabalhadores Agrícolas (CONTAG) was established. Chilcote (1972:269-70) recounts that,

the Church-supported unions had their origin in the state of Rio Grande do Norte under Bishop Eugênio Sales de Araújo. In 1961 young priests, inspired by Bishop Sales's work, decided to initiate a training program in Pernambuco and to form legally recognized rural unions. By 1963 there were forty-eight legal rural unions in Rio Grande do Norte, apparently all Catholic-oriented, and sixty-two unions in Pernambuco of which sixty-one were Church-sponsored. ... The major effort was led by two parish priests, Padres Antônio Melo of Cabo and Antônio Crespo of Jaboatão, two municipalities in the depressed sugar belt around Recife.

The Catholic Church, in the first half of the twentieth century and recently, concerned itself primarily with the peasantry and with issues such as land reform, land invasions, peasant cooperatives, and violence against peasant leaders. During the years preceding the military

coup, however, the Church's attention shifted momentarily¹⁷ to the rural proletariat -- the various types of rural workers who were also engaged in wage labor. As Forman (1972:198) put it, "inspired by the papal encyclical 'Mater et Magistra,' the Church ... defined its role ... as primarily reformist and conciliatory, stressing improvements in living conditions for the salaried worker, cooperation with the federal government, and the inapplicability of the concept of the class struggle. Its primary concern ... [was] with the promotion of labor legislation for the rural salaried worker."

The shift in the Church's attention, from the peasant to the rural proletariat, was prompted to a large extent by its anti-communist sentiments and the unionizing activities of the various communist parties in the region. Although the church may not have been successful in its competition with these organizations and the subsequent Peasant Leagues, it was the only organization to survive the military coup and to continue to have an impact on the rural population. Where the other groups disappeared, the Church continued to play a significant role in some regions during the years of the military regime and since its fall. And while the Church continued to be active after the coup in the organization of unions of rural workers, its attention would again shift to

¹⁷ Nevertheless, the Church continued in the vanguard of those calling for radical agrarian reform.

the peasantry and it would come to advocate a more adversarial stance in the relations between peasants and landowners and between peasants and the state.

As was noted above, Communists were one of the first groups to attempt to organize peasants and rural workers. They became particularly active in the state of Pernambuco during the late 1940s, organizing rural workers and occasionally peasants, into leagues. In 1954, the Brazilian Communist Party in São Paulo set up the União dos Lavradores e Trabalhadores Agrícolas do Brasil (ULTAB, or the Union of Farmers and Agricultural Workers of Brazil) -- an organization which brought together sharecroppers from the coffee fields and field workers from the sugar *usinas* (Chilcote 1972:269). Similar organizations were attempted elsewhere in Brazil. Many of the early communist agitators in the Northeast participated with Francisco Julião in the organization of the first Peasant Leagues although Julião and his followers would eventually come into conflict with the Communist Party.

The most often cited grounds for the differences between the Communists and Julião are the concerns of one for the proletariat and the other for peasantry. Often politicized within urban, industrial unions, upon entering the countryside, Communists were concerned primarily with such issues as schools, medicines, legal aid, burial funds, and the extension and application of the existing labor

legislation to rural workers. Where Julião consciously advocated leagues which were outside the control of the labor laws, the Communists favored legally recognized unions. Consequently, the Communists believed "that agitation for agrarian reform should be subordinated to efforts to extend labor legislation to rural areas" (Forman 1972:196). These diverging emphases, as we shall see, often come into conflict with the interests of the rural populations associated with one or another group and were responsible, in part, for the tenuous foundations of many of these organizations.

2. The Peasant Leagues

More has been written, and more conflicting interpretations have been put forward, about the Peasant Leagues than perhaps about any other class movement in Brazil. For Paraíba, it is interesting to note that little in the way of analysis of the events of the early 1960s has been generated internally -- most of the studies of the activities of the Leagues in Paraíba have been conducted by academics from outside the state. Here I will only sketch out some of the main debates and issues raised. It is important to recognize, however, that a good part of these debates were generated by the simple failure of the contending sides to highlight, as Forman (1972:190) did, the fact that "in reality, there was not one peasant movement in

Brazil but several, differentiated in terms of the rural subcultural groups which comprised their membership and of the leadership through which they voiced their demands." Another controversy evolved around the role and fundamental meaning of outside leadership and agitation. Here, a sterile rigidity often takes hold -- the existence of leaders from outside the rural population is used to negate the class basis and significance of the conflict.

One of the most problematic aspects of the Peasant Leagues is the figure of Francisco Julião. Julião was a lawyer from Pernambuco, a Federal Deputy for the Brazilian Socialist Party, a member of a *Pernambucano* family with extensive rural properties, including cane fields, and was widely considered to be the leader and organizer of the Leagues. Significantly, as Forman (1972:195) points out, "there is no evidence that a peasant league meeting ever took place within the county in which his family's property was located even though it was the area of greatest agitation in the state." Furthermore, it seems apparent that Julião's political aspirations and his need for an electoral base were at the root of his association with the peasantry. These facts in themselves, however, do not justify a blanket devaluing of the Leagues or the conflict and confrontation which spread throughout the region during those years.

In the anthropological literature on Brazil, the basic lines of the debate on the Peasant Leagues were drawn in an

article written by Leeds (1964a) which was inspired by a Monthly Review article by Julião (1962). Leeds attempts to dispel certain misconceptions about the Leagues that he felt were popular among North Americans, including the view that the Leagues were evidence of a unified class-based movement. While he disagrees with those who view Julião as the de facto leader of the Leagues -- noting that other groups with other leaders were also organizing in the region (1964a:191) -- Leeds ultimately views the fact of outside leadership as the most revealing aspect of the events. He argues that the masses were being organized from the outside in a paternalistic manner and were being used to advance the careers of politicians (1964a:194,197). These politicians were a new elite who were attempting to usurp the old political elites, that is, the coastal sugar interests and the old *caciques* from the interior. According to Leeds, Julião was representative of this rising elite -- the liberal-conservatives (1964a:199). As a result, Leeds predicted little would change in the Northeast except that the old dominant classes or interests would be replaced by a new elite faction with more emphasis on modernization. In the end, these new elites were simply proletarianizing the peasantry.

Similar arguments were made by Galjart (1964) in his article entitled "Class and 'Following' in Rural Brazil."

He also claimed that a class struggle had yet to develop in Brazil since the leaders of the movements were not peasants but from the upper classes; the leaders were in conflict with each other and therefore dividing their followers; and whatever benefits accrued to the peasants came as favors from the state rather than as concessions. Galjart (1964) concluded, then, that these peasant organizations were simply followings -- that is, groups which supported influential men or organizations in return for influence in gaining benefits or favors (1964:21). The peasants, in other words, wanted particular benefits and therefore would follow any leader who supplied these benefits. A leader's relationship, as such, was to his followers rather than to a class as a whole. Although the roots of such relationships could be traced to the traditional systems of patronage and following which had existed in the region for most of the century, like Leeds, Galjart also assigned importance to new elite sectors composed of financial, commercial, and industrial interests (1964:11). For Galjart then the movement was simply a transformation of followings centered on landowners to followings centered on new elite sectors, politicians or on government.

Galjart's article inspired Huizer to respond the following year. Huizer (1965:132) argues that while it may be true that class consciousness was not yet fully developed in the region, it had begun to develop. While the peasant

leagues may have been partly a case of 'followings' or new forms of patronage, they were also symptomatic of the development of class consciousness. Huizer went on to argue that even if these were followings, they were qualitatively different from the earlier forms (Huizer 1965:132) -- a point which Galjart (1965) does not address in his response to Huizer. For Huizer, the new followings, unlike earlier followings, were marked by choice-making and decision-making from below (1965:142). Huizer also criticizes Galjart for romanticizing the patronage system of the past (Huizer 1965:132) and points out that the presence of intellectual leaders was not in conflict with Marx's analysis of class struggle (Huizer 1965:135).¹⁸

Two later articles, one by Forman (1972) and the other by Palmeira (1979a), take less rigid approaches to the topic and are more willing to allow for the co-existence of both class conflict and cooptation in addition to recognizing that some form of outside leadership and participation may be necessary for peasant movements to get off the ground. Both make the point that the political aspects of the events of the 1960s have been overstated at the expense of economic

¹⁸ In another article on the subject, Morais (1976), one of the 'intellectual-socialist' leaders of the Peasant Leagues, makes the point that the movement in the Northeast had begun as a peasant political movement but he concedes that the upper class took over the movement and killed it. He also discusses how outside leaders had redirected the peasant and proletariat activities because they felt that the time was not right.

considerations and argue that the conflicts were both political and economic. Forman (1972), as was noted above, made the argument that, in the case of Brazil, economic rationalization had led to political radicalization. His hypothesis went as follows:

...urbanization, industrialization, and subsequent commercialization in agriculture create demands for increased production and consumption in rural areas which ultimately lead to a breakdown in traditional forms of behavior and to widespread discontent. Given the structure of Brazilian agrarian society, an influx of capital into the countryside results in further concentration of landholdings, in the increased proletarianization of the rural masses, and in the increased indebtedness of the rural masses. The accouterments of a rationalized internal marketing system -- make mass recruitment of peasants, and thus mass movements, possible (Forman 1972:184).

Palmeira (1979) makes a similar point and adds that the struggles must also be seen to have unfolded within the limits set by national legislation -- the unions, for example, could only act in terms of conflict which was recognized in legislation relating to labor and agricultural concerns. On the other hand, while the law allowed owners to act against workers, the law could also be an important

weapon for the workers as well. In other words, there were limits to both the structures of domination and those of resistance.

3. Antônio Dantas and the Peasant Leagues of Paraíba

A fundamental error of much of the literature on the Peasant Leagues derives from an almost exclusive reliance on media accounts of the Leagues and histories of the elite leaders such as Julião. Both sources present a fundamentally top-down perspective on the events and minimize the role of the non-elite participants. In this section, I provide a brief sketch¹⁹ of Antônio Dantas, one of the founders of the Peasant League in Santa Rita. Like his counterpart in the neighboring municipality of Sapé, João Pedro Teixeira, Antônio had longstanding ties with the sugar *usinas* of the Paraíba River valley although both men spent some time outside the state and both found employment outside the sugar industry. Pedro Teixeira, unfortunately, did not live to tell his story (although others have told it for him including the Eduardo Coutinho (1984) movie 'Uma Cabra Marcado para Morrer'). Antônio did survive the violent repression of the Peasant Leagues and has recently returned to unionizing activities among rural workers and peasants.

¹⁹ This sketch is based on a published interview with Antônio Dantas (Gonçalves 1981) and a book on the Peasant Leagues (Benevides 1985). In 1987, I also interviewed and accompanied Antônio Dantas on several trips he made to visit rural unions in the state.

His story serves as a counterbalance to the usual overemphasis on the upper echelon 'leaders' and suggests that the lower levels were not simply 'followers' of these leaders.

Antônio Dantas was born on the outskirts of Sapé in the hamlet of Cuité. His father, Manoel Rita, was from a peasant family and his mother, Maria Rita, was from the Indian community of Baía da Traição. He began working in agriculture when he was seven years old. He worked at a variety of rural tasks, including hoeing, planting, and cutting in the cane fields as well as in the factory of an *engenho*. When he was around thirteen he took a job as a domestic in João Pessoa which allowed him to attend school for a few years. Antônio looks back on this time as having planted the seeds of his first consciousness of class conflict. His relations with his employers were mixed: he had good relations with the man of the house but felt that the *dona da casa* treated him and the other servants as slaves. She relentlessly enforced her strong religious practices on the household, requiring her employees to attend mass, catechism, and confession. Antônio reports that "one of these times when I went to confession, I told the priest the humiliation I had to suffer.... He said that I should suffer these humiliations with humility, with resignation, and at the end of the confession, he said that the poor were born to suffer" (Gonçalves 1981:105). This

experience he felt contributed to his later conviction "that the church was nothing more than an instrument against the poor, against the humble, in favor of the rich" (Gonçalves 1981:105).

In the late 1940s, Antônio moved to Recife, Pernambuco where he first found work in a textile factory and later as a journalist for a union paper. He became active in the textile workers' union and in union and Communist Party politics. In the 1950s, on visits back to family members in the Santa Rita area, he would spend time with relatives, old childhood acquaintances, and Communist Party (PCB) members who were trying to organize unions in both the rural and industrial sectors of sugar production. He recalls that even then there was violent repression of these activities and participants disappeared.

In 1959, the same year the state's first Peasant League was organized in Sapé, Antônio moved back to Paraíba where he found work in João Pessoa as a travelling salesman. Prior to leaving Pernambuco, he had become influenced by Julião's Peasant Leagues and was beginning to question the program of the Communist Party. Soon after returning to Paraíba, Antônio became General Secretary of the Federação dos Trabalhadores Agrícolas (FETAG, or the Federation of Agricultural Workers) which was under the control of the PCB at the time but influenced by Julião's platform of a radical agrarian reform. He eventually came to reject what he saw as

the 'roadside reform' advocated by the Party. In 1963, he was expelled from the Party for "disagreeing with the political line and betraying the Party" (Gonçalves 1981:108). He later left the Federation as well.

Despite Antônio's attraction to the agrarian reform platform, most of his organizing activities were with rural workers employed by the *usinas*. He was instrumental in the success of the state-wide strike against the *usinas* in 1963 despite the attempts by other groups to derail the effort. The ostensible leaders in the state at this time included agronomist and State Deputy Assis Lemos (PSB), lawyer José Gomes da Silva, and *Desembargador* João Santa Cruz,²⁰ supported, in public, by Governor Pedro Gondim. The strike against the *usinas* had stopped all of the *usinas* except Usina Monte Alegre on a Tuesday. That next day Antônio met with the President of the Rural Union of Mamanguape and a meeting with workers was called for the following day which succeeded in bringing Usina Monte Alegre's workers into the strike as well.

Antônio reports that the next day -- Friday -- Deputy Lemos came looking for him and reported that "the *companheiros* had come to an accord, that a commission had

²⁰ João Santa Cruz ran unsuccessfully for Mayor of João Pessoa in 1959 on the Socialist Party Line and with the endorsement of the UDN. He had had his political rights denied in the 1930s and 1940s for his association with the Communist Party. In 1958, however, Governor Flávio Ribeiro Coutinho had appointed him *Desembargador* or Judge at the High Court.

gone to the *usinas* and an accord had been made with the *usineiros* over the question of salary.... Assis asked me not to begin a fight against this since the peasants [sic] had participated in the negotiating commission and it was unwise to divide the movement" (Gonçalves 1981:113). Antônio pointed out that a meeting of all of the striking workers would be necessary so that a vote on the accord could be taken. Before the meeting could take place, Assis and his 'negotiating' team met with the *usineiros* at the Ministry of Labor and the accord was signed. Antônio attended this meeting and reports that

I said that I would not put my signature on the infamous paper.... They had betrayed the movement but they would pay in the future.... I denounced the group of people who had not participated in the last assembly nor in the movement, but who had participated in the negotiations. I asked that these elements leave since they were people who were not welcome at that assembly. I thanked the participation of the *companheiros* who came and explained that the victory had not been total, but had been partial, partial because elements, forces outside of the movement had been involved in the negotiations, but this would serve as an experience for the later battles. I proposed that the *companheiros* organize in their work locations

to elect a representative or a commission that would ... participate in future negotiations and guarantee these accords. This was necessary since even though the accord had been made, ... it could still be ignored by the owners and therefore it was necessary to have a commission to watch over (Gonçalves 1981:114).

At a later assembly after the delegates from the various work sites had been chosen and brought together for their first meeting, Antônio again recounts attempts by the 'intellectual' leaders to control the direction of the group's activities. According to Antônio,

on Thursday, at the marked hour, the assembly began with the representatives of all the local bases. To my surprise, the upper echelons of the movement were there, the owners of everything, the owners of truth, those who had made the accords secretly without consulting with anyone. The great 'intellects' were there as well, among them Dr.

José Gomes who was a lawyer (Gonçalves 1981:114).

When the earlier 'accord' had been negotiated with the *usineiros*, it was in the name of the Food Producers Union²¹ -- rural workers did not at this point have their own union. At this meeting with the local delegates, Antônio proposed

²¹ Industrial workers at Paraíba's *usinas* are still members of this union. Unlike workers in other states, they have yet to form their own union.

that a union of cane workers be organized such as had already been carried out in Pernambuco. Again, Antônio was challenged by the 'inner circle' which alleged that the workers did not have sufficient experience to direct a union of that breadth. Antônio's response was that,

the workers had the capability -- if they had the capability to plant cane, to harvest the cane, to make sugar, to spill their blood, to sweat and cry, they had the experience and capability to have and direct their own union.... And I said more: that here was the underestimation of this bourgeoisie, who wanted to be owners of the truth, who wanted to lead all and everything (Gonçalves 1981:115).

The Union of Rural Workers was formed in Santa Rita that same year although its offices were frequently closed because of fear of repression, members disappeared, were found murdered, or went into hiding after being threatened, while others left the movement out of fear. With the coup the following years, Antônio and many of his fellow *companheiros* were imprisoned. All were replaced in the unions by individuals who were considered 'friendly' to the military regime. In 1987, Antônio and a new breed of rural workers were still trying, unsuccessfully at times, to have these individuals removed from the leadership of Paraíba's rural unions. At the same time, Antônio and others like him

were attempting to shift the focus of rural unions. In the 1960s, the rural unions in the cane zone were ostensibly organized to represent both wage laborers and peasant producers. Through the influence of individuals like Antônio, however, the initial membership drew heavily on wage laboring cane workers. Soon after the coup, the rural unions came to be identified more with peasant producers and attracted few cane cutters. In 1987, Antônio was attempting to bring cane cutters back into the unions.

D. The Response of the *Usineiros*

In response to the organizing activities and demands of Paraíba's rural workers in the 1960s, on April 13, 1962, members of the Ribeiro Coutinho and Velloso Borges families as well as some of their fellow landowners and political colleagues met to begin setting up an Association of Rural Landowners. The meeting was held at the Commercial Association of João Pessoa and chaired by Sabiniano Maia.²² Among those in attendance were: Vice-Governor André Gadelha,

²² Sabiniano Maia was a consummate jack of all trades. The son of a not too distinguished family -- he took his wife's last name -- he first aligned himself politically with the Ribeiro Coutinho in Itabaiana back in the 1920s. He was at various times and for various terms, a nominated Mayor of Mamanguape, Guarabira, Campina Grande, as well as an elected Mayor of Guarabira and Sapé; an Ad-Hoc Prosecutor; an Assistant Prosecutor and a Prosecutor; Police Delegate; State Secretary of Education and Health, of the Interior and Justice; Director of the Government Newspaper and Radio Station, President of the Credit Cooperative of the Agricultural and Commercial Bank, and so on.

State Deputy Joacil Pereira²³; João Ursulo Ribeiro Coutinho Filho; Renato Ribeiro Coutinho; José Waldomiro Ribeiro Coutinho; and Deputy Clóvis Bezerra who later became President of the Legislative Assembly (twice), Vice-Governor (twice), and Governor, from 1982 to 1983. A second meeting of the group later in the month also included *usineiros* Flaviano Ribeiro Coutinho Filho (elected First Secretary); Jocelin Veloso Borges (elected First Vice-President), Aguinaldo Velloso Borges; and Solon Lins (elected a substitute to the Fiscal Council). Also in attendance was João Batista Brandão, previously a technician at Usinas São João and Santa Helena and one of Usina São João's most important cane suppliers (elected to the Fiscal Council); Edison Ribeiro de Moraes, Brigade General of the Military Police; and Mário Miranda Vilas Boas, the Archbishop of João Pessoa from 1959 to 1963 (Maia 1985:211-12).

The meeting began with Flaviano Filho reading the minutes of the earlier meeting in which the rights of rural landowners were set forth -- these rights should be "to maintain a line of collaboration in defense of agrarian reform within the Christian principles declared by Pope John 23rd in the new encyclical 'Mater et Magistra,' while protesting with total vehemence against the reform measures

²³ Joacil Pereira was also an opportunist politician and civil servant. In his youth, he joined João Santa Cruz in the Communist Party and later in organizing the Socialist Union of Paraíba. During the years of the Peasants Leagues, he became one of the Leagues most vocal enemies.

tied to the practices of the Communists and preached by profiteers and political demagogues" (Maia 1985:212). It was further noted that the entity would be clearly oriented by the principles of respect for the law and the norms of democracy. Joacil Pereira added his satisfaction in seeing landowners and the 'glorious Brazilian Army' come together in defense against the subversive activities of the Communists of Cuba and Moscow (Maia 1985:212). He and several others went on to reaffirm the immediate need for agrarian reform and for a better life for rural workers while at the same time recognizing the right to private property. These were the same sentiments expressed twenty-five years later by the region's and the country's politicians when yet another version of an agrarian reform program was reduced to naught.

At this same meeting, the statement was made that "we want to end this battle ... without war, without blood" (Maia 1985:218). But blood had already been shed -- only eleven days before the first meeting of the Association of Rural Landowners, João Pedro Teixeira, leader of the Peasant League of Sapé, had been murdered; only a few weeks before that, Alfredo Nascimento, an associate of Teixeira, and a founder of the Peasant League of Miriri had died. In the face of the groundswell of protest and indignation which emanated from the countryside and the cities over the deaths, the state's *usineiros* and landowners were projecting

their strength in numbers and coordinating their allies when they organized the Association.

The inclusion of politicians, the military personnel, and individuals from the conservative faction of the Catholic Church at the Association meetings was not without purpose. Implicated as the intellectual authors of the murders were Aguinaldo Velloso Borges and Pedro Ramos Coutinho, the older illegitimate brother of Renato Ribeiro Coutinho and João Ursulo Filho. Alfredo Nascimento was a tenant on the 15,000 hectare property Miriri owned by Pedro Ramos Coutinho. The tenants on this property had been fighting for some time to pay their rent in cash rather than in the one workday a month they were required to give to Pedro. Pedro refused and began terrorizing tenants in an attempt to push them off the land. In one such campaign, a battle broke out between the tenants and Pedro's thugs -- an administrator was wounded and two of his gunmen died; Alfredo and another tenant were shot to death (Benevides 1985:90). Pedro Ramos Coutinho had been indicated in another incident in which a tenant from one of his properties who was also a leader of the Sapé Leagues had been shot in the leg while walking through the center of Sapé. This individual, Pedro Inácio de Araújo or Pedro Fazendeiro, would survive this and other attacks²⁴ and go on to run

²⁴ Pedro Fazendeiro and Deputy Assis Lemos were beaten as they worked in the office of the Itabaiana League by a group led by two nephews of Aguinaldo Velloso Borges in

unsuccessfully for the State Legislature the following year, only to be found dead on the roadside hours after he had been 'released' from detention following the military coup in 1964.

A police report filed on April 16th, two weeks after Pedro Teixeira's death provided substantial evidence that Pedro had been killed by a sergeant and two soldiers of the military police at the request of Aguinaldo Velloso Borges. Five days before, on April 11th, Deputy Joacil de Brito Pereira had successfully engineered a way out for Aguinaldo. In the election for state deputies in 1958, Aguinaldo had earned sixth place on the list of substitute deputies for the UDN coalition. Two of the substitutes had already moved up into the legislature and two others had moved on to other activities. Two positions in the legislature needed to be opened up to allow Aguinaldo to move in and attain the immunity from prosecution accorded to members of the Assembly. Deputies Clóvis Bezerra and Flaviano Ribeiro Coutinho Filho requested and were granted sick leaves, allowing Aguinaldo to move beyond the law.

Although ensured of impunity in the death of Pedro Teixeira, the landowners of the Paraíba River Valley had sorely miscalculated their ability to intimidate the rural

September 1962. The event was reported in the local papers as having been a youthful, impetuous, and justified shoving match -- they were protecting the family's honor -- in which light wounds resulted (Benevides 1985:114).

population and to count on the acquiescence of the urban sectors. Pedro's death had served not only to fan the embers of discontent among peasants and rural laborers -- membership in the Leagues swelled following his death -- it had awakened urban sensibilities to the injustices and privation which had long characterized the countryside. Within days of Pedro's death, thousands streamed into the center of the city in protest; groups from all sectors of society and with diverging interests and agendas now found a common ground; a Federal Commission was appointed to look into the deaths, the Leagues, and land reform. Governor Pedro Gondim wavered on the issue. He was both interested in aligning with the populist ideology then in vogue in the country and dependent politically on the state's political and economic elites. His indecision only inspired more hope and protest on the part of those seeking change and more violence and repression on the part of landowners.²⁵

²⁵ Other violent confrontations in the state included: conflicts between the Lungren family, owners of the Rio Tinto Cloth Factory (and later Destilaria Tabu) and their sharecroppers and tenant farmers; Pedro Teixeira's son was attacked two months after his father's death; in an attempt to destroy the homes and expel his tenant farmers, Rubens Régis, one of the founders of the Association of Rural Landowners was killed; in the municipality of Mari in January of 1964, employers of Usinas São João and Santa Helena and policemen from Santa Rita attacked a group of peasants preparing their fields -- ten individuals died including the General Manager of the usinas; in March of 1964, Joacil Pereira and Marcos Odilon Ribeiro Coutinho led an attack of military police against a group of law students holed up in the Faculty of Law in downtown João Pessoa.

If Governor Gondim and President Goulart faltered on the issues and the situation, the military did not. Increasingly the military had come to act independently from the government and from the laws of the country but in concert with the landowners and *usineiros*. Their members frequently accompanied landowners' thugs in attacks on peasants and rural workers; the military reportedly supplied most of the arms used by the landowners in their attacks; they conducted raids on rural settlements ostensibly to collect stockpiled weapons -- in one raid they removed all of the peasant's farm implements.²⁶ At Miriri, Pedro Ramos' property, where following the death of Alfredo Nascimento the tenants had dug in and refused to move, troops from around the Northeast were invited to use the property for military practice and maneuvers in 1963.

E. Conclusion

In April of 1964, the military took control of the state and of the country -- overt conflict and confrontation in the countryside would be put on hold for at least twenty years. The state's landowners and *usineiros* would spend these years preoccupied with expanding their sugar fields and factories, their cattle ranching operations, their

²⁶ Rather than confront the army over the return of the peasants' tools, Governor Gondim is reported have dug into the state treasury to buy the peasants all new tools (Benevides 1985:42).

reforestation projects, their pineapple plantations, or whatever endeavor they could use to attract the funds of SUDENE or the myriad other development schemes which followed in the wake of the military coup and which competed to accept the ever increasing amount of foreign aid which poured into the country as a reward for the anti-communist victory. While pursuing economic interests, the state's *usineiros* were guaranteed that their political interests would be protected -- that the status quo and compliance would rule in the countryside. Following the return to civilian power in the 1980s and the return to open political competition, the status quo is again being challenged. Compliance is no longer ensured and once again the region's *usineiros*, and landowners in general, are entering into violent confrontations with their workers. The implications of these conflicts and of other recent challenges to the elite are discussed in the following chapter.

CHAPTER EIGHT

CONFLICT AND CONFRONTATION IN THE 1980S

A. Introduction

In 1983 and again in 1987, one particular region in Paraíba stood out in terms of the frequency and intensity of confrontations between rural workers and large landowners. This was the area to the north and west of Guarabira and the town of Guarabira itself. In 1973, the *município* of Guarabira had had only 8,800 hectares of sugar cane with approximately 70 percent of its lands planted in cotton, beans, manioc, corn, and sisal. The major cash producing crops at that time were pineapple, sweet potato, manioc, avocado, cashew, oranges, mangoes, and sugar cane. By 1980, the area under cane cultivation had increased threefold. This increase came about primarily through the expansion of cane production into previously 'uncultivated' lands.¹ Furthermore, the total number of agricultural holdings in the area decreased over this period in every category except for properties between 1,000 and 9,999 hectares -- the largest holdings. As well, the number of individuals holding property as renters, squatters, and particularly, shareholders, decreased over the same period and the area as

¹ This is according to official record keeping. If the example of other areas of the state is applicable, however, previously 'uncultivated' lands may mean that they were uncultivated by the land or title owners although they may have been cultivated by squatters or sharecroppers.

a whole experienced a net drop of 16.5 percent in its population -- the highest decline in the state.

Guarabira falls within the so-called *Piedmonte da Borborema* microregion of Paraíba. Although the *Piedmonte* and the neighboring *Brejo Paraibano* are frequently included as part of the *agreste* region of mixed farming, the microregions had two longstanding *usinas* (Usina Tanques and Usina Santa Maria) and a new distillery (Destilaria Borborema). In 1983, the *Piedmonte* was a region marked by violent and active confrontations between landowners and rural workers. It was here in August of 1983 that Margarida Maria Alves, the president of the local Union of Rural Workers, was shot and killed, reportedly on the orders of one of the region's *usineiro*. Aguinaldo Velloso Borges, reportedly responsible for the death in 1962 of Pedro Teixeira, leader of the Peasant League in Sapé, was implicated in Margarida's death. Again preliminary charges were brought against the alleged hired gunmen. And again, despite the public outrage and promises from a variety of official agencies that justice would be forthcoming, nothing has yet been accomplished.

Four years later, in November of 1987, the 'Margarida Case' was one of several assassinations being reviewed by the Tribunal Nacional dos Crimes do Latifúndio -- a commission set up that year to investigate unresolved crimes committed by landowners and modelled on the Russell

Commission which investigated Vietnam War crimes in the United States. According to the Tribunal, between 1964 and 1986, 1,188 individuals had been killed by landowners and during that time, only two cases had come to trial.² The Tribunal also reported that, in the first half of 1987, there were 249 armed conflicts reported in the Brazilian countryside. Of these, "...196 were linked to land conflicts, 19 to labor questions, 3 to conflicts between squatters and prospectors, 29 to conflicts related to droughts, and 2 to union problems (Diario de Pernambuco, November 8, 1987, p. A6). The Tribunal, counting on the participation of representatives from the Associação Brasileira de Reforma Agrária (ABRA), the Comissão Justiça e Paz da Arquidiocese de São Paulo, the Comissão Pastoral de Terra da CNBB, the Ordem dos Advogados do Brasil (OAB), and the Movimento Nacional dos Trabalhadores sem Terra among others, hoped to mobilize the Brazilian democratic conscience and bring peace to the countryside. Despite these laudable attempts by respected and influential national (and international) institutions and associations,

² Americas Watch (1991) reported that from 1964 through 1989 there had been "...1,566 murders of rural workers, Indians, lawyers, nuns and priests and other professionals linked to the land struggle..." (Human Rights Watch 1991:1). Furthermore, they noted that "...of a total of 17 trials, nine resulted in acquittals and only eight ended in convictions. The convictions occurred in the few cases where members of the professional classes (three priests, three attorneys), or of groups with special international connections (two Indians), were murdered (Human Rights Watch 1991:1).

it is revealing that in 1983 Paraíba's political and economic elites did not apparently feel that it was necessary to again shield the suspected author of the crime behind the walls of the Legislative Assembly. Although fewer of Paraíba's *usineiros* now held political office at the state or federal level, their interests have been repeatedly protected while the concerns of rural workers and peasants have been ignored. To begin to come to an understanding of why and how this occurs and what potential there might be for change, in this chapter³ I focus on contemporary forces and activities within the state and the nation and explore what impact these have had on the *usineiro* elite and on inter and intra-class relations.

B. *Usineiro* Politicians and Party Politics in the 1980s

Although a number of prominent politicians and leaders lost their political rights following the military coup,⁴ none of Paraíba's *usineiros* had their political rights suspended although their actual participation in state

³ Information for this chapter was collected through participant in Paraíba's social life in 1986/88, by way of discussions with workers' organizations and representatives in 1983/84, and from a survey of local newspapers for the 1980s and a variety of published sources. Among these were Andrade (1986), Costa (1986), Maia (1980), Maia (1985), Mariz (1987), and Odilon (1984). Information on the alcohol industry in Paraíba is available in Eid (1986), Melo (1986), and Mendes Filho (1983).

⁴ Included among these were Celso Furtado, the architect and Director of SUDENE; Miguel Arraes, Governor of Pernambuco; and Pedro Gondim, Governor of Paraíba.

politics declined. Of the Ribeiro Coutinho, Renato, Flaviano Filho, Luiz Inácio, João Crisostomo, Marcus Odilon, Cassiano, João Ursulo Filho, and Odilon remained active in local, state or national politics throughout most of the 1960s. By the 1970s, however, only Marcus Odilon still held an elected office -- as mayor of Juarez Távora in 1968 and of Santa Rita in 1976, and then as state deputy in 1982. Luiz Inácio had died in 1968 while his brother João Ursulo died in 1972. Although he never held office again, Renato was considered a significant player in state politics until his death in 1982. Flaviano Filho was elected a substitute senator in 1970 but never held office. Odilon continued to run for office, unsuccessfully, in Rio Grande do Norte throughout the 1970s and early 1980s.

With the return to open political competition in the 1980s, only Marcus Odilon, Odilon, Renato's son Carlos Antônio and Jorge's son Jorge Urçulo regularly participated in party politics. Marcus Odilon ran for everything and any party. In 1976, he was elected mayor of Santa Rita on one of the three ARENA party slates. His running mate, an ex-employee of Usina São João, had run unsuccessfully for mayor of Santa Rita in the last election with the support of Renato Ribeiro Coutinho. In 1982, Marcus Odilon was elected to the state assembly for the PMDB but stepped down in 1984 to run for mayor of João Pessoa for the Partido Trabalhista

Brasileiro (PTB).⁵ He lost this election and in 1986, he was again the unsuccessful PTB candidate for Vice-Governor on a coalition slate with the PFL, PDS, PMB, and PDC (see below for a discussion of these parties). After spending the next two years out of the state, Marcus Odilon returned to be elected mayor of Santa Rita for a second time in 1988.⁶ This he accomplished with the support of the incumbent mayor, his cousin and previous adversary, Severino Maroja, and the PMDB.⁷

Odilon Ribeiro Coutinho attempted his first electoral campaign in the state of Paraíba in 1988 when he was a Partido Socialista Brasileiro (PSB) candidate for Federal

⁵ The PTB, Vargas' old companion party to the PSD, enjoyed a short-lived resurgence in the mid-1980s although it was now affiliated in most instances with the PDS, the successor to the UDN and not with the PMDB, the successor to the PSD.

⁶ It is interesting to note that in the year preceding the municipal elections, much of the local press reported that Odilon Ribeiro Coutinho, not Marcus Odilon, was being encouraged to run for mayor of Santa Rita. According to Odilon, this was a confusion which occurred quite frequently. While such errors may result simply from journalistic sloppiness, they also suggest two trends: the unfamiliarity of contemporary journalists with the (potential) political elite or the increasing obscurity of the Ribeiro Coutinho in local and state politics.

⁷ Flávio Maroja's grandchildren, including Severino, form part of the increasing 'middle' class representation in state politics. While Maroja individuals continue to play an important role in municipal politics in Santa Rita, they have recently had some success as well at the state level -- Severino's brother José Luiz -- a medical doctor -- was elected to the state assembly for the PMDB in 1986.

Deputy.⁸ He was not successful in this campaign. Two years earlier he was a candidate for Federal Deputy in Rio Grande do Norte for the PMDB and endorsed by the Communist Party of Brazil (PC do B). He was unsuccessful in that campaign as well. It is reported that he is still active in the PSB in Paraíba although he continues to spend extended periods outside of the state.

The other *usineiros* who have remained active in politics in Paraíba include José Fernandes de Lima of Usina Monte Alegre and some of his nephews and Aguinaldo Velloso Borges' sons-in-law from Usina Tanques. As noted previously, José Fernandes de Lima continued in his position as a state deputy, elected in the years following the military coup for the MDB and later the PMDB. In 1987, he was again chosen to be President of the Legislative Assembly. Several of his nephews are currently active in municipal politics in Mamanguape.

Aguinaldo Velloso Borges' son-in-law Enivaldo Ribeiro first entered the State Assembly in 1975 as an ARENA candidate although the following year he resigned to become mayor of Campina Grande. Enivaldo returned to the State Assembly in 1987, elected for the PDS although he

⁸ The PSB was another old party resurrected in the 'redemocratization' of the 1980s. It gained considerable strength in the central-south regions of Brazil in the months preceding the 1989 presidential elections as a centralist party. It eventually joined the Frente Brasil Popular (FBP) and supported the PT's candidate, Luís Inácio "Lula" da Silva, for president against Fernando Collor de Melo.

subsequently switched his allegiance to the PFL. By the end of the field research, the political force of Campina Grande had come to weigh heavily on the state and Enivaldo was considered a leader of one of Campina Grande's two major factions. Another son-in-law of Aguinaldo, Aécio Pereira, a state deputy, had begun his political career within ARENA and eventually moved to the PDS. His father, Francisco Pereira Vieira, had been an associate of the Ribeiro Coutinho in the old UDN and had first been elected to the State Assembly in 1954 although he did not take office until 1959. He was re-elected in every election since. Aécio's brother, Adauto -- husband of Luiz Inácio Ribeiro Coutinho's widow -- has been a Federal Deputy since 1982 for the PDS as well. These Pereira politicians are reportedly members of the '*Grupo da Varzea*' which are believed to represent the interests of the Ribeiro Coutinho and Velloso Borges *usineiros*.

Party politics in Paraíba in the 1980s can perhaps best be characterized as a game of opportunism and second guessing and with a new regard for aligning with the national ruling coalition that was apparently not common in the past. In 1982, during the first direct election for state Governors since 1966 and the first election since the party reform of 1979, three major parties vied for votes. These were the Partido do Movimento Democrático Brasileiro (PMDB), the Partido Democrático Social (PDS), and the

Partido dos Trabalhadores (PT). In Paraíba, two other parties -- the Partido Trabalhista Brasileiro (PTB) and the Partido Democrático Trabalhista (PDT) -- supported the PMDB. The leaders of the PMDB in Paraíba came primarily from the old PSD and MDB although a renegade group from the PDS eventually came to play an important role in the party. In 1983 the leader of the PMDB in the Legislative Assembly was Edvaldo Fernandes Mota who had been elected in the four previous elections on the ARENA slate. In 1979, Edvaldo had left ARENA/PDS with a group headed by João Agripino Filho, the Governor of Paraíba in 1966 and the head of the UDN at the time of the military coup in 1964. For a short while these dissidents formed the Partido Popular (PP) -- according to Alvarez (1990:146) "the party of Tancredo Neves, which brought together sectors of the bourgeoisie who had become disillusioned with the military regime's management of economic policy." The PP eventually merged with the PMDB. Another important spokesperson for the PMDB in Paraíba was Humberto Lucena. Lucena was the grandson of ex-President of the state and *epitacista* Solon Lucena and son of Severino Lucena, an ex-president of the PSD.

The 1982 elections revealed the influence of the *ex-udenista*, João Agripino Filho, on the PMDB as well as the party's heterogeneous composition and its cautious approach to oppositionary politics in the *abertura* period of political redemocratization. Rejecting one of their own as a

suitable candidate for Governor, they chose instead to back Agripino's cousin Antônio Mariz who was also a convert from ARENA and PP. Another convert to the PMDB, Marcondes Gadelha -- whose family had passed through the UDN to the MDB and then to the PMDB (and later to the PDS and the PFL) -- was rejected because of long standing animosities between his family and the Agripino Maia. Agripino's influence in the PMDB at this time is most often explained as resulting from little or no choice -- either Agripino Filho would dictate the PMDB's candidate or he would run for Governor himself on the PDS ticket. The old guard was allowed to appoint Mario Silveira -- a long time disciple of Humberto Lucena -- as the candidate for Vice-Governor while João Agripino Filho ran for Federal Deputy. A nod to the old PSD and its occasional utilitarian ties to the old UDN was accomplished with the candidacy of ex-Governor Pedro Gondim for the Senate. Two *usineiros*, Marcus Odilon Ribeiro Coutinho and José Fernandes de Lima, were elected to represent the party in the State Assembly.

The PDS of the early 1980s had changed little from the UDN of the 1960s. Active PDS politicians whose fathers and grandfathers or who themselves had been UDN candidates included the Gaudencio family; the Pessoa family; Wilson Braga, his wife and sister; the Pereira family; the Cabral family; Joacil Brito Pereira; the Bezerra Cavalcanti family; and Egidio Madruga among others. In the 1982 election,

having failed to woo João Agripino Filho back to the PDS, the party chose Wilson Braga, a lawyer, as their candidate for Governor, and a wealthy industrialist and political neophyte, José Carlos da Silva Jr., for Vice-Governor. Marcondes Gadelha, shunned by the PMDB, became their priority candidate for the Senate. Soon after the 1982 elections, in the context of mounting public pressure for direct elections for President, and increasing dissatisfaction with the nationally ruling PDS, particularly in regards to the country's worsening economic situation, the PDS began to break apart. Significant numbers of both old and new party affiliates left the party for the newly formed Partido da Frente Liberal(PFL). In Paraíba, those who chose to stick with the increasingly unpopular PDS included 'Grupo da Varzea' members Aécio Pereira Lima, his father, Francisco Pereira Vieira, and Carlos Pessoa Filho.⁹

Although the PMDB and other opposition parties had significant successes in the south and central-south regions of the country during the 1982 elections, in the Northeast the PDS maintained its hegemony. In states like Paraíba,

⁹ Although the PDS, as well as the PFL, was and is frequently implicated as the party of the *usineiros*, no major *usineiro* has been a candidate for the party. An exception might be made for Aécio since he was a minor shareholder in his father-in-law's company. His father, Francisco Pereira Vieira, was reported in the press following the 1986 elections to be an *usineiro* (*O Norte*, November 23, 1986, p. 4). I found no data to support that designation.

this was not unexpected given the previous decades of control by the UDN, the frailty of the opposition, the opportunistic nature of local politics, and the continuing fears and suspicion on the part of the general populace over a possible return of military control or of reprisals on the part of the military. During the years of the military regime, with the exception of a few oppositional stalwarts, both old and new politicians tended to ally themselves with the various ARENA party slates and a switch to the PDS was a logical move in a still tenuous political environment. With restrictions on electoral propaganda still in place¹⁰ and with the PDS in control of the financial resources of the state -- which could be diverted to electoral ends -- what was surprising was that the opposition did as well as it did in the Northeast. The PMDB sent to office five federal deputies, fourteen state deputies, and took thirty-six *municípios* while the PDS had seven federal deputies, twenty-two state deputies, and one hundred and thirty-four *municípios*. Perhaps most significant is the fact that PMDB won the majority of the most populous *municípios* including the sugar-producing *municípios* of Santa Rita, Sapé, Bayeaux, Guarabira, Mamanguape, Areia, and Alagoa Grande. Obviously, the 'Grupo da Varzea' was having little influence in urban centers. Like the earlier UDN/PSD divisions, the

¹⁰ The Falcão Law, passed in 1976 and intended to limit the effectiveness of the opposition, "prohibited paid electoral propaganda on TV and radio..." (Alvarez 1990:141).

contemporary structuring of political affiliations appeared to follow both class and rural/urban boundaries -- with the PMDB relying on the support of the middle class in urban areas and the PDS finding its electoral base in rural areas and its financial support among the state's rural economic elites.

By the late 1980s, with national and local discontent with the ruling PDS at a peak, the rush by politicians to disassociate themselves from the party increased dramatically. And while the country and the world celebrated the victory of PMDB governors in all states of the country, with the exception of Sergipe, as symbolic of the decline of the old regime and the advent of democracy in Brazil, within the Northeast, analysts were left to contemplate how much the new political elite resembled the old.¹¹ Elected Governor of Paraíba for the PMDB in 1986 was Tarcísio Burity, the ARENA/PDS appointed Governor in 1979. The PMDB sent seven deputies to the Federal Congress and won the state's two senate contests. The PDS/PFL coalition, on the other hand, succeeded in electing five federal deputies. In the State Assembly, the PMDB was initially in the minority,

¹¹ In the 1986 gubernatorial election in Pernambuco, this element was turned on its head to the benefit of one candidate. The elderly PMDB candidate, Miguel Arraes, had been Governor of Pernambuco just before the military coup. His opponent, José Mucio Monteiro, was a young political newcomer but also a nephew of the owner of two of Pernambuco's larger *usinas*. One of Arraes' campaign slogans became: "The old is the new and the new is the old" (Martins 1987:65).

electing seventeen deputies while the PDS/PFL elected 19 deputies.¹² Minor parties such as the Partido dos Trabalhadores (PT), the Partido Socialista Brasileiro (PSB), the Communist Parties (PCB and PCdoB), and the Partido Democrático Trabalhista (PDT) which had some successes elsewhere in the country, had little or no impact in Paraíba.

Among the PMDB, however, a brief examination of the past political activities of its elected candidates reveals the diversity of its members. Although party stalwart Humberto Lucena was elected senator, he came second in the race to Raimundo Lira, a wealthy businessman and property owner from Campina Grande, who was widely believed to be a political neophyte. Lira, however, had been affiliated with the PDS until the 1983 divergences within that party. Among the federal deputies elected for the PMDB was Alusio Campos. Campos was a cattle rancher in Paraíba and Maranhão and the son of a turn-of-the-century politician. He had first been elected to the state assembly for the PSB in 1950 and had been a senator for the UDN and ARENA in 1962, 1966 and 1974

¹² It is instructive to note here that of the seventeen state deputies elected for the PMDB, only five were veterans of the State Assembly. Twelve of their successful candidates were new to state politics and most of these individuals were not members of the traditional political elite -- as a result, little information was available on their previous activities or future potential. Among the PDS/PFL elected deputies, on the other hand, fifteen of the nineteen were returning to office for at least their second term. Many of these had been politically active in the state for decades.

before being elected a federal deputy for the PMDB in 1982. Another federal deputy, Antônio Mariz, had first been elected mayor of Sousa for the PTB, entered the UDN as Secretary of Culture and Education for his cousin Governor João Agripino Filho, was an ARENA Federal Deputy for three terms in the 1970s, and had been an ARENA consideration for Governor in 1978 before switching to the PP and later the PMDB along with João Agripino Filho. A similar trajectory had been followed by another federal deputy, Edivaldo Fernandes Motta, who had won election for state deputy four times for ARENA and had been a leader of the PP before switching to the PMDB in 1983. Again, foresight in predicting the eventual attraction of the PMDB, seems to have attracted politicians to the PMDB rather than a commitment to oppositional politics or democratic ideologies.

The PDS/PFL candidates had almost all begun their political careers within the UDN, ARENA, or PDS. The PFL candidates were primarily individuals who had left the PDS in 1983 or 1984 when soon-to-be President Sarney left the party as well, to affiliate with the PMDB and Tancredo Neves in the race for President against Paulo Maluf -- many of these individuals, however, had voted for Maluf against Neves and only changed affiliation after Tancredo won.¹³

¹³ Despite the overwhelming public pressure for direct presidential elections in 1984, the ruling PDS/military coalition succeeded in retaining indirect elections for

Within months after Burity took office, the majority of the PFL members of the Legislative Assembly severed their ties to the PDS and joined PMDB members in jockeying for benefits and sinecures. By the end of the field research in mid-1988, Burity had moved further afield from the mainline PMDB and closer to the PFL which was gaining strength nationally. In the elections for President at the end of 1988, Paraíba overwhelming fell in with a renewed national-level PFL/PDS coalition, voting for Fernando Collor de Melo for president over the PT/PMDB/PSB candidate, Lula. And although the state followed the trend of much of the rest of the country in 1990 in again electing a PMDB Governor -- the ex-mayor of Campina Grande and a ally of Raimundo Lira -- many of the old line center-right candidates were returned to office as well.

C. Class Conflict and Confrontation in the Cane Fields

As I have suggested above, despite the national and international rhetoric of 're-democratization' prevalent in Brazil (and other South American nations) during the 1980s,

President within the Electoral College which they stacked with their supporters. The attempt was not wholly successful however. The government's candidate, Paulo Maluf, lost to the PMDB's Tancredo Neves. Nevertheless, it must be remembered that Tancredo had previously headed the PP and his running mate was José Sarney, now of the PFL but previously national president of the PDS. Center-right factions were guaranteed a major role in the national government when Tancredo died before taking office and his vice-president Sarney stepped into office.

fieldwork among cane workers and other rural sectors during the period left me skeptical if not outright cynical about these claims. Here I do not intend to address the debates on the meaning and nature of 'democratization' or 're-democratization' in the literature on Latin America (see for example, Nef 1988; O'Donnell, Schmitter, and Whitehead 1986; Stallings and Kaufman 1989). Rather, I focus exclusively on the attempts and effectiveness of rural workers, peasants, and their allies during the 1980s in advancing their concerns and agendas in the face of various responses from *usineiros* and landowners.

By the early 1980s, although the numbers of resident rural workers and peasants in the cane regions of Paraíba had declined, the rural wage labor force had in fact increased. This was due primarily to the impact of PROÁLCOOL. In Brazil as a whole, Pastore (1989:188) reports that in 1984 the Comissão Executiva Nacional do Alcool (CENAL) estimated that the number of jobs generated by alcohol production had gone from 117,500 jobs in 1978/79 to 423,000 in 1984/85. For the alcohol-producing factories in Paraíba, Melo (1986:334) reports that in the period from 1980 to 1984 the number of jobs generated by the industry rose from a 1980 base of 2,532 to 3,995. According to Mendes Filho (1983:186-87), the figure projected by CENAL for Paraíba was 5,557 direct jobs and 27,784 indirect jobs to be generated by the Alcohol Program. Again it must be

reiterated that the majority of these new positions, particularly when discussing field labor, are seasonal positions making use of temporary wage-laborers.

These temporary laborers have added their particular interests to the list of concerns of the cane industry's rural workers. Research with cane workers in Paraíba in 1983/84 revealed that as with sugar cane workers elsewhere in Brazil during that period, the main issues discussed by rural workers in Paraíba included registration of workers, wages and the enforcement of legal benefits, expulsion from land, changes in cutting requirements, transportation and accident benefits.¹⁴ Workers, however, approached these issues with varying degrees of intensity and commitment and through various means -- sometimes through formally organized groups and at other times, through informal, impromptu means. The primary formal organizations available

¹⁴ I do not pretend to have spent sufficient time with wage laborers to know all their major concerns. I do, however, feel that their interests are at times misrepresented by national and foreign researchers and political activists who are concerned more with their own interests and political agendas. Registration, for example, was and is a primary concern in many reports on workers' issues. Some cane workers, I believe, would never volunteer registration as a major issue unless encouraged to do so. Others would even deny that the issue is a major concern for them. This may be because they are seasonal employees registered in other professions and activities and have no interest in jeopardizing existing benefits. For others, registration is of little concern simply because, given the horrific conditions of the job, they never plan to stay around longer than tomorrow. Or for others, registration guarantees nothing -- they have regularly seen the rules and regulations ignored and the difficulties which workers face in making the law work for them.

to aid workers in their struggles were unions, church groups, several governmental agencies, and infrequently, political parties.

In general the leaders and the activists in these organizations were not rural workers themselves. Rather they were academics, intellectuals, church personnel, politicians, or middle class radicals. Workers, on the whole, could be pulled into these organizations at specific times to confront specific issues, but they tended to drop out again after the issue was resolved or reached a stalemate. Furthermore, certain regions of the state and certain organizations definitely had greater numbers of politicized workers than others. Santa Rita, the region where fieldwork with cane cutters was conducted in 1983/84, may have been somewhat anomalous in its lack of political organization during that period. Being in the heart of the cane growing region of the state may have also been significant.

As was discussed in Chapter Seven and as Garcia (1983) noted for the state of Pernambuco, 'peasant' political movements have frequently gained force in areas peripheral to the large sugar cane plantations and have often involved small producers and squatters. This appeared to have been the case in Paraíba as well. In 1983, the most politically active rural workers at Usina São João were a group of small private landowners or peasant farmers who were temporary

wage laborers in the cane fields. By 1986, the greatest number of conflicts reported in the local media involved small producers on lands recently incorporated by the new distilleries. Conflicts continued as well in the 'peripheral' region of Guarabira discussed above.

1. The Catholic Church and Land Reform

In 1983, the most overtly active groups supporting the rights of the poor and dispossessed in Santa Rita were those groups identified with the Catholic Church. These local church groups worked primarily on issues specific to the town and its residents, although they did become involved in other more general issues on occasion. In the *município* of Santa Rita, at least, there appeared to be little contact between church groups and the region's rural residents or its rural proletariat. Unlike the years immediately preceding and following the military coup, none of the local church groups, for example, were engaged in the organization or sponsorship of rural unions nor do I have any evidence of their promotion of causes of particular concern to cane cutters. In other regions of the state or the Northeast, this may not have been the case. In Guarabira, for example, it appears that death threats against the local Bishop were a response in part to his encouragement of the local union, rural wage laborers, and leaders such as Margarida, in addition to his activities geared to land reform. During the

1983/84 research in central-south Brazil around the Ribeirão Preto region of São Paulo, some Church groups had the rural proletariat as their major concern.

After the earlier brief concern with the rural proletariat, by the 1980s, the primary focus of the Church in the Northeast was again the peasantry and particularly the issue of land reform. As was discussed in Chapter Seven, agrarian reform had been a concern of some segments of the Catholic Church since the 1950s and it became a major concern of the Church again in the 1980s. By the mid-1980s, however, calls for agrarian reform were no longer restricted to the Church or to radical interest groups. The issue had become part and parcel of the larger demand for a return to 'democracy.' Land reform became a major issue in the elections of 1986 and during the constitutional debates the following year. The creation of land reform as one of the most talked about public issues and more importantly, as an election issue, owed much to President Sarney's somewhat surprising announcement in October 1985 of the National Plan for Land Reform.

Having a land reform plan, statutes, and regulations is one thing, having the conviction to implement them is another thing. For Paraíba, the 1985 plan had projected the expropriation of 200,000 hectares and the settlement of over 6000 families by the end of 1987. By that time, however, only 2,356 hectares were in the expropriation process and

only 127 families had been given land titles. By the end of 1989, of the projected national total of 43 million hectares, only 4.6 million have been expropriated and only 85,000 of the projected 1.4 million families have been given land (Folha de São Paulo, October 15, 1989, p. A-7). Much of the church's involvement in land conflicts in Paraíba (and elsewhere in the country) has been a series of frustrated attempts to simply ensure that the laws of the land and particular legal judgments are adhered to. Many of the land conflicts in Paraíba have been going on for decades; some of them were even legally 'resolved' ten or more years ago but this has not prevented violent intimidation of the peasantry or new legal challenges.

A cursory survey of some of these land conflicts reveals the almost overwhelming difficulties that individuals face awaiting or encouraging land reform. One particular case which was reported on intermittently in the local media during the 1986/88 field research involved Fazenda Gurugi, located in the *município* of Conde. A review of local newspapers reports from the late 1970s until the early 1980s revealed that the conflicts involving this property were longstanding. The resident sharecroppers had first experienced problems in 1979 when ownership of the property had changed hands. By 1982, the new owner was regularly using violence against the resident population which repeatedly went to the local press and the relevant

authorities requesting resolution of the confrontation. Governor Burity, in his first term in office, made several visits to the area promising to resolve the issue. By August of 1982, the local press reported that the government had begun the process necessary for the property to be expropriated. According to local newspaper reports, by early 1988, problems relating to the property still had not been resolved (see, for example, Correio da Paraíba, April 21, 1988, p. 6).

Another conflict, reported in the press in 1987, involved Fazenda Subaúma in the *município* of Alhandra. These accounts noted that the property had, in fact, been legally expropriated in 1983. The landowner, however, had contested the decision and it was supposedly still under review. In the meantime, the landowner had continued to plant cane on the contested lands. Tired of waiting for possession of their land, in 1986 the peasants began pulling up the landowner's cane. Violence ensued. After visiting the site, authorities from the relevant agencies requested that the peasants give them a month to settle the problem. A year later, with nothing having been accomplished, the peasants again began pulling out cane. This time the military police arrived, took five peasants prisoner and confiscated their agricultural implements. And again the government promised to look into the situation (A União, April 22, 1988, p. 9).

The majority of the publicized rural conflicts in Paraíba during the 1980s were related to land disputes. Many of these conflicts had their origins in the late 1970s when ownership and land use patterns shifted in the coastal and agreste regions of the state in anticipation of PROÁLCOOL. The new distilleries, in particular, were buying up new lands or converting previously owned land to cane production thereby displacing small farmers -- some of whom had worked the land for generations. Fazendas Gurugi and Subaúma described above were both located in the coastal strip near Paraíba's border with Pernambuco. Traditionally an area of fishermen, peasant farmers, and some coconut plantations, this was the region where several *usineiro*-families from Pernambuco built their new distilleries. To supply these distilleries, much of the surrounding land was planted in cane. Or where peasant farmers remained on the land, their survival was threatened by the toxic distillery waste dispossessed off into local rivers and streams.

In these various conflicts, despite the legal and moral support of groups such as the Catholic Church, its Center for the Defense of Human Rights, the Federation of Agricultural Workers, and some rural unions, the influence of landowners on local authorities and on the state and national governments prevailed. Pressured by politicians and landowner interest groups, a new agrarian reform plan enacted by the Sarney government in October 1987 diluted the

original plan to such an extent that few of Paraíba's disputed areas would qualify for land reform.¹⁵ By the time Brazil's new constitution was enacted in 1988, the right to private property was given precedence over agrarian reform and the financial resources available for implementing land reform had been cut drastically. By that time as well many local dioceses had backed away from support for land reform or their radical leaders had been silenced and replaced by more conservative leaders.

2. The Unions, FETAG, and the UDR

During the 1983/84 research in Santa Rita, the local Union of Rural Workers was neither particularly active nor considered effective by most if not all of the workers I spoke with. It was generally perceived to be staffed and run by government approved lackeys and aligned with landowners rather than workers. Although workers had come to control the unions in some *municípios*, these as well were frequently racked by political infighting and contending ideological

¹⁵ The government's concern with the support of landowners at the expense of peasant farmers was evident in the newspaper advertisements which the Ministry of Agrarian Reform and Development ran nationwide at the time of the 1987 reforms. "Who is afraid of agrarian reform?" asked the advertisements. The ad went on to answer: only the 2.6 percent of rural landowners (who hold 47 percent of the country's agricultural lands) should be worried -- but only if their land is not productive. In addition to 'productive' land, properties of up to 250 hectares in the South/Southeast, 500 hectares in the Northeast, 1,000 hectares in the Center-West, and 1,500 hectares in Amazonia could not be expropriated.

orientations. The group that appeared most vocal state-wide in championing worker and peasant rights was the Federation of Agricultural Workers (FETAG) -- actually an umbrella organization for rural unions. Like the Church groups, the Federation appeared to concern itself most with land conflicts and not labor legislation. Influenced by their sister federation in Pernambuco, FETAG did, however, direct their attention to cane workers now and then. In 1983, for example, Federation officials were brought from Pernambuco to meet with local unions of rural workers in the cane zone to encourage them to push for the registration of workers, holiday pay, just salaries, and other financial benefits. Local union leaders were also being asked to actively campaign in the fields and surrounding towns while distributing FETAG literature imploring workers "to fight for their rights." FETAG was also active in calling for higher wages and better working conditions for those employed on the drought fronts in the interior.

The influence of the stronger and more active unions from the cane regions of Pernambuco intensified in the following years. Cane cutters in Paraíba, who at the beginning of 1984 appeared completely disorganized, struck briefly at the end of that year. A series of short strikes and work stoppages took place at various *usinas* and distilleries over the next several years. A threat of a strike by cane workers in October of 1987 resulted in

arbitration by the Labor Tribunal. By the beginning of 1988, rotating walkouts had begun as workers charged that the *usinas* had ignored the October legal accords. Wage increases had not been forthcoming; workers were still being denied holiday pay, the thirteenth salary, and other financial benefits; no changes had been made to guarantee the safe transportation of workers nor in providing workers with protection in the handling of dangerous chemicals. And large numbers of the region's workers still were not registered. At the end of January 1988, one hundred workers from Usina Santana went to the Regional Labor Delegacy (DRT) complaining that they had been laid off at the beginning of January but had yet to receive any of the benefits owed to them (Correio da Paraíba, January 30, 1988, p.7). Eighty percent of these workers were purportedly unregistered. Moreover, many of them reported that when they had been hired months before, they had given their work cards to the *usina* to be signed but these cards had not been returned or had been returned unsigned -- thereby denying them access to their legal benefits. As usual, the relevant authority promised to look into the situation.

In conflicts involving the enforcement of labor laws or land disputes, the various government agencies and authorities appear to have had little or no means (or will) to ensure that their decisions were enforced. Furthermore, as conflicts drew on and workers or peasants resorted to

mass protests, work stoppages, or sit-ins, they were likely to find themselves looking down the barrel of a rifle -- either in the hands of a landowners or his hired gunmen or in the hands of the military police. When workers or peasants could not be put off by the bureaucracy, by delays, by studies, or by promises, they could always be put off by force. Violence against union members and leaders, as well as charges of communist infiltration and revolutionary agendas, served to intimidate potential new members and increase the hostility directed against such groups.

One of the most overt examples of the increasing hostility to worker and peasant demands was the growth of the Democratic Ruralist Union or União Democrática Ruralista (UDR) in the late 1980s. Formed in 1985 to contest the Sarney's land reform program, the UDR initially attracted ranchers and landowners from the north and center-west regions of the country. By way of auctions of donated cattle, the UDR quickly built up a huge war chest to challenge the plan in the press and in Congress and to briefly launch the UDR's founder for President in 1988. UDR funds were also boldly reported to have been used to purchase thousands of guns to 'protect' the countryside.

By the beginning of 1988, sections of the UDR were being organized in Pernambuco and Paraíba. In both these states, the UDR seems to have attracted *fornecedores* (sugar cane suppliers) and cattle ranchers. The UDR president in

Paraíba was Roderico Borges, a cane supplier, rancher, city councillor in João Pessoa, and a member of the PFL. In January 1988, Borges reported that the Paraíba branch of the UDR already had more than 500 members, including *usineiros* and medium and large rural producers. Until the end of the field research in Paraíba in June of that year, there was little evidence to connect anyone but Borges with the UDR in Paraíba. Although it is possible that the region's *usineiros* may have been providing funding or logistical support to the UDR, there appeared to be no attempts on the part of *usineiros* to publicly support or champion the UDR. Whether they participated in the UDR or not, Paraíba's *usineiros* ultimately benefited from the UDR's challenges to the national land reform program.

D. Conclusion

An overview of *Paraibano* politics in the 1980s suggests that there has been little relevant change in the composition of the controlling political elites. Although the 1970s and 1980s saw a decline in office-holding by Paraíba's *usineiros*,¹⁶ *usineiros* were not wholly absent from politics. A few *usineiros* still regularly compete (often

¹⁶ The reduced of participation in electoral politics by the state's *usineiros* may be simply the result of happenstance -- a significant number of the older generation of *usineiros* died during the 1960s and 1970s at a time when much of the next generation was still considered too young or inexperienced to enter politics.

unsuccessfully) for positions in state and federal governments. Their limited participation in state politics may reveal that their interests are better served by cultivating alliances outside of the region and outside of traditional party politics. A significant number of *usineiros*, however, are still active in local politics in the *municípios*. Municipal officeholding was and is often seen as a prerequisite to state and federal positions and thus the current municipal activities of the state's *usineiros* might be simply a preliminary stage to wider political participation. In contemporary Brazil, municipal politics, however, can be much more advantageous than state and federal politics. As more and more of an individual's and a locale's necessary resources emanate from the central government, control of a municipal government gives an individual or group access to governmental funds and resources, as well as control over local systems of authority and the granting of favors.

The significant rewards available to those engaged in municipal politics may also account, in part, for the increasing political participation of members of the region's petty bourgeoisie. As teachers, doctors, pharmacists, or commercial retailers, these individuals are well placed to develop loyal followings of those they have helped in often insignificant ways. Once elected to municipal government, however, they are significantly better

positioned to expand and intensify their local followings and to finance wider political campaigns. And although these 'new' political elites have a tendency to play patronage politics with the poor to a greater extent than the 'old' political elite, they are no less likely to champion issues of concern to the regions' peasants and proletarians.

For both the state's traditional political actors and these relatively 'new' participants, much of their success is tied to their relation with the central government or to other hegemonic groups elsewhere in the country. This accounts to a large extent for their *situacionista* tendencies. On the other hand, Paraíba's political and economic elites cannot concern themselves solely with central governmental and Central-South interests. Would-be politicians must confront an expanded, vocal, and more independent electorate. Economic elites must concern themselves with the impact of this electorate and their supporters on the formulation of national and local policies which may impinge on their activities and profits. Outside of formal politics, the behavior of the region's workers, whether it involves strikes, vandalism, appeals to state or international agencies, or emigration from the region and its industries, impacts directly on the present and future performance of the region's elite.

Access to and control over land remains a key element in Paraíba's skewed social structure. The concentration of

much of the state's land in the hands of a minority has intensified over the last several decades. The region's *usineiros* and distillery owners have expanded their hold over much of the fertile, coastal land. Rampant inflation and new commercial opportunities have encouraged urban professionals to buy up rural land as well. These trends have increased the size of the poor and marginalized segment of the society. With few other economic opportunities available, it is no wonder that conflicts over land are increasing. Land reform is crucial to a more egalitarian division of wealth and power in Paraíba. As such, it represents a serious challenge to the power of many of the state's elite. Control over local systems of authority can be a very important tool in circumventing these challenges. But local control, by itself, is not enough given the position of the Northeast, both economically and politically, in the larger national and international context.

CHAPTER NINE

CONCLUSION

This dissertation has examined the impact of selected global and national transformations on the organization, relations, and strategies of the *usineiro* elite in Paraíba, Brazil. The Northeast as a whole, and the state of Paraíba and its coastal *zona da mata* in particular, are seen to have been shaped by the actions and responses of these regional elite to changes in the organization of wealth and power at the level of the nation and the world system. The impact of these economic and political shifts was mediated by shifts in elite strategies and in the relations of local elites to other regional extra-regional groups and interests.

One of the themes which oriented this study was the impact of changing political and economic conditions on members of an established or 'traditional' dominant class. On the one hand, a survey of the landowning class in Paraíba's *zona da mata* in the past century, reveals that shifts in the composition and activities of this class have occurred. In Paraíba, the traditional *senhor de engenho* shared power at various times in the past with other landholding elites. By the beginning of this century, many of the state's mill owners, unable to compete nationally and internationally, had gone broke and lost their lands. In the middle of the last century until the early decades of this

century, foreign demands for Brazilian cotton allowed cotton producers, processors, and merchants as well as cattle ranchers to dominate the state. The wealth and connections attained by some members of this group allowed them, in the early decades of this century, to buy the large sugar-producing *usinas* which were now necessary to compete nationally and internationally. Since then, *usineiros* have played an important role in the region.

While some families successfully shifted their resources from one economic activity to another, others fell out and down. Nevertheless, these shifts did not fundamentally alter the association between land and power in Paraíba. Landholding still remains a crucial resource in Paraíba's agriculturally-oriented economy. And although industrial and financial elites have come to share power with landowners, the state's manufacturing and financial concerns are intimately connected to agriculture as well -- through the processing of agricultural products and the financing of agricultural activities. And the trend in this century has been one of increasing concentration of landownership in Paraíba. In that sense, the power of an ever smaller landed elite has increased.

In the international division of labor set in place at Portuguese colonization and still operative in this century, the Northeast became an exporter of agricultural products. To compete in modern world markets today, the production and

processing of these products have become profoundly capitalistic. Sugar and alcohol production, then, is not just an activity involving land. It is also an industrial activity involving much capital. And by all accounts, sugar and alcohol production in Paraíba's *usinas* is highly unproductive. *Usineiros* rely heavily on government subsidies and investments, and on support from financial institutions. Federal and state governments, however, are heavily indebted themselves to international lending agencies. As pressures mount for governments to drastically reduce their spending, Paraíba could face a crisis on two fronts: reduced financial support for its agriculturally derived industries and cuts in government jobs which sustain large segments of the population.

During this century, *usineiros* in the Northeast have responded to national and international shifts by increasing their demands for governmental intervention and input. The origin of Brazil's *usinas* and *usineiros*, in general, owes much to the attempts on the part of national and state governments at the end of the last century to rescue the country's sugar industry from imminent collapse. Once foreign companies had been eliminated from the transformation process, it fell to the Brazilian government to finance the industrialization of sugar production. The central mills program and federal and state guaranteed loans

and tax incentives both sustained the past *senhores de engenho* in some states and created the new *usineiros*.

In the 1930s, the Brazilian government again stepped in to mediate intra-elite conflict among *fornecedores*, *usineiros*, and commercial agents and to protect northeastern producers who could no longer compete with central-south producers. This was accomplished through the creation of the Institute of Sugar and Alcohol (IAA) -- an agency which long shielded the Northeast's sugar industry from the need to implement major restructuring and which assigned northeastern producers a role in defining sugar policy that far outweighed their contribution to the country's sugar industry.

In the decades that followed, the central government further consolidated their influence over the Northeast by way of their various programs to modernize the region. The sugar industry, in particular, was given a major boost following the United States embargo of Cuban sugar at the end of the 1950s. To make Brazilian sugar more attractive to the United States market while at the same time attempting to avert the threat of revolution in the Northeast, a massive effort was undertaken to 'develop' the region. Northeastern *usineiros* were more than willing to benefit from this national and international largess through grants for agricultural and industrial modernization and mechanization, expansion of cash cropping, cattle ranching

and diversification. Allowing regional development to be shaped, directed, and financed in the corridors of Brasilia or Washington, made the Northeast's *usineiros* increasingly subordinate to outside interests. Where the region's sugar producers balked, however, was at any attempt to 'modernize' regional landholding patterns or to bring about changes in the regional social structure. Both of these processes were seen as threats to their traditional monopoly of rural property and rural authority.

When many of the populist-leaning federal and state governments of the 1950s and early 1960s could not ignore the intensification of inter-class conflicts and pressed in their attempts to negotiate a new compromise between the country's elites and masses, the northeastern sugar producers sought other allies. Reactionary elements in the country's armed forces and among western powers fearful of the 'communist menace,' readily came to their aid. Throughout the 1960s and 1970s, these partners ensured that change and development in the Northeast would follow a path of what many Brazilian analysts have come to call 'conservative modernization' (see, for example, Martins 1987:70). Martins (1987:70), in an insightful article on Pernambuco's *usineiros*, describes conservative modernization as partial modernization and modification "instituted from above, without the participation of rural workers and in a climate of negotiation where only the sugar elites and state

bureaucrats participated... [such that] the direction of the transformation of the sugar producing zone ... has been dictated by intra-elite conflicts and confrontations."

As Martins (1987:70) goes on to describe, conservative modernization of the Northeast sugar industry took place amidst the repression of organized social movements, political parties, and unions. During this period, local elites, although subordinated to other hegemonic interests, were allowed to reassert some measure of local control and to carry out their economic activities more or less as if little had changed. The modifications adopted by the region's *usineiros* that I have discussed elsewhere -- the expansion of cane fields, production of alcohol, greater use of agricultural machinery, fertilizers, irrigation, and so on --were accomplished without the implementation of any serious structural changes. On the other hand, as Martins (1987:71) argues, resistance on the part of *usineiros* to changes in land use patterns, to greater expenditures on research into new cane varieties and techniques, to alternatives to mechanization, to administrative reorganization, to the closure or merging of small, unproductive factories, and to better working conditions for their labor force, has again brought the industry into economic crisis.

The unproductivity of cane cultivation and sugar and alcohol production in Paraíba and elsewhere in the Northeast

is typically attributed to administrative inefficiency, low capital investment in updating and maintaining the industrial sectors or in renovating cane plantings, labor shortages due to low wages and precarious working conditions (Martins 1987:71). Years of state protectionism had discouraged concern for production costs and capitalist practices. Their financial problems are compounded by the huge debts (often in U.S. dollars) most of the state's *usinas* contracted in the 1970s and early 1980s to add distilleries to their properties. As the value of the Brazilian currency rapidly declined and as interest rates and inflation rose dramatically, *usineiros* found themselves increasingly unable to meet their obligations. In Paraíba, even harder hit were those *usineiros* who had attempted what most experts advised was the only hope for the economic sector: diversification. Although this strategy appears to have helped some *usineiros* elsewhere in the Northeast or in the Center-South, in Paraíba it has generally had drastic results.

By 1988, individual *usineiros* and *fornecedores* as well as their interest associations could do little but lobby more intensely for higher prices and for programs to control interest rates and lessen their debt. For northeastern producers, however, it had become much more difficult to get anyone to listen to them. As Martins (1987:77) notes, at the national level, the advent of the New Republic and the

greater strength of the legislature weakened the force of lobbies which had traditionally taken their concerns directly to the relevant ministries. In addition, the IAA had lost most of its influence and was threatened with extinction.

In past decades, Paraíba's *usineiros* and landowners had been ensured some degree of complacency in regard to another sector of regional society: the rural population which was kept subordinate through paternalistic and patronage relations. Landowners and producers had more flexibility in manipulating their profits by taking more from and giving less to their labor force. Since the 1950s, with the expulsion of resident workers and with the increasing proletarianization, politicization, and urbanization of the countryside, these ties have weakened. Employer-employee relations within the sugar industry are increasingly confrontational and mediated by the state or other interest groups.

I am not suggesting here, however, that class and ideological conflicts have come to define the essential bases of political relations in Paraíba or elsewhere in Brazil. Although these sorts of conflicts do appear now and then -- I believe that the conflicts in Paraíba in the early 1960s and many of the land conflicts today include confrontations of this nature -- it is also true that the masses rely on initiatives from above as well and that

vertical relations remain important in providing access to these initiatives (Chalmers 1977:408). What I am suggesting is that these vertical, face-to-face relations are less likely today to be formed between workers and *usineiros*. Workers in the cane industry are more likely to form ties with individuals from the communities in which they live. Of course, where *usineiros*, such as Marcus Odilon, participate in local *município* politics, these ties are re-established.

An additional theme of this study has been the utility of the concepts of local or regional elites, elite families, and dominant classes. Here I was concerned with the historical and contemporary continuities and modifications of elite groups and in their relation to the state and other hegemonic interests. I also sought to uncover some of the behaviors and practices which have either encouraged or limited the reality and the expression of an elite presence. Here I would concur with Chalmers (1977:404) in concluding that "the distinctiveness of the Latin American pattern [of the sociopolitical structure] is that it began with strongly elite-centered vertical social structures and has by and large avoided any break in the continuity." What has changed to some degree is the arena in which these hierarchies operate. With the shift of power to national institutions and Center-South national and international interests, Paraíba's *usineiros* have had to operate within a wider arena

and within new constellations that cross-cut local, regional, and national structures.

These shifts in the organization of wealth and power have required new strategies and relations on the part of a regional elite. While the use and manipulation of kin relations may serve some of their purposes, these are limited although not ineffectual. On the one hand, we could conclude that the apparent decline in paternal control within families, new opportunities for women, diverging generational lifestyles, and changing marriage patterns may anticipate a decline in the functional unity of elite families. On the other hand, it is more probable that these trends are the very strategies which are necessary for these elite families to reproduce themselves. Ensuring that one has contacts within and access to an expanded network of essentially vertical structures of status and authority (Chalmers 1977:404) is essential if families such as the Ribeiro Coutinho are to remain more than simply a local elite.

The case study of the Ribeiro Coutinho shows that they are still part of the local elite, if not alone at the top. And, as *usineiros*, one could probably also continue to assign them a position within the regional elite given the continuing (and with PROÁLCOOL, the expanded) importance of

cane cultivation in the Northeast.¹ At the national level, they share with other *usineiros* and distillery owners the consideration and benefits accorded to sugar and alcohol producers due to their role and participation in both the national economy and international markets. Despite the continuing federal and international support available to cane producers, it is also clear that the state of Paraíba as a whole, and its *usineiros*, in particular, are minor and increasingly, inconsequential, players on the national scene.

Despite rhetoric to the contrary, Paraíba's *usineiros* have become more of a burden than an asset to the economic well-being of the region. They rely increasingly on state, federal, and private support to maintain themselves. To date, most of their activities have been directed simply towards survival. They continue to argue that Paraíba's sugar industry must be protected and maintained by national and state governments as a source of regional employment and as the only viable economic activity for the *zona da mata's* fertile river valleys. As such, they appear at times to be more concerned with retaining their status as *usineiros* than with the financial difficulties of their enterprises.

¹ Although in states such as Pernambuco which have developed a much more diversified economic base (including manufacturing, tourism, transportation, and processing), their role may be limited unless they have expanded their economic activities into these areas as well.

The current behaviors and practices of Paraíba's *usineiros* might lead one to predict a reduction or limitation of their position as a relevant elite faction in the region or as a faction able to play a significant role in shaping the future of the region. Perhaps this is wishful thinking: the unity of the group has, in fact, been reinforced by the protectionist practices of the state. And these practices have done little to rectify the 'Northeast Problem,' or to change the fundamental inequalities in Brazilian society. On the other hand, the an apparent decline in some forms of state protectionism, might predict a weakening of elite solidarity and reproductive capability.

On the other hand, there appears to be little interest (or likelihood) within the country of fundamentally altering the clientelistic and elitist nature of power arrangements. It is also unclear who would replace *usineiros* at the apex of local power relations in the *zona da mata*. Although new political actors and new hierarchies have appeared on the scene, including trade unions, agrarian reform activists, and 'liberal' professionals, they are also integrated into vertical hierarchies and are often a part of the same hierarchies which integrate *usineiros*. Although Paraíba's *usineiros* are most certainly still part of the elite in these hierarchies, they do appear to have arrived at an important historical juncture. To continue to occupy elevated positions in the chain of regional and national

elites (Chalmers 1977:404), they must either define new political and economic strategies to survive in an altered social and political economy or they will be forced to become increasingly reactionary and anachronistic as they simply attempt to hold on.

APPENDIX I

OWNERSHIP SUMMARIES OF
PARAÍBA'S USINAS AND DISTILLERIES1. **USINA SÃO JOÃO**

- a. Founded: 1888
- b. Municipio: Santa Rita
- c. Current Owners (Company and Major Shareholders):

CIA USINA SÃO JOÃO S/A

- i. Odilon Ribeiro Coutinho
- ii. Alberto and Arthur Ribeiro Coutinho (Ch of Abelardo Ribeiro Coutinho, deceased)
- iii. Wife and children of Luiz Inacio Ribeiro Coutinho, deceased

d. Previous Owners

1882 Concession to Francisco Carneiro da Cunha, João Evangelista Carneiro da Cunha and Luiz Monteiro Caminhoá (Decree 8451 of March 11, 1882)

1883 concession transferred to Count of Barral (Decree 8925, April 7, 1883)

concession transferred to **Companhia de Engenhos Centraes nas Provincias da Parahyba do Norte e Sergipe** (File 1889Rel), company founded in Rio de Janeiro November 22, 1883 by Manoel de Mendonça Guimarães.

- i. Honorio Augusto Ribeiro
- ii. Baron de Santa Maria
- iii. Baron de Oliveira Rõxo
- iv. Raymundo Breve Oliveira Rõxo
- v. Honorio Gomes de Paiva Coutinho
- vi. Manoel de Mendonça Guimarães
- vii. Francisco Tavares Bastos
- viii. José Cardoso de Moura Brazil

1887 loan secured in Amsterdam from **Westerdorp and Company**, bringing in as creditors Herman Karlo Westerdorp, Richard von Rees and others

1888 Engenho Central São João goes into operation on October 9, 1888.

?1890 **Companhia Industria e Construcção**; new name for Companhia de Engenhos Centraes nas Provincias da Parahyba do Norte e Sergipe (first minutes available for 1896)
Director-President: Manoel de Mendonça Guimarães

1896 **Cia Assucareira Parahyba-Sergipe** (renaming of the above company, shareholders appear to remain the same)

1904 **Cia Assucareira** (renaming of the above company, shareholders again remain basically the same)

sometime in the following nine years, the factory was repossessed by its creditors

1913 (?) **Cia Assucareira - Paraíba**, creditors: Richard von Rees, Herman Karlo Westerdorp and others, factory rented to João Ursulo Ribeiro Coutinho

1914 **J. Ursulo & Cia./J. Ursulo Irmãos & Cia**

- i. João Ursulo Ribeiro Coutinho
- ii. Helena Pessoa de Melo Ribeiro Coutinho
- iii. Flavio Ribeiro Coutinho
- iv. Otaviana Ribeiro Coutinho Ribeiro
- v. João Maximiano de Figueiredo

1932 **J. Ursulo Irmãos & Cia.** (sons of João Ursulo Ribeiro Coutinho)

- i. Renato Ribeiro Coutinho
- ii. João Ursulo R.C. Filho
- iii. Flavio R.C. Sobrinho
- iv. Luiz Inancio R.C.
- v. Cassiano R.C.
- vi. Odilon R.C.
- vii. Abelardo R.C.

1941 **Cia. Usinas São João e Santa Helena S/A**

- i. Renato Ribeiro Coutinho
- ii. João Ursulo R.C. Filho
- iii. Flavio R.C. Sobrinho
- iv. Luiz Inancio R.C.
- v. Cassiano R.C.

- vi. Odilon R.C.
- vii. Abelardo R.C.

1968 Cia Usina São João S/A

- i. João Ursulo R.C. Filho
- ii. Luiz Inacio R.C. (deceased)
- iii. Cassiano R.C.
- iv. Odilon R.C.
- v. Abelardo R.C. (deceased)

2. USINA SANTA RITA (Usina Cumbe)

- a. Founded: 1910
- b. Municipio: Santa Rita
- c. Current Owners:

S.A. USINA SANTA RITA

(children and widow of Flavio Ribeiro Coutinho)

- i. José Painho RC and wife Natercia Suassuna Dutra RC
- ii. Francisca Ninosa RC Bezerra de Melo, husband Renato Brito Bezerra de Melo and 6 children
- iii. Ana Rita RC and children
- iv. Berenice Maria RC (Paulo Neto)
- v. Estate of Berenice Mindello RC
- vi. João Crisostomo RC, wife Maria Helena Pessoa de Mello and children
- vii. shares in company treasury (probably held for family of Francisco Leocadeio RC, deceased)

- d. Previous Owners:

USINA CUMBE 1910-1917

1910 Coronel Antonio de Brito Lyra or Brito Lyra & Cia

USINA SANTA RITA

1917 "Tenente" Antonio Ferreira do Costa Azevedo

1922 Firma Individual Flavio Ribeiro Coutinho

- i. Flavio Ribeiro Coutinho

1933 S.A. Usina Santa Rita

- i. Flavio Ribeiro Coutinho
- ii. Berenice Mindello R.C.
- iii. Flaviano R.C.
- iv. Odilon Maroja
- v. João Fernandes de Lima
- vi. Virginio Velloso Borges
- vii. Olivio Maroja Camara
- viii. Arnobio Maroja
- ix. Ursulo R.C.
- x. Manoel Fernandes de Lima

various other shareholders, primarily relatives of Flavio R.C. or his wife, Berenice Mindello come in as shareholders until 1948 when the company becomes limited to members of the nuclear family, Throughout most of the history of the company, the major shareholder is Berenice Mindello R.C.

3. USINA SANTA HELENA (USINA BONFIM)

- a. Founded: 1917/1921
- b. Municipio: Sapé
- c. Current Owners:

CAIENA - CIA AGRO-INDUSTRIAL SANTA HELENA S/A

(widow and children of Renato Ribeiro Coutinho)

- i. Maria Anunciada R.C.
- ii. Carlos Antonio R.C.
- iii. José Fernando R.C.
- iv. Maria Lucia R.C. Cruz

- d. Previous Owners

USINA BONFIM 1917/21 - 1931

1917 ?built by Gentil Lins

1921 Firma Individual Gentil Lins

- i. Gentil Lins de Albuquerque
(reports that company began functioning in November 1920.)

1925 bought by João Ursulo Ribeiro Coutinho
(factory not in operation)

USINA SANTA HELENA 1931 - PRESENT

1932 J. Ursulo Irmãos & Cia. (sons of João Ursulo Ribeiro Coutinho)

- i. Renato Ribeiro Coutinho
- ii. João Ursulo R.C. Filho
- iii. Flavio R.C. Sobrinho
- iv. Luiz Inancio R.C.
- v. Cassiano R.C.
- vi. Odilon R.C.
- vii. Abelardo R.C.

1941 Cia. Usinas São João e Santa Helena S/A

- i. Renato Ribeiro Coutinho
- ii. João Ursulo R.C. Filho
- iii. Flavio R.C. Sobrinho
- iv. Luiz Inancio R.C.
- v. Cassiano R.C.
- vi. Odilon R.C.
- vii. Abelardo R.C.

1968 CAIENA - Cia Agro-Industrial Santa Helena S/A

- i. Renato R.C.
- ii. Maria Anunciada R.C.
- iii. Carlos Antonio R.C.
- iv. Maria Lucia R.C. Cruz
- v. José Fernando R.C.

4. USINA ESPÍRITO SANTO

- a. Founded: ?1928
- b. Municipio: Cruz do Espírito Santo
- c. Owners:

**ADALBERTO JORGE RODRIGUES CRUZ RIBEIRO and
OTAVIANA RIBEIRO COUTINHO RIBEIRO** (1928 until
closing in 1930)

usina later dismounted and lands incorporated into
Cia Usinas São João e Santa Helena S/A.

5. USINA SANTANA (UZINA PEDROZA)

- a. Founded: 1922
- b. Municipio: Santa Rita
- c. Current Owners:

USINA SANTANA S/A

(children of Flaviano Ribeiro Coutinho)

- i. José Waldomiro R.C.
- ii. Marcus Odilon R.C.
- iii. estate of Flaviano R.C. Filho
- d. Previous Owners:

UZINA PEDROZA 1922 - 1925 (Engenho Velho)

1922 **Manoel Sebastião de Araujo Pedroza**
 Olga Cardoso de Araujo Pedroza
 Maria Margarida Pedroza
 Antonio Leonardo Pedroza
 Amelia Colmon Pedroza
 José Elpidio Gondim
 Maria Alice Pedroza Gondim

USINA SANTANA 1925 - PRESENT

1925 FIRMA INDIVIDUAL FLAVIANO RIBEIRO COUTINHO

- i. Flaviano Ribeiro Coutinho

1952 USINA SANTANA S/A

- i. Flaviano R.C.
- ii. Celeste Teixeira R.C.
- iii. Ninosa de Lourdes Teixeira R.C.
- iv. Flaviano R.C. Filho
- v. Marcus Odilon R.C.
- vi. Flavio R.C.

Destilaria Flaviano Ribeiro Coutinho Ltda.,
 founded in 1979, incorporated into Usina Santana
 S/A in 1984.

6. USINA SÃO GONÇALO

- a. Founded: prior to 1928

b. Municipio: Santa Rita

c. Owners:

A. MELLO & FILHOS LTDA

- i. Antonio da Silva Mello
- ii. Maria Amelia de Carvalho Melo
- iii. José Galvão de Mello and Zita Barbosa de Melo
- iv. Cypriano Galvão de Mello and Caliope Campelo de Melo
- v. Agenor Galvão de Mello and Ivete Pimental de Melo
- vi. Mariano Barboza and Nair de Melo Barboza
- vii. Abel de Menezes Lyra and Nelda de Melo Lira
- viii. Gonçalo Galvão de Mello
- ix. Zaira Galvão de Mello
- x. Edberta Galvão de Mello
- xi. Rosa de Lourdes Galvão de Mello

reportedly acquired and dismounted by Cia Usinas São João e Santa Helena in 1946 (although Annuario Açucareiro lists them as owning the property in 1937.)

d. Previous Owners:

pre-1928: ?Antonio da Silva Mello

1928 Antonio da Silva Mello and his children

loan in the name of the above taken out on April 27, 1928 from Antonio Mendes Ribeiro, Recife for 600:000\$000 to reform the usina. Due to non-payment of the loan, a legal case ensued in 1932. This case appears to have been settled in 1934, at which time the Mellos incorporated the company, probably in preparation to its sale.

1934 A. Mello and Filhos

7. USINA TANQUES

a. Founded: 1927

b. Municipio: Alagoa Grande

c. Current Owners:

USINA TANQUES S/A

- i. Aginaldo Veloso Borges
- ii. Maria Luiza Peixôto Veloso Borges
- iii. Virgínia Maria P.V.B. Ribeiro
- iv. Marisa P.V.B. Bezerra de Carvalho
- v. Adette P.V.B. Buarque de Gusmão
- vi. Walquíria P.V.B. Pereira de Lima

d. Previous Owners:**1927 ZENAYDE HOLMES & CIA LTDA**

- i. Heretiano Zenaide Nobrega de Albuquerque
- ii. Claudino Alves da Nobrega
- iii. Apolônio Zenaide
- iv. João Holmes Solenulio(sp?)

1941 FIRMA INDIVIDUAL HERETIANO ZENAIDE

- i. Heretiano Zenaide

1950 USINA TANQUES S/A

- i. Heretiano Zenaide Nóbrega de Albuquerque
- ii. Maria Elvidia Nobrega Zenaide
- iii. Hermano Nobrega Zenaide
- iv. Heretiano Zenaide Filho
- v. Hélio Nobrega Zenaide
- vi. Alda Nobrega Zenaide
- vii. Wamberto Nobrega Zenaide
- viii. Elza Nobrega Zenaide

company incorporated in preparation for its sale

1951 USINA TANQUES S/A

- i. Virginio Veloso Borges
- ii. Aginaldo V.B.
- iii. Jocelin V.B.
- iv. Maria Luiza Peixôto V.B.
- v. Manfredo Carneiro Monteiro Borges
- vi. Maria do Carmo Carneiro Monteiro Borges

8. USINA SANTA ALEXANDRINA (Usina Monte Alegre)

a. Founded: 1929

b. Municipio: Gramame, Capital, PB

c. Owners:

JOSÉ CAVALCANTI REGIS/C. Regis e Cia. Ltda

C. Regis e Cia Ltda.:

1926 i. João Regis de Amorim
 ii. Marianna A. Cavalcanti Regis (widow of Severino Castro Regis, Founder of the company)

1930 i. Mariana A. Cavalcanti Regis
 ii. José Cavalcanti Regis

1940 company dissolved, equipment bought and moved by **Irmãos Fernandes Ltda** for Usina Monte Alegre.

Usina Sta. Alexandrina appears to have functioned for two harvests only, 1929/30 and 1930/31.

9. **USINA SANTA MARIA**

a. Founded: 1931

b. Municipio: Areia

c. Current Owners:

S.A. USINA SANTA MARIA

i. Solon Lyra Lins
 ii. Solon Lira Lins Filho
 iii. Josefa de Menezes Lins
 iv. Vera Lucia Serpa de Menezes Lins
 v. Fernando Serpa de Menezes

d. Previous Owners:

1931 **FRANCISCO DE ASSIS PEREIRA DE MELLO**

during the late 1930s, the usina was under the administration of **S/A WHITE MARTINS**

during the 1940s, it was listed as the property of **FRANCISCO DE ASSIS E FILHOS, VVA.**

1952 **FIRMA INDIVIDUAL SOLON LYRA LINS**

i. Solon Lyra Lins

1964 S.A. USINA SANTA MARIA

- i. Solon Lyra Lins
- ii. Josefa Gasiela de Menezes Lins
- iii. José Lins Sobrinho
- iv. Vera Lucia Serpa de Menezes Lins
- v. Gumerindo de Farias Leita Sobrinho
- vi. Paulo Pereira Viano
- vii. José Lira Lins

10. USINA MONTE ALEGRE

- a. Founded: 1940
- b. Municipio: Mamanguape
- c. Current Owners:

USINA MONTE ALEGRE S/A

- i. Manoel Fernandes de Lima
- ii. Children of Gustavo Fernandes de Lima, deceased:
Luiz Cyrillo Fernandes
Maria Aparecida Fernandes Guedes
- iii. José Fernandes de Lima
- iv. Wife and children of João Fernandes de Lima, deceased:
Nair Gagliardi Fernandes
João Laércio Gagliardi Fernandes
Maria Ligia Gagliardi Fernandes Ribas
Maria Inez Gagliardi Fernandes
Horacio Gagliardi Fernandes
- v. Wife and children of Carlos Fernandes de Lima, deceased:
Maria da Conceição Nogueira Fernandes
Antonio Fernandes Neto
Carlos Fernandes de Lima Filho
Alberto Luiz Nogueira Fernandes de Lima
Adriana Maria Fernandes P. de Melo
- vi. Guilhermia de Novaes Fernandes

d. Previous Owners:

1929 C. REGIS E CIA LTDA (owner of Usina Santa Alexandrina which was dismantled and sold to Irmãos Fernandes Ltda)

1940 IRMÃOS FERNANDES LTDA

- i. João Fernandes de Lima
- ii. Manoel Fernandes de Lima
- iii. Gustavo Fernandes de Lima
- iv. Carlos Fernandes de Lima
- v. José Fernandes de Lima

industrial equipment bought from defunct
Usina Santa Alexandrina, Gramame, Pb

1949 USINA MONTE ALEGRE S/A

- i. Gustavo Fernandes de Lima
- ii. João Fernandes de Lima
- iii. Carlos Fernandes de Lima
- iv. José Fernandes de Lima
- v. Manoel Fernandes de Lima
- vi. Aurora Pezzani Fernandes
- vii. Nair Gagliardi Fernandes
- viii. Guilhermia Novaes Fernandes

11. USINA SÃO FRANCISCO (Destilaria Borborema)

- a. Founded: 1946/48
- b. Municipio: Pirpirituba/Guarabira
- c. Owners:

USINA SÃO FRANCISCO S/A 1955 - 1960

- i. Otavio Ribeiro Coutinho
- ii. Nair de Araujo R.C.
- iii. Serafim R.C.
- iv. João Otavio R.C.
- v. Maria Aparecida R.C.
- vi. Maria Auxiliadora Pedrosa R.C.
- vii. Abilio Dantas

after several years of losses, company goes out of
business in 1960.

- d. Previous Owners:

1946/48: Old engenhos and lands bought by Otavio
Ribeiro Coutinho; Edson Ribeiro Coutinho
and Jorge Ribeiro Coutinho

Machinery bought from Usina Três Marias

by Otavio, Edson and Jorge Ribeiro
Coutinho

Usinas ceased functioning in 1960, property later owned by Usina Santana S/A and members of the family of Flaviano Ribeiro Coutinho who finally install a distillery on the property beginning in 1985. (see DESTILARIA BORBOREMA)

12. USINA NOSSA SENHORA DO PATROCÍNIO

no information available, although the usina was supposedly dismantled and the property incorporated into Cia. Usinas São João e Santa Helena S/A.

DISTILLERIES OF PARAÍBA:

13. DESTILARIA ARTHUR TAVARES

- a. Founded: 1974
- b. Municipio: Pedras de Fôgo, PB
- c. Current Owners:

GIASA - GRAMAME INDUSTRIAL E AGRICOLA S/A

- i. Usina Central Olho D'Água S/A
- ii. Usina Estives S/A
- iii. Estate of Henrique Vieira de Albuquerque Melo
- iv. Helena Hardman Tavares
- v. Vinicio Tavares de Melo
- vi. Virgílio Tavares de Melo
- vii. Murilo Tavares de Melo
- viii. Marcílio Tavares de Melo
- ix. Silvio Tavares de Melo
- x. José Tavares de Melo
- xi. Terezinha Tavares da Costa Carvalho
- xii. Romildo Tavares de Melo
- xiii. Clovis Nobrega Lima
- xiv. José Urbano da Costa Carvalho
- xv. João Batista Siqueira de Albuquerque
- xvi. Manoel Neves de Barros Falcão
- xvii. M & N Participações

- d. Previous Owners:

part of the land on which the distillery was built appears to have been owned originally by the

Tavares de Melo family where they probably grew cane for their usina in Pernambuco; part of the lands may have been owned as well by members of the Vieira de Albuquerque Melo family from São Miguel de Taipu, Pb.

14. DESTILARIA SANTO ANTÔNIO

- a. Founded: 1976
- b. Municipio: Mataraca/Mamanguape
- c. Current Owners:

AGICAM: AGROINDUSTRIA DO CAMARATUBA LTDA

- i. Carlos Pessoa de Mello
- ii. Maria Leda Dourado Pessoa de Mello
- iii. Belarmino Luiz Pessoa de Mello Neto
- iv. Carlos Pessoa de Mello Filho
- v. Maria Guiomar Pessoa Guerra
- vi. Antônio Francisco Dourado Pessoa de Mello
- vii. Vaudrillo Leal Guerra Curado
- viii. Maria de Fátima (Sonia) Dourado Pessoa de Mello Cartaxo
- ix. João Domingos Pessoa Guerra
- x. Eliana Rabelo Pessoa de Mello

Pessoa de Mello family of Pernambuco, owners of Usina Aliança in PE and Usina ? in Rio Grande do Norte as well.

- d. Previous Owners:

majority of incorporated properties were medium sized holdings bought from a variety of owners by family members in 1976 and 1977, some with loans from the BNB.

15. DESTILARIA MIRIRI

- a. Founded: 1976
- b. Municipio: Sapé/Santa Rita
- c. Current Owners:

DESTILARIA MIRIRI S/A

- i. Usina Central Nossa Senhora de Lourdes S/A

- ii. José Ivanildo Cavalcanti de Moraes
- iii. Geraldo Antonio Cavalcanti de Moraes
- iv. Gilvan Celso Cavalcanti de Moraes
- v. Luismar Melo
- vi. Paulo Fernando Cavalcanti de Moraes
- vii. Hugo Malta de Resende

(Cavalcanti de Moraes family of Pernambuco, owners also of Usina Central Nossa Senhora de Lourdes, PE and Destilaria Jacuibe, Santa Rita, PB)

d. Previous Owners:

appears to have bought the bulk of the property for the distillery in 1975.

16. DESTILARIA TABU

- a. Founded: 1977
- b. Municipio: Caaporã
- c. Current Owners:

AGRO INDUSTRIAL TABU LTDA

- i. Estate of Alberto Herman Theodor Lungren
- ii. Arthur Axel Lungren
- iii. Anita Elisabeth Lungren
- iv. Frederico Axel Lungren
- v. Herman Ralf Lungren
- vi. Elisabeth Christina Lungren Bittar

d. Previous Owners:

company founded through the incorporation of the commercial firm Herman & Axel Lungren, a ranching and farming operation based at Fazenda Tabu, Caaporã and Pitumbu, PB.

1967 HERMAN & AXEL LUNGREN

- i. Alberto Herman Theodor Lungren
- ii. Arthur Axel Lungren

raised cattle, grew sugar cane (primarily for sale to Usina Nossa Senhora Maravilhas in Pernambuco and coconuts

the bulk of the land was acquired by the

brothers from the estate of their father,
Guilherme Alberto Lungren in 1957

17. DESTILARIA UNA

- a. Founded: 1977
- b. Municipio: Sapé
- c. Current Owners:

UNA AGRO-INDUSTRIAL S/A

- i. Cassiano Ribeiro Coutinho (deceased)
- ii. Yedda Regis Ribeiro Coutinho
- iii. Paulo Germano Regis Ribeiro Coutinho
- iv. Marcos Frederico Regis Ribeiro Coutinho
- v. Cassiano Ribeiro Coutinho Filho
- vi. Heloisa Regis Ribeiro Coutinho Rabelo Dias
- vii. Lilitana Regis Ribeiro Coutinho Barbalho Silva
- viii. Helena Ribeiro Coutinho Baracuhv
- ix. Fernando Antonio Baracuhv
- x. Marcelo José Barbalho Silva
- xi. Fernando Eduardo Rabelo Dias
- xii. Una Participação e Administration (1981)
(an investment company owned by the family, a
major shareholder in Empresa de Mineração
Sublime Ltda as well.)

- d. Previous Owners:

appears that the majority of the properties
incorporated for the distillery had been owned
already by members of the family

18. DESTILARIA JACUÍPE

- a. Founded: 1980
- b. Municipio: Lucena/Santa Rita
- c. Current Owners:

DESTILARIA JACUÍPE S/A

- i. Destilaria Miriri S/A, Sapé, Pb
- ii. José Ivanildo Cavalcanti de Moraes
- iii. Paulo Fernando Cavalcanti de Moraes
- iv. Geraldo Antonio Cavalcanti de Moraes
- v. Luismar Melo

(Destilaria Jacuípe S/A becomes a 35% shareholder in Rio Vermelho Agro-Pastoril Mercantil S/A in 1984.)

d. Previous Owners:

land for construction of the distillery and agricultural production acquired in 1976.

1984 RIO VERMELHO AGRO-PASTORIL MERCANTIL S/A (a Grupo Lungren company) acquired by Destilaria Jacuípe S/A and Usina Central Nossa Senhora de Lourdes S/A and divided into two holding:

AGRO PECUARIA MIRANDA LTDA

i. Paulo Fernando Cavalcanti de Moraes

AGRO PECUARIA RIO CLARA LTDA

i. Luismar Melo

19. DESTILARIA JAPUNGU

a. Founded: 1980

b. Municipio: Santa Rita

c. Current Owners:

JAPUNGU AGROINDUSTRIAL S/A

i. AGROFERTIL S/A: INDUSTRIA E COMERCIO DE FERTILIZANTES, Cabo, PE

a. Geraldo Guennes Tavares de Lima

b. Paulo Fernando Queiroz de Figueiredo

c. Sebastião Simões Filho

ii. ECONOMICO S/A

a. Banco Economico S/A

b. Calmon de Sá family of Bahia

iii. large number of minor shareholders

d. Previous Owners:

1980 JAPUNGU AGROINDUSTRIAL S/A

i. Agrofertil S/A, Cabo, PE

ii. Cia Usina São João S/A, Sta. Rita, PB

iii. 20 minor shareholders

- 1981 iv. Conepar: Cia Nordeste de Participações (Salvador, Bahia) added as a major shareholder
- a. Angelo Calmon de Sá
 - b. José de Sá Neto

some of the land comprising the company had been owned originally by Agrofert S/A.

also takes over Jacaraúna - Empreendimentos Agropastoris Ltda in 1984 which was a company founded in 1981 by

- i. Sebastião Simões Filho
- ii. Geraldo Guennes Tavares de Lima
- iii. Paulo Fernando Queiroz de Figueiredo
- iv. Max Paskin
- v. AGROFERTIL S/A

20. DESTILARIA BORBOREMA

- a. Founded: 1985 (1974)
- b. Municipio: Pirpirituba
- c. Current Owner:

BORBOREMA AGRO-INDUSTRIAL LTDA (1985 - Present)

- i. José Waldomiro Ribeiro Coutinho
- ii. estate of Flaviano Ribeiro Coutinho
- iii. estate of Ninosa Teixiera Ribeiro Coutinho?
- iv. Usina Santana S.A.
- v. Selda Falconi Ribeiro Coutinho
- vi. Flaviano Falconi Ribeiro Coutinho
- vii. Cristiana Falconi Ribeiro Coutinho
- viii. Selda Celeste Ribeiro Coutinho
- ix. Ana Dalva Ribeiro Coutinho
- x. Rodrigo Falconi Ribeiro Coutinho
- xi. Helena Maria Maroja Ribeiro Coutinho

- d. Previous Owners:

1946 USINA SÃO FRANCISCO S/A

Otavio Ribeiro Coutinho and family

usina went out of business in 1960, the factory was eventually dismantled and the land sold to the family of Flaviano Ribeiro Coutinho

**1974 COMPANIA AGRO-INDUSTRIAL BORBOREMA S/A -
CIEMA**

- i. Ninosa Teixeira Ribeiro Coutinho
- ii. José Waldomiro Ribeiro Coutinho
- iii. Flaviano Ribeiro Coutinho Filho
- iv. Selda Falconi Ribeiro Coutinho
- v. Helena Maria Maroja Ribeiro Coutinho
- vi. Usina Santana S.A.
- vii. Flaviano Ribeiro Coutinho
- viii. Celeste Teixeira Ribeiro Coutinho

appears to have been set up with the unstated plan of setting up an alcohol distillery but starts with the pretense of producing aguardente.

1981 AGROPECUARIA BORBOREMA LTDA

- i. José Waldomiro Ribeiro Coutinho
- ii. Flaviano Ribeiro Coutinho
- iii. Ninosa Teixiera Ribeiro Coutinho
- iv. Usina Santana S.A.
- v. Selda Falconi Ribeiro Coutinho
- vi. Flaviano Falconi Ribeiro Coutinho
- vii. Cristiana Falconi Ribeiro Coutinho
- viii. Selda Celeste Ribeiro Coutinho
- ix. Ana Dalva Ribeiro Coutinho
- x. Rodrigo Falconi Ribeiro Coutinho
- xi. Helena Maria Maroja Ribeiro Coutinho
- xii. Celeste Teixiera Ribeiro Coutinho

appears not to have gotten approval yet for a distillery so turned primarily to cattle raising and rental of company property and equipment

21. DESTILARIA XUA

- a. Founded: 1987 (1977)
- b. Municipio: Mamanguape
- c. Current Owners:

AGRO-INDUSTRIAL XUA LTDA (1983 - Present)

- i. ENARQ: Engenharia e Arquitetura Ltda
Natal, RN
Director- President: João da Silva Furtado
- ii. João da Silva Furtado

- iii. José Marques de Almeida Filho
- iv. Marcos Alberto Maia Teixeira
- v. Mario Sergio Garcia de Viveiros
- vi. Félix José de Sousa Filho
- vii. Jonas Cavalcante de Souza

d. Previous Owners:

1977 AGRO-INDUSTRIAL XUA LTDA

- i. Ernandes Souza Medeiros
- ii. Luiz Franco da Rocha
- iii. Argemiro José da Rocha

- 1979 i. Ernandes Souza Medeiros
ii. Hilda de Barros Medeiros

given over to a variety of functions, including production of aguardente, freight transport and import and export until finally became a distillery in 1986 or 1987.

APPENDIX II
ELITE RESEARCH

In discussing anthropological fieldwork in introductory courses, I have often found myself confronting the dilemma of reconciling my own views on the 'how' of field research with the 'who.' On the one hand, I consciously make an effort to enlighten students about the varieties of ethnographic experience and to encourage them to seek out new areas and problems for study -- to see anthropology as more than simply the study of 'traditional' peasants and tribal peoples in exotic locales. On the other hand, I find myself reciting the standard inventory of anthropological techniques -- participant observation, questionnaires, formal and informal interviews -- which are all informant-oriented. The inconsistencies arise when I attempt to relate these techniques to my own field experience with elites. In such situations, I frequently find myself describing my earlier experiences with factory and field workers, rather than with elites, to illustrate anthropological techniques.

While discussing participant observation, I generally begin to question the 'anthropological' nature of elite research and of my own fieldwork in particular. In the field, I frequently felt that I was not doing things correctly and that it would have been much easier to study peasants or workers. Nevertheless, I also felt that what I

was trying to do was important. My interests in elites and and in power were longstanding.

These interests came together during my undergraduate studies in anthropology when I also came to embrace the concept of participant observation as a highly efficient research technique. At the same time, I began to read the current articles on both the necessity and difficulty of 'studying up' (see, for example, Nader 1974 and Wolf 1974). Thus, while cognizant of potential difficulties, I concluded that 'studying up' was preferable to 'studying down' as a means of mitigating the often noted power differentials between the researcher and the researched and as a means of 'evening out the score' of what I felt had been too many studies of the 'disadvantaged' by the advantaged.' I had also expected the degree of 'otherness' to diminish in the context of elite research, rather than to augment, as was the case. I had also failed to sufficiently grasp Nader's (1974:307) warning that "in reinventing anthropology, we might have to shuffle around the value placed on participant observation that leads us to forget that there are other methods more useful for some of the problems and situations we might like to investigate."

Although my research proposal emphasized data collection techniques other than participant observation, my image of myself as an anthropologist, as Nader (1974:306) anticipated, was often shattered by my inability to

participant-observe among the elite I was studying. I also became convinced that this inability was not an issue for most other anthropologists -- that being raised in the 'correct' social environment would have provided me with whatever skills were necessary to participate. This led me initially to question my own abilities as an anthropologist rather than certain of the standard assumptions and dynamics of anthropological research.

My sense of deficiency was compounded by the apparent ease with which I moved in and around the communities and families of the poor in the region. During my 1983/84 fieldwork in Paraíba, I had lived with a poor family in a well-established shanty neighborhood of Santa Rita. When I returned to the state in 1986, I again lived with this family for four months before obtaining an apartment in the city of João Pessoa. Nevertheless, I spent many weekends with 'my' family in Santa Rita -- they and their friends and neighbors became my home away from home and my 'family' in the field. The intimacy which developed between myself and these people was facilitated, I believe, by my own background as well as by the understanding that I was not studying them, but others: cane cutters during the first project and elites during the second. Although I learned much about being a *brasileira* and a *paraibana* from my Santa Rita family, and in teaching I occasionally recount events

which we shared, I would feel uncomfortable and somewhat exploitative in writing of them as subjects.

Such was not the case among the elites. While people's interest in my presence and my research varied enormously, I was always very candid that I was studying the histories of the region's *usinas* and the histories of the families that owned the *usinas*. As such, given our infrequent meetings, part of the formality and aloofness that marked our relations could be attributed to the researcher/subject nature of our interactions.

On the other hand, many anthropologists have formed close and personal relations with their informants even while these relations are marked by ambiguous understandings and motives. Power and/or status, I believe, are crucial components of most, if not all, researcher/informant relationships regardless of whether one is studying 'up' or 'down.'¹ In the latter case, however, the anthropologist frequently has the advantage -- he or she is better able to control the nature of relationship and the direction of the research. A sense of control or expertise over the research and writing is usually considered beneficial. However, as Sheehan (1990:387-88) puts it, in such situations, "many anthropologists rely upon a somewhat illusory sense of intellectual superiority to sustain themselves throughout

¹ I recognize that a power/status aspect may have been a crucial component of my early relations with 'my' family in Santa Rita. This eventually changed.

the ego-threatening experience of fieldwork." Whether one is attempting to study academics and intellectuals as Sheehan (1990) did or people whose wealth and local power far outweigh that of the anthropologist as I did, one's status, and hence legitimacy, is continually questioned and renegotiated.

This questioning of the anthropologist's status and authority may in fact be one of the most positive outcomes of elite research. Similar conclusions have been reached by oppressed peoples conducting research on oppressed peoples. A growing literature, particularly within, although not exclusive to, feminist anthropology, has begun to challenge social scientific convictions of authority and expertise. Calling for 'egalitarian research principles,' this perspective suggests that much of what has been conducted in the guise of social research is neither 'meaningful' nor 'honorable' for either the researcher or subject (Kirby and McKenna 1989). Both anthropologists and their subjects would, according to this view, benefit from collaborative ventures in which the needs and concerns of both parties were an intricate part of the research including its design, implementation, analysis, and presentation. Such an approach, obviously, would entail a lessening of the anthropologist's control over their research and their writing. Working among the elite, I clearly experienced what I felt was an involuntary lose of control over 'my' elite

subjects. This manifest itself in an inability to set the terms of our interactions or even to determine whether interactions would take place, to get necessary information, and to adequately distinguish at times between what was genuine information and what was superfluous or equivocal. I would like to think, however, that this experience will serve me well in future research by making me more sensitive to issues of status, control, and power and to egalitarian research principles.

Although power or status differentials were obviously a part the elite research experience, the particular organization and ideology of *Paraibano* sugar elites also were influential. My sense -- since I had little concrete experience to judge these matters -- was that the most significant interactions and relations among the *Ribeiro Coutinho* and other *usineiro* families were confined to close kin. Although friendships may have been formed outside the kin group in schools, in business, or in political activities, these friendship were, until recently perhaps, subordinate to kinship. Godparents were almost always grandparents, parents, aunts, uncles, siblings, or in-laws, as were dinner or house guests and even business partners. Furthermore, who your parents were often seemed more important than who you were or what you did. By such criteria, I was of no importance and no consequence in the larger status system of *João Pessoa*. I also had none of the

social skills and mannerisms which might have suggested that I was someone someplace. On the positive side, however, this also meant that I could not be slotted into a preordained status or faction.

Being a single female in a highly sex-segregated environment where a women's status was likely to be determined by her husband's, also had its advantages and disadvantages. I frequently felt that I might have had a slightly better chance of being included in occasional social events if a spouse had been present. On the other hand, I can also think of events I probably never would have been invited to if I had brought along a spouse. As half of a couple in such situations, it is also likely that I would have been relegated to the female periphery rather than being allowed to remain in the 'center court.' That this was permitted did not endear me to the wives, mothers, sisters, and daughters who attended these events. Being single, female, and career-oriented perhaps hindered, to the greatest extent, my relations with elite women. I had little or no contact with women from any of the usineiro families. This gap in the data was magnified because little information on female members was available in public sources.

Some of these gaps might have been filled had I not kept myself isolated from the local academic community until late in the research. The research affiliation that had

allowed me to travel to Brazil was with a research foundation in Recife, Pernambuco rather than with an institution in Paraíba. Although I always found the people at the Fundação Joaquim Nabuco friendly and helpful, I was never there for sufficient periods of time to partake to any sufficient degree of their wisdom. In Paraíba, I had initially been leery of making a nuisance of myself around the university for two reasons. First, as a foreign researcher in a country with a well established but sorely underfunded social science tradition, I was hesitant to knock on doors and present myself as a 'funded' outsider here to study things I knew little about. Although, as far as I was aware, no members of the state's *usineiro* families were active in the university, I did eventually discover that most university professors knew a lot about the families and I could have benefited from more intensive contacts. Some professors had occasional social contacts with family members; others had gone to school together or had common acquaintances. Few of the professors I met, however, participated intimately in the lives of this elite faction or shared the same status and wealth.

Second, I was also reluctant to begin my fieldwork with too close an association with the university since I did not know where academics were placed in the local class and status system or what their linkages to the elites may have been. Furthermore, anthropology in much of the Northeast is

fairly distinct from North American anthropology. It tends to concern itself more with folklore and popular culture. As a result, I was apprehensive that people might misunderstand my research and lead me in unproductive directions.

Underlying these considerations was a similar concern to that expressed by Sheehan (1990:387) when she wrote that, the desire by Irish academics

to take on a watchdog role in relation to their native culture is understandable and in many cases appropriate, but it is also a strategy that allows them to deflect attention away from their own influence as intellectual interpreters of other people -- their poor and disadvantaged countrymen -- with whom they may share only a common nationality.

Although many northeastern academics may share more than a common nationality with northeastern elites -- they may also share similar lifestyles, neighborhoods, schools, and friends -- they also have their own biases, preconceptions, and interests to protect and project. As did I. My strategy was simply to come to at least some tentative opinions of my own before I requested input from others.

As a result of these concerns and obstacles, much of the research involved archival and literature searches. I went through various published genealogies on various family members as well as histories of various *municipios* that frequently included genealogical information as well. I also

scanned available newspapers from the end of the last century, for the years when various *usinas* opened, and for the last ten years. Obituaries and notices for masses celebrated for the deceased were frequently sources of new information on family ties and business interests. The social pages in local newspapers were also often a source of information on family and business although I also found the reports erroneous at times. Company records at the Junta Comercial provided information on family businesses, partnerships, and personal data. Whenever possible, I attempted to verify the collected information with family members or with other knowledgeable local individuals. The genealogy of the Ribeiro Coutinho family presented in Chapter Five, for example, came together through the reading of various biographies, dictionaries, histories, political and economic accounts, newspaper articles and obituaries, government papers, and through the questioning of family members, *usina* employees, and local residents.

A final point relating to elite research warrants mentioning: this is the particular status of the researcher at the time of the research or perhaps more correctly, to the personality and personal history of the researcher which allows him or her to project a certain status. As I discussed above, being single and female had some influence on the research. Identifying myself as a graduate student rather than as an anthropologist or as an adjunct professor

also lessened my status vis-à-vis the local elite and academic community. Perhaps more importantly, my unspoken but self-conscious identification as a daughter of working class parents made me uncomfortable and retiring among the elite. Had I had more confidence in myself and in my training, I might have been able to have conducted more forceful and probing research.² Because of my personal background and anthropological training, as well, I had more empathy for the *usineiros'* workers than for the *usineiros* themselves. Conscious of this bias, I have struggled, both in my research and in my writing, to produce something which neither suggests "ideological sympathy" for the elites nor "a polemical condemnation of elites" (Marcus 1983:23). Balancing these two extremes, although ideally a goal of all social science research, becomes perhaps more of a consideration in elite research since we must confront our own and our readers' ideological tendencies while at the same time ensuring that we do not offend those groups who may have the ability to hinder future research.

Regardless of my own or of most anthropologist's personal background, Marcus (1983:9) is probably correct in stating that

[f]ew social scientists have viewed themselves as members of the elites they studied. In researching

² On the other hand, these are personality traits which may have facilitated my relations with other class segments.

elites, we have been outsiders viewing a culture that was almost as distinct from our own, and as difficult to comprehend, as the cultures of the tribal subjects anthropologists have traditionally studied.

Although excessive perceptions of 'otherness,' such as may own, should be a concern in all types of anthropological research, in elite research, without the false sense of familiarity which may in fact stem from the anthropologist's higher status or power, the sense of 'otherness' may be personally overwhelming for the anthropologist. Moreover, it may become a hindrance to the research. As Marcus (1983:9-10) goes on to suggest,

The fact that elites are always observed from an outsider's perspective has also carried over to the development of the concept of the elite as a theory and research tradition; the schematics of elite organization and its place in larger system frameworks have been much more commonly addressed than its internal culture and practices. This bias of perspective may impede the development of an ethnographic view, which must link its traditional focus on subjective culture and small group process to the preponderant but valuable body of work on elite structures and functions conceived externally as part of larger systems.

My particular experience of elite research and the research results presented here expose these impediments to an ethnographic view. On the other hand, they serve, I believe, to remind other anthropologists that their ability to "focus on subjective culture and small group processes" may say more about their position in relation to the people they are studying than their unique abilities as an anthropologist.

The preceding discussion is not meant to suggest that elite research should be rejected or avoided. Rather, I have intended to suggest that elite research requires serious consideration of new problems while, at the same time, it provides new perspectives on old problems and assumptions. In either case, it can only enhance the practice and theory of anthropology. It may be, as well, that elite research can lead us to reevaluate what anthropology should be and how one should do it.

GLOSSARY

- abertura*: a policy of planned political opening or liberalization instituted by General Figueiredo after he became President of Brazil in 1979.
- agreste*: a region of the Northeast located between the fertile coastal strip or zona da mata and the semi-arid interior or sertão
- aguardente*: a crude rum made from sugar cane, more usually called cachaça in Brazil
- alvarista*: political followers and associates of Alvaro Machado, a prominent political figure in Paraíba during the Old Republic and Governor of the province in 1892.
- americanismo*: the political phenomenon and influence of José Américo de Almeida who played a major role in Paraibano politics from the 1930s until the 1950s.
- americanos*: the political followers and associates of José Américo de Almeida, Governor of Paraíba from 1951 to 1956 and founder of one branch of the UDN party.
- anexa*: destilaria anexa, an alcohol-producing distillery attached to an usina or sugar-factory.
- argemiros*: the political followers and associates of Argemiro de Figueiredo, Governor of Paraíba from 1934 to 1940 and founder of the second major branch of the UDN party.
- autonoma*: destilaria autonoma, an alcohol-producing distillery that is not attached to an usina or sugar factory.
- bagacho*: bagasse or the dried crushed sugarcane that remains after the juices have been extracted; traditionally used to fuel a sugar factory's furnaces.
- bangüês*: an archaic term for a small sugar mill and its agricultural properties; derived from the handheld stretcher or litter used to carry the corpses of slaves.
- bodega*: a small general store with a canteen and bar.

brejo: a general term which denotes a moist area with a permanent water supply; in Paraíba, it refers specifically to two microregions, the smaller Brejo Paraibano and the encompassing Zona de Brejo located more or less within the agreste and centered around the municípios of Alagoa Nova, Areia, Serraria, and Bananeiras.

caatinga: according to Andrade (1980:219), the "drought-resistant thorn scrub vegetation of the interior parts of the Northeast; the areas characterized by such vegetation." In Paraíba, the term is used most often for particular microregions within the agreste and never for microregions of the sertão.

cabo eleitoral: an electoral handler, vote catcher, or canvasser; more specifically, it can refer to an influential individual who controls a party's vote in an electoral district or who is responsible for registering voters.

cacique: a political chieftain or political strongman; in Brazil, a coronel.

CNBB: the Conferência Nacional dos Bispos do Brasil or the National Conference of Bishops of Brazil; an influential Roman Catholic Church organization which has until recently been very supportive of radical programs such as Liberation Theology.

compadrazgo: ritual co-parenthood or symbolic relationships between parents recognized by a religious ceremonies in which god-parents participate; term is not used frequently in Brazil.

compadre: a co-father or one's children's religious godfathers; an important relationship that ties two males together through their children; also comadre or co-motherhood.

concunhado: a co-brother-in-law; a man's wife's sister's husband or a woman's husband's sister's husband; also concunhada.

conscientização: to become aware or conscious of one's conditions of existence; to make another politically aware.

conterrâneo: fellow citizen or countrymen; more specifically, an individual from one's home state, region or town.

conto de reis: one million reais, the monetary unit in Brazil until 1942; written 1:000\$.

coronel, coronéis: colonel in the army or militia; more generally a rural boss or large landowner.

coronelismo: system of political control and manipulation of the rural vote by the coronéis.

desembargador: a chief judge or judge at the High Court.

destilaria: a distillery producing alcohol as a gasoline substitute; may be an anexa or an autonoma.

dona da casa: a housewife or female head of household.

donatário: recipient of a land grant from the Crown.

empreguista: the act of or individual playing employment politics; an individual who gives or receives government employment in return for political support or affiliation.

empreiteiro: a labor contractor, typically providing teams of field laborers for an usina.

engenho: an old-fashioned sugar mill or a mill and its surrounding lands.

engenho central: a large, 'modern' sugar factory which buys its sugar cane from a number of surrounding separate and private properties.

entresafra: the period between sugar cane harvests; in the Northeast, typically from around March to September.

epitacista: in Paraíba, a political follower or associate of Epitácio Pessoa, President of Brazil from 1919 to 1922.

fazenda: a large rural landholding devoted to ranching or crop production.

folheto: according to Slater (1982:271) "the general term for 'pamphlet' and used by *cordel* authors as a synonym for their stories."

fornecedor: a private individual who sells sugar cane to an usina, destilaria or engenho.

getulista: a political follower or associate of Getúlio Vargas, President of Brazil from 1930 to 1945 and from 1950 to 1954.

lavrador: in general a farmer; more specifically, an individual who rented or sharecropped a fairly substantial parcel of land belonging to an usina or fornecedor.

literatura de cordel: used interchangeably with *folheto*; according to Slater (1982:270) "the *cordel* refers to the string on which these stories in verse were displayed in marketplaces."

meirista: sharecropper.

morador, moradores: worker resident on the property of an usina, engenho, or other rural property.

município: an administrative subdivision of a state similar to a county; the *município* and its seat share the same name.

paraibano, paraibana: a resident or native of Paraíba.

parentela: kindred, extended family.

paulista: a resident or native of the state or city of São Paulo.

pequeno colono: small farmer or peasant producer.

perrepista: member of the Partido Republicano Paulista (São Paulo Republican Party) and supporter of Júlio Prestes' candidacy for President of Brazil in 1930; against Vargas and the Liberal Alliance.

pessedista: member of the Partido Social Democrático (Social Democratic Party) formed organized by Vargas as the official party in 1945.

PETROBRÁS: State-owned and directed petroleum company; organized by Vargas in 1953 in response to pressure from various sectors for nationalization of the oil industry.

prefeito: mayor or head of a *município*.

prefeitura: town hall, city hall, or the administrative offices of the *município*.

PROÁLCOOL: the National Alcohol Program instituted in 1975.

quilombo: a settlement of fugitive slaves.

rapadura: block of dark brown sugar.

Recôncavo: the lands surrounding the Bay of All Saints in the state of Bahia; the heart of the state's sugar-growing area.

réis: plural of *real*; former Brazilian monetary unit. One hundred *réis* is written \$100.

religiosos: members of a religious order; priests, nuns, friars, etc.

salgadino: a salty hors d'oeuvre or canape; a snack food.

senhor de engenho: an owner of a sugar mill.

sertanejo: a resident of the *sertão*.

sertão: the semi-arid interior of the Northeast.

sesmaria: a land grant from the Portuguese Crown.

silvinista: a follower or associate of Silvino Elvídio Carneiro da Cunha or the Baron Abiahy, an important leader of the Conservative Party during the Empire and the Old Republic.

situacionista: political 'in' group; those in power or their supporters.

sociedade anonyma: a joint stock company.

suplente: a substitute to a political office; a first *suplente* to the senate, for example, would take office when the first senator from his/her state resigns.

tabuleira: a low coastal plateau; the sandy hills bordering the fertile river valleys in the *zona da mata*.

trabalhador: a rural worker; may be a wage laborer, a sharecropper, or peasant producer.

udenista: a member of the UDN or União Democrática Nacional party (National Democratic Union) organized in 1945.

usina: a modern sugar factory; the factory and its surrounding lands.

usineiro: the owner of an *usina*.

várzea: river floodplain characterized by moist, fertile soils; the sugar-producing valleys of the *zona da mata*.

venancista: a follower or associate of Venâncio Neiva, a President of Paraíba during the Old Republic and a leader of the Conservative Party.

vinhoto: a liquid residue of the distillation process of producing alcohol from sugar cane; a potential pollutant unless properly treated.

walfredista: a follower or associate of Walfredo Leal, a leader of the Republican Party of Paraíba (Partido Republicano da Paraíba) during the Old Republic and a Vice-President and President of the state.

zona da mata: the fertile, cane-growing region of the Northeast along the humid east coast.

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