

**Cultivating Hope:
Struggles for Land, Equality, and Recognition in the Cacao Lands of Southern Bahia, Brazil**

by

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For,

André de Mata
Andrezinho
Antônia Peroba
Barnabé
Camilo
Chuca
Corne
Emília
Eugênio
Francisco Marcelino da Assunção
Gerino
Guilherme
Hermínio
Inês
Leopordo
Manuel Braz
Manuel Timote
Maria Crente
Nestor
Paulino
Ricardo de Dentro
Ricardo de Fora
Tiodoro
Valdemar de Dentro
Véa Aninha

And many other *posseiros* of old,
whom we shall never meet, but whose names and stories are alive.

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INTRODUCTION:
RECKONING AND RELEASE FROM THE PAST

1. Finding Oneself; or, Self-Recognition

Just a few days before I left Bahia at the end of 2010, I went to visit Guiomar and Lázaro at their home in the rural community known as Pequi Community. I had gone to deliver several copies of a film that we had recorded together with their children on their family's small cacao farm, what they and other families in the region refer to as their *roças*. Guiomar and Lázaro were among 15 other squatter families who, in April 1997, began to occupy and cultivate lands on a nearby abandoned plantation called Nossa Senhora. The old plantation had been purchased in 1970 by an absentee landowner from Bahia's capital, Salvador, who sought to take advantage of federal loan money that had become available to plant natural rubber. Not long after, however, these efforts and the plantation were abandoned. People in the region say that the owner had accumulated a sizable gambling debt, gone bankrupt, and his agricultural enterprise was eventually given over to the ever-encroaching forest. By the time Guiomar, Lázaro, and the other families began to cultivate those lands for themselves, the plantation had been long-since been abandoned and was completely covered in forest. Since 1997, these families have dedicated themselves to the years-long process of transforming the forest into bountiful agroforests of cacao and rubber trees and manifold other fruit and spice trees.

This was the first bit of land that any of these families had ever really been able to call their own. At 60 and 65 years of age, respectively, both Guiomar and Lázaro, like many of their companions, had expended their physical strength over the first decades of their lives while working on the region's expansive cacao and rubber plantations. Guiomar had grown up landless while working for others, as her parents had never owned any land. Lázaro's father, on the other hand, had owned a small plot of land located further inland toward Bahia's arid interior,

in what is called the *sertão*. For reasons that were not entirely clear,¹ when Lázaro was yet a young man, his father sold the family's farm and spent all of the money he had received for the land in town. Dispossessed of their inheritance—however humble it may have been—and without any place where they could plant for themselves, Lázaro and his siblings were then forced to find work on other people's land as day laborers, sharecroppers, and tenants. This was where he and Guiomar eventually met, were married, and began a life together.

When I first met Guiomar and Lázaro in 2002, they and the other families in this burgeoning agricultural community of squatters were still in the midst of the arduous labor of clearing small plots of forest; planting the land, first with manioc and bananas and later with various other tree crops; cultivating the plots over several years; and waiting patiently for the trees to finally bear fruit. By 2010, after long years of hardship, heavy work, and great patience, these families finally had something to show for their many years of work. Their cacao trees, which take up to three years before they begin to give fruit, were increasingly productive, and they were finally able to tap the rubber trees that take anywhere from seven to 10 years before they are ready to produce. They had been building and cultivating their *roças* from the ground up, over a period of some thirteen years. Finding land, and transforming it into something from which they could create lives for themselves, was the culmination of a life-long quest for the good.

Filming these families' farms first became a part of my fieldwork in 2009, at the suggestion of another farmer named Colodino. In the rural communities where electrical power was available, as it was at Pequi Community, many families, even the humblest, had small televisions. People were accustomed to watching various telenovelas and the nightly news after long days of work, and just before they went to bed. Moreover, as store credit was more and more available at appliance stores in town, many rural families also had increasing access to DVD players. The local market for pirated DVDs in town was always quite active at that time.

The first film that I recorded with Colodino was initially a fumbling affair, at least on my part. We did various tests with the video function on my digital camera, but it soon became clear that it would not be sufficient to the task. Shortly after, I purchased a small handheld camera

¹ It is possible his father had sold their farm because of debt, and a number of people who had also worked on the region's plantations suggested that their parents' farms had been put up for auction owed to outstanding debts. Foreclosures on small property owners with outstanding debts were fairly common in Bahia in the late 19th and early 20th century (see Mahony 1996, especially chapters 10 and 11).

from the United States, and when it arrived, we began filming once again. I had never tried to make a film before and, moreover, I had never used any video editing software. My first attempts were done in good faith, at best. Colodino, on the other hand, was the director and he had a concrete vision of how he would demonstrate his life story through a video narrative. Familiar with television and movies, he had long imagined what it would be like to see himself and his story on television! The film begins with a shot of him walking across the river and entering his family's land via a pathway that he often took through the forest in his earlier years, while he was still working on the plantations. Little did he know, on those now distant days, that he would eventually come to call this particular stretch of forest his own.

This opening scene demonstratively presents and recalls, by way of demonstration, the course of his life, with the rest of the film tracing the gradual transformation of the forest into something new, a source of abundance. But first, he must labor to show this transformation and, to this end, we move to one of the first plots that he and his family had cleared in the forest. He recounts that they had been working under the rain on one of the days when they were there clearing the understory. The rain provided a cooling relief from the heavy toil involved in clearing the forest and, perhaps, was also a mark of their perpetual exposure to the elements that characterized their lives for so many long years. He goes on to recall a stew (*moqueca*) they had made that afternoon from three tiny fish they had caught in the river and shared together. It was a small, humble meal—very likely an inadequate meal—but it brought satisfaction and renewed their strength:

The first roça that I planted 12 years ago—well, we had practically nothing to live from. I set up a fishing pole there on the river, and caught a *carí*, a *traíra* and a little *berézinho*. I made a fish stew up there in the middle of the elements, and I ate, and was satisfied.²

Turning from this story and to the present, he looks toward the rest of his family's roça behind him, which they had built over the 12 years that followed this first meal. His roça now includes a series of small fish ponds that they had built by hand, and he points to the water behind him:

² “A primeira roça que eu botei há doze anos atrás—então, nós praticamente não tinha como sobreviver. Eu botei um anzol ali no rio, e peguei uma carí, uma traíra, e um berézinho. Fiz uma moqueca ali no meio do tempo, e comi, fiquei satisfeito.”

Today, I'm showing here—12 years later—that I've got fish weighing more than a kilo, more than you can eat. But that was a critical moment that I went through. I lived working for others. So, for me, I'm winning and I'm happy. And I'm building this with just me and my family. Everything I've got here was made by my family.³

And so we continued down the path of his life narrative, which took us across the verdant landscape, interviewing his family members, friends, and into the homes of friends and neighbors. The final product, the film of Colodino's farm, was an immediate hit and word spread fairly quickly of the work that he had done with my assistance. Over the course of the next year, I received many requests from other families to make films of their own farms, the result of which was more than 21 hours of film made with more than a dozen families around the region. Completing each project, I copied and delivered several DVD copies of each family's film. The copies quickly found their way into the hands of neighbors, family members living in cities as far away as Salvador, Belo Horizonte, Brasília, and São Paulo, and even into the hands of local politicians and neighboring plantation managers. Whether as arguments or aesthetic performances, these films were above all reenactments of these people's lives and testaments to the achievements that each family had won—at great cost and with great struggle.

Lázaro and Guiomar were among those families that had asked me to make films. We made a film of their farm on November 15, 2010, together with two of their sons. As with the other films, the date the film was recorded and the names of the roça(s) appeared at the beginning of the film, if they had a name at all. Apart from holding the camera, asking some occasional questions, and performing the rudimentary editing that was required to piece the bits together, my other artistic role was to add the date that we filmed and the name of the farm to the DVD's frame. Lázaro's roça was named *Sítio Santo Antônio*, presumably named for Saint Anthony of Padua (alternatively "of Lisbon"). Guiomar's roça was named *Sítio Santa Luzia*, presumably named for Saint Lucy of Syracuse.

Lázaro and I arrived quite early that first morning and we began filming before Guiomar and two of their sons eventually joined us later that morning. Lázaro was nervous and nearly unable to speak his own name when we began to record, as he struggled to introduce himself.

³ "Hoje to amostrando—com doze anos—eu tenho peixe de mais de um kilo aí. Não dá vontade de comer. Mas foi um ponto muito crítico que eu passei. Vivía empregado. Então, pra mim to vencendo. E to alegre. E to construindo isso só com minha família. Tudo que eu tenho aqui é com a minha família."

We started and stopped the camera several times until he relaxed a bit more. In one of the first takes, he had begun to say that he, his family, and his friends were able to begin their lives anew on the farms they were building:

Here we are on the roça, and it was here that I started my life—⁴

Lázaro stopped for a moment. He could no longer muster a sound, and needed to collect himself, before we began again. Eventually, we shot our first take:

[Lázaro]: Good morning, Jon.

[Jonathan]: Good morning, Lázaro.

[Lázaro]: My name is Lázaro de Jesus Anunciação. This—my farm here—this roça here, it depends—it’s my family’s. This here, I began from zero—from forest.

And today—thanks to God—it’s got crops. [Today,] I feel pride in my life—in God, above all—I feel pri—⁵

Lázaro cannot finish uttering the word “pride,” and he stops speaking. His eyes water, but he does not cry. Then he continues:

[Lázaro]: The love and friendship of my friends (*amigos*) and my friends (*amigas*), and my children.

[Jonathan]: And today do you feel happy?

⁴ “[A gente ta aqui na roça,] e foi aqui que eu comecei minha vida.”

⁵ “L: Bom dia, Jon.//J: Bom dia, Lázaro.//L: Meu nome é Lázaro Trindade Anunciação. Essa—meu sítio aqui—essa roça aqui, depende—é da minha família. Isso aqui, eu peguei no zero—em mata. E hoje—graças a Deus—ta com a lavoura. Eu tenho orgulho na minha vida—em Deus, em tudo falando—eu tenho orgul—”

[Lázaro]: Today I feel happy.

All my life I was a citizen. But what I understand by citizen—[means] having things. And being a good person but not having anything, to me that's not a citizen. But having things, that's a citizen—it's a citizen of good—for the family, for friends, for everything, after all.⁶

Lázaro's words merit some preliminary explanation, and here I will focus on the notion of goodness and goods. In saying that he has become a "citizen of good," or a *cidadão de bem*, he can be understood both as a citizen of good conduct—"being a good person," as he suggests earlier—but also a citizen of *goods*: material goods, things, property, and land, in his case. Being a *cidadão de bem* is an idiom that is historically bound up with legal status distinctions that are grounded in property ownership.⁷ Lázaro is hardly suggesting that he had become a baron, but by focusing on a fuller notion of citizenship, he is drawing attention to capacities and resources through which one can be *good*.

He makes this clear at the end of his statement. By being a citizen of good(s), he can externalize his good conduct in novel ways. This means that he can be good *for*, or direct good action toward his family, his friends, and even strangers, for example, by providing for them. It is not that he was wholly cut off from relationships with others before, but now he could be *good for* and *provide for* them in ways that had been previously closed off or limited for him as a result of his father's earlier actions. I would like to suggest that this early experience of having been *cut off*—and being delivered to decades of plantation work and hardship—is what gives meaning to Lázaro's expression. The *for-anotherness* of his relationships had been undermined for much of his life, and, upon reflection, he was coming to see that his ability to act and be *for* others was being transformed in profound ways.

⁶ "L: O amor e amizade dos meus amigos, e minhas amigas, e meus filho.//J: E hoje você sente feliz?//L: Hoje eu sinto feliz. Toda vida eu fui cidadão. Mas o cidadão que eu entendo—tendo as coisas. E a pessoa ser direito e não ter nada, pra mim não é cidadão. E tendo as coisas, é cidadão. É o cidadão de bem—pra família, pa amigo, pa tudo enfim."

⁷ See Holston (2008:84-85) for a discussion of the status of being a "good man" (*homem bom*) in relation to the right to vote in Brazil, where suffrage was historically restricted to men who were literate, property owners, white, and so forth. The notion of the *homem bom* appears to parallel what Lázaro is calling a *cidadão de bem*. By saying that he has finally become a *cidadão de bem*, as a result of having land, Lázaro is not claiming sudden membership in an elite class; rather he is offering a critique of the fact that most citizens live in poverty, with few material goods, and therefore their formal status as citizens is substantively undermined.

Several weeks later, I finally arrived to see Guiomar and Lázaro at their home, with several copies of their DVD in hand. Like many of the families that I had made these films with, they would send these extra copies to friends and family members in other parts of the state and around the country. Many people kept at least one pristine copy with their personal documents—birth certificates, voting cards, identification cards.

They invited me into their home so that we could watch the DVD on their television, and after everyone had been served a small cup of coffee, we began. Guiomar and Lázaro were eager to see it, and watching was exciting and full of commentary. Lázaro, at one point, explained that “a roça is a mother.”⁸ To his mind—and for many other people—he stood in relation to the roça as he would stand in a relation of care and maternal kinship. The roça cared for him, literally, by providing for them in their increasingly old age.

Several minutes into the film—in only a few brief sentences—Lázaro glosses over his relationship with his father, his early turn toward plantation life, the suffering that ensued, and his long arduous search for land:

My father had land, sold it, and I departed for [work on] other’s plantations in my youth. And then, I said to God, that one day I would get a bit of land for me to work—for me and my children. Then I walked about almost the whole world.⁹

Watching this now—seeing himself on the television, seeing his *story* before him—Lázaro places his face into his hands. His body begins to shake forcefully, and then he finally begins to weep.¹⁰

2. The Historical Arc and Beginning Again

⁸ “Uma roça é uma mãe.”

⁹ “Meu pai tinha terra, vendeu, eu parti pa fazenda dos outros na minha juventude. E ai, eu dizia a Deus que eu ainda pegava uma terra pa mim trabalhar—pa mim e meus filho. Aí, rodei, praticamente quase o mundo todo.”

¹⁰ Fn594.

“It is in the nature of beginning that something new is started which cannot be expected from whatever may have happened before. This character of startling unexpectedness is inherent in all beginnings and in all origins.” Hannah Arendt¹¹

Like so many others, Lázaro had lost the world he had known in his youth, as he was cast out into a world of plantations and anonymous and isolated suffering. When Lázaro and Guiomar had taken to the forest on the old abandoned plantation, together with friends and other families, this was their attempt to break away from all that had happened before and an attempt at a new beginning. As Lázaro had suggested through his own reflections, it was the moment when he was able to truly begin to live and, in a strong sense, he was experiencing a sort of social rebirth. Witnessing an image of himself on a small television, Lázaro was faced with an emerging form of selfhood that was both unexpected and increasingly recognizable. Lázaro, his family, and his friends had finally found ground upon which they could stand, ground upon which they could have social standing. In a sense, they had gained (and were recreating) a world through which they could recognize themselves in new ways.

This ethnography is a story of losing and gaining worlds. It is a story both about the ancestors, people who are remembered and referred to as being *posseiros*, and about those people who followed them and live today. Traces of the ancestors’ earlier lives may still be encountered upon the landscape, and their names still live in the mouths of those who tell stories about them. People do not tell stories about the ancestors’ world merely for the sake of recounting the past. They do so for the sake of reckoning and wrestling with the past in their present, as they struggle to move forward, and to open new pathways into the future. In this sense, this ethnography is an account of people reckoning with who and what they have been, as they find themselves anew. For Lázaro, rendering his own and his family’s story into the format of a short film was part of a broader “dramatic transformation of human activity,” a lived drama that “concerns not so much what has come into being as what is yet emerging” (Colapietro 2004:60-61). Rendering his life into a story allowed Lázaro to fulfill what Michael Jackson calls the “narrative imperative,” a view of “storytelling as a vital human strategy for sustaining a sense of agency in the face of disempowering circumstances” (2002:14-15). As Jackson suggests: “To reconstitute events in a story is no longer to live those events in passivity, but to actively rework them, both in dialogue

¹¹ Hannah Arendt (1998[1958]:176-177).

with others and within one's own imagination" (2002:15). In other words, rendering his life into a story for others enabled Lázaro to transform and release his own past.

This ethnography aims to understand the social and historical context of people like Lázaro, who are participants in contemporary land rights movements that emerged in the northern cacao lands of Bahia, Brazil in the 1990s. The specific region under consideration encompasses the hills of the Dendê Coast, which are roughly situated between the towns of Valença and Camamu, approximately 100 kilometers south of the city of Salvador and 100 kilometers north of the city of Ilhéus.¹² The historical arc of this microregion, and of this ethnography, can be divided into three broad periods, which I reconstruct primarily from oral historical sources.

First, prior to the 1950s, the specific area in question could be characterized as what Gonzalo A. Beltrán (1979) called a "region of refuge"—or what James C. Scott (2009) would later characterize as a "hill" space. Members of the rural poor had taken to the hills in this region to build a new social world apart from the region's plantations. In a sense, they were seeking freedom and new beginnings. These families are locally remembered and referred to as *posseiros*, who will be discussed at length in the coming chapters. While the *posseiros* were a diverse group of people, many of them would have been descendants of freed and former slaves. As such, this period of the ethnography is broadly concerned with the first several decades of the post-emancipation period in Brazil, and, in particular, the quest for land undertaken by freed slaves and their descendants. As this ethnography is partly about the historical process of "emancipation," it is also about people's historical struggle to achieve something that they might deem worthy of the name of "freedom." The problem of freedom has gained increased attention from diverse anthropologists, sociologists, and historians (Bauman 1988; Laidlaw 2002, 2014; Patterson 1991; Robbins 2007; Rose 1999; R.J. Scott 2005). While I cannot address the vexed problem of "freedom" and "determinism" in social analysis (see Keane 2003), here I can offer that the problem of "freedom," in the present context, might be initially understood through the idea of properly burying the ancestors, and of striving to find a way to live, and to live well, by releasing the inherited burdens of the past. In this sense, the problem of freedom resonates with

¹² See the map in Figure 3.

Hannah Arendt's notion of "natality" (1998[1958]), as the kind of freedom that accompanies new beginnings, such as the new beginning that the posseiros sought by taking to the hills.¹³

The second historical period of this ethnography examines regional developments between the 1950s and 1970s, when a series of national and regional political economic transformations led to the rapid expansion of new rubber and cacao plantations into the hills where the posseiros had been living. These families, some of whom may have been living there for several decades, lost their land through a series of land grabs in an episode of what Karl Marx (1976[1867]) would have called "primitive" or "original accumulation," and what David Harvey (2003) would later redescribe as "accumulation by dispossession." To understand this second period together with the first, I situate oral histories in a broader political economic framework. Here I draw upon research by the historian Warren Dean (1987) on the expansion of plantation rubber in Brazil, which helps account for land grabs and struggles over land that parallel those that Foweraker (1974, 1981) has described for other regions of Brazil. I draw broadly upon the work of others who have worked in Bahia's cacao lands, most notably the historian Mary Ann Mahony (1996, 1998, 2008) and the anthropologist Anthony Leeds (1957), as well as the historian B.J. Barickman (1991, 1994, 1998) who has done extensive work on Bahia's Recôncavo region to the north.

The third historical period of this ethnography begins in the late 1980s and 1990s, when these new plantations entered into a period of crisis. In this period, many plantation workers were laid off, and a number of plantation lands were temporarily abandoned. In a significant turn of fate, a new generation of ex-plantation workers and their families—like Lázaro's—began to occupy and cultivate the land on a number of the region's plantations. Taking up part of the world for themselves, they were simultaneously staking claims for recognition in the social world. This moment was a reversal of fate, not a fate that merely appeared from the heavens, but a fate that they had to seize upon and make for themselves. The agrarian communities that emerged in this period are varied in their institutional structure, and include decentralized squatter groups, local legal associations seeking to purchase local plantation lands, and

¹³ Arendt's concept of "freedom," Passerin d'Entrèves (1994:66) has suggested, is closely related to this notion of rebirth and new beginnings:

"By freedom Arendt does not mean simply the ability to choose among a set of possible alternatives (the freedom of choice so dear to the liberal tradition) or the faculty of *liberum arbitrium* which, according to Christian doctrine, was given to us by God. Rather, by freedom Arendt means the capacity to begin, to start something new, to do the unexpected, with which all human beings are endowed by virtue of being born."

communities associated with the “Landless Rural Workers’ Movement” (*Movimento dos Trabalhadores Rurais Sem Terra*), better known as the MST.

Among these innumerable movements and organizations, the MST stands out as one of the most notable and influential organizations of its kind (see Wright and Wolford 2003; Welch 1999 for some relevant history). While the MST has attracted a great deal of attention from activists and scholars around the world, especially given its sheer size and public campaigning, other research has begun to document the broader diversity of rural movements in Brazil (Fernandes et al. 2009; Feliciano 2006; Simmons et al. 2010; and Welch 2009), as well as the complexity of people’s experiences within the MST (Caldeira 2008, 2009; Wolford 2010a). This ethnography contributes to our understanding of land rights movements on both counts, by drawing attention to a diverse range of land rights organizations and experiences, many of which are understudied, and by exploring some of the internal complexities of people’s experiences within the MST.

The MST has been the focus of a large number of studies on land reform in Brazil, and its official vision has often framed the terms for debate and research alike. When rural people have presented politics that run contrary to some aspects of the MST’s official positions, such encounters are often framed and evaluated in terms that are available through the MST’s own political vision. As will be seen below, people living in MST communities have sometimes faced the reproduction of exploitative relationships in settlement institutions, notably through the “collectivization” of land and labor, and the reproduction of status hierarchies in relation to some members of the organization’s leadership. These observations corroborate some of Eliane Brenneisen’s (2002) research in southern Brazil, and suggest that some aspects of the MST’s institutional structure have allowed for the reproduction of what might be called “patron-client analogues” internal to the region’s MST settlements. When settlers resist such collectivization, it might be suggested that this is because people are “individualistic” in their orientation, or that they have somehow failed to appreciate the MST’s social and political vision. My approach in this ethnography is to build a robust account of the region’s land rights movements by attempting to grasp local understandings of history, politics, and justice on their own terms. When the MST’s leadership is challenged by community members, as will be seen at the end of this ethnography, those challenges must be understood in terms of regional histories, experiences, and notions of the good. Attention to the details of people’s experiences of hardship, in different

historical periods, undercuts any attempt to cast these processes of social contestation in terms of a bifurcated “collectivist” versus “individualist” framework. This ethnography shows that the struggle to create a more just world is something that also occurs internal to liberatory social movements such as the MST, where the struggle for emancipation can also occur internally. These challenges, however, cannot be properly understood as “oppositional” to the MST. Indeed, given the historical trajectory of which the MST is a part—aiming to create a more just and participatory Brazil—these community members’ challenges will best be understood as an unflinching embrace of the same historical spirit that gave rise to the MST and other social movements like it.

2a. The Quest for Land

In the years leading up to emancipation in 1888, the Brazilian abolitionist and diplomat, Joaquim Nabuco, famously argued that the emancipation of slaves should be coupled with the democratization of Brazil’s land base. Specifically, he proposed a series of land taxes through which Brazil’s latifundia could be dismantled and parceled out to freed slaves and other members of the rural poor.¹⁴ Indeed, as Mattos de Castro (1998:55) has noted, between 1818 and 1874, the percentage of “free and freed people” in Brazil had grown from 41 percent to 84 percent, and so when Nabuco emphasized the need to redistribute land to freed slaves, he was also thinking of the rural free poor who were part of a growing rural underclass of plantation workers, day laborers, and sharecroppers. Enacting such a policy would have amounted to a radical form of affirmative action that would have coupled the work of abolition with the work of bringing about substantive material equality. Nabuco seems to have viewed the problem of poverty more generally, and the breaking up of the large latifundia, as a crucial step in the process of emancipation. Nabuco had suggested:

Abolitionism means personal liberty, even better, the civil equality of all classes without exception—as such it is a social reform; it means free work—as such it is an economic reform; it means small property in the future—as such it is an agrarian reform; and as it is

¹⁴ See Rogers (2009:27).

an explosion of human dignity, feeling for family, respect for the other, it is a moral reform of the first order. [Nabuco 2010(1885):456, my translation]¹⁵

Here, Nabuco connected notions of human dignity and respect with small property ownership and free labor—not labor that is “free” to work for large plantations, but a vision of freedom that attended to equal access to material resources. In an earlier electoral campaign in the city of Recife, Nabuco had made an even more explicit connection between access to land, property, and the work of emancipation:

Gentlemen, *property does not merely mean rights, it also means obligations*, and the state of poverty among us, the indifference with which we all look toward the condition of the people, does no honor to property, just as it does no honor to the powers of the State. For my part, then, if I am elected, I will no longer separate these two questions—the emancipation of the slaves and the democratization of the soil. (Long applause.) One is the complement to the other. Ending slavery is not enough; it is necessary to destroy the entire edifice of slavery. [Nabuco 2005(1884):58, my translation, emphasis in original]¹⁶

In many respects, Nabuco’s remarks amounted to a rejection of the idea that what Isaiah Berlin (1969) would later call “negative” and “positive” freedom could be treated separately or held in isolation. Needless to say, however, Nabuco’s views were never taken very seriously, and the grossly unequal distribution of land continued to be a source of enduring social inequality in Brazil.

One crucial site, then, through which inequalities were reproduced across generations—and the past continued its hold upon the present—was in the vastly unequal distribution of land, which spanned the pre- and post-abolition periods. James Holston (1991, 2008) has explored the

¹⁵ The original Portuguese text reads: “O abolicionismo significa a liberdade pessoal, ainda melhor, a igualdade civil de todas as classes sem exceção—é assim uma reforma social; significa o trabalho livre, é assim uma reforma econômica; significa no futuro a pequena propriedade, é assim uma reforma agrária, e como é uma explosão da dignidade humana, do sentimento de família, do respeito ao próximo, é uma reforma moral de primeira ordem.”

¹⁶ Part of this passage is also cited by James Holston (2008:116). The original Portuguese text reads: “Senhores, a propriedade não tem somente direitos, tem também deveres, e o estado da pobreza entre nós, a indiferença com que todos olham para a condição do povo, não faz honra à propriedade, como não faz honra aos poderes do Estado. Eu, pois, se for eleito, não separarei mais as duas questões – a da emancipação dos escravos e a da democratização do solo. (Longos aplausos.) Uma é o complemento da outra. Acabar com a escravidão não nos basta; é preciso destruir a obra da escravidão.”

role that the vastly unequal distribution of land has played in the undermining of social inclusion and democratic citizenship in Brazil. Property ownership and literacy (among other criteria) were, at different points in Brazilian history, requirements for suffrage, and, as such, the exercise of full political citizenship was restricted to an elite and aristocratic class (see Holston 2008, especially chapters 3 and 4). Indeed, as Stuart B. Schwartz (1975:154) has noted, social “distinctions based on property and income rather than on estate, order, caste, or color” had significantly contributed to the social exclusion of Brazil’s rural and urban poor in the early 19th century. Victor Nunes Leal's (1977[1949]) landmark study of the Brazilian patron-client relationship, commonly referred to as *coronelismo*, also drew renewed attention to the role that unequal access to, and control over, land played in the reproduction of social inequality and political misrepresentation well into the 20th century. Sharecroppers, day laborers, tenants, and other members of the rural poor found themselves in a position of coercive dependency that subjected them to the whims and caprice of their patrons (*coronéis*), whose social power was rooted in disproportionate control over land and other resources crucial to making a living. Whether codified in what Holston (1991) calls the “misrule of law” that establishes impossible bureaucratic barriers to political participation, or inscribed in social practices and economic realities, the maldistribution of land was a central site of struggle in the reproduction of social hierarchies and inequalities.

This ethnography focuses, therefore, upon people’s efforts to find land, and a place in the social world, by literally staking claims to small stretches of the world. This struggle to find a place in the world included both descendants of freed slaves, and also members of the rural free poor, for whom access to productive resources like land in the post-emancipation period was a key problem (Scott 2001; Scott & Zeuske 2002). The search for land that was undertaken by Lázaro and his companions in the 1990s can therefore be thought of as one moment of a broader, multigenerational struggle to dismantle the vastly unequal world that people had inherited from slavery, and from plantation life, more generally. Focusing on contemporary land rights movements in their historical context, moreover, suggests that the process of “emancipation” can be thought of as ongoing; emancipation was not only about “freedom” but also a quest for some substantive form of material “equality.”

As such, this ethnography can be seen as crossing with the concerns of historians who study post-emancipation societies (Mattos de Castro 1987, 1995, 1998; Scott 1998, 2005). For

these scholars, freedom is also not merely freedom “from,” or only “negative” freedom in Berlin’s (1969) sense—although this may be a moment of freedom, as people attempt to remove themselves from problematic relationships (as in taking to the hills). Freedom was also the capacity and ability to act, and so is a kind of “positive” freedom. As will become clear later in the ethnography, action always depends upon an “other”—whether one’s own physical body, trees, land, or social relationships. In other words, “freedom” is not the same as absolute “independence,” but might be thought instead of as depending “well” upon an “other.” Freedom, then, is not a one dimensional matter and might be thought of as a complex kind of good. Indeed, as Rebecca J. Scott has noted, creating substantive forms of freedom after slavery meant attending to the “multiple constraints on human freedom, some of which were lifted with legal emancipation and some of which were not”; such a holistic approach toward “freedom,” therefore, means exploring a whole host of problems faced by former slaves, ranging from “access to land, freedom from violence, political voice, respect for individual dignity, integrity of their families, education for their children” (Scott 1998:20). This ethnography attends to various dimensions of these problems and their interrelationships. The quest for land will also mean, among other things, a struggle for political recognition from the state, which also means an understanding of legal bureaucratic forms, literacy, and access to various kinds of legal documents.

2b. Narrative, Justice, and “The Good”

The oral historical narratives used for reconstructing the different periods of this ethnography are drawn from several people’s accounts of their childhood and young adult life in the region, as well as generalized narratives about regional history. Generalized or “typified” historical narratives might forgo particular details about specific people and events, instead representing historical trends for the region in broader strokes, but they also point toward potential sources of evidence for more specific historical claims.¹⁷ As such, the historical

¹⁷ Such evidence might include material remains that can be found about the landscape, or evidence from specific people’s life stories and experiences. The interplay between typified narratives and specific life stories can be best seen in Chapter 1. There, a man named Damião offers a highly typified account of the posseiros that had inhabited

dimension of this ethnography can be thought of as a historical study of the region from the perspective of those who live there today, people who are interested in providing accounts and evidence for their own history. The ethnohistorical dimension of this ethnography has two broad goals. The first interest is to build up a historical account of this part of the world, the details of which are taken to have truth-value by those who recount them. At some points, I indicate dimensions of narratives that may be unclear, doubtful, and perhaps even wrong, as my interlocutors engage in moments of truth-evaluation between different narratives about similar events,¹⁸ and between story-tellers and listeners who play complementary and sometimes alternating roles. Rather than suggesting that these narratives offer a view-from-nowhere, this dimension of story-telling suggests that these narratives can be understood as developing a public and intersubjective orientation toward local histories.¹⁹ For the present ethnography, moments of truth-evaluation are especially important when claims about truth come together with claims about justice.

While I take it that these oral histories generally do tell us a good deal about what “actually” happened and how things were, the second and primary interest in these narratives, as social facts, pertains to their critical import and productive social power. The interest in oral histories does not, therefore, merely aim at reconstructing a particular historical period. Rather, these narratives about the region’s history are a critical and constitutive dimension of contemporary social and political life in the region. Through these retrospective historical narratives, people undertake an archaeology of the historical conditions of their own contemporary lives. They do so not out of mere historical curiosity, but because their past is still alive for them. By grasping the problems that the families faced in the world that preceded their own, and especially the hardships that emerged as the posseiros were violently displaced, people both seek to make sense of, and orient themselves in, the struggle for life that they are engaged in today.

the region. Then, at the end of his narrative, he suggests that we go talk with a direct descendant of the posseiros, a man named Seu Pedrinho, who had lived through specific moments of history that Damião recounts.

¹⁸ This will be seen most clearly in the story about Jeremias at the outset of Chapter 4.

¹⁹ In this sense, the narratives can be thought of as being “objective” insofar as they foster an intersubjective orientation toward the world. See Karl Popper (2002[1959]:22-26). While the terms “intersubjective” and “public” do not appear in C. S. Peirce’s philosophy of science, he works in the spirit of both notions throughout his work (e.g., 1998[1868], 1998[1877]). For Peirce, arriving at some notion of “truth” hinged upon the possibility of mutually adopting and intersubjectively evaluating diverse perspectives about the world. Peirce’s notion of “intersubjectivity” could be found in his notions of “dialogue” and “community.”

This historical orientation connects to problems about “justice” and the social “good,” which, I would like to suggest, are partly the objects of such historical reflection. In his discussion of the nature of distributive justice, Charles Taylor (1986) suggests that different notions of distributive justice hinge upon different notions of human dignity, which in turn hinge upon wider notions of the human good. Differences in these latter notions about “dignity” and “the good” amount to differences in notions of distributive justice. Taylor notes:

Differences about justice are related to differences about the nature of the good. . . . And they are related in particular to a key issue, which is whether and in what way human beings can realize the good alone, or to turn it around the other way, in what way they must be part of society to be human in the full sense or to realize the human good.

[Taylor 1986:36]

Taylor then goes on to say that “if we have a conception of a certain structure that is essential for human potentiality, or for the fullness of human potentiality, it defines for us the kinds of subject to whom distributive justice is due” (Taylor 1986:40). In other words, matters of justice hinge upon what counts as a person, and in the context of this ethnography, this is a historical problem that people were struggling with as their humanity was denied. What is at stake in this ethnography, then, is that as people attempt to reconcile with historical injustice, they also attempt to develop alternative notions of what is good, what is just, “who” and “what” they are, and what is owed to them in terms of justice—whether as a form of social recognition or in the distribution of material goods and resources.

This ethnography, therefore, is mediated both by ethnohistorical reflection and by emerging conceptions of the good and of personhood. The outlook of this work draws from a wide range of literatures. First, I draw on work that develops Aristotle’s broad notion of “goods” as a hierarchically integrated set of activities, relationships, and things (Aristotle 2000; cf. Kraut 1989; MacIntyre 1981; Nussbaum 1986; Sen 1999), and in particular Aristotle’s observation that being able to carry out the activities attendant to a good life requires what he calls “external goods” (2000:15; cf. Kraut 1989:253-260; MacIntyre 1988:30-46). In the present ethnographic context, the quest for “freedom” and “emancipation”—for the descendants of former slaves, and rural families seeking to escape plantation life—is sundered without material resources (e.g.,

land, trees) that are attendant to socially meaningful activity. Anthropologists have drawn upon and developed different dimensions of the “virtue ethics” tradition (cf. Foucault 1988[1984], 1990[1984]; MacIntyre 1981; Williams 1995) in fruitful and productive ways, for example, by exploring practices of ethical self-formation: the cultivation of “virtuous” habits, dispositions, and emotions, the education of one’s desires, and the exercise of critical reflection over conduct (Hirschkind 2006; Mahmood 2005). While ethical self-formation is paramount to Aristotle’s ethics, it cannot be abstracted from his holistic account of the interrelationships and interactions among other kinds of goods—what he thought of as “external goods, goods of the soul, and goods of the body” (2000:13). These various goods are not thrown together as a mere collection, but are rather integrated and interactive in ways that gesture toward a broader ecology of ethical life (Kraut 2007²⁰; cf. Keane 2010; Laidlaw 2014, chapter 5). As I show, especially in Part Two and in the conclusion to this ethnography, achieving what is “good” not only means fashioning and refashioning the self; moreover, it means cultivating relationships with “others,” such as trees and friends, and realizing the self through such relationships.

This ethnography is also informed by scholarship that explores the role of “recognition” in the agonistic processes of ethical life and in claims for justice (Habermas 1973[1968]; Hegel 1977[1807]; Honneth 1995; R. Williams 1992, 1997), including the notion of the “causality of fate” that Habermas developed from his reading of early Hegel (Habermas 1968; Hegel 1961[1798]). The problem of social recognition as a matter of justice, what is sometimes called “recognitive justice,” emerged from the inability of early notions of “distributive justice (Rawls 1971; Dworkin 1981) to adequately account for injustices based on experiences of social stigma, attributions of inferiority, cultural and social discrimination, historical domination and exclusion, and so on. The appearance, for example, of the “New Social Movements” (Buechler 1999; Edelman 2001; Pichardo 1997) and “multiculturalism” (Taylor 1994; Povinelli 2002) was partly a reaction to the failure of traditional class-based politics to address social injustices of these kinds. Still, struggles over the distribution of material resources have hardly disappeared, as material inequalities have only become exacerbated in recent decades. This has raised questions about the interrelationship between notions of recognitive and distributive justice, which, in contemporary social conflicts, appear to be intricately intertwined (e.g., Kirsch 2006).

²⁰ While Kraut does not use the term “ecology,” the range of examples that he draws upon—from flourishing humans, animals, and plants—is suggestive of such language.

The relationship between cognitive and distributive justice, then, has become the subject of long-standing debate (Fraser 1995; Fraser & Honneth 2003). Aristotle's discussion of distributive justice (1996, 2000) helps to specify its interrelationship with recognition, albeit indirectly. In his view, distributive justice concerns the distribution of goods *among equals*, and, in his historical context, among equals in a hierarchical and aristocratic society. The question of justice, therefore, hinges on who "counts" or is recognized within the circle of equals (cf. Stuurman 2004), or, as Taylor noted, the subject to whom (distributive) justice is due. This ethnography explores the contested boundaries of the circle itself, and the consequences that such contestation has for problems of justice. In this ethnography, I see problems of distributive injustice and material inequality as problems of failed social recognition that must be addressed through processes of historical reckoning and reconciliation.

If, following Taylor, what counts as a "person" has implications for accounts of justice, this ethnography is also about a broad reconfiguration of what has been called the "moral economy" (Thompson 1971; see also Edelman 2005, 2012; Randall and Charlesworth 2000; Scott 1976; Wolford 2005). While the food protests described by E.P. Thompson (1971) partly reinscribed traditional social hierarchies by appealing to a language of paternalist obligation and authority, the land rights movements that are the focus of this ethnography are challenge the sources of social authority that underlie traditional forms of moral economy. While some approaches to moral economy explore a stabilized "*sense of right and entitlement*" and a well-form "*sense of justified outrage and indignation*" (Scott 2000:188, my emphasis), this ethnography can be thought of as exploring reconfigurations in the sense of right and entitlement, as people make sense of "who" they are, what they are owed, and the historical nature of contemporary injustice and indignation. In other words, people in this context can be thought of as challenging the very terms of a received moral economy, as they refashion the notion of "persons" who can be participants into a "truly" moral economy that affords everyone their just due.

In a broad sense, then, this ethnography is about transforming accounts and categories of "personhood" (Butler 2005; Mauss 1985), and shifting semiotic ideologies of what counts as (and can be expected from) a "person." The notion of a "semiotic ideology" (see Keane 2007:16-21) gestures toward the dynamic and causal interplay among different symbolic forms, material things and practices; and social relations; all of which portend different kinds and possibilities of agency, human or otherwise. As Keane succinctly puts it, semiotic ideologies

“involve basic assumptions about what kinds of beings inhabit the world, what counts as a possible agent, and thus what are the preconditions for and consequences of moral action” (2008:20-21). Certain notions and expectations of “persons”—such as where they can appear or move in space, the kinds of bodies they have, or the kinds of actions that can be anticipated from them, as in speech, work, or claims to rights—can have profound effects upon the distribution of material resources like land or the distribution of political representation. In many respects, then, this ethnography explores people’s attempts to experiment with and intervene upon the “kinds” of social beings they have taken themselves to be, as they explore new agentive possibilities—capacities to speak, capacities to refuse, capacities to stake claims—that modify the conditions and possibilities for moral action and ethical life. Demanding political recognition, or offering signs and marks of a new kind of person, can have mutually transformative effects that, in turn, can hold profound implications for the distribution of various resources, whether social or material. Conversely and reciprocally, securing access to material goods like land and trees can, in the long run, affect one’s understanding of “who” and “what” one is as a social being—as was seen in the case of Lázaro. Broadly, then, this ethnography builds upon anthropological work that explores the interrelationships and interplay between different forms of goods, both material and social, and forms of social recognition (cf. Appadurai 1986; Keane 1997; Mauss 1990[1950]); Munn 1986). It attempts to explore the ways in which people’s relationships with the land and other material goods (such as the trees they plant) provide grounds for building affirmative forms of self-recognition (cf. Hallowell 1958; Ingold 2000; Leach 2003; Miller 2005), and enacting new relationships through which people build positive forms of community.

3. Organization of the Ethnography

This ethnography is organized into three broad parts. Part One explores regional history from the perspective of the posseiros who had taken to the region’s hills in late 19th and early 20th century, and then traces the loss of that world in a series of land grabs. Part Two explores different dimensions of “the good,” ranging from idioms through which people evaluate and understand social relationships, and the interrelationships between different kinds of material

goods and social goods, such as having a “name” or being able to make claims to land. Part Three of the ethnography resumes the historical narrative where Part One leaves off, and describes the emergence of different land rights movements in the region as part of an effort to escape plantation life and build new relationships. This part concludes by examining ongoing struggles against the reproduction of social hierarchies and inequalities.

3a. Part One: The Posseiros’ World

This part of the ethnography draws on oral histories in order to build an ethnographically driven account of the region’s history from the perspective of those who still inhabit it today. Chapter 1 explores one oral history that presents one version of the region’s broader historical arc. It begins with a description of the posseiros’ world, their forms of life. The narrative then quickly moves to the loss and theft of that world, and culminates with the emergence of land reform movements, in particular, the appearance of the MST as an important force for social contestation. This chapter then describes the emergence of other land rights movement in the region, and begins to set up the problem that will appear in Part Three, where we will see that the forms of social inequality and hierarchy reappear in unexpected ways, and become the object of ongoing social contestation. As will be seen, the point of contention among these different land rights movements will center on the figure of the legal land “document” (*documento*) or title.

Chapter 2 describes the region in some of its physical and social characteristics, and describes it as a historical “region of refuge” (Beltrán 1979; see also Scott 2009) for escaped or freed slaves, and other members of the rural poor, who had sought to make new worlds apart from the region’s plantations. What David Harvey (1990:258) called the “friction of distance,” and James C. Scott similarly called the “friction of terrain,” were central to these acts of escape into the hills and forests. The forest and the hills appear, in this chapter, as an active power that people appropriate into their effort to escape from exploitative relationships.

In Chapter 3, I attempt to reconstruct the posseiros’ world in more detail, drawing upon descriptions of the forms of social coordination, trust, exchange, and property that were part of their world, and which formed part of what might be called the posseiros’ “moral economy.”

This chapter explores inchoate and emerging notions of “equality” and “satisfaction” that, at least in retrospect, were taken to be important but lost dimensions of their world.

Chapters 4 and 5 describe the loss, and what many remember as being the theft, of the posseiros’ world. Chapter 4 describes a series of political economic transformations that occurred in the region, beginning with the construction of a new road through the hills, and culminating in the rapid expansion of rubber (and later new cacao) plantations into the region. This period of primitive accumulation involved a series of land grabs through which the posseiros were dispossessed. Part of the justification for their removal, suggested by their usurpers, was that few of the posseiros had land “documents” (*documents*) that legalized their landholdings. This chapter both begins and concludes with narratives about two people who were important historical actors in this process, and suggests that through their attempts to stake an asymmetrical claim to the world, they had undermined the grounds for their own social being. Chapter 5 attempts to capture different experiential dimensions of this process of theft by exploring different people’s narratives regarding this process.

3b. Part Two: Social Goods

This part of the ethnography takes a broad approach toward understanding various dimensions of the social good, which informs local notions of justice about the interrelationships between forms of social recognition and various material goods. I would like to suggest that the historical trajectory presented in part one raises questions about precisely the kind of subjects and persons to whom justice is owed. As will be seen, this leads to an emphasis on having a “name” and being able to stake claims to “property.”

Chapter 6 explores the relationships between different kinds of “goods” as a nested set of relationships. The chapter begins by exploring the relationships among different kinds of social goods—whether friends, family, or having a name—in maintaining social life. The chapter examines the notion of “God” as the recognition that any human life must be lived, in part, through relationships with something other than the “self.” The chapter continues by exploring an emerging notion of “limits,” which both separate the self from the other, but, crucially, bring them together by preventing both self and other from destroying one another. This chapter

concludes by exploring one case in which the limitations between self and other were violated and transgressed, and one person was reduced to a state of nothingness and “slavery.”

Chapter 7 begins by exploring the agonistic process of transforming the forest into a livable world. The chapter continues by exploring the personal relationship to the body and the experience of fatigue, in order to emphasize that the self is not reducible to a body, and that the ability to transform the world requires control over a physical body, which is not a mere given but something that must be cultivated and maintained. At this point, the chapter explores the idiom of “eating” as expressing an ineliminable condition of struggle. The chapter continues by exploring different instances of “eating” in a wide range of domains, in order to grasp various forms of suffering that may be the source of injustice. The chapter concludes by exploring the idea of greed and “miserliness” as a social stance that potentially destroys or consumes others at the same time that it can be self-destructive.

Chapter 8 looks at further dimensions of the moral economy, exploring the notions of genuine and instrumental generosity, and the idea of having a “name” as a good that offers people access to various kinds of social relationships and exchange. The chapter explores the way in which some names are “revealed,” and potentially undermined, through forms of conduct that affect social relationships. Having a good or bad “name” or reputation brings one together into relationships with others, or else cuts one off from sociality. Namehood connects to a notion of “friendship,” which, like a name, is not a fixed relationship but something that changes and is modified through conduct.

Chapter 9 looks at the property relationship, not just as a relationship to mere “things,” but as a relationship to trees that are recognized in social terms. Cultivating trees is, first off, understood as a means toward affirming ones standing in the world by establishing relationships with the world itself. These relationships ground generous action and foster other kinds of social relationships. People’s claims to property are not unilateral claims of “ownership” over some bit of the world, but are rather claims to a relationship with some stretch of the world that can, in turn, help mediate further relationships. The property relations, in this context, is neither “individualist” nor “collectivist,” but rather relational. By understanding the ways in which these property relationships are internally structured, we can make sense of what it means to transgress property relations in this context. This, in turn, will help to make sense of people’s

challenges to collectivist forms of property that appear in Part Three, which undermined people's abilities to cultivate relationships, both with their trees, and with other people.

3c. Part Three: Land Rights Movements

This part of the ethnography attempts to contextualize contemporary transformations in the region that led to the emergence of a wide range of land rights and land reform movements in the region. Chapter 10 describes the new plantations that had eventually emerged in the region over the course of the 1960s and 1970s, exploring the ways in which they were established and the working and living conditions that existed for women and men. The chapter looks at different forms of autonomy and dependency that workers experienced through different work regimes, and the sources of social recognition they experienced through their work. The chapter concludes by briefly examining one way through which people could challenge the plantation's claims to land, notably, by planting on the land itself.

Chapter 11 explores the broader collapse in social categories, and can be read in contrast to Chapter 3, where the posseiro past was remembered, in many cases, in idealized terms. This chapter explores a broad collapse of social categories, relationships, and distinctions, whether in terms of kinship, forms of exchange, or notions of respect. This collapse is taken by some people as an ambivalent process, but one clear upshot of these transformations is that many members of the rural underclass have found that traditional and problematic forms of social authority have been eroded. This collapse has brought some people to discover their capacity to use their voices and to demand social acknowledgement, which has further provoked further collapse and reconfigurations in social relationships. These discoveries are both symptomatic and programmatic of their increasing ability to stake claims for social standing and recognition in the world.

Chapter 12 traces the first emergence of land rights movements in the region. The chapter begins by tracing various contours of decline in the region's plantations, and early struggles in claims to land that began in the 1980s and continued into the 1990s. The narrative traces one man's initial attempt to claim an uncultivated stretch of forest as his own. He is eventually joined by other plantation workers from the region, and together, they established one

of the region's first land rights movements and communities. At length, through these various episodes, they discovered new capacities to act and to represent themselves in new ways. The chapter concludes by tracing further developments in the struggle for land, leading up to the moment just prior to the emergence of a number of other land rights organizations, including the MST.

Chapter 13 explores the conflicted appearance of the MST in the region. The chapter begins by exploring the reemergence of hierarchical relationships on a squatter settlement that eventually became affiliated with the MST, and these settlers' efforts to challenge that new hierarchy. The chapter attempts to understand this episode by exploring different dimensions and conditions that fostered the reappearance of new inequalities, whether hierarchical relationships instituted through coercion and fear, or institutionalized forms of collective labor and property that proved inadequate to people's sense of property and distributive justice. The figure of legal "documents," and the lack of control over them, reappears here as a condition that undermines people's efforts to achieve the good. This chapter explores ongoing efforts by settlers to transform the conditions of their lives, and transform the MST itself, as they engage in collective actions that foster mutual regard for one another. These struggles are understood as struggles over the nature of "community," a community that neither privileges the individual nor the collective, but rather people's relationships with one another and with their world.

The Conclusion ends with a brief exploration of what it means to "cultivate hope." It begins by considering evidence that few of the settlers on the MST settlements had named or baptized their farms, which is to suggest that their farms had not become full social "beings," at least not in the ways in which the "property" relation was explored in Chapter 9. Increasingly, some people are naming their farms, and this suggests that their farms are becoming alive to them, as an "other" that bears their hopes for creating a new world. Cultivating hope becomes, in a sense, an act of cultivating or contributing to the life of the other, an "other" that is apart from, but not wholly external to or separable from the self. Hope, in this context, is objectified in people's relationships with trees and other material aspects of the world, which, in turn, allow people to cultivate fulfilling relationships with one another.

PART ONE:
THE POSSEIROS' WORLD

CHAPTER 1:
NARRATING A WORLD

1. Walking Through the Past

When walking through the landscape with friends whose eyes have been properly educated, they may point out remnants of a lost world. A level stretch of ground carved into the hillside, an old jack fruit tree in the forest, a patch of *crotus* plants spread out upon the ground. These are very likely old house plots, old farm sites, places where old people lay. If you come upon a flat, rectangular plot carved into the hillside, you have very likely found the site of an old house. Looking closely, you may still find some remaining posts from the walls, perhaps shards of broken dishes, or even—if the house stood somewhat more recently—some broken clay roofing tiles. If you come upon such a house site, it is furthermore likely that you could find old fruit trees nearby—perhaps a large jackfruit tree, a small stand of palm trees, a *castanheira* tree, or maybe even some old cacao or clove trees. Conversely, if you came across a large jackfruit tree in the forest, it was very likely that you could find a house site nearby. House sites and trees are signs of one another. If you came across a small mass of *crotus* plants, furthermore, you might find a series of rectangular depressions in the ground, each varying in length. These were the graves of some of the last people who buried their dead near their homes, instead of at the cemetery in town.¹ These house sites, fruit trees, graves were all reciprocal signs of one another. They pointed to an old world, an abandoned world that has mostly been lost.

¹ “Crotus” plants refer to the plant genus *Croton*, which encompasses a wide variety of flowering plants, often used for ornamental purposes. In this region, some people recall that crotus plants were historically planted at grave sites

This was the world of those who are referred to as the *posseiros*. The *posseiros* were families who had taken to life as small farmers in the hills and forests around the region. These families were squatters on these lands until they were driven out by expanding cacao and rubber plantations in the mid-20th century. “Posseiro” is derived from the term *posse*, roughly translated as “possession,” and so *posseiros*, in this context, are people who possess land by virtue of their dwelling and living upon it.² This etymology is rarely, if ever, remarked upon, and it is the latter use—of being capable of coming into possessing—that holds importance in the story that follows. The world of the *posseiros* is lost, but memories of their world still find life in narratives and tales about them. The story in this ethnography begins with the *posseiros*, and it is a story that unfolds over several generations. It is not a story about “a” people but rather people, many of whom were directly impacted by the vestiges of slavery—through bonds of blood and kinship—and many others struggling with the vestiges of the vastly unequal world of which slavery was a part.

2. A Narrative for Today, from the Future Past

We begin—as always—with someone telling us a story.³ On February 7, 2009, I was with Damião and his neighbor, Murilo. We were sitting on the ground outside of Damião’s house, underneath the shade of a nearby tree. It was a Saturday morning, everyone had the day off, and the summer sun was heating up. Damião had begun to recount how the region was *de primeiro*—back “in the beginning.” Damião was born in 1951 in a municipality to the west of Ituberá. He migrated to the region with his family when he was eight years old, and lived through significant parts of the narrative. He had learned other parts of the narrative from elders, many of them old *posseiros* who, very likely, had shared their stories with him while sitting

belonging to the *posseiros*, those families who occupied the hills and forests of the region, described below. These plants are very hardy and, reportedly, they are even resistant to the herbicides that are widely used on the region’s plantations. Consequently, patches of *crotus* plants can both be found in areas where the forest regrew around old grave sites; I have personally observed old grave sites—still surrounded by *crotus* plants—on plantation lands even where chemical herbicides are frequently employed. The specific species of these plant, or range in local varieties, is unclear.

² For helpful comparative cases of *posseiros* living in other parts of Brazil, as well as useful conceptual and legal clarifications about the history of Brazilian property law, see Benatti 2008; Dean 1976; Garcia 2008; Grynszpan 2009; Heredia 2008; Motta 1996.

³ I take it that “narrativity” is an ontogenetic condition for all human beings.

under the shade of trees. Through moments of togetherness such as these, different narratives become bound together.

I had returned to Bahia only a few weeks prior, and after a couple years of absence, and this was the beginning my doctoral fieldwork. As Damião begins his narrative, I ask if I could record the conversation. Both he and Murilo agree, and so I grab my recorder. He invites us to imagine it together with him as he begins:

I—I lived here.⁴

He points to a spot on the rust-colored ground beneath us, making a map of an actual stretch of land.

I didn't have a document for this land. I didn't even have a personal identification card—I didn't even have my own document. I didn't have an identification card, no selective service card, no social security number. I was a—a 'Joe Nobody' ('*Zé Ninguém*'), you see? Because in the old days, that's how things worked.⁵

That personal identity and possession of land or other property were not objectified in bureaucratic forms of documentation is crucial in this narrative. Damião emphasizes these facts because the lack of documents facilitated the theft of the *posseiros*' lands.⁶ At this point, the wealthy Brazilian businessman Norberto Odebrecht enters the narrative and takes advantage of the *posseiros*:

And so then along comes a business man like Odebrecht. He shows up here, discovers this whole world of land—just like he actually did find.⁷

⁴ "Eu—eu morava aqui."

⁵ "Eu não tinha documento dessa terra. Então num tinha registro—eu mermo não tinha documento, eu não teho carteira de identidade, não teho reservista, não tem CPF. É um—"Zé Ninguém." Ta entendeno? Que de primeiro, funcionava assim."

⁶ See Chapters 4 and 5.

⁷ "Veio um empresário que nem Odebrecht chega aqui, descobre esse mundo de terra—como ele descobriu esse mundo de terra aqui."

Here a historical narrative merges with an assertion of historical fact and truth. Like many other discoverers—whose “discoveries” were ironically anything but that—Odebrecht “discovered” a wide stretch of unoccupied land that was already occupied by other people—people who had a harder time being recognized in the historical record. In the late 1940s and 1950s, Odebrecht (and others) began assimilating this world of forest and land, first exploiting it for timber, then selling the timber-barren lands to various national and international corporations interested, especially, in developing plantation rubber. These acts of appropriation were guided by various activities that brought this apparently “vacant” land—what was called *terra devoluta*—into deeper relation with the state government. Two activities basic to that process were “measuring” the land and “clearing” the forest:

And he went out measuring. He put together some engineers, cutting pathways and measuring, cutting pathways and measuring.⁸

The land was not unoccupied, but the posseiros’ occupation was unrecognizable to the state—or, rather, simply ignored. And so began the loss of one world at the cost of another’s emergence—a story that will be developed in the next chapter. For now, however, let us continue on with the narrative. Damião draws me and Murilo further into the story:

And you’re there in the middle of all that. Me and you, we’re neighbors. You’re the same thing (*mesma coisa*) as me. Jon’s the same thing—he’s here, a neighbor—like this, at a distance of 6 kilometers—or 3 or 4 kilometers—5 kilometers between us. All of us are neighbors. Let’s say:

“Here—from here to there is Jon’s [land]. Here to there is Murilo’s. And from here to there is mine.”⁹

⁸ “Aí saiu midino. Mete os engenheiros, abrimo rumo e midino, cortano rumo e midino.”

⁹ “Tu ta aqui puru meio. Eu e tu é vizinho. Tu é a merma coisa de mim. Jon é a merma coisa. Ta qui vizinho, assim, distancia de 6 km—é 3, 4 km—5 km de um pa outro—vizinho pa outro. Vamo dizer:// ‘Aqui—daqui pra ca é de Jon. Daqui pra ca é de Murilo. E daqui pra ca era meu.’”

Damião points to various positions on the imaginary stretch of rust-colored land, mapping out the sites of our respective landholdings. Murilo and I are drawn further into the narrative as participants. The narrative posits a basic kind of equality among the three of us and the possibility of coordinated action that is presented in a structure of mutually attending to one another, whether through reciprocal visits or in work parties:¹⁰

Two posseiros. I would go to your house, you went to mine, and we held a work party.¹¹

Our life in Damião's narrative was humble, and it held to a basic pattern:

Just raising pigs—that's the only thing people did: raise pigs, plant manioc, eat game.¹²

Small amounts of cash crop production—manioc flour (*farinha*), oranges, house crafts—were sold for money that was used to purchase consumables that we couldn't provide for ourselves:

I went to town to buy a change of clothes, buy ammunition for my shotgun to shoot at animals—and that was it. I didn't concern myself with radios or television. Not with anything—not with documents—not with anything. So, I lived like an indian, like an animal there in the woods.¹³

Eventually, I ask him how people reckoned property relationships and how they differentiated which stretches of land belonged to one person or another. Damião explained that it was different features of the natural landscape, such as trees or mountains that were used to indicate the general boundaries. Damião pointed his finger to demonstrate, and acted like he was pointing out a boundary to another person:

¹⁰ The term *adjunte* (“work party”) that appears in the next sentence refers to a kind of work party hosted by families with small landholdings, in which one family calls others to help with a significant work task. This usually involves ample drinking, food, and celebration in the evening, and is distinct from an *ademão*, which refers to a smaller, informal work group held between just a few individuals who periodically trade labor. See Chapter 3, Section 5.

¹¹ “Dois posseiros. Eu ia, ia na tua casa, tu ia na minha e fazia um—fazia um adjunte.”

¹² “Só criano porco—e o povo só fazia isso—criar porco, plantar mandioca e comer caça.”

¹³ “Eu ia na cidade comprar um—uma roupinha, comprar munição pa espingarda pa atirar em bicho e—e só. Num importava com radio, nem televisão, nem com nada—nem com documento—nem com nada. Então, vivia como índio, um bicho lá no mato.”

“Here—there’s a big tree here. This here is mine. There—there on that hill is mine.”

We pointed like this, with our finger—let’s say—“from here”—we pointed over there to that tree there.¹⁴

This was how the world was reckoned and divided, through joint attention guided, in part, by a pointing finger and some declarations. Damião’s cell phone rings and the conversation stops for a moment.

Damião speaks authoritatively on these matters, and he invites us to take up a first-person perspective as he recounts these stories. This was the world that he saw slip away as he grew up in the region, and the world as it had been conveyed to him by those posseiro elders with whom he had become friends. By drawing Murilo and I into the story, he is presenting a historically available perspective, and giving particularity and concreteness to what is a generalized story of loss—and the ongoing struggle for renewal.

2a. The Loss of the Land

Loss began here:

Well, this is what happened: Odebrecht saw all this [land] here, and tore it all apart.¹⁵

After Odebrecht had measured all of the land, kicked out the posseiros, opened up the forests and harvested the valuable timber, he sold the land to national and international businesses aiming to invest in plantation agriculture in the region. Odebrecht’s activity spanned from the late 1940s and culminated in the 1970s, when this new plantation economy finally overtook the hills.¹⁶

Several significant moments marked this transformation, one of which was Firestone’s arrival in

¹⁴ “‘Aqui—tem uma árvore grande aqui. Aqui é meu. Daqui, daqui lá naquela serra é meu!’//Pontava assim de dedo—vamo dizer—‘daqui’—pontava la pa quele pé de pau lá.”

¹⁵ “‘Aí é o seguinte: Odebrecht via esse negócio aí, picava a porra.’”

¹⁶ See Chapters 4 and 5.

the region, the first to plant rubber, and a land colonization settlement initiated by the Brazilian federal government, today referred to as the *Colônia*, or the “Colony.” All of these processes, through various actions and intermediaries, resulted in most of the *posseiros* being pushed out of the hills.

Unlike the large plantations that resulted from this process—each measuring several hundred, and some several thousand hectares in size—the *Colônia* was part of an early effort in Brazil to bring about democratic distribution of land through processes similar to homesteading. The project was carried out by a federal organization called the “National Institute of Immigration and Colonization” (INIC),¹⁷ which, after several iterations, would later be transformed into the federal organization now known as the “National Institute of Colonization and Agrarian Reform” (INCRA).¹⁸ Damião explained how the *Colônia* was organized:

INCRA measured 25 hectares of land for each family there at the *Colônia*. And today, nobody can take it. There, [land passes] from son to grandson, from grandson to son. (It’s like the way we live now—you understand?) INCRA measured the land there—because the land belonged to the government—and then gave the lands there to the—to the *posseiros* and others who didn’t have land at the time.¹⁹

The *Colônia* was the first land reform project in the region, and it is possible that some of the former *posseiros*, who had lost their land to Odebrecht, had resettled there. When he says that the *Colônia* is “like the way we live now,” Damião is referring to a more recent settlement where his family acquired a small bit of land, when his and a dozen other families—all former plantation workers—began squatting and cultivating the lands of an old abandoned plantation called *Nossa Senhora*. In this sense, at least in certain respects, Damião understands himself as a sort of descendant of the *Colônia*. Today, Damião explained, it was becoming easier for poor rural families to acquire land:

¹⁷ *Instituto Nacional de Imigração e Colonização*.

¹⁸ *Instituto Nacional de Colonização e Reforma Agrária*.

¹⁹ “O INCRA mediu 25 hectares de terra pa cada um povo da *Colônia* ali. E hoje ali ninguém toma—é de fi pa neto, de neto pa fi, ali. É como agente ta aí agora—ta entendeno? O INCRA mediu ali, que era terra do governo aí deu aquelas terra ali pu, pu, os *posseiro* e quem não tinha terra na época.”

Today the system has changed. What is the system now? There—there, you see—there at Nossa Senhora, it belonged to just one owner. Today, how many owners are there?²⁰

Murilo answers:

[Murilo]: There's a bunch!

[Damião]: That's what the government wants. For example, I have a document that I go to pay to INCRA—I pay INCRA. Colodino has one. I have a social security number. I have an identity card and I'm recognized in Brazil—because I'm a person. So, I pay my taxes. Today, the government knows that I'm recognized—it knows that I am recognized.

So, today, when an “Odebrecht” wants to get his claws on someone's land—like our land there—he can't do that anymore. Because I pay my taxes every year. I have a document! I exist! And the people in the old days, Murilo, they didn't exist!²¹

The people that did not “exist,” in Damião's narrative, were the posseiros. The posseiros in this region were very likely—and predominantly—descendants of freed and escaped slaves, who had likely intermarried with people of indigenous heritage, and probably also some migrants of European (Portuguese, Dutch, Irish, Italian, German) heritage. Damião often identifies himself as *moreno* (literally, “brown”), variously describing his father as both *moreno* and *branco* (“white”), and he often noted that his mother was *índia* (“indian”) with long, straight black hair. As Damião had known many of the old posseiros in his youth, when he says that the posseiro did not “exist,” he means to say that they did not exist for the state and the law. It was for this reason that the posseiros lost their land to Odebrecht:

²⁰ “Hoje mudou o sistema. Qual o sistema? Ali—ali ó—na Guadalupe era de um dono só. Hoje tem quantos dono?”

²¹ “M: ‘Tem um bocado!’//D: ‘O governo quer isso. Por exemplo, eu tenho um documento que eu fui pagar o INCRA—eu pago o INCRA. Colodino tem. Eu tenho CPF. Tenho identidade e sou reconhecido no Brasil que eu sou gente. Então, pago meus imposto. Então, o governo sabe que eu sou reconhecido. Sabe que eu sou reconhecido.//Então, quando um ‘Odebrecht’ hoje, quer meter as garra nim um terreno como o da gente aí, ele num pode mais. Porque eu pago imposto todo ano. EU TENHO DOCUMENTO. EU IXISTO! E o povo de antigamente não ixistia Murilo.’”

They didn't exist—like they were animals. If somebody traveled from the hills to go file a complaint against Odebrecht in town—how could they file a complaint? If they didn't exist—they didn't even have a document?²²

Saying that they “didn't even have a document,” Damião means that beyond legal land titles, they also did not have personal documents, such as social security cards, identification cards, or work cards. Without these basic legal documents, they were simply non-entities to the state bureaucracy. Consequently, Odebrecht merely had to declare:

“No, this there—all that there is mine.”

Odebrecht got a lawyer in there who said: “All that there belongs to Odebrecht—Odebrecht bought it—ALL OF IT!”

And then the old *posseiro* there—he suddenly finds himself living on Odebrecht's land. He hadn't paid any taxes—the government didn't even know him—it didn't recognize him. The court judges didn't recognize these people, so they kicked them out.²³

Damião's family had migrated to the region from westernmost fringes of the cacao lands, near where cacao gave way to Bahia's semi-arid *sertão* region. Damião's parents had lost their land to a public auction (*leilão*) after a bank foreclosed upon them, and they became landless. He grew up in town, where he likely became familiar with *posseiro* families that had lost their land and moved into town. When he became old enough to begin work on the burgeoning plantations in the 1960s, there he met and became friends with other *posseiro* families that had not yet left their land—and others who, by then, may have already turned to plantation work themselves. The adult *posseiros*—the “old timers” (*os velhos* or *os antigos*)—he counted as being among his elders, and the younger *posseiro* generations he counted as among his friends.

²² “Não iexistia, como fosse um bicho. Quando chegava lá o cara saia daqui da roça pa cidade, ia dar queixa de Odebrecht. Como é que dar queixa? Que ele não iexistia, nem documento tinha?”

²³ “‘Não, isso, aquilo ali é meu.’//Odebrecht botava advogado: ‘Aquilo ali é de Odebrecht, Odebrecht comprou—TUDO!’//E ele ta—ta dentro da área de Odebrecht. Ele não paga imposto—o governo nem conhecer ele não conhece. A justiça não conhece esse povo, aí expulsava.”

Although the various families that came to the region had come at different times, and had immensely varied stories and heritages, their narratives intersected and came to follow the same pathways over the decades.

Damião recalled one posseiro family that he had come to know particularly well after they had lost their land to Odebrecht. Seu Pedrinho, who was 21 years older than Damião, was the son of an old posseiro named Seu Ermilino, and their family had lost their land to Odebrecht. Turning away from the dirt map in front of us, and pointing toward the hills across the valley, Damião explained:

Seu Pedrinho's people there—Seu Pedrinho lost all of this here to Odebrecht—Seu Pedrinho's parents. They lost this here to Odebrecht—all of that there, all of that forest there—see!²⁴

He pointed to the plantations and the hills surrounding us (as seen in Figure 1 below), and explained:

Half of that—it belonged to Seu Pedrinho's father. I knew him. Seu ERMILINO. I knew him. I'd met him—he was very old, but I knew him. You see? All of this here belonged to Seu Pedrinho's father. All this here. But Seu Pedrinho's father didn't have a document for this land—he didn't have shit—and he lost it to Odebrecht.²⁵

²⁴ “O lado de Seu Pedrinho mermo—Pedrinho perdeu isso aqui pa Odebrecht—Os pais de Pedrinho. Perdeu isso aqui pa Odebrecht—aquilo tudo lá, aquela mata todinha lá—ó!”

²⁵ “A metade era—era do pai de Seu Pedrinho. Eu conheci ele. Seu ERMILINO. Eu conheci, cheguei conhecer. Bem veín, mas eu conheci. Ta entendeno? Isso aqui tudo era do pai de Seu Pedrinho, isso aqui. O pai de Seu Pedrinho não tinha documento—não tinha porra de nada—perdeu pa Odebrecht.”

Figure 1: The Hills



As a result of this set of historical experiences, Damião concluded, people had learned the lesson and the same theft of land would never happen again:

But today, no. Things have changed. Now Odebrecht can't take land from anybody—because nobody's stupid anymore. Now, everybody's got a social security card—they have an identification card and pay their taxes.²⁶

This theme of possessing and controlling “documents” as a means of securing ownership and self-ownership will recur throughout this ethnography. Murilo was 41 years old—18 years younger than Damião—and had only migrated to Ituberá some 11 years earlier from another municipality in the west. Damião was recounting the entire historical narrative of the region to us both. Murilo was surprised by some of the details, and had been under the impression that before Odebrecht established his plantation in the region there was only forest. He asked:

[Murilo]: That [plantation] he bought there...it was just forest—?

²⁶ “Então, hoje não. Mudou o isquema. Hoje, Odebrecht não pode tomar a terra de ninguém, que ninguém é mais besta. Hoje, todo mundo tem um CPF, tem uma identidade e paga os imposto.”

[Damião]: No—there were some people living there, man! Here in Brazil, Murilo, there were people living in every corner of the world! It was like this—listen up. It started like this, Murilo.

You—me—me—pardon me for saying this, but you—the truth is this:²⁷

Damião pauses here because Murilo is identified in the local community as being *nego* (“negro,” short for the Portuguese term *negro*) and as being particularly *preto* (“black”) with strong African ancestry. In many contexts, to refer to someone as *nego* or *preto* might be taken as negative value judgment, but before entering into the next part of the narrative where he will mention the African slave trade, Damião explicitly seeks to avoid any negative implication:

[Damião]: The Portuguese brought the *negos* from Africa to work here—say, for the owners of the sugar mills, or coffee [plantation].²⁸

Murilo laughs and exclaims:

[Murilo]: To work handcuffed!

[Damião]: Right—they were taken to the place where they sell—where the *negos* were sold, in the market at São Joaquim. They were sold just like bunches of *maxixe*,²⁹ just like bunches of crabs.³⁰

Damião realizes that in talking about Murilo’s African ancestors—especially given the way in which racial questions have become politicized in Brazil—he might be introducing a rift in the

²⁷ “M: ‘Aquele [fazenda] ali ele compou...só foi mata?’//D: ‘Não—tinha algum morador ali rapaz! Tinha, todo canto do mundo, aqui no Brasil Murilo. Era assim—escute só. Começou assim Murilo. Tu—eu—eu—desculpe eu dizer isso, mas voce—a, a verdade é essa.’”

²⁸ “Os português trazia os nego da África pa trabalhar aqui—como pus dono de engenho de açúcar, café.”

²⁹ *Maxixe* (*Cucumis anguria*) is a vegetable that is often sold in bunches, variously referred to in English, such as “bur cucumber,” “gooseberry gourd,” “maroon cucumber,” “West Indian gourd,” among other terms.

³⁰ “M: ‘Trabalhar amarrado!’//D: ‘Era—vinha o lugar de vender os—os nego era na feira de São Joaquim. Vendia igual a maxixe empencado, igual a caranguejo.’”

shared narrative he is attempting to build, and so he does further work to bridge any potential rift:

[Damião]: I'm not trying to talk bad about you—

[Murilo]: No—I know! I get what you're saying!

[Damião]: —nor about me either, because I'm—I—I'm the same thing as you.³¹

Murilo agrees, and then Damião advances the story:

[Damião]: Well—they were sold in bunches, just like a—a bunch of *maxixe* in the marketplace. Then, you had to work for the rest of your life. Some guy would go there and buy you—you'd work for the rest of your life there as—as a slave. There all you had was some food—a little bit of clothing to wear, and that was all, and—

[Murilo]: —just working—

[Damião]: —just working day in, day out. You had to work—if you were a well-behaved negro, things might've been a bit better. But if you weren't—

[Murilo]: —it was over—

[Damião]: —strapped to the tree trunk. You were beaten—killed just like any animal. That's how it was. There were no documents—there weren't any documents for blacks.³²

³¹ “D: Não é desfazendo de voce—’//M: ‘Não, eu sei! Eu to entendeno!’//D: ‘—nem de mim, porque eu sou—eu—eu sou a mesma coisa de voce.’”

³² “D: ‘Então—vendia empencado igual um, um, um maxixe na feira. Aí, voce trabalhava pro resto da vida. Um cara ia lá e lhe comprava—voce trabalhava o resto da vida ali como—como escravo. Ali voce só tinha comida—uma roupinha pa vestir e, e somente e—’//M: ‘Só trabaiair.’//D: ‘—trabalhar de sol a sol. Tinha que trabalhar—ou

The narrative is interrupted again at this point. A young man, who works at one of the plantations just across the way, comes to ask Damião if he has any pain medicine. The young man had injured his finger while working. Damião instructs him to go inside his house, where he could find some medicine in a drawer.

The direction that Damião was seeking to take the narrative, before he was interrupted, was to explain that because of the suffering that the slaves had faced on the plantations, many of them had escaped into the forests and the hills. After slavery was abolished, many of the freed slaves had also made their way to the forests of the region that surrounded them. Therefore, when Odebrecht had taken the land in this region, it was not “empty,” uninhabited forest. There were people living there, many of whom were directly descended from escaped and freed slaves. These families, including Seu Pedrinho’s, had lost these lands when Odebrecht took control of the region and a new plantation economy expanded into the forest. Damião’s own family, and other families from other parts of the region, had likewise lost their land by other means—whether through outright foreclosures, expulsions, or other forms of dispossession—and these families had migrated to Ituberá when plantations began expanding in the region in the 1950s. It was through people’s encounters in town, and on and around the plantations, that their various narratives came together into a joint narrative, which, at length, advanced into a new phase.

Damião concluded this part of the narrative in the following terms:

[Damião]: So that is the history, Murilo. Sometimes we think—we think it’s [not] true—but this is the story. Whoever doesn’t have a document doesn’t exist in the world!

[Murilo]: No, they really don’t exist.

se fosse um nego bom tinha mais regaliazinha, se não fosse—’//M: ‘Já foi.’//D: ‘—entrava no tronco. Caia na porrada—matava igual um bicho. Era assim. Não tinha documento—num ixtia documento pa preto!’”

[Damião]: They're an animal—an animal. If you don't have a registration [card]—you're unrecognized, you see?³³

2b. Upheaval and the Reversal of Fate

Up to this point, Damião had sought to narrate the historical condition of the hills and the plantations that surrounded us, as we three sat upon the ground, underneath a tree. Damião drew on these various props as he narrated—the dirt map he scribbled on the ground, the plantation groves beside us, and the distant hills where Seu Pedrinho's parents had lived. In this way, he brought the history that was all around us to life. The story drew us together, people from very different backgrounds and with very different histories, developing a joint perspective on the world through narrative and conversation.

Damião's purpose, however, was not merely to narrate a dead past, but to draw on that past to give all of us insight into the present and into the future, and to reveal how the heavy burden of the past was being gradually released. Damião continued in his narrative:

Now, the tides have turned against the rich. The rich owe the government. Ângelo Calmon de Sá—you saw how they took ten of his plantations. You know they took ten of his plantations, right?³⁴

Damião was talking about recent land reform initiatives—aiming to redistribute the land to the rural poor—and the various land rights movements that had emerged in Brazil in the 1980s. Ângelo Calmon de Sá, a former Brazilian banker and one of the richest people in the country, owned a large number of plantations in the cacao lands, and these had been taken over by one of Brazil's most powerful and well-known social movements: the Landless Rural Workers' Movement, or the MST.³⁵

³³ “D: ‘Então a história é essa Murilo. As vez a gente pensa—pensa que é a verdade—a história é essa. Quem não tem documento num ixiste no mundo!’//M: ‘É não ixiste mermo não.’//D: ‘É um bicho—é um animal. Não tem registro, é desconhecido, entendeu?’”

³⁴ “D: ‘Hoje, o bambu gemeu em cima do rico. O rico deve ao governo. Ângelo Calmon de Sá—como tomaram 10 fazenda dele. Ce sabe que tomaram 10 fazenda dele, né?’”

³⁵ *Movimento dos Trabalhadores Rurais Sem Terra*.

Colloquially referred to as the *Sem Terra* (“Landless”),³⁶ the MST arrived in this part of the cacao lands around 1997. Earlier in that decade, toward the beginning of the 1990s, a fungal disease called ‘witches’ broom’ (*Crinipellis pernicioso*) was introduced from its Amazonian home into the cacao lands that stretched all along the southern coast of Bahia, Brazil.³⁷ This region was once home to one of the most successful attempts in the Americas to cultivate cacao on a large scale. When the disease entered the region, Bahia’s cacao latifundia faced an agricultural epidemic that would eventually devastate the region’s cacao economy. Around the same time, at the end of the 1980s, the Brazilian federal government ended price supports for natural rubber, which had been introduced into this region of the cacao zone in the 1950s. This confluence of events broke the back (albeit temporarily) of the latifundia in the cacao lands. Many of the large plantations fell into rapid decline and bankruptcy, and this included several of the plantations described in this ethnography. Many plantation workers were laid off and some of the plantation lands began a return to fallow.

This collapse was followed by the proliferation of diverse land reform organizations throughout the region. These organizations ranged from (1) squatter groups, formed by groups of local workers who had become friends on the plantations, and who joined together and began to occupy and cultivate abandoned plantation lands. Other groups included (2) independent legal associations, also formed of former plantation workers, which sought to directly negotiate with land owners to directly purchase plantation lands. Finally, (3) the MST was an important player in the region, whose arrival was both symptomatic of this larger transformation, but also exemplary of it in many ways.³⁸ The MST, Damião explained, had taken over 10 cacao plantations in the wider cacao lands that were owned by Ângelo Calmon de Sá:

The Sem Terra took ten of his plantations—he lost ten plantations to the Sem Terra because he owed a lot [of unpaid taxes] to the government.³⁹

³⁶ Throughout this ethnography, if I refer to the “Landless” with a capital “L,” I am referring to the MST. When I refer to the “landless” population with a lower-case “l,” I am referring to people who do not own any land.

³⁷ For an account of the highly charged political circumstances under which witches’ broom may have been introduced into the cacao zone, see Caldas and Perz (2013).

³⁸ See Chapters 12 and 13 for extensive discussion of these land reform communities.

³⁹ “O Sem-Terra tomou 10 fazenda dele—ele perdeu 10 fazenda pu Sem-Terra, porque devia muito o governo.”

Damião gave other examples of local plantations that were taken over by the MST because of unpaid taxes, as further indications that the tides were turning against the rich. Damião was among the squatters who had taken over the plantation at Nossa Senhora, but he explained that their broader political clout was limited. The MST, he explained, played an important role given the immense pressure that the organization was able to exert on the government. Although the MST was not the sole actor, its role in advancing the cause of land reform in Brazil was highly significant. In the past, Damião explained, the government would have never taken property from the rich. The emergence of the MST in Brazil, and their arrival in the region, helped to change the situation:

But then the MST came into existence. This MST is a strong movement because the people unite and go there—and fight tooth and nail and—they’re not afraid to die—like it was a war. They invade—take over [the plantation] and there are gunfights. They might encounter the Devil, but they’re there—life or for death—like it’s a war. Because when they go to invade some land—when they go invade a plantation—it’s for life or death. So, that’s what the MST is.⁴⁰

The MST was so audacious, he explained, that they had even invaded the plantation owned by the former Brazilian president, Fernando Henrique Cardoso, who was in office from the mid 1990s through the early 2000s. Damião explained that—at least in earlier periods—the MST operated in this militaristic fashion because its leaders view the federal government as unresponsive and as never making good on its promises to bring about land reform. According to Damião, to be heard at all, the MST had to be combative. Damião was reveling in the story, and turned to Murilo to explain what the MST had done to the former president’s plantation:

[Damião]: So you see, the Sem Terra even invaded Fernando Henrique’s plantation—didn’t you know that—?

⁴⁰ “Mas existiu esse. Esse o MST que é um movimento forte tem que o povo se une mermo e vai lá—e com garra e briga e se—não tem medo de morrer—como se fosse uma guerra. Invadiu—toma conta e tem tiroteio. Pode ter a peste eles tão lá—vai pa vida ou morte—como fosse uma guerra. Que quando vai invadir uma terra—quando vai invadir um, uma fazenda—é pra vida ou morte. Então, é, o Movimento Sem Terra é assim.”

[Murilo]: —where was this?

[Damião]: There over in São Paulo! Hot damn! They drank good whiskey! Wine!
All—all of Fernando Henrique’s FANCY foods! They ate EVERYTHING!
OH! Oh boy!

Didn’t you know about that, Murilo? It was on television—those guys
messing around, drinking whiskey—drinking good wine—EXPENSIVE!
IMPORTED—everything. They didn’t keep his plantation, but they invaded
it—it was the government!

For you to understand, the Sem Terra are so tough that they invaded the
government’s plantation—and he was president at that time!

[Murilo]: The Sem Terra really are bold!⁴¹

Damião explained that part of the Sem Terra’s purpose was to create an image of strength:

[Damião]: Murilo, it’s so that they can reflect the image that they are strong, you
see?⁴²

Damião turns to another plantation worker named João, who had just showed up to join the
ongoing conversation:

[Damião]: João, do you remember—the time when the Sem Terra invaded Fernando
Henrique’s plantation?

⁴¹ “D: ‘Ce ver que até a fazenda de Fernando Henrique, o Sem-Terra invadiu, num sabe disso não?’//M: ‘Onde é isso?’//D: ‘Lá pu lado de—de São Paulo! Oxe! Beberam whiskey bom! Vinho! É, é, é as comida boa de Fernando Henrique—da mansão de Fernando Henrique. TUDO eles comeu! AH, mas minino!//Tu num sabia disso não, Murilo? Passou na televisão—ái os cara desceno enrolano, os cara bebeno whiskey, bebeno vinho bom—CARO, IMPORTADO—tudo. Num ficaram na fazenda, mas invadiram a fazenda dele, do governo!//Pa voce ver que o Sem-Terra é tão forte que invadiu a fazenda do governo e ele era presidente na época.’//D: ‘Sem Terra é ózado mermo!’”

⁴² “D: ‘É pa poder sair a—o reflaque, Murilo, que eles são forte, entendeu?’”

[João]: I remember.

[Damião]: They drank—all of Fernando Henrique’s drinks—all the fine foods—
EVERYTHING!⁴³

João laughs.

[Murilo]: But he was still president then?

[Damião]: He was president—ha! The Sem Terra are [not] a joke—you’re thinking
the Sem Terra are weak, huh?⁴⁴

This imagery of rural workers seizing upon and consuming the wine and food that belonged to the President of the Republic was riveting to people like Damião and Murilo. For Damião, the MST was exemplary of the potential social power that could be exercised by the members Brazil’s rural underclass.

Indeed, the MST is one of the largest and among the most historically important social movements of its kind in Brazil, and it has played a vital role in forging political spaces in which debate could occur about the legitimacy of land reform, land occupations, and other forms of direct action within Brazil and beyond. However, as the MST is a large and complex social movement, it is also a site of internal struggle and contestation; and despite attempts to present a publicly coherent ideology, the MST cannot be understood as a singular or monolithic social entity. Indeed, Damião is ambivalent about the MST, and he is not alone among members of the region’s rural poor. Many people in the region who are actively involved in, or potential beneficiaries to, land rights struggles are critical of inequalities and hierarchies that they have seen reproduced on MST settlements in the region. They attribute the reproduction of these conditions to the lack of access to legal “documents” (*documentos*) for their land—a central

⁴³ “D: ‘João, se lembra da—da vez que, que o Sem-Terra invadiu a fazenda de Fernando Henrique?’//B: ‘Eu me lembro.’//D: ‘Beberam a—as bebida de—de Fernando Henrique, as comida boa—tudo!’”

⁴⁴ “M: ‘Mas ele era presidente ainda?’//D: ‘Era presidente—ah! Sem-Terra ta é brincadeira—ta pensando que Sem-Terra é, é fraco, é?’”

figure that appears throughout Damião's narrative above—and settlers' dependence upon MST leaders who mediate access to land and other government resources.⁴⁵ Because this ethnography is partly about the struggle for freedom and emancipation—a struggle that occurs and recurs at different historical moments and across a wide range of relationships—it should not be surprising that struggles for emancipation occur within struggles for emancipation. I explore struggles internal to the region's MST settlements at length in Chapter 13, but in order to understand these struggles, we must first understand people's historical experiences and understandings of “the good.” This will be the task of Part One and Part Two of this ethnography, respectively, before turning to ongoing land rights struggles in Part Three.

3. Narrative Directions

Five days after I recorded Damião's narrative, Damião and I were sitting with Seu Pedrinho in his living room on February 12, 2009. Seu Pedrinho was 79 years old by then, and still in good health. After some initial introduction and about an hour of initial conversation, Damião eventually left me with Seu Pedrinho so that he could attend to some business in town. I remained with Seu Pedrinho for over three hours talking, and recorded various stories that he shared from his own and others' lives. In many respects, the entire course of my ethnographic research—and the purpose of this ethnography—represents an attempt to flesh out the brief 14-minute interview that I had recorded with Damião and Murilo.

I had known Damião since 2002—only five years after he and his companions had begun to occupy the plantation at Nossa Senhora—and I had been broadly interested in different agricultural and land use questions, as well as the land reform movements that had emerged only a few years before I first visited the region. I had always heard stories about the posseiros. I knew they had lost their land, but I did not know much about who they were. I knew disparate other things about the region's history, bits and pieces about the plantations and plantation life,

⁴⁵ In the introduction, I referred to the configurations of such relationships as “patron-client analogues.” I develop this further in Chapter 13.

and the different land reform communities and organizations that emerged in the region in the 1990s.

Damião's narrative presented a broad historical framework, drawing together multiple generations of people from various regions and backgrounds, that helped me to make sense of the important transformations that were occurring in the region, and it allowed me to see the real historical depth of these transformations in a new way. The narrative hinted at many of the themes that will be important throughout this ethnography—themes of subordination, hope, documents, friendship, eating, transgression, renewal, and many others. Damião's words had seized my attention and they had taken me in, just as Damião, in his earlier years, had been drawn into this narrative himself. Over the course of the next two years, following the various threads of this narrative wherever and to whomever they would take me, I visited many other people's farms, homes, and living rooms throughout the countryside and in town. This ethnography is a result of these efforts, and has grown out of Damião's, Seu Pedrinho's, and many, many other people's stories.

CHAPTER 2:
FOREST & HILLS

1. The First Approach

São Jorge dos Ilheos: Jan. 15, 1860 . . .

When these hamlets disappeared from view, a long, green, uninhabited expanse of boundless forest succeeded. As on the ocean the gleam of a distant sail awakes in the mind of the sailor a longing desire to reach the spot where his unknown fellow-men are living and moving; so is it also with the white columns of smoke rising high to heaven from the green sea of forest, and telling the traveler how yonder, among the distant leafy willows, some fellow-man is leading a self-sufficing existence, and, unknown, is fighting the battle of life. The gaze of the passer-by lingers enquiringly on these signs of lonely existence; and not without melancholy does wild imagination paint the life of those who, far from the world, separated from all whom they love, thus seek an asylum in the impenetrable forest, from motives indefinable.

Fazenda do Vittoria: Jan. 16, 1860 . . .

Here the mass of vegetation rises on all sides of the spectator in endless variety, and meets high over his head in a thick shady roof, from which depend lianas and creepers of every kind. The eye cannot discern whence each plant springs, or where it terminates. Around the roots of the trees is an immense growth of these creepers; when the crowns begin to spread, there is again a fresh world of these plants thickly intertwined; and the brilliant sun can scarcely penetrate through the rich verdure of these vaulted roofs, and only sheds a dim mysterious light into the halls below, in which the atmosphere is ever cool.

This chapter is concerned with the forests and the hills as figures in regional historiography and as active powers in the social world. The first description is of the forested hills along the Bahian coast as viewed from a ship travelling south from Salvador to Ilhéus. The second is of the forest surrounding a cacao plantation not far inland from Ilhéus. Both are excerpted from Ferdinand Maximilian Joseph's *Recollections of My Life* (1868:297-298, 300, respectively). The fantastic descriptions of Bahia that are recorded in the third volume of these *Recollections* detail Maximilian's romantic desire to directly encounter primeval "Virgin Forest" (*Mato Virgem*) during his voyage to Brazil between 1859 and 1860. They were written several years before he was declared Emperor of Mexico in 1864, and published less than one year after he was subsequently executed by Mexican republican forces in 1867.

Shortly after arriving in Salvador on the Bay of All Saints,¹ Maximilian's expedition soon followed the coast south on their way to the city of Ilhéus, what was then called *São Jorge dos Ilheos*, the center of cacao production along Bahia's southern coast. The intervening region between these two centers, separated by some 229 kilometers, is comprised of a series of costal islands and mangrove estuaries. Set back from the coast, a broad stretch of hills rise abruptly and extend westward toward the semi-arid scrublands, or *sertão*. Small port towns, tiny fishing villages, and former indigenous settlements (*aldéias*) that had been established by Jesuit missionaries in earlier centuries, could all be found scattered about these islands and at the entrance to the mounting hills. The first moment presented above describes this intervening region, revealing signs of human life in the sea of forest that leads away from the coast. The observer remains separated from this world through water and distance, distant from those whom Maximilian imagined as lonely asylum seekers, far from the world, fighting the battle of life.

When they finally arrived in Ilhéus on January 15th, Maximilian's expedition immediately prepared to depart for the Virgin Forest by traveling upriver via canoe the very next day. They set out for a plantation owned by a fellow-Austrian who had retired to the forests surrounding Ilhéus to become a cocoa planter. The second moment, then, is Maximilian's description of the forest with the distance removed, as he encountered it directly and concretely. Even with the distance removed, though, the forest remained an interminable and impenetrable

¹ *Baía de Todos os Santos*. Historically, the city of Salvador was simply referred to as Bahia, short for the name of the bay. Today, the city of Salvador is the capital of the federal state of Bahia. My references to Bahia refer to the contemporary federal state, and all references to Salvador refer to the contemporary city.

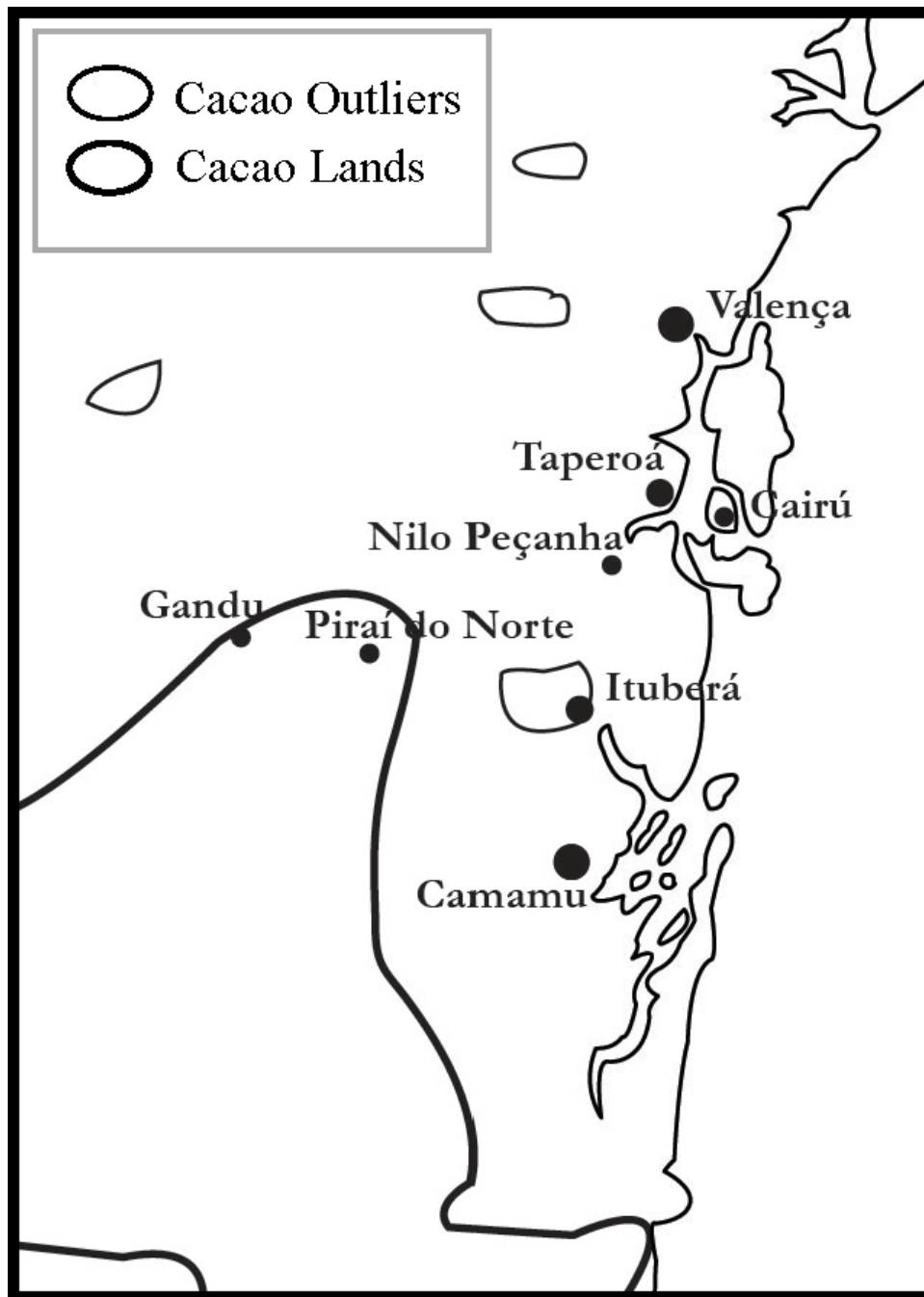
mass of relationships. What from a distance appears as a simple, undifferentiated mass of green becomes interminably differentiated and complex. The forest gives the observer pause, and it holds the observer at a distance for at least one other reason: “...for through the forest one cannot be said to go—one must jump, vault, and lose half one’s skin” (Maximilian 1868:338). The cost of encounter with the forest is half one’s skin.

2. Into the Forested Hills

The present chapter describes the forested hills of the intervening region between Salvador and Ilhéus. The part of the coast under consideration is today referred to as the Dendê Coast,² which stretches between the historical port towns of Valença and Camamu, and includes the towns of Cairú, Igrapiúna, Ituberá, Nilo Peçanha, and Taperoá. The ethnography is broadly concerned with these coastal municipalities, and focuses in upon the region to the west of Camamu, Igrapiúna, and Ituberá, where the hills and forests set back from these towns eventually reach towns that are referred to as Gandu and Piraí do Norte. These town can be seen in the map of the Dendê Coast region presented in Figure 2 below.

² *Costa do Dendê*. Dendê is a type of palm tree that is cultivated for palm-oil that is an important ingredient in various Bahian cuisines, most notably the fish stew referred to as *moqueca*.

Figure 2: Map of the Dendê Coast Region³



³ This maps found in Figures 2, 3, and 4 are all derived from a map of the cacao lands that can be found Leeds (1957:37). Leeds had derived his own map from one that he acquired from the Cacao Institute of Bahia. I have been unable to locate an original copy of the Cacao Institute's map.

The hills and forests described in this chapter supply a set of material relationships that both constrained social life in important ways, and, as will be suggested, offered some possibilities for asylum and escape from pathological social relationships. Together, these forested hills provide part of the natural stage upon which the life of this ethnography is played out, and understanding them will give an initial sense of themes of expenditure, exposure, and fatigue involved in the encounter with the forest. These and other related themes, such as the notion of a “limit” or boundary, will be explored in later chapters.⁴ Chapter 3 attempts to recover traces of the lives led by those “unknown” people who were “fighting the battle of life” through seeking “asylum in the impenetrable forest.” There I attempt to understand the forms of life that had taken root in the hills in the post-emancipation period among members of the rural poor. The period with which these two chapters are primarily concerned begins after the abolition of slavery in 1888 and takes us through the 1940s and 1950s. Chapter 3 breaks off at the point when other social processes were set in motion that contributed to the dismantling of this world. Chapter 2 and 3, therefore, explore how that world was put together; chapters 4 and 5 explore how that world was violently taken apart.

3. Hills & Forests Before and After Abolition

Before the final abolition of slavery in 1888, the “Law of Free Birth” (*Lei do Ventre Livre*) of 1871 had already established the freedom of infants born to people who were still legally bound to the institution of slavery. One consequence of this was that legally free individuals continued to be brought up in and shaped by a lifeworld in which slavery was the background condition of sociality. When Brazil finally abolished slavery in 1888, many former slaves began to form satellite communities on the outskirts of the plantations that had previously housed them as slaves. These former and freed slaves, and other members of the free rural poor, were variously referred to as *agregados* and *moradores*—or “residents” or “tenants at will” (Barickman

⁴ For an exploration of the notion of “exposure” see Chapter 6, Section 4; for the notion of “limits” see Chapter 6, Section 3; for the notion of “fatigue” see Chapter 7, Section 3.

1991:331) who had ultimately returned to the plantation life, whether as wage laborer, sharecroppers, or tenants that cultivated small plots of land referred to as *roças*.

The figure of the “roça” is powerful in the region, and will be a crucial site of social life throughout this ethnography. *Roças* are plots of cultivated land, frequently cultivated in forest clearings, and people who cultivated *roças* historically were often referred to as *roçeiros*. Historically, *roças* were cultivated by slaves in their free time, both for subsistence provision and possibly even the production of limited cash crops (Barickman 1994). Free landless people searching for access to land may have likewise become tenants on these same plantations, and were similarly dependent upon large landowners for access to land. *Roças* cultivated by such families were typically planted on marginal plantation lands, typically by clearing a new stretch of forest. Both slave provision grounds and tenants’ *roças* were often planted with manioc and other subsistence crops like beans, corn, and bananas (Barickman 1991:373-375).

Referring to freed slaves and members of the rural poor as “tenants at will” highlights the seemingly volitional characteristic of their community and work arrangements, but the reality was that without securing access to basic productive resources like land, former slaves and other members of the rural underclass remained in a situation of coercive dependency. These tenants were beholden to large landowners, frequently referred to as *coronéis*, and were often recruited into local political struggles by virtue of their dependence upon landlords. Barickman describes the tenant’s condition thus:

Planters granted their “tenants at will” not only land, but also protection in the disputes with neighbors and with the law. In return, *moradores* performed odd services for their planter landlords: “going upon errands,...seeing that the woods are not destroyed by persons who have not obtained permission to cut down timber, and other offices of the same description.” They occasionally paid a “trifling rent” in cash or produce, and, at election time, they would be on hand to support the planter’s candidate. When necessary, a planter might also call on them to serve as thugs and henchmen in his own feuds with fellow landowners. [Barickman 1991:375]

This system of political and economic dependency and patronage was characterized as *Coronelismo* (Leal 1977[1949]). As some tenants were occasionally called to do violence on

behalf of their landlord, it is plausible that they were likewise aware that the very same violence could be turned against the tenants themselves if they transgressed the will of their landlords. The tenant's position in this social world was thus precarious. The same was true of their roças and plantings. As Barickman notes, tenants often "lacked notarized written leases to the land they cultivated. Their tenure was, therefore, always insecure" (1991:331), and they might be evicted with little notice. Eviction, or the threat thereof, was a motive for frequent movement:

[T]hrown off one estate, agregados and other "tenants at will," often described by contemporaries as restless nomads, moved on to another plantation or farm where, again without paying rent, they would construct a new hut and open a new clearing for another roça. [Barickman 1991:375]

For some freed slaves and other members of the rural poor, this nomadic condition seems to have motivated some to depart for the more distant hills and forests where they might find land to work for themselves and create new social relationships that did not reproduce the coercive dependencies of slave society.

These migrations to the forested hills and other backland areas can be understood not only as a search for land, but also as a part of people's attempts to extricate themselves from relationships that bore a coercive and problematically dependent character. In short, the quest for land was an attempt to give formal, legal freedom the substantive content of social and material equality. The withdrawal to the hills in search for land reflected an important insight of the Brazilian abolitionist and statesman, Joaquim Nabuco, who linked the initial work of emancipation to the work of democratizing Brazil's land base.⁵ What Nabuco realized was that the maladies of slave society would persist after abolition unless radically affirmative actions were taken to transform the underlying relationships that perpetuated various forms of social inequality. What he advocated were land reform policies that would incorporate ex-slaves and other members of the rural poor into the class of property-owning small farmers (Acerbi 2007:489). Specifically, he called for a series of land taxes that "would help break up the massive holdings of the elite" (Rogers 2009:27), and promote the redistribution of land to poorer members of the rural population. Nabuco saw the relationship between property-ownership and

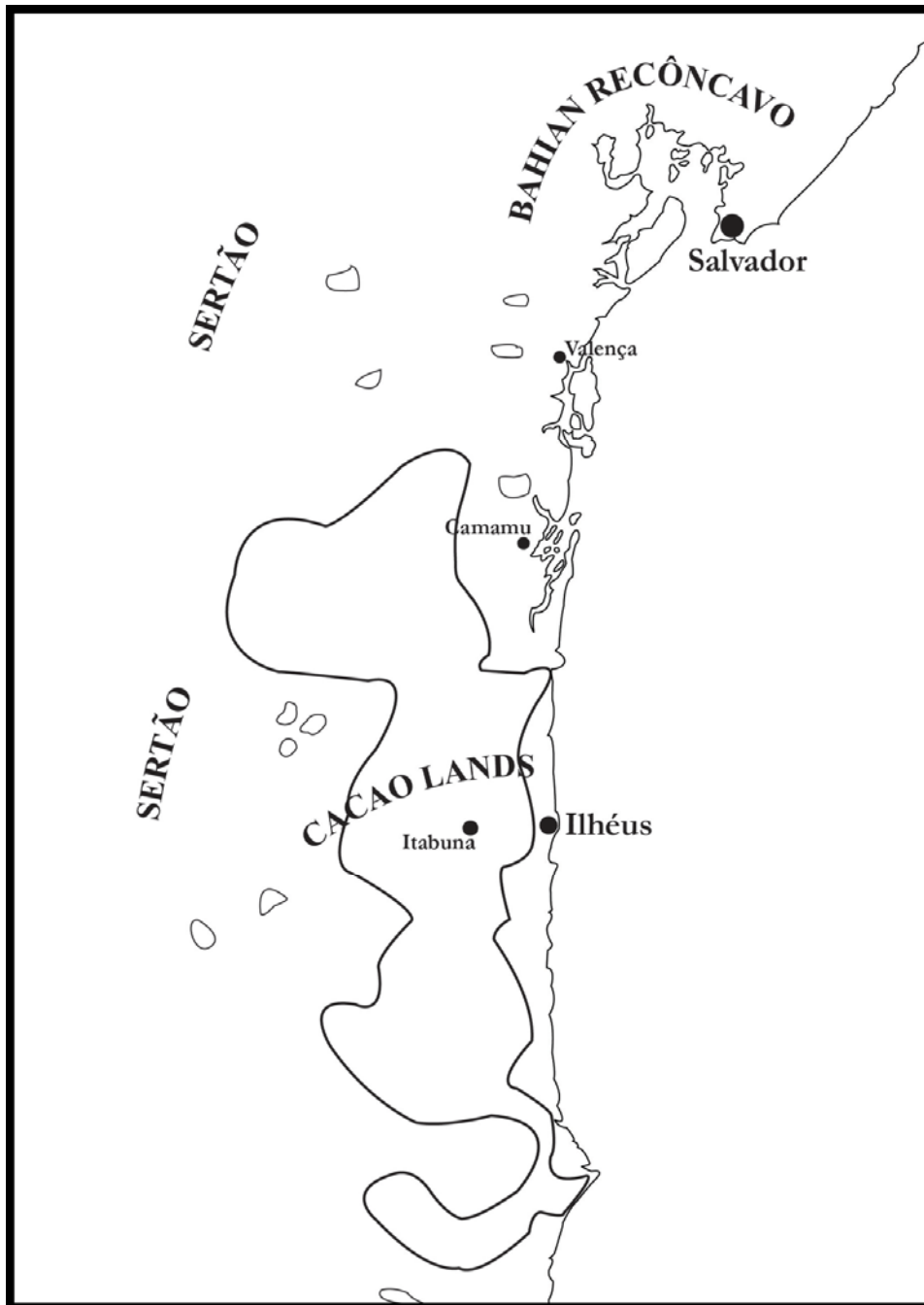
⁵ See the Introduction, Section 2a for a discussion of Nabuco's views.

free labor as an important corrective to the pathological social relationships that were the enduring inheritance of slavery, which defaced both master and slave alike. Needless to say, none of this ever happened. In the absence of any concerted governmental policies, many former slaves simply took to the hills.

Entering the hills was an entry into what official maps of the region called *terra devoluta*, or “unoccupied” or “vacant” frontier lands that were owned by the state. In the region of Bahia under consideration, these lands were densely forested and inhabited by various insects, animals, plants, and—at least through the late 19th and early 20th centuries—indigenous peoples that had neither been domesticated by the Brazilian state nor by earlier Jesuit missionaries. Various asylum seekers—fleeing slaves, squatter farmers, criminals, bandits and other misfits—were also occasional inhabitants in the hills. The population with which this ethnography is primarily concerned, then, includes both the descendants of slaves as well as other members of the rural free poor who had migrated into this region in search of land and a place to work.

There is limited extant scholarship about this particular region. Just as the forested hills hindered the reach of the landlords and the law, and made the hills a suitable place of refuge for escaped slaves in earlier periods (and even bandits fleeing from the law today), the same material relationships hindered the reach of historical and archival scrutiny by holding observers and recorders at a distance. Consequently, most historical agrarian studies of Bahia have focused on the Recôncavo region. The Recôncavo is comprised of the sugar and tobacco-producing region, and is more than 10,000 square kilometers in size. Oriented around the capital city of Salvador, the Recôncavo encompasses the entire landmass around the Bay of All Saints (Barickman 1998; Hutchinson 1957), just north of the Bahia’s cacao growing region, as can be seen in the map of the southern Bahian coast presented in Figure 3 below.

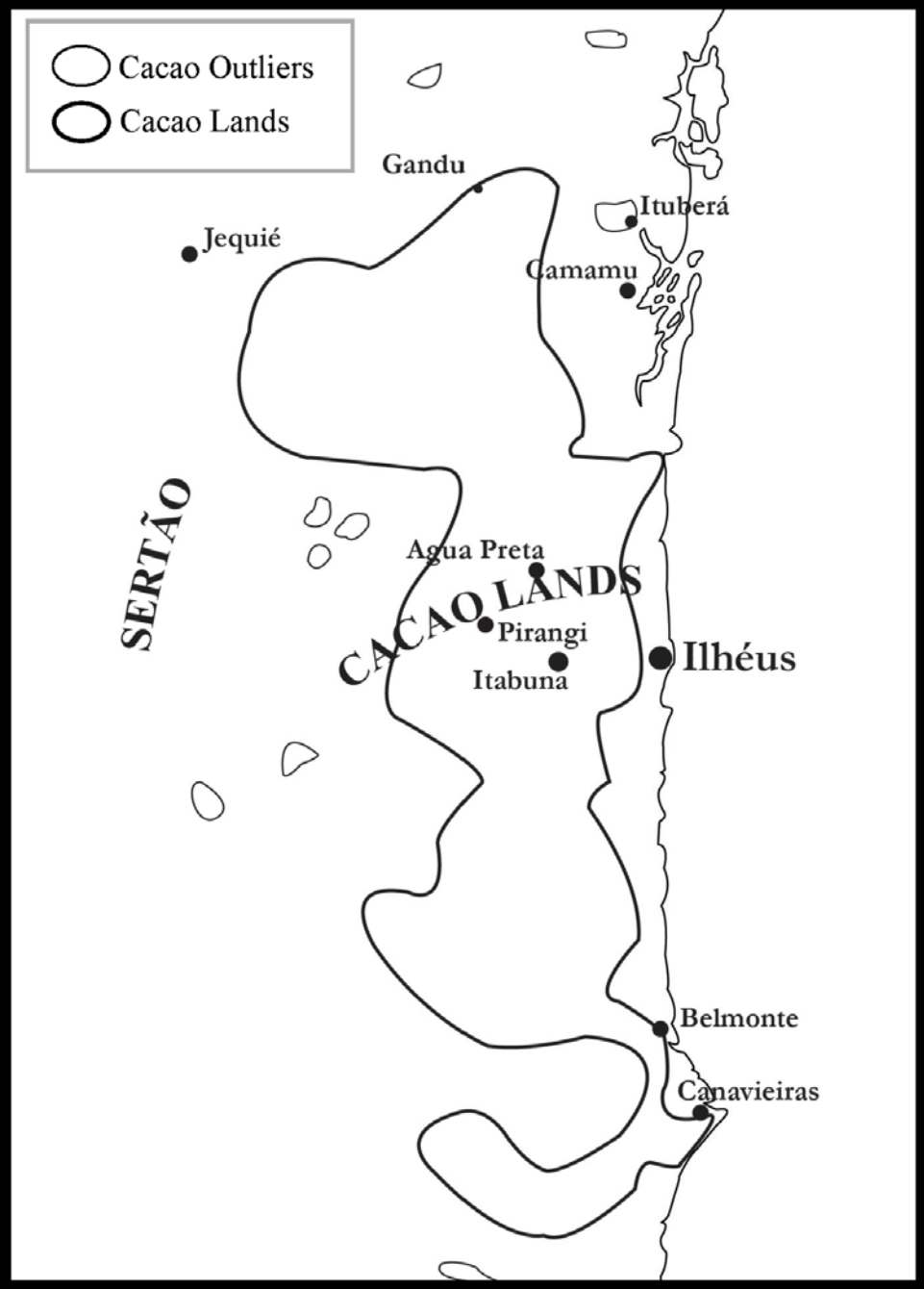
Figure 3: Map of the Southern Bahian Coast



Other historical agrarian studies have focused their attention on the cacao-producing centers near Ilhéus (Mahony 1996; Luce 2009; Leeds 1957; Wright 1976). As such, the hinterlands between these productive centers represent, for the most part, a historical lacuna from which occasional

signs of life would emerged during this time. The central cacao lands can be seen in the map presented in Figure 4 below.

Figure 4: Map of the Central Cacao Lands



Although these studies for the most part focus on the productive centers, they do provide suggestive hints at the forms of life that had emerged in these hinterlands by examining their relationship to the productive centers. Before turning to the oral-historical narratives and the question of what life was like in the hinterlands to explore the forms of life that had emerged in these hills several decades after emancipation, it will be helpful to examine some of the earlier signs of life coming from the hills before abolition. Toward this end, in the next section I examine some evidence about life at the margins of the plantation economies, which can be gathered from historical literature that focuses mainly on the productive centers. This will help to clarify the social import of the forest and the hills from a broader perspective.

3a. *Manioc Farinha, Out of the Hills*

Barickman's (1998) study of the sugar and tobacco economy of the Recôncavo region, surrounding the Bay of All Saints, examined the production of foodstuffs that were crucial to the metabolism of the slave-driven sugar plantations. In this context, the planting and processing of manioc⁶ tubers into *farinha* or "manioc flour" (*farinha de mandioca*)—a coarse, calorie-rich but nutritionally empty flour—was crucial fuel for the human component of the sugar production complex.⁷

Most of the *farinha* that was sold to the sugar planters was produced on lands along the southern portion of the Recôncavo. Barickman's (1998) study also draws attention to *farinha* that made its way to Salvador from smallholdings scattered among the coastal hills and forests along the southern coast. This would have been the region that Maximilian described above in the first excerpt from his *Recollections*. According to Barickman, this region provided a regular, albeit limited source of *farinha* that reached Salvador through the small port towns of Valença and Camamu. These small ports were the outlets for *farinha* produced by free smallholders—*posseiros*—who were living in the hills surrounding these and other towns in the region. Public officials residing in the towns of Valença and Camamu were the source of historical documents about the productive activity emerging from this region.

⁶ *Manihot esculenta*.

⁷ See Barickman (1991, especially chapter 3) for an account of the slave diet on the sugar plantations; see also Schwartz (1970:316).

Manioc, also referred to as yuca or cassava in other parts of the world, is cultivated through a swidden, or shifting, agricultural system that is land extensive rather than capital intensive. This means that instead of investing in the construction and maintenance of farm plots over the generations, cultivation relied on and took advantage of widely available and fertile forest lands that could be converted into manioc roças. These plots had limited temporal horizons of only a few years, as manioc production quickly depleted soil fertility. Small plots—perhaps no more than a half-hectare in size—could be opened in the forest with a relatively small outlay of labor. The use of fire was a crucial labor-saving technique in this context.⁸ After twelve to eighteen months, large manioc tubers could be pulled from the ground and subsequently processed into farinha. The planting process could be repeated perhaps one or two more times before the plot was abandoned and cultivators moved on to new patches of forest to clear and plant.⁹

Manioc provides incredibly high returns on labor and requires relatively little upkeep.¹⁰ Because of this high return, even if a manioc plot is never weeded and abandoned to fallow, a person could always return to an abandoned field and still reap a sizable harvest. As such,

⁸ Most studies of swidden and slash-and-burn agriculture emphasize the importance of burning for quickly releasing nutrients into the soil. From the perspective of people actually working the land, however, their motivation for using fire has more to do with clearing the land and making it workable, rather than attempting to increase fertility. This will be seen more clearly in Chapter 7, Section 2.

⁹ It was for this reason that those involved in the timber trade, as well as the sugar planters to the north who depended on the forests for firewood to burn in their *engenhos*, or sugar mills, complained so vehemently about the manioc planters: not only was manioc a crop that was cultivated by lowly members of the rural poor, but this land-extensive crop could quickly deplete significant stretches of forest to produce what was, from their perspectives, mere slave food. Barickman cites a complaint registered by one local official from Ilhéus from as early as 1785:

“Francisco Nunes da Costa, crown judge for the comarca, complained that, in only six years’ time, they had ‘reduced precious forests as ancient as the world to ashes.’ “No manner of accounting,’ he added, could reckon the damage the roçeiros had already done. The only solution was ‘to guard, defend, and demarcate’ the remaining stands of hardwood timber and to force the ‘rustic and ambitious’ roçeiros to plant their cassava elsewhere.” [Barickman 1991:289]

Barickman likewise cited complaints by sugar mill owners (*senhores de engenhos*) who were likewise opposed to subsistence agriculture of the posseiros and roçeiros owed to their need for timber:

“[M]any planters displayed an open hostility towards subsistence agriculture. In their view, the cultivation of cassava only sped up deforestation and thereby deprived their mills of the firewood needed in making sugar. Shortages of firewood, which had caused problems as early as the 1600s, continued to worry *senhores de engenho* [sugar mill owners] in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Planting cassava also meant diverting resources—land and especially labor—from the more profitable production of sugarcane.” [Barickman 1991:159]

¹⁰ Robert McC. Netting (1993:135), for example, reports that mechanized corn production in the United States results in a input-output ratio of 1 kcal input to 2.93 kcal output, whereas Tanzanian cassava grown through shifting cultivation results in an input-output ratio of 1 kcal input to 22.93 kcal output. Research by Charles J. Stevens in the Kingdom of Tonga suggests that smallholders there were able to achieve an astonishing input-output ratio of 1 kcal input to 81.67 kcal output (personal communication, January 10, 2013).

manioc cultivation is a perfect example of what James C. Scott calls “escape agriculture” (Scott 2009:190-207). Escape agriculture contrasts from other forms of agriculture that require expensive infrastructural investments (e.g., the construction of irrigation canals, terraces or hedgerows), which tend to tie people more securely to their landholdings. Manioc cultivation, in this historical context, was an especially appropriate cultivation strategy as the circumstances of land ownership and land tenure were relatively unstable.

The primary and perhaps only infrastructural investment required for farinha production is the *casa de farinha*, or flour “house” or mill. Because manioc decomposes relatively quickly once it is pulled from the ground, and consequently is not easily transportable over long distances, converting it to flour is a crucial part of the process. Even today, this process takes place in flour mills through a process that involves peeling off the skin, grinding the tubers into a coarse paste, pressing out the excess water, and then drying and roasting the flour over a large copper pan—several feet wide—that is heated by a low-temperature wood fire. Very few producers of manioc actually own and operate their own flour mill. Instead, a relatively well-established producer could set up a flour mill where neighboring producers could process their manioc for a fee. Today, this fee is covered by a fixed percentage, perhaps 10% or 20% of the final product.

The kind of agriculture that took place in these hills, therefore, was a land extensive (rather than capital or labor intensive) form of cultivation that was easily adopted by squatters who had few incentives, let alone the resources, to make long-term investments in their fields, crops, or infrastructure. Fields could be abandoned on relatively short notice and would soon return to secondary growth forest. This situation reflected the relative informality and insecurity faced by squatters farming in the hills.

3b. Migration Into the Hills

These forests not only housed smallholders and squatter farmers producing farinha, but also, over the course of the centuries, escaped slaves, bandits, and various indigenous

populations that successfully resisted colonial incursions for several centuries.¹¹ Barickman points to early reports of “marauding bands of runaway slaves who attacked isolated farmsteads in the cassava growing township of Camamu...between 1825 and 1837” (1998:78). Further north near the Recôncavo, Prince (1972:80) cites an 1825 request for militia support, from a regional official in the town of Cachoeira, “to put down the continuous disorders, thefts, and assassinations committed by outlaws, vagabonds, and fugitive slaves who live on the outskirts of the villages.” These so-called outlaws, vagabonds, and marauding slaves had taken refuge in the forest as a place of escape and asylum. The presence of groups of escaped slaves in the early 19th century was linked to a rise in slave rebellions in the region between 1807 and 1835. Reis (1988) attributed these rebellions to sugar planters’ decisions to expand cash-crop production onto lands that they had formerly reserved as provision grounds where slaves formerly planted roças of subsistence crops, such as manioc and beans. As Barickman notes elsewhere (1994), these provision grounds were important not only to the slave’s subsistence and well-being, but, in some cases, slaves may have been able to sell surplus from their gardens and accumulate monetary resources that could be used, for example, to purchase one’s freedom (see also Schwartz 1977:74). Having this productive resource taken away from them, therefore, was a significant transgression against these slaves and one motivation for rebellion.

Schwartz (1970:319) points to the districts between Cairú and Camamu as areas of particularly high incidence for runaway slaves. Schwartz attributes this in part to the relatively better working conditions for slaves in this region, since this coastal region focused on the less humanly destructive production of manioc and farinha. The sugar mills to the north were said to consume both the forests—to fuel the fires of the sugar mills (Barickman 1991:278)—and the slaves who operated them as well. Slaves who worked on sugar plantations were reported to have a lifespan of as little as low as six years: “In the interior...the slaves are badly fed, worse clothed, and worked so hard that the average duration of their lives does not exceed six years.” (Ewbank [1856:439] cited in Reis [1988:113]).¹²

While better working conditions may have been more conducive to slave resistance, so too was the relatively weak military situation in these interior townships. Schwartz suggests that the weak military situation may be partly attributed to frequent attacks by Aimoré Indians who

¹¹ For a useful survey of the different periods of human occupation in the region, ranging from pre-colonial human occupation through the end of the 19th century, see Fleisher (2006:114-124).

¹² For a more detailed discussion of life expectancy, see Schwartz (1985:369-370).

inhabited the forests through the nineteenth century, and to the region's sheer distance from Salvador. Both of these factors made military support more difficult to organize (Schwartz 1970:320). Runaway slave settlements were often located close to towns and farms, as they were dependent on what Schwartz called a "parasitic" economy "based on highway theft, cattle rustling, raiding, and extortion" (1970:322). To be sure, if these groups were cultivating manioc beyond subsistence use, they also depended on coastal towns to market their harvests.

Schwartz (1977) reported on one specific slave rebellion that occurred on a sugar plantation just outside of the town of Ilhéus in 1789. In this case, nearly fifty of the plantation's three hundred slaves revolted, killing their overseer, and fled to the forest with important machine parts and equipment that left the sugar mill at a standstill for nearly two years. Eventually, the slaves were tricked out of hiding on the premise of peace negotiations and then recaptured. At one point before their recapture, however, the slaves reportedly submitted a peace treaty to their master through which they made a series of very specific demands.¹³ These included, for example, details about how specific work-tasks should be performed, and a demand for Fridays and Saturdays off as these were saint days. They also requested regular access to a Salvador-bound boat on which "we can place our cargoes aboard and not pay freightage," and they demanded that new overseers had to be approved by the slaves themselves. The most interesting and perhaps significant demand made in their peace treaty was found in the final line:

"We shall be able to play, relax and sing any time we wish without your hinderance nor will permission be needed." [Schwartz 1977:79]

The forest played an important and constitutive role for this rebellion and others like it, and, Schwartz notes, in general the "geography and ecology of the Bahian littoral aided escape, and the result was a large number of fugitives and *mocambos*" (1970:319).¹⁴ At the end of this chapter, I would like to suggest that people appropriated the causal powers of the forest to constitute an inchoate form of negative freedom, and a position from which they would more safely exercise their voices. Before attempting to clarify the role and meaning of the forest and hills for these moments of rebellion, I would like to briefly examine some of the natural features

¹³ See Appendix 1 for a reproduction of this treaty, reproduced from Schwartz (1977).

¹⁴ A *mocambo* is one term for a runaway slave settlement, which can also be referred to as a *quilombo*.

of the hills and forest in this region that sustained their distance from the centers, especially with respect to rain, mud, and an inability to build good roads.

4. Regional Geography & Ecology

The section of the chapter describes the combination of rainfall, topography, and mud that constituted barriers to intensive colonization of the region prior to the 1930s, before the first road was built through the region. After briefly reviewing some of the relevant geographical and ecological conditions, and their consequences for transportation infrastructure in the wider cacao lands up through the early 20th century, this section concludes with local historical narratives with respect to transportation in the region under consideration.

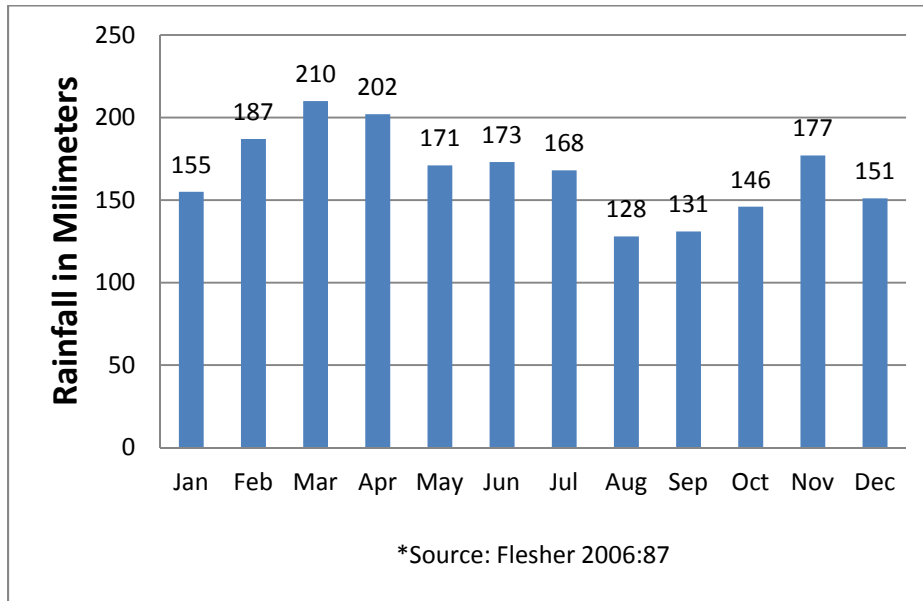
4a. Forests, Hills, Rain

Bahia's cacao lands generally coincide with, and are indeed founded upon, a coastal area that enjoys relatively high rainfall in contrast to most of the state of Bahia. Rainfall enters the cacao lands on easterly winds that travel west from the ocean and gradually move inland over the hills.

Annual rainfall in the Dendê Coast region is about 2,000 millimeters at the coast and about 1,700 millimeters some 20 kilometers inland, or between 67 and 79 inches of rain annually (SEI 2003).¹⁵ Other measures of regional precipitation put the annual average at about 2,051 millimeters, whereas according to Flesher (2006:86), the average annual rainfall from 1952 through 2002 fluctuated between a range of 1,313 and 2,666 millimeters. In terms of monthly distribution, the wettest months are between February and July, while the driest period is between August and January, as can be seen in Figure 5 below.

¹⁵ Compare this to the average of 33 inches that falls annually around Detroit.

Figure 5: Average Monthly Rainfall, 1954-1997 (millimeters)*



Daily temperatures on the coast range from a nighttime low of about 18°C (64.4°F) to a daytime high of around 30°C (86°F), with variation depending on the season (Flesher 2006:86). Higher up in the hills, the nighttime temperatures can drop even lower, in part owed to the cooling effects of greater forest cover. This climate, the combination of heat and rainfall, supports a rich tropical environment and lush forest that is part of what is called the Atlantic Forest (*Mata Atlântica*), which historically stretched along most of Brazil’s eastern seaboard.¹⁶

The lowest hills immediately off the coast range from about 150 to 200 meters in elevation. Moving inland, they easily surpass 400 and 450 meters. The hills present any viewer with an impressive landscape. As the hills become higher, rainclouds moving westward drop more and more of their precipitation until they dissipate and the landscape becomes dry. Eventually, just 100 kilometers to the west, the wet and densely forested landscape gives way to the semi-arid scrubland environment, or *sertão* region, for which Bahia is famous.

4b. Roads, Transportation, and Mud

¹⁶ See Dean (1995) for an important account of the environmental and social history of the Atlantic Forest.

The region's hills, combined with the high levels of precipitation and dense forest, made it difficult for commercial interests to expand into this region prior to the 1930s and 1940s. In 1923, for example, a U.S. Department of Agriculture team had visited the region around Ituberá in search of sites for the expansion of rubber production.¹⁷ The USDA team, however, "ruled it out for plantation development...because of its hilly terrain" (Dean 1987:121). The problem was in large part one of transportation. The large number of waterfalls found at regular intervals along the region's rivers compounded these difficulties, making it impracticable to expand inland by boat. Maximilian described these waterfalls as early as 1860, and pointed to the impediment that they would pose for steam-power, colonization, and commercial agriculture:

At the first and inconsiderable cataract that we passed, it was not necessary for our conductors to spring into the water to drag the canoe between the masses of granite; the paddles were sufficient, and this first impediment in our road attracted our attention, particularly for this reason that, although so skillfully guided, we bumped against some of the rocks covered by the water. These rocky passages are great obstacles to all attempts at colonisation on the Cachoeras [waterfalls], as they naturally render steam-power useless; and without the intercourse which this facilitates, successful colonisation is not to be thought of in our times. The slender canoes cannot bring the raw produce into the market in large quantities, or quickly enough, and productive agriculture is not practicable here. [Maximilian 1868:321]

One of the main rivers in Ituberá region, the Rio Cachoeira Grande, is riddled by a series of smaller and larger waterfalls and is relatively unnavigable. The terminus of the river is marked by an impressive waterfall, called the Pancada Grande, which rises over 60 meters high.

Construction of good roads in the wetter areas near the coast was impracticable until as late as the early 20th century. It was not the forest itself or the hills that prevented the construction of good roads. For centuries, forests all over Brazil had been systematically felled with steel broadaxes (Dean 1995), and the hills in other regions along the coast had not proven insurmountable. The decisive factor, perhaps, was the rain and consequent mud.

¹⁷ See Chapter 4, Sections 5 and 7 for an account of the expansion of rubber in the region after the 1950s.

Mud is not found in high quantities where forest groundcover remains intact. Whenever land that has been stripped of vegetation encounters heavy rainfall, however, mud is abundant. Under normal ecological circumstances, plants roots, decaying leaf and other plant litter would absorb rainwater and quickly move it through the water cycle. But when there are no plants to absorb the water—and as trucks, cars, other vehicles, and even human foot traffic prevent the growth of feeder roots that absorb water—water accumulates as pools upon the clay-rich soils. This circumstance creates mud. When roads are built through the forest, as few trees as necessary would be removed in order to reduce labor costs. Consequently, such roads will be lined on both sides by tall stands of trees that bloc the sunlight for most hours of the day, except when the sun is directly overhead. This slows the drying process and compounds the problem.

As a consequence of all of this, relatively few roads were built in this region prior to 1930. Instead, sea transport was the main connection to the capital in Salvador. Historically, the port towns of Valença and Camamu were connected to Salvador via a north-south sea route, while the towns to the interior such as Gandu were connected via the north-south land transect that eventually became the BR-101. The BR-101 was the first major highway to be built in the region in the 20th century, and spans most of Brazil's eastern seaboard. The BR-101 does not hug the coastline directly, but was built some 20 to 30 kilometers inland—very likely the result of an engineering decision aimed at avoiding higher levels of rainfall just off the coast. It was only in the 1990s that the state highway—the BA-001/650—that connects the coastal towns of Valença, Ituberá, and Camamu—was finally asphalted.

Throughout most of the region's history, therefore, the major transport routes were two north-south transects, the first connecting Salvador and Ilhéus by sea, and the other an inland route connecting the Recôncavo and Itabuna. These routes encompassed the cacao towns between them. Between these two longitudinally parallel transport routes, there was dense rainforest that stretched across the hills. These travel routes served as de facto boundaries for the forested hills and hinterlands. Up until the early 20th century, the intervening forested region stretched from somewhere between 60 to 90 kilometers along a north-south transect, and around 30 kilometers along an east-west transect. It was only around 1930 when the first road, called the BA-250, was built along the east-west transect. Consequently, the forested hills were opened up to more intense traffic that connected the coastal town of Ituberá to the BR-101. The

construction of the BA-250 was an important event that helped facilitate the theft of land that is described in chapters 4 and 5.

4c. Mud, Mules, and Foot Travel

Prior to this time, and even after the road was built, most people traveled through the hills by either mule or on foot. This meant that travel times were slow and costly. In the municipality of Ituberá, between the 1940s and 1950s, for example, families living in the hills had to walk to town to sell their goods, which may have been transported by mule or carried across one's back. In my interview with Alonso, Gilberto, and Josué, brothers who had grown up in the hills and lived several kilometers back from the BA-250, explained how they used to travel through the region in their youth. The oldest brother, named Alonso, explained how they used to travel into town:¹⁸

For us to get to Ituberá—in those days it took three days for us to get to Ituberá. You left here mid-day on Thursday and walked. You walked until it started getting dark Thursday evening. When it got late, and we were about half way there, we stopped at the home of a posseiro. We slept there, and the next morning we placed the cargo back on the animal. When we arrived in Ituberá, it was mid-day on Friday. You sold whatever goods you had to sell. Sometimes when there was enough time to buy some goods, you bought them. When there wasn't time, you slept, and then early Saturday morning you bought your fare, got back on the animal, and went home. Slept on the road again, and made it home mid-day on Sunday.¹⁹

¹⁸ The story probably dates from the late 1940s and later, when Alonso would have been at least 10 years old, and old enough to be working in this capacity.

¹⁹ “A: Pra gente ir pra Ituberá—que naquele tempo pra gente ir pra Ituberá era três dias. Voce saía daqui quinta-feira mei dia, aí andava. Andava até de tarde quinta-feira. Quando era de tarde chegava no mei da estrada arranchava na casa de um posseiro. Aí durmia, quando era no outro dia botava a carga no animal de novo. Aí quando chegava em Ituberá era sexta-feira mei dia. Aí vendia aquelas cargas que tinha. De vez em quando, quando dava pra comprar alguma coisa dava. Quando não dava, durmia, quando era no sábado de manhã cedo comprava aquelas coisa, muntava no animal de novo, vinha. Durmia na estrada de novo, pa chegar em casa no domingo de mei dia pa tarde.”

Alonso added further detail:

And it was all on foot! That is, today it's by car. You leave at six in the morning and by seven you're already in Ituberá. But in those days, no, it took three days. We walked through this [forest]—entered into the forest there at Sofrida Plantation. We'd leave here, go into the forest at Sofrida Plantation...and we would come out at the Colônia. From the Colônia...we went to Ituberá.²⁰

I asked them if they made this trip barefoot, curious to know if they wore any special footwear:

[Jonathan]: And you went barefoot?

[Alonso]: Barefoot, my son!

[Josué]: We went barefoot.

[Jonathan]: Not mounted on the animal?

[Alonso]: No, no, no—the animal carried the load and we were behind, following the animal, moving the animal along.²¹

In the interview with Seu Pedrinho, he reported that if one of his family members needed to go to the town of Valença on some business, it would take four days by mule to arrive there from their home in the hills.²² Likewise, he suggested that in order to travel between the towns of Gandu and Ituberá, in order to deliver a cargo of cacao to the port, required five or six days of travel by

²⁰ “E é de pé! Quer dizer, hoje é carro. Voce sai daqui seis horas, quando é sete horas já ta em Ituberá. E naquele tempo era três. A gente andava nessa—entrava nessa mata aí, entrava na Sofrida mesmo. Saía daqui, entrava na mata Sofrida...apois, a gente saía na Colônia. Da Colônia...ia pa Ituberá.”

²¹ “Jonathan: E foi descalço?//Alonso: Descalço, meu filho!//Josué: Era descalço!// Jonathan: Mas montado na, no animal?//Alonso: Não, não, não. O animal com carga, e a gente atrás seguino o animal, tocano o animal pra frente.”

²² These observations likely date from between 1940 through 1950s, before his family lost their farm. The distance to Valença from the location where his family's farm was probably located is just over 50 kilometers in a straight line. By mule or footpath, the distance would have been significantly greater owed to various curves in the path. For example, the absolute distance between Ituberá and Gandu is about 36 kilometers. The distance along the current road that passes between the two towns, however, is approximately 56 kilometers.

mule. Seu Pedrinho explained that travelling to Salvador was a different kind of undertaking altogether:

At that time, for a person to go to Salvador—let’s say a Dr. John Doe—they had to be a very rich planter to go to Salvador. Understand? They would do a calculation, for example:

“In three years—two years from now I’ll go to Salvador.”

Only those people that had more money. Today, that’s all changed—anybody can go to Salvador. Leave in the morning, arrive in the afternoon.²³

So even for those whom Seu Pedrinho considered relatively well-off, those who were called “doctors,” making a trip to Salvador was a significant and costly undertaking.

Around this same period in mid-20th century, the anthropologist Anthony Leeds (1957) reported on travel conditions in municipalities such as Itabuna and Uruçuca, which were located in the heart of the cacao lands some 100 kilometers south of Ituberá. Mule traffic was higher there as the cacao economy was stronger, but even there cacao planters encountered difficulties with transportation. Leeds described the situation:

Mule paths were ill-marked and ill-built, following the vertical contours of the hills rather than the horizontal. Paths were ‘made’ mostly by walking over the same area long enough to flatten everything to a width of several meters amidst the *roças* (‘orchards’) or the forests. The mules had time and again to tread in each others’ footsteps for sure footing. This created alternate holes and ridges (*trilhos*). In wet weather, the mules sank so deep into the mud holes that their bellies scraped the *trilhos*. *Tropeiros* [muleteers] had to lift them out. It was in such spots that the cacao was ruined. As the holes dried out, the mud turned sticky, holding back man and beast. The greatest dangers occurred

²³ “Uma pessoa daquela época pa ir ali em Salvador—chamava Dr. Fulano de Tal—precisa ser muito fazendeiro pra ir ali em Salvador. Entendeu? Fazia cálculo://“Dois, três anos,” por exemplo, “daqui a dois anos vou em Salvador.”//Aqueles pessoas que tinha melhores condições. E mudou, agora mudou, qualquer pessoa ta ino ali em Salvador. Vai de manhã, chega de tarde.”

where mule paths had to cross streams and marshes. Mules ‘not rarely’ perished here from fatigue, broken legs, or the weight of the load which made them sink. [Leeds 1957:106-107]

Travel times for the *tropeiros*—muleteers or mule-drivers—were probably slower than they would have been for people on foot, since the muleteers would have been managing multiple animals. Other costs associated with maintaining large mule troops were higher, as well. Whereas for the *posseiros* families, any mule, donkey, or other animal transport might have been considered a durable form property, and a stable element of the means of production, mules on cacao plantations were more like consumable goods and probably lived shorter lives. Leeds suggests that in this part of the cacao zone, the rate of mule loss was 5% of the total mule population per year (Leeds 1957:107).²⁴

In the interview with Seu Pedrinho, he shared two stories that illustrated the difficult transport conditions for mules and donkeys in that period. The first story was about a *fazendeiro*, or plantation owner, named Pantaleão.²⁵ Seu Pedrinho told his story:

There was a man named Pantaleão...A fazendeiro named Pantaleão in Gandu...He had a cachaça factory, to make cachaça.²⁶

Pantaleão had purchased some large cement tubes with which he planned to build a large smokestack for his cachaça factory. The tubes had shipped from Salvador and arrived at the small port in Ituberá. Because of their size, they were not readily transportable by typical means, and Pantaleão had to make special arrangements:

For him to take ten of those tubes [from Ituberá] to Gandu, he had to buy forty oxen.

The road was SO GOOD [i.e. bad] that the oxen ended up dying along the road, and they never arrived.²⁷

²⁴ See Leeds (1957:137-139) for further descriptions of mule transport in the central part of the cacao lands during this period.

²⁵ This nickname is probably short for “Espanta-Leão,” or “Scares-a-Lion.”

²⁶ “Que era um homem chamado Pantaleão...Era um fazendeiro, chamava Pantaleão...Ele tem uma fábrica de cachaça, fazer cachaça.”

Seu Pedrinho explained that, to this day, the tubes could still be found where they had been left along the old mule path that, over the years, had become overgrown into forest that is now part of one of the region's plantations. Seu Pedrinho explained that if I was to enter that forest with someone who knew the tubes' whereabouts, I could still find them lying there:²⁸

You can ask any of the older people up there [and they will tell you where they are]...There are people who can still prove this story.

So, that's how [transport] was back then—everything very difficult, difficult, difficult.²⁹

Seu Pedrinho immediately transitioned into another story illustrating the same problem, but highlighting some of the social networks of support that had grown up around the mule paths as a result. The story was about an enterprising merchant from the westward town of Piraí do Norte:

Once I met a merchant in Piraí do Norte—he was a gringo, named Zé Casali...Well, he set up a large market, a very big building [in town]. It's still there today.

Well then, he took a trip from Piraí do Norte with his fat wife—he was really fat, too. It took them three months to get from Piraí and arrive here [in Ituberá].³⁰

Today, the trip only takes a couple hours by bus, and in that time, the journey should have only taken a few days. Seu Pedrinho gradually begins to invoke the rain:

²⁷ “Ele pa levar dez tubo daquele pra Gandu, comprou quarenta boi de canga.//A istrada era tão boa, que acabou boi morreno pela istrada e tudo e não chegou la.”

²⁸ Unfortunately, I was unable to make this trek during my dissertation fieldwork.

²⁹ “Pode perguntar alguém la de mais velho, que da, que diz, é ali...Tem gente ainda eu acho que prova isso.//Então, era assim, tudo difici, difici, difici.”

³⁰ “Olha, eu arancei um niguciante em Piraí do Norte—era um gringo, chamava Zé Casali...Aí ele botou um grande comércio, um prédio muito grande. Até hoje ta la.//Aí, ele saiu de Piraí do Norte, a mulher fortuna e ele bem forte também. Levou três mês de Piraí pa chegar aqui.”

In that time, plastic didn't exist yet. It was leather tarps made from oxhide—you killed an ox, skinned it, put the leather out to dry.³¹

He laughed at these recollections: “Oh boy, what times—what times!”³² And he continued:

That was what they used to cover the loads of cacao, so that it wouldn't get wet. It was made of leather. And it rained so much at that time, that [Zé Casali had to stop] there at the Morro Plantation—him with one hundred and twenty donkeys, all loaded with cacao. One hundred and twenty donkeys there at Morro Plantation alone.³³

At the time, he explained, the muleteers and other travelers sought these outposts and other places to rest and pasture their animals during the long trip. Morro Plantation is the name of a contemporary plantation that was established by Norberto Odebrecht in the early 1960s, after the posseiros like Seu Pedrinho had lost their land. Before that time, Morro Plantation was the site of one of these resting points as well as the site of Seu Pedrinho's homeplace:

Some people there had old pastures where travelers could show up with their animals, put them [to pasture], and leave the next day. Well, they stayed there for sixty days while it rained, without even seeing the sun or the light of day.³⁴

Zé Casali's party made periodic attempts to leave the outpost, but invariably they had to turn back again because of incessant rain and the intractable grade of the hills:

By the time the muleteers would load up fifty or sixty donkeys, it was already midday [and they'd made no progress]. So they turned back:

“No. Unload them, unload, unload them again.”

³¹ “E naquela época num ixtia plástico. Era couro de boi—matava o boi, esfolava, botava o couro pa secar.”

³² “Mas rapaz, que tempo—que tempo!”

³³ “E aquilo era que cobria as cargas de cacau—pa não molhar. Era couro. E chovia tanto naquela época que ali, ali na Fazenda Morro, e ele veio com cento e vinte burro carregado de cacau. Cento e vinte burro, só ali em Morro.”

³⁴ “Ali tem umas pessoa que tinha aqueles pastos, que agente chegava com animal e dava pa colocar ali pa sair no outo dia, levou sessenta dia ali chaveno sem ver nem o sol, claridade do sol.”

And the rain *falling, falling*.

There was a hill called the Big Stream Hill—very high up.

[The muleteers asked:] “How to get up the hill? How to get up the hill?”

They spent two months just underneath those ox leathers.³⁵

I asked him to clarify how they survived in the hills for so long, and how they would eat. Seu Pedrinho explained:

Oh, they brought lots of food! Oh, there was no lack of food! They carried lots of food in these troops. There were even people there that didn’t work for them. When they were camped there, you could go there and eat with them—ask for anything and they’d give it, the muleteers would give it. They had some ten, twenty, thirty, fifty barrels of dried cod that they carried. There were people to carry loads of meat on the donkeys...One hundred and twenty loads—each load was sixty kilos. Everything on the backs of donkeys. Food in that time—no, nobody made a fuss about [sharing].

So then, he spent three months there—two months there [at Morro Plantation], and three months to arrive [in Ituberá].³⁶

In this view, surviving in the hills depended on relationships of mutual aid, sharing, and generosity. This is quite different from the view articulated by Maximilian, who at different

³⁵ “Que quando os tropeiro carregava cinquentá, sessenta burro, já era mei-dia. Aí já voltava://“Não. Descarrega, descarrega, descarrega de novo.”//E a chuva tome, tome.//Tinha uma ladeira que chamava ladeira do riachão, assim, em pé muito comprida.//“Como é que subia. Como é que subia?”//Levou dois mês só ali debaixo dos couro do boi.”

³⁶ “Ah, comida eles tinha muita, ah, o que num faltava muito era comida. Eles tinha muita comida nessas tropa. Tinha gente que até não trabalhava com eles. Quando eles tava acampado ali, você podia ir comer—pedir tudo ele dava, os tropeiro dava. Era uns dez, vinte, trinta, cinquenta barrica de bacalhau que ele levavam. Tinha gente de levar fardo de carne nos burro...Cento e vinte de fardo, fardo de sessenta quilos. Tudo nas costa de burro. A comida naquela época não—ninguém fazia questão não.//Apois, ele levou três meses ali—dois mês aí e três mês la pa chegar aqui.”

points envisioned lone individuals surviving in the forest, as will be discussed in the next section. These relationships of mutual dependency and aid will be explored in further detail in the next chapter.

The combination of the hills, rainfall, shade, and mud curtailed early efforts at intensive colonization by making it difficult to create inroads into the forests and hills. Settlers who did inhabit the forests were primarily involved in activities appropriate to a kind of agriculture that had a limited time horizon and required minimal investment in infrastructure, as was the case with manioc cultivation and the production of farinha. For those who were more directly involved in the cash crop economy, like the merchant described above, the hills were merely a place to be passed through, and sometimes at great expense.

Consequently, those areas that were opened up to relatively intense exploitation in the region were closer to the coast and situated on natural outlets to sea travel. Major centers like Salvador and Ilhéus were situated in geographical locations that offered ideal conditions for sea transport, while smaller towns situated on the coastal mangrove estuaries such as Cairú, Camamu, and Valença also enjoyed favorable geographical conditions that enabled them to emerge as small ports towns. These small ports in the Dendê Coast provided an outlet for the small amounts of manioc production that would be coming out of smallholdings in the forested hills to the west of these towns. It is likely, therefore, that when Maximilian witnessed “white columns of smoke rising high to heaven from the green sea of forest,” he was either witnessing smoke rising from a posseiro’s farinha mill or else smoke from a newly opened swidden in the forest.

5. Social Meanings of the Forests & Hills

From a longer historical perspective than is available ethnographically, at least in this setting, we have seen that these hills played a dynamic role in terms of their orientation toward the state’s productive centers such as Salvador and Ilhéus. Insofar as people in these hills were orienting themselves toward the centers, this region was a source of both timber and especially farinha. These facts can tell us a bit about the forms of life that had taken hold in the hills. Given what we know about farinha production, for example, we can infer certain things about patterns of land use and land tenure security. The hills have also been drawn into many people’s projects of

escape, whether those were escaped slaves, bandits, or members of the free or freed rural poor looking for a place where they could make a living. In many cases, people went to the hills to remove themselves from a degrading lifeworld in which they found themselves alienated—whether through exploitative forms of wage labor, sharecropping, or slavery—from their work and from a fair share in the social good.

If, from the perspective of escaped slaves, it is true that by venturing into the forest one risks half one's skin, then this physical risk was apparently tolerable for at least two reasons. First, the forest does not discriminate among the master and the slave; it consumes the skin of all. In this respect, the forest imposes an inchoate equality among all people through an indiscriminating acknowledgement of the physical finitude and vulnerability of all human beings. If, under the conditions of slavery, the master had already placed the slave's life and body on the chopping block, the move to the forest appears as an attempt—however imperfect and often failed—to invite the master to risk injury of his or her own body. While the slave has long been aware of her own physical finitude and limits under conditions of slavery, the move to the forest is a moment in which the master is forced to recognize his or her own finitude and the limitations of will. The slave says: "I will risk all and leave you for the forest. If you feel your will to be so unlimited that you can subsume me and everything else into it, then come test your infinitude against the forest. For you will find that the forest—for its part—does not draw distinguish between you and me. Here, at the feet of the forest, we are equals." If, as Hegel had suggested in his mythological analysis of the master and the slave, the pathology of these kinds of relationships is not only owed to the fact that the slave's humanity goes unacknowledged, but also that the master misrecognizes the kind of being that he or she is by sustaining an inflated and aggrandized self-regard,³⁷ then the slave's escape to the forest is part of the master's public humiliation, or the process of making the master humble. In other words, through this act of escape, the slave makes a public example of the fact that the master does not command all, and as a figure of public authority and power, the master becomes increasingly uninspiring.

Second, if the slave has already lost her life and body to bondage, the slave has nothing left to lose and everything to gain by departing for the forest. Although the slave gains a limited form of freedom, she exchanges a form of coercion and death that is based in human evil and avarice for the amoral death of the sublime and impartial forest. Although the forest may equally

³⁷ I owe this reading to J. M. Bernstein's publicly available lectures on Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit*.

destroy slave and master alike, the slave appropriates the brute force of the forest into an assertion of her dignity, while intoning the words: “No, no more.” In one sense, the hills and the forests could be considered as analogous to a sign posted on a door declaring: “No!” or, more precisely: “No entry!” This is not to reduce the significance of the hills and forest to just this and only this type of negating relationship, but rather to indicate one specific way in which the forest can be drawn into purposeful activity. In this case, that activity is one of escape and the obstruction and severance of a pathological social relationship. When certain forms of symbolic language fail, or are not heeded, other semiotic forms that have more forcefulness³⁸ may be recruited into the symbolic form. This is why people facing an assailant may not only yell out, “No!” but they may also *push* back at the assailant, thereby giving a more robust material body to the negative assertion.³⁹ One may similarly recruit other kinds of entities—like a slamming doors, or dense forests, or deep mud—into negative assertions like these.⁴⁰ It is this potentially negating property of the hills and of the forests that makes the region in question characterizable as a “region of refuge” or a “hill” space, in the senses developed by Beltrán (1979) and later by James C. Scott (2009).

In other words, as the forest imposed a rudimentary form of respect between master and slave by holding the master at a distance, the slave was able to wrest her personality from complete effacement and subsumption into the master’s will.⁴¹ This was the negative or negating dimension of the escape to the forest, the winning of what might be thought of as a brute instance of what Isaiah Berlin (1969) called “negative freedom,” albeit not a form of negative freedom resulting from social conventions and institutions, but rather a form that is forcibly won and wrested away. Indeed, the negative form of freedom won by the retreat to the

³⁸ To borrow a term from Charles Sanders Peirce, this forcefulness could be referred to as the phenomenological category of “Secondness,” that undeniable aspect of “resistance” and the sense of “otherness” that emerges over the course of one’s interactions and encounters with the world.

³⁹ Or, someone who is being assailed may call the sheriff. In this moment, the sheriff is directly incorporated into a sign relationship as a representation (or, in more familiar terms, a representative) of a symbolic formation, in this case, something that is called a law.

⁴⁰ It is probably not a coincidence that when children run away from home, they often take to the woods.

⁴¹ This could be fruitfully compared with David Harvey’s notion of the “friction of distance”: “Accessibility and distanciation speak to the role of the ‘friction of distance’ in human affairs. Distance is both a barrier to and a defense against human interaction. It imposes transaction costs upon any system of production and reproduction...Distanciation is simply a measure of the degree to which the friction of space has been overcome to accommodate social interaction.” (Harvey 1990:258-259). Harvey is drawing upon Giddens’s notion of “time-space distanciation” (1986:258-259).

forest is constituted by the imposition of impediments and limitations.⁴² As will be seen in the following sections, it was through the communing and intermingling of the human and non-human that human personality, wrested from bondage, was able to grow into something new as people began to create a new lifeworld and, crucially, substantive forms of positive freedom.

For the landless rural people in Brazil's post-abolition period between the late 1880s and the end of the 1940s, the hills of this region were a place of asylum. For several decades after the abolition of slavery, the forests in this region housed a world in the making, until it could no longer remain outside the reach of capitalized plantation agriculture and was violently dismantled. The next chapter attempts an initial reconstruction of this world.

⁴² This may appear to be a strange invocation of the notion of negative liberty, since this idea is typically thought of as the absence of constraints or impediments to action. While the move to the forest is decidedly an establishment of a constraint and impediment upon the master and slave alike, it is simultaneously a lifting (even if temporary and imperfect) of the constraints that the master imposed upon the slave's capacities to act. The escape to the forest, therefore, might be understood as a moment in the building of more robust and tractable forms of freedom. Axel Honneth, before exploring the limitation and pathologies of a myopic focus upon negative freedom, attempts to recover the "kernel of intuitive truth" and "enduring attractiveness" that has given the notion of negative freedom its longevity, which he attributes to the idea that "the purpose of freedom is to secure a protected free-space for egocentric action, unimpeded by the pressures of responsibility toward others" (Honneth 2014:22-23). Under conditions of slavery, or in other contexts of massive social inequality and hierarchy, in which the "ego" is wholly subsumed by and beholden to another, the appearance of *strivings* toward free-spaces, and the emergence of inchoate notions of negative freedom, begins to make sense.

CHAPTER 3:
A WORLD IN A SEA OF FOREST

1. Contours of the World

As Seu Pedrinho entered deeper into his narrative, his spouse Heloísa turned to a young woman Sílvia—a neighbor who had been participating in the conversation, but, like me, had mostly been listening with great attention. Heloísa noted Sílvia’s interest in the unfolding narrative:

Heloísa: You’ve liked listening to this conversation, too, haven’t you?

Sílvia: Well, it’s the stuff Seu Pedrinho’s talking about—I’ve never heard him talk about this before.

Heloísa: Well, that’s what I’m saying. This is Seu Pedrinho’s story (*prosa*).

Sílvia: It’s just that he’s never talked about this with us before.¹

Heloísa’s comments help to make clear that Seu Pedrinho’s *prosa*, which can also be translated as “talk” or “conversation,” has a certain degree of stability and sedimentation as a narrative. Heloísa had heard it many times before, while it was the first time for both Sílvia and *me*. Stories like Seu Pedrinho’s, when they are recounted, draw younger generations of people into the narratives, inviting them to imagine the contours of this otherwise distant world that was unfolding in Seu Pedrinho’s living room. The present chapter draws upon Seu Pedrinho’s and others’ narratives about their early lives in the hills, or their movement to the hills as children or

¹ “H: Gostou da prosa também, não é?//S: Não, é a prosa de *Seu Pedrinho*—que eu nunca vi ele dizer isso.//H: Então, é isso que to dizem. É a prosa do Seu Pedrinho.//H: Não, que ele nunca conversou isso com agente.”

young adults, in order to reconstruct a view of the world that their families had created out of the forests and hills that were described in the previous chapter.

Narration is a process of constructing and reconstruction of worlds for the work of the imagination. In a similar manner, this chapter draws upon Seu Pedrinho's and others' narratives in order to build a composite image of the world and social institutions that the posseiros had created in the hills. Here I explore the different kinds of goods, material and social, out of which and through which their relationships were built. One theme that strongly emerges in these narratives is that social relationships in the hills were partly based on the normative ideals of trust, respect, and reciprocity. As will be seen, to trust was to grant the fate of the self to the care of others; while to respect was to uphold the dignity of another that was entrusted to the self. These form of relationship can be seen as a generalized ethos of generosity, based on giving and sharing; relationships of mutual aid, for example through work parties and labor exchanges; and in other kinds of more organized exchange and transaction; and, finally, in property relations. To violate that respect would be to consume and destroy the other—violating that dignity—and to break the bond of trust that made freely given (but not necessarily “chosen”) social relationships possible. These are in contrast to the forms of violation and loss that will be explored in Chapter 4, and especially in Chapter 5.

1a. Kin & Neighbors

The posseiros' homeplaces in the hills were spaced by several kilometers. Seu Pedrinho reported that he could often walk for at least forty minutes before reaching his nearest neighbor, and he recalled that there were about six farmsteads on the route between his family's own roça—situated on one corner of what is today called Morro Plantation—and Ituberá some 25 kilometers away. Including the farmstead that belonged to Seu Pedrinho's family which was some 25 kilometers inland, we can estimate that, along this one pathway into town, these seven families were separated by at least 3.57 kilometers. Since foot and mulepaths very likely followed circuitous routes through the contours of the hills, the distances were probably greater and travel times between home sites probably took a couple hours. The posseiros' home sites

would have been situated along various pathways, instead of a single pathway, although few traces of these old pathways and their homes remain.

People like Damião, who had encountered *posseiros* families in their youth, or those who had grown up in the region like Seu Pedrinho, still recall the names of some of their elders. A collection of names from various interviews includes 20 men and 5 women. The men's names include:

André de Mata, Andrezinho, Barnabé, Camilo, Chuca, Corme, Eugênio, Francisco, Marcelino da Assunção, Gerino, Guilherme, Hermínio, Leopoldo, Manuel Braz, Manuel Timote, Nestor, Paulino, Ricardo de dentro, Ricardo de fora, Tiodoro, and Valdemar.

The women's names include:

Antônia Peroba, Emília, Inês, Maria Crente, and Vêa Aninha.

In the absence of more detailed information, it is hard to reconstruct the precise relationships between these different names, if each name was associated with a distinct home site, how long they had resided in these hills, and so on. Many home sites were probably connected by consanguineal and affinal ties, while relationships among others were probably based upon affinity. Seu Pedrinho recalled several of his family's own neighbors:

No, no—they weren't always relatives, no. They were more acquaintances (*conhecido*), but they weren't relatives.²

The term *conhecido* can be translated as “acquaintance” or “known,” but it might be more accurately translated, through circumlocution, as “someone who is known to someone.” The English translation “acquaintance” does not capture the social import of what it means to be *conhecido*, whereas to be “known” does not capture the dimension of recognition, acknowledgment, and familiarity. To clarify Seu Pedrinho's suggestion that his neighbors were “known,” I asked him if his family was friends with these neighbors:

² “Não, não, às vez não era parente não. É conhecido assim, mas não era parente.”

We became friends, and that was the same as being relatives—the same as being a brother, the same as a child. There were households that loved us, and we loved them, too. It was like everyone was a child [of the same family].³

In an interview with a woman named Felícia, the term *conhecido* makes a similar appearance and is situated in a further order of relationships and goods. Reflecting on the *posseiros*, and making reference to the poverty that she had witnessed at the time, Felícia suggests:

[People were] really poor. They had nothing to live from. But they had their own houses to live in. And they knew one another, no?⁴

If, in Felícia's view, the *posseiros* had “nothing to live from,” they did at least have two kinds of goods: houses in which to live, and recognition from one another. In this view, the *posseiros* were not wholly exposed to the forest and its material forces, as they had other goods that protected and sheltered them: their houses and their relationships. These and other goods mitigated the experience of material poverty, and their relationships afforded a measure of spiritual (or social) wellbeing. In the following sections, I describe elements of these different kinds of goods and show how they—and others—came together to create a social world that offered what many recall as having been a positive measure of social meaning and fulfillment.

1b. Respectability, Age, and Gender

Given the list of names collected above,⁵ we can see that the *posseiros* were remembered as being both men and women. That their names are remembered is significant, and that women's names were also remembered says something significant about who the *posseiros* were, even though their names are quantitatively fewer in that list. It suggests that women were

³ “Pegou amizade, aquilo era mesmo que ser parente—é mesmo que ser irmão, é mesmo que ser filho. Tinha casa que amava agente, agente amava também. Parece que era tudo filho.”

⁴ “Pobre mesmo, que não tinham nada pra viver. Mas tinha casa pra morar. Se conheciam né?”

⁵ This list of names was not collected systematically, but rather these names were freely recalled across various interview situations.

grouped as being among the class of posseiros, that they could make claims to home sites and roças, and that they could be recognized apart from men. The recall of women's names, for example, did not indicate "possession" by men, or social standing in terms of men's names, as might be the case if a woman's name "Fulana" was defined in terms of her husband's name "Cicrano": "Fulana de Cicrano," or "Fulana the spouse of Cicrano."

At the same time, social relationships were structured by idioms of respect and respectability that constituted forms of social differentiation that, in turn, constituted particular social spaces and forms of activity across age and gender lines, as in the division of labor. Damião recalled the different spaces for men and women, and the "respect" that separated them out:

It was a strong respect. For you to enter a place where there were only women, it was very difficult. The married women were there separated, and for you to enter in their midst, it was very difficult to go in there, especially if you were a single male.⁶

The respect that segregated the spaces between women and men, he explained, also obtained in courtships between young women and men:

In the old days, for you to get close to a girl—AVE MARIA!...First you had to earn the trust of her parents...just to get close enough to see if you could get a kiss. It was very difficult back then. Both of you might be really excited, but there was no way, you were supervised the whole time.⁷

This separation of gender into spaces was mirrored in the separation of adults and children. For example, in the interview with Francinha and Mateus, and the brothers Alonso, Gilberto, and Josué, they likewise suggested that children would not violate the space of adults. Mateus

⁶ "Era um respeito brabo. Pa voce, pa voce entrar num lugar que só tinha mulé, era muito difice. As muleres casadas taca lá separada, e pra voce entrar ali naquele meio, era muito difice pa voce entrar, principalmente um cara solteiro."

⁷ "De premero, pa voce chegar perto de uma moça, AVE MARIA!...Tinha que tomar premero confiança dos pais...pa poder chegar perto pa ver se conseguia dar um beijo pelo menos. Era muito difice. Podia ta os dois ansiosos, mas não tinha jeito, era vigiado direto."

recalled that in these interactions between adults and children, the relevant categories of different kinds of persons were legible and unproblematized:

In the old days, children had their fathers, their mothers, their uncles, their aunts, and well, in those days, they obeyed them all, those older people. In the old days all of the children respected those older people.

What child would have shown up here—just like we’re here now—and some kid shows up and walks between us here talking? Not one, not one would pass through. If they wanted to go into the kitchen, they had to go around that way, see, to come in through that way. But in the old days, with us here, they wouldn’t pass through.⁸

In the interview with Alonso, Gilberto, and Josué, Alonso similarly commented:

In my father’s time, if we were here talking—just like we are now—for a child to enter in through this door and go out through the other, they couldn’t walk between.⁹

I jokingly asked if a child might go through the window instead, and Alonso explained:

If he was there, he had to jump through the window, and if not he always had to ask for permission:

“My father, with permission I will pass through.”

Then it was okay, he could pass. But to do so of his own accord, without asking for permission, no, he couldn’t pass...All the old man had to do was to give an angry look, and we already knew we shouldn’t interrupt.¹⁰

⁸ “Os minino de premero tinha seus pai, suas mãe, seus tio, suas tia, bem e tudo e finarmente, abedecia todos eles, aqueles pessua mais véio, aqueles pessua mais véio, os minino de premero todos eles respethava.//Por que, quem era um minino, pur mode chegar aqui, qui nem nós tamos aqui e um minino da gum thempo chegar aqui ente nós e passar aqui nós cunversano aqui? Nenhum, nenhum passava, se quisesse entrar na cuzinha tinha qui arruviar pur la, oie, pur mode entrar pur la. Mas aqui tinha, nós tamo aqui, de premero num passava.”

⁹ “No tempo do meu pai, pa nós tá palestrano aqui—que nem nós tamo aqui—pa entrar menino lá dessa porta e saí nessa outra, aqui não passava não.”

Gilberto explained that if any one of them was to walk through without asking for permission, then their father would immediately grab them by the ear and take them away. Alonso explained that their father used to carry around a switch or rod made from a plant, called *imbira*, that was found in the forest, and that he would strike them with it whenever they got in trouble.

These separations according to gender and age were instances of a wider notion of respect that, in many people's retrospective accounts of the past, subsisted in peoples relationships. This was a theme that was generalized across many typified accounts of the past. Damião, for example, suggested that in the past:

There was more respect. People respected other people's families. You didn't hear cursing, you didn't see guys disrespecting others' families—children, women, nothing. AVE MARIA! There was an angry respect back then!

2. Making a Living, Agriculture and Subsistence

The posseiros' household economy was a mixed strategy that combined horticulture, especially manioc production as a primary cash crop, as well as animal husbandry, foraging, fishing, and hunting. In this section, I explore recollections about the various ways that posseiro families made a living. A common theme that emerges across many of these narratives is not one of starvation and hunger, but rather memories of relative abundance and a common condition that was shaped by an ethic of sharing and generosity, which will be explored further in Section 4 below.

2a. Subsistence and Cash Crops

¹⁰ “Se ele tivesse lá, tinha que pular a janela, ou se não em todos os casos que pedisse licença://“Meu pai, licença que eu vou passar.”//Aí, tudo bem, passava. Mas por conta própria dele mesmo, sem pedir licença passar, não passava não. Bastava o véiu olhar assim de trevesa, já a turma sabia que não era pa romper ali.”

In many ways, the posseiros' agricultural holdings were not especially different from the provision grounds that former slaves and other rural tenants were permitted to cultivate on marginal plantation lands.¹¹ Their cultivated fields consisted primarily of manioc from which they produced farinha. Some of this farinha would have been directed toward household consumption, but the bulk would have been sold in local markets in Ituberá and other nearby towns.¹² Other cash crops would have been either non-existent, or of vastly less importance.

In addition to planting manioc, a number of other crops were part of the household subsistence strategy. Alonso, Gilberto, and Josué recalled that their family planted various vegetables, greens, and herbs (*tempeiros*), including okra (*quiabo*), collard greens (*couve*), cabbage (*repolho*), and small cherry tomatoes that often grew as volunteers, without having been planted. Francinha remembered her family growing small amounts of sugarcane in moister low-lying areas, but this would be for household consumption. She likewise recalled that various fruit trees were cultivated, if not deliberately planted, and these might have included jack fruit (*jaca*), bread fruit (*fruta pão*), and papaya (*mamão*) trees that—like many other plants—often grew from discarded or otherwise randomly dispersed seeds. Seu Pedrinho also recalled planting bananas, which are a common cash crop today, but noted that there was never any significant market for them. Consequently, bananas, like other fruits, simply went to waste:

We planted and planted and planted all of this, but we didn't have a place to sell it, we threw it out, and it just rotted.¹³

He explained that this was the case with various other vegetables and fruits for which there were no markets and household demand was limited. There was an overabundance of fruit despite the minimal expenditure of labor involved in producing it. Damião, in a similarly Edenic reflection, also recalled an overabundance of fruit in his childhood, and suggested that much of it simply went to waste or was thrown aside:

If it was too sour, we'd just throw it to the side:

¹¹ See Chapter 2, Section 3.

¹² See Chapter 2, Section 3a for a description of manioc production.

¹³ “Tudo isso agente plantava e plantava e plantava, num tinha aonde vender, que jogava fora, apodrecia.”

“I don’t want that, no.”

We’d pick a guava fruit, take a bite, and throw it to the side. An orange—you only wanted oranges that were really sweet to eat, if it was too sour you didn’t want it. You ate two, three oranges, and threw them away. Most went to waste. So, we didn’t give much importance to what we had in the old days, we wasted everything. If there wasn’t [someone] to eat [the fruit]—the animals also ate. Animals ate a lot. But [we didn’t] give much importance to those things, no, because there wasn’t anybody to sell it to.¹⁴

According to Seu Pedrinho, many people also cultivated yams, sweet cassava, pumpkins, sweet potatoes, corn and different kinds of beans such as fava, pigeon peas (*feijão andu*), and another referred to as *mangalô*. The common pinto bean (*Phaseolus vulgaris*), simply referred to as *feijão* without any a qualifier, which today is a nearly universal staple in contemporary Bahian cuisine, was not a universal or even common part of many local people’s diets. Caio, who had migrated to the region from the west, suggested that this was the case toward the sertão region: “At that time beans didn’t exist, we didn’t even know what beans were because we didn’t plant them.”¹⁵ Elsewhere, Damião concurred: “People in the early days didn’t bother so much with this business of beans,”¹⁶ while rice, likewise, was unknown to people like Caio who noted: “We didn’t know what it was.”¹⁷ The daily portion of beans and rice, accompanied by farinha and perhaps a bit of pepper sauce (*molho de pimenta*), so ubiquitous in contemporary times, was not yet a part of many people’s diets, and this can be seen in some people’s eating habits.¹⁸ This dietary pattern may be traced to the eating habits of older generations. Antônia, for example, explained that her daily fare was based on manioc flour, prepared into a *farofa* by frying it in some kind of oil or other cooking fat, which she ate together with some banana:

¹⁴ “Se esse negócio tava azedo jogava pra lá://‘Não quero mais não.’//Tirava uma graviola, chupava um pedacinho e jogava pra lá. Uma laranja, só queria laranja que fosse bem doce pa chupar, azeda não queria. Chupava duas, três laranjas e jogava pra lá. Perdia mais. Então, não tinha muita importância no que tinha antigamente, esperdiçava tudo. Não tinha quem comer—os animais também comiam. Bicho comia muito. Mas não tinha muito importância não pelas coisas não, que não tinha a quem vender.”

¹⁵ “Feijão naquele tempo num ixtia, nós num conhecia quase o que era feijão porque num prantava.”

¹⁶ “O povo de premero não importava muito com esse negócio de feijão...”

¹⁷ “Nós num conhecia.”

¹⁸ Barickman suggests that beans, rice, and corn enjoyed nothing more than a “secondary role in the common diet.” These grains, he reports, represented only 12 percent of the total store in Salvador’s Public Granary between 1785-1851, whereas farinha constituted 87.7 percent of the total stores (1991:121-122)

I don't—don't eat rice, I don't eat beans. I don't eat pasta. I won't eat it. Now, my food is—my little bit of farofa.¹⁹ Now, a lot of people only eat with banana, if there's *banana da prata*, I can eat, if not, I don't eat. Because my nature doesn't take to it.²⁰

The cultivation of cacao—already an important crop in the early 20th century among smallholders and large planters in the central cacao lands surrounding the city of Ilhéus and Itabuna to the south—was cultivated at very low-levels in the Dendê Coast region, and it was likely absent among many, if not most, of the posseiros' landholdings. Some people reported small and even medium-scale plantings. A man named Jeremias, who was partly responsible for helping to bring the region into the plantation economy in the later decades (as will be seen in Chapter 4), reported encountering cacao groves of between 100 and 200 trees that posseiro families planted in the valleys between the hills. Antônia estimated that her own family had between 100 or 200 cacao trees. Seu Pedrinho, on the other hand, estimated that his family had planted some four thousand cacao trees, the harvest from which they sold in the towns of Piraí do Norte and Ituberá. Seu Pedrinho's was the largest cacao holding that was reported to me among those who were considered posseiros, and he suggested that their cacao groves were relatively large for that period: “Any person that had 3,000 cacao trees—they already went by the name of *fazendeiro*,”²¹ or a plantation owner.

Regardless of the accuracy of Seu Pedrinho's retrospective estimation, the size of the plantings reported by Seu Pedrinho must be understood in relative and local terms. Leeds (1957:228-253) provides helpful comparative evidence from the central cacao lands for the 1950s in his discussion of smallholding cacao establishments as contrasted to large cacao plantations in that region. There Leeds distinguishes among smallholding establishments that he calls *roçeiros*, squatters who planted *roças*, and *burareiros*, who were the owners of small farms called *buraras*. Leeds differentiates *roçeiros* from *burareiros* insofar as the *burareiro* had some

¹⁹ Farofa is farinha fried in a small amount of butter or oil. Sometimes little bits of dried steak—*jabá*, more commonly known as *carne do sertão*—will be included to add additional substance and calories.

²⁰ Eu num, num como arroz, eu num como feijão, eu num como macarrão, como não. Agora, minha cumida é, minha, minha, meu pouquinho de farofa. Agora, um tanto de gente qui só come cum banana, se tiver banana da prata eu como, se num tiver eu num como. Que a natureza num pega.

²¹ “O macho que tinha três mil pé de cacau, já, já tinha o nome de fazendeiro.”

form of legal title to their land, whereas the roçeiro had no legal title, but might, in some cases, possess a measurement of their land:

The roçeiro, or holder of a roça, is a squatter who does not have legal title to the land, but may, and often does, own a measurement of the land on which he squats. This measurement is salable and affords him legal protection from trespass or unwarranted attempts to seize his land. [Leeds 1997:228]²²

Compared to the plantations that Leeds describes in the central cacao lands, the smallholding cacao farmers that Leeds describes were quite small. Leeds suggests that smallholdings ran from between 8 to 10 and 30 hectares in size (1957:229-230), and he describes two buraras having as much as 22 hectares planted in cacao (Leeds 1957:164). From other figures Leeds provides (1957:229-230), it can be roughly inferred that small cacao holdings (both buraras and roças) in the central cacao land ranged anywhere from 5 to 16 hectares in size, on average. By contrast, Leeds (1957:164) reports much larger cacao plantations, the smallest of which had 33 and 35 hectares of cacao groves, and other cases that ranged from 150 hectares, to 400, 451 (395,000 trees), 700, 1,500, and 1,505 (1,505,000 trees) hectares of cultivated cacao holdings.

Assuming that Seu Pedrinho's recollection is correct, and not an overestimation, and accepting Leeds's (1957:117) report that the conventional measure for the number of cacao trees per hectare for that time period was about 1,000 trees per hectare, this means that Seu Pedrinho's family would have had about 4 hectares of land in cacao cultivation. As will be seen, Seu Pedrinho later suggests his family possessed at least one form of legal documentation in the form of a private deed (*escritura*, see Section 7d below). In the context of the broader cacao lands, and in Leeds's terms, Seu Pedrinho's family would have been considered among the smallest of

²² These differences in legal status had bearing upon rates of taxation, which was very likely aimed at pressuring roçeiros into measuring and acquiring title to their land through the local land offices:

A minor disadvantage of the roçeiros compared to the burareiros or fazendeiros is the differential tax rates for untitled and titled lands. Those holding titles pay at the (1947) rate of 0.46% while the roçeiro pays 0.70% unless he has a measurement, when he pays 0.56%. [Leeds 1957:244]

The term *posseiro* enters into Leeds's research at only one point, to suggest that "[i]n local usage, the word *posseiro* ('holder') is occasionally used to refer especially to the [burareiro]" (1957:228). In my own research, I have never encountered the term "burareiro" in any natural discourse, and the term "posseiro" is used to lump together what Leeds differentiates as "roçeiros" and "burareiros." Indeed, although the term "roça" is still widely employed when referring to smallholdings, to refer to someone as a "roçeiro" would be a form of denigration.

the “burareiros,” given that they controlled some form of legal document to their land.²³ Relative to his neighbors, many of whom had no cacao holdings, it is understandable that Seu Pedrinho might claim that families with a few thousand cacao trees (and perhaps some form of documentation for their land) would have been considered “fazendeiros.” This is a highly local and relative distinction, and it is not clear that such distinctions amounted to wholesale differences in “class” or rather (and more likely) differences of degree and condition within a class.

Clove trees, a cash crop that would become widely cultivated in the region after the 1950s and 1960s, could occasionally be found near remains of old house sites built by earlier generations, which had subsequently been abandoned and returned to forest. Seu Pedrinho was only able to recall one family that had planted cloves on a scale of any significance, while another man named Jorge recalled that his grandfather had planted clove trees around the border of some of his cattle pastures. Jeremias reported encountering posseiros who owned one or two cloves trees. Overall, cloves appeared to be an even less significant cash crop than cacao was for posseiro families. The same appeared to be the case with coffee. Although the neighboring municipality of Camamu had historically exported small quantities of coffee from its port, coffee plantings do not figure centrally in local historical memory to the west of Ituberá.

2b. Cash and the Marketplace

Those things that could not be cultivated on farmlands might be purchased in town after selling a cargo of farinha or some other product of value. According to Seu Pedrinho, a typical shopping list for someone going into town could include things like lead shot (*chumbo*), gunpowder (*pólvora*), and salt—all three of which were important for hunting and preserving meats—as well as other goods like kerosene, sugar, coffee, dried steak (locally known as *jabá*, *charque*, or *carne seca*), and dried cod (*bacalhau*).²⁴ If these products were not purchased in town, they might be purchased in small country stores (*vendas*) that were owned by families that

²³ This will be seen to be consequential for his family’s ability to resist the land grabs that occurred later, as will be seen in Chapters 4 and 5.

²⁴ According to Barickman, farinha and dried steak were the primary elements in the slave diet, as was dried cod (*bacalhau*) during Lent (Barickman 1991:128).

were, in Damião's words, a "little better off" (*melhorzinho*). Damião estimated that such stores might have served an area of approximately 10 square kilometers, and sold basic commodities that could also be found in town: kerosene, candles, salt, sugar, dried steak, dried cod, and maybe ground coffee. To be sure, however, the prices in these small country stores were higher than those in town because of transport costs and middlemen. Consequently, it seems likely that country stores were most frequented by travelers and muleteers (*tropeiros*), rather than by *posseiros* residing in the hills—unless they were in a pinch for a bit of kerosene or a handful of salt.

Not all of these goods, however, were affordable to the *posseiros*—even if they would have been considered cheap by past standards. Gilberto suggested that purchasing dried steak, or *jabá*, was not within his family's means. Instead, they purchased bundles of small dried fish, called *espetinho*: "That was what we bought. No, my son, we weren't able to buy dry steak."²⁵ Gilberto's older brother, Alonso, suggested that for their family and many others like them, buying food in town was something they did on a very limited basis:

Nobody at that time went shopping for groceries. It was fishing or setting up traps in the forest. Setting up shotgun traps—because at that time, shotguns were legal. Everyone made their traps, set up their shotguns, killed animals—put out *mondéu* traps—snares to catch animals that we could eat. Fishing in the river—for fish to eat—because nobody went grocery shopping.²⁶

2c. *Animal Husbandry*

Other important sources of sustenance were procured by raising animals such as pigs and chickens, both of which were important sources of protein. Pigs were important in many households. Caio recalled: "My father tired of slaughtering so many thirty kilo pigs to put into

²⁵ "Era o que nós comprava. Não dava pa comprar jabá não, meu filho."

²⁶ "Ninguém naquele tempo não fazia feira. Era pescar ou botar armadilha na mata. Botar espingarda—que naquele tempo, espingarda era liberada. Todo mundo fazia suas armadilhas, botava suas espingardas, mata bicho—botava mundé—laço pa pegar bicho pa gente comer. Era pescar no rio—pa pescar pa comer—que ninguém fazia feira."

the house.”²⁷ Alvina—who was born in 1914 in the region of Laje, and probably came to Ituberá some time in the 1950s—noted that if pig meat was not sold, it was salted, dried, and stored for future household use, and in many cases, pigs might be raised for collective work parties (see below). Raising chickens was another important activity that did not require the same amount of labor necessary to raise pigs. Seu Pedrinho reflected upon the abundance he recalled growing up:

I came there [to Ituberá] when I was little—one year old. But in those years, we never experienced misery (*miséria*), no. We always had abundance to give to neighbors.²⁸

He recalled his family raising a lot of chickens in anticipation of new births. When a woman in their family gave birth, neighbors would come to help out, and those chickens would be shared with these visitors:

At that time, when a woman would give birth—when she got pregnant—she would raise chickens so that when it was time to give birth, she could kill them [to share with others], you see? There were some women at that time, when they gave birth—it was a very dark time—that they only had four, maybe five chickens to kill.²⁹

Another woman named Anabel, who was born in 1959 and came to the region in 1962 where she grew up, remembered that rural families raised large numbers of chickens in anticipation of childbirth, as this source of food was viewed as an especially healthy and revitalizing food for post-partum women.³⁰ Not only was the meat cooked and eaten, but broth from stewed chicken would be mixed with farinha in order to make a hearty porridge. Raising and sharing chickens was a medium through which relationships of mutual aid could emerge among neighbors. Seu Pedrinho recalled:

²⁷“Meu pai cansava de matar porco de trinta quilo pa jogar dento de casa pa comer.”

²⁸ “Vim pra aí pequeno—com ano. Mas através dessas coisa, a gente nunca passou miséria não. Sempre agente tinha com bundancia pa dar aos vizinhos.”

²⁹ “Naquela época, as muler ganhava neném, saía grávida aí ficava criano aquelas galinha pra quando ela ganhasse neném matar, entendeu? E tinha muleres que quando ganhava nenem naquela época—era uma época tão apagada—que só tinha quatro, cinco galinha pa matar.”

³⁰ Similarly, Barickman (1991:128) reports that during the period of slavery, masters occasionally provided chickens to sick slaves.

When my mother gave birth, there were days when we would kill six chickens per day. Six chickens per day, to give to the neighbors—because the neighbors came to watch over her, see? They came to visit, and we gave a lot of food.³¹

He recalled his parents saying:

“There are still chickens to kill, go ahead and kill them. Go ahead and kill them because there are plenty of chickens.”³²

And he concluded:

All of my life, we raised chickens—chickens in great quantity, in great quantity. And we lived from those things.³³

While agriculture and husbandry were integral part of making a living, we can begin to see the ways in which both productive activities provided opportunities for enacting relationships of sharing, generosity, and mutual aid. Before considering this in closer detail, however, we can briefly explore other ways of making a living outside of the cash and cash crop economy.

2d. Foraging

Beyond subsistence agriculture and participation in the region’s money economy, a significant part of people’s livelihoods could be procured from the regions various rivers, streams, and forests. In addition to cultivating different plants, foraging for fruits and nuts, as well as fishing, trapping, and hunting were all important parts of making a living. Although fruits, nuts, and other edible plant matter could be collected from the forest, these sources may

³¹ “E a minha mãe, não, quando a minha mãe ganhava neném tinha dia da gente matar seis galinha por dia. Seis galinha por dia, pa dar a vizinhança—que as vizinhança vinha olhar ela, né? Vinha visitar, era muita comida que agente dava.”

³² “Ainda tem galinha pa matar, pode matar, pode matar que tem galinha.”

³³ “Aí toda vida criou galinha em quantidade, em quantidade. E vivia dessas coisa.”

have been relatively limited. Many Europeans who arrived in Brazil, perhaps arriving with Biblical imagery in mind, “spoke dreamily about the easy living in a land with ‘forests abounding in delicious fruits’” (Barickman 1991:127). One French traveler, Louis-François de Tollenare, who had traveled through Brazil from 1816-1818 and had recorded some observations about life in rural Bahia, remarked: “I was wrong in assigning importance to the fruits found in the forest. They are less plentiful and less consumed than I had thought” (Tollenare 1971 cited in Barickman 1991:127). While this may have been partly true, it is also very likely that Tollenare—as a Frenchman with a culturally specific schema of what counted as “fruit”—simply did not know how to identify edibles in the forest.

If the forest was a limited resource for subsistence, the rivers, streams, and coastal estuaries were among the most plentiful sources of food. Several people that I interviewed recalled an abundance of both fish and game. Caio recalled his youth, before he migrated to the region from the west: “We collected lots of game and there was a river with fish—it also had a lot of fish...We lived in a place that had lots of fish and forest game.”³⁴ Fishing was conducted using lines, nets, fish traps such as the *jequi* (pictured in Figure 6 below), and in the coastal estuaries where shellfish could be readily collected.³⁵

Figure 6: *Jequi* Fish Trap



³⁴ “Nós catava muita caça e tinha um rio de peixe, muito peixe também que tinha...Nós morava num lugar que tinha muito peixe e caça do mato.”

³⁵ Barickman (1991:129) notes that shellfish provided a supplementary source of protein in the diet of rural Bahian slaves.

Antônia similarly recalled making her living from diverse food sources. I asked her if she fished when she was younger, and she exclaimed: “WELL—WELL—WELL! We fished, we collected shellfish—we did everything!”³⁶

Hunting was another important source of people’s livelihood, and was an activity especially carried out by men who learned how to hunt from other men as young boys (Flesher 2006:449).³⁷ Trapping, like foraging, is an activity that may have been carried on by both women and men, and involved setting up various kinds of snares and other traps. These skills were very likely of indigenous provenance, as Flesher suggests, “inherited from the Tupí peoples who lacked domesticated animals other than the dog and relied on fish and game for their animal protein” (2006:449). Sometimes traps were set using old makeshift shotguns that were set up along animal trails, waiting to be triggered and discharged by the next animal to walk by.

People reported eating various types of animals such as pacas, armadillos (*tatu*), agouti (*cutia*), wild pigs or peccaries (*caititu*), brocket deer (*veado*), and various types of monkeys. Wild game appeared to be an open-access resource, and the division of meat did not seem to be guided by any fixed obligation between, for example, hunters and the land owners where the game was caught, but rather distributed among one’s kin and neighbors. Mateus explained what might be done with the meat from a wild pig (*catitu*) if one was killed:

You gave [some meat] to who—to whoever needed it.

Because if someone killed [some animal], there were the neighbors [to consider]...If you caught some game here, everyone ate—the neighbors here—everyone ate...There wasn’t anybody that remained hungry.

Everybody gets hungry here—if somebody catches some game, nobody was left hungry.
Everybody ate.³⁸

³⁶“Oia, oia, oia! Pescava, mariscava—fazia tudo!”

³⁷ For an important and comprehensive account of hunting practices in the Ituberá region, see Flesher (2006:248-268, 449-457).

³⁸ “Se dava a quem—a quem precisava.//Porque ali se um matasse, tinha uns vizinho...Se arranjasse um girozinho aqui, todo mundo cumia—vizinho aqui—todo mundo cumia...Num ficava ninguém na parte de ther cum fome.//Ta tudo cum fome aqui—um arrumou um giro, ninguém ficava cum fome. Todo mundo cumia.”

So instead of fixed relations of obligation, the division of meat or other foods appeared to be guided by a generalized ethic of sharing that was grounded in the general recognition of physical necessity that was shared by all through the cyclical experience of hunger.

3. Shelter, Exposure, and Repose

If survival and making a living in the hills was characterized by diverse strategies that involved various engagements with, and transformations of, the non-human environment, as well as social relationships of giving and sharing, then creating shelter apart from the forest was another means of mitigating the various forms of exposure that emanated from it. Maximilian described the residences he encountered as differentiated from the forest in a decidedly marked fashion, and he begins to suggest that one reason for this was to create a haven from some of the region's natural hazards:

Hence the universal custom of leaving the houses unencircled by the slightest token of vegetation: no beautiful trees to afford shade, no flowering shrubs, none of the countless beautiful creepers twining round the supports of the verandahs, not the slightest possible sign of a garden! And why should there be this want of taste? There are two reasons for it. The danger of poisonous reptiles, which might conceal themselves in the shades; and the constant life out-of-doors, amid the luxuriance of nature which overpowers the owner by its profusion, and leaves him only the night-time in which to seek the shelter of his home. [Maximilian 1868:327-328]

The following sections describe the forms of shelter, repose, and covering used by the posseiro families, as part of the efforts to create a livable world amidst and out of the region's forests.

3a. Houses, Walls, and Roofs

Posseiro houses in the hills were typically built as mud huts (*casas de taipa*) or as grass huts (*casas de palha*), both of which were built from materials that were readily available in the natural environment. If the use of naturally available building materials was partly owed to limited monetary resources, Seu Pedrinho also suggested that high transport costs limited the use of manufactured building materials.

Grass hut houses were built from an underlying wooden frame that was covered using different kinds of grass, staw, or palm fronds, which were used to cover and enclose walls and roof alike.³⁹ Mateus reported that in his youth, the walls of grass huts might be enclosed using plants such as *burí*, *juçara*, and *marimbu* (*roxo* or *branco* varieties), and according to Alvina and Sebastião, roofs were covered with plants such as *indaiá*, *ouricana*, *paião*, *patioba*, and *sapé* grass. Grass hut houses had a limited time horizon in terms of their durability, and they frequently had to be repaired or rebuilt altogether. Caio report that after five or six years, grass hut homes began to cave in, and he recalled that by the time he left home at the age of fourteen years, his father had already built three houses at their home site. Sebastião similarly reflected on all of the grass hut homes he had built over the course of his life:

I grew tired of making so many grass hut houses. When it started to rain—coming from way up there on that mountain—[the water] would immediately start dripping inside the house. I'd to look for some banana leaves and put them on [the roof] to cover—to plug those leaks so that we could stay in bed.⁴⁰

Leaking water during the rains was a theme—one of physical exposure—that recurred in several narratives about grass hut houses. Alvina similarly recalled falling rain, and plugging leaks in the roof with *patioba* fronds. Alonso, Gilberto, and Josué, likewise, recalled spending many rainy nights standing in a corner, instead of lying down in bed, so as to avoid the dripping water.

³⁹ Grass hut houses seem to have fallen out of favor. I have never recorded an instance of any family living in the countryside residing in a grass hut, hence the use of the past tense. The only place where one may still encounter grass hut structures are on beaches where tourism is an established form of commerce, and the appearance of grass huts affords tourists an air of “tropical” authenticity.

⁴⁰ “Cansei de fazer casa de palha, quando a chuva—vinha laaaaaa naquela serra—já tava pingano tudo dento de casa, aí eu tinha que caçar umas palhas de banana e botar pelas pingueiras, pa cobrir—tapar aquelas pingueiras pa poder deitar enriba da tarimba.”

Taipa, or mud hut houses, were similarly built from an underlying wooden frame—perhaps hewn from the thin trunks of young trees—and walls made from a wattle-and-daub type construction.⁴¹ In both cases, the roof was typically covered using different kinds of grasses, palm fronds, broad leaves, or other suitable plant materials that are generically referred to as *palha* (straw). As is still the case with transient structures built from few resources, it is likely that the underlying wooden frames (posts, supports, beams) were made from whole, relatively unworked trunks and branches of trees of appropriate sizes. Compared to grass huts, the construction of a *taipa* house, especially the lattice framework over which clay would be packed, required a greater investment of labor, and probably reflected a less transient, and more financially stable, living situation than of those families that lived in grass hut houses.

3b. Beds and Rest

People commonly slept on *camas de ripa* (lath beds), which were made from laths—long, straight-grained strips of woods—that were laid across a rectangular wooden frame. The bed was made by planting four stakes (*estacas*) in the ground over top of which a rectangular frame was built, which supported the rest of the bed. Mateus explained that the laths were then laid length-wise over top of the structure. He and Francinha explained that the laths were made from flexible wood that would readily distribute and support the weight of a sleeping body without splitting or cracking, and might be made from trees such as *patí*, the *juçara* palm, or other trees.

Sebastião explained that a bed similar to the lath bed was referred to as a pole bed, or a *tarimba* or *cama de vara*. A pole bed was similar to a lath bed except that instead of the laths, the bed was made using long, thin poles made from whole trunks of young tree saplings collected from the forest. Given differences in the labor involved in procuring laths and poles, it seems more likely that poorer families—perhaps the majority of the *posseiro* families—used poles instead of laths, as the former were available freely in the forest and, unlike lath boards, did not require extensive modification or processing.

Bedding material was made in layers. On top of the poles or laths, some suitable plant material, such as from the *juçara* palm, would be placed over top of the bed to pad the surface.

⁴¹ Or a woven lattice structure covered with clay. *Taipa* houses are still a common construction form.

On top of this, any extra cloth or fabric that was on hand might be laid over top these plant materials, presumably to reduce the itch. People referred to these as “grass mattress” (*colchão de capim*), since manufactured mattresses, according to Alonso, were largely unheard of: “Nobody had even heard of them, we didn’t even know what a mattress was.”⁴² Alvina explained that, instead of grass mattresses, some families placed woven mats (*esteiras*) over top of the laths or poles. These, Seu Pedrinho explained, were made from plants like *pirí* or other plant materials. Alonso, Gilberto, and Josué explained that if there was no bed upon which to place the mats, then the mats were simply placed on the ground. This was very likely the sleeping place for young children, especially young boys, who were given last priority for bedding.

Blankets, finally, might be made from rough pieces of cloth. Francinha, and elsewhere Antônia, explained that when people slept they might cover themselves with cotton sheets made from *linhagem*, a kind of rough sackcloth that was salvaged and repurposed from heavy cotton bags that were originally used to store and transport foodstuffs. Antônia explained: “We weren’t able to buy fabric to make sheets,”⁴³ and instead they recycled cloth bags. Mateus suggested that bed coverings of these kinds suffered from problems with *pulgas*, or lice. Alvina recounted that they made pillows by stuffing little bag—probably made out of sackcloth—with fibers of a flowering plant called *marcela*,⁴⁴ which is said to be *sadia* (“healthy”) and have curative properties. According to others present during the conversation with Alvina, the *marcela* plant helps to prevent headaches, sinusitis, and it is popularly believed to have calming effects as well.

These living conditions likely represented those which prevailed for the most humble of families. Francinha indicated that in the hills, however, there were some families that were relatively better off and who occupied another type of house:

There were mattresses for those families that were better off—those who had—who owned a house with a tile roof (*casa de telha*), or a farinha mill. Those people had

⁴² “Colchão ninguém via falar, nem sabia o que era colchão.”

⁴³ “Num tinha cum que comprar pano pa fazer lençol.”

⁴⁴ *Achyrocline satureioides*. Also popularly called *macela* and *macela-galega*.

mattresses. But the fragile people (*gente fraco*)—the others—those other people, no—they just had a little house to live in.⁴⁵

A *casa de telha* would have the same type of wall construction as the *taipa* house, but with a roof covered by clay roofing tiles, or *telhas*. Owning a *farinh* mill simultaneously indicated, but also bolstered, the capacity to accumulate the resources necessary to enjoy certain type of goods like tile roofs and mattresses. These differences in housing types and household goods suggest different dimensions upon which social differences were indicated, with the humblest families in the social hierarchy described as being “small” (*pequeno*) or “weak people” (*gente fraco*).

3c. Clothing and Shoes

Several people suggested that many *posseiros* only had two changes of clothes. According to Jorge, each person typically had one set of clothing for everyday life working on the *roça*, and a clean change of nicer clothes that were “starched and stored away”⁴⁶ for occasions when people went into town or attended special social events such as weddings or baptisms. Seu Pedrinho likewise suggested that some people had more than one set of work clothes and dress clothes:

At that time, you had two sets of work clothes, and two [sets] to go out into town. Those [with two sets] were already “people” (*gente*).⁴⁷

When Seu Pedrinho says that they were “people,” he means to say people of relative financial means, suggesting further potential distinctions in terms of material and social status. Damião, who was still present during this part of the conversation with Seu Pedrinho, suggested that only the relatively well-off had more than one change of clothes:

⁴⁵ “Istia colchão p’as pessoa mais quilibradozinho—qui tinha—pissuía uma casa de têa, uma casa de farinha. Aquele ainda pissuía um colchão. Mas gente fraco—os outo—os outo não—[só] tinha a casinha de viver.”

⁴⁶ “Dois vestidinhos aquilo era guardadinho, engomadino.”

⁴⁷ “Gente” in this context might be translated as gentry or nobility, with the implication of differential “personhood” or “humanity.” People who are *gente* are viewed as being of a higher status than members of the rural poor. Having two sets of work clothes as well as two sets of town clothes was a mark of status and relative wealth.

[Damião]: It was only the guy who were a little bit richer that had two [sets of clothes], no?

[Seu Pedrinho]: Right—that’s right—

[Sílvia]: Oh my Lord!

[Damião]: It was those who were a little richer that had [more than] two—the poor didn’t have [more than] two—they only had one to go [into town] and another to stay in town.⁴⁸

Clothes were made of different kinds of fabric of different qualities. Mateus reported that over the course of his life, he had owned several shirts made of plain white madras cloth (*madrasto*),⁴⁹ Jorge remembered clothing from a fabric called *amescla*, while daily work clothes (and clothes for children) might have been made from the same kind of sackcloth (*linhagem*) that was used to make bed sheets. According to Mateus and Francinha, families would buy small quantities of uncut cloth to make their clothing, and if they did not have money for these purchases, it was not uncommon for “those poorer women,”⁵⁰ according to Jorge, to trade a day of work in exchange for a couple meters of *madrasto* or *amescla* cloth.

Footwear, if any was worn at all, took various forms and many people went barefoot. Anabel remembered seeing some people who had made shoes from old tires,⁵¹ while Mateus explained that some people wore a higher quality sandal called the *tamanco malandrinha* (or simply “tamanco” or “malandrinha”), which was made from a wooden sole and leather straps that were nailed to the sole using small brads. A pair of *tamancos* would have been part of one’s change of nicer clothes, Mateus explained, and reserved for travel to town and special events:

⁴⁸ “D: ‘O cara mais riquinho, né, que tinha duas?’//SP: ‘É, era, quer dizer—’//S: ‘Deus é mais!’//D: ‘Era o riquinho que tinha duas—o, o pobre não tinha duas não—só tinha uma pa ir e outra pa ficar, né?’”

⁴⁹ Madras cloth, in northeastern Brazil also known as *madapolão*. Madras cloth comes from the Indian city of Chennai, formerly known as Madras, and was probably brought to Brazil through Portuguese trade.

⁵⁰ “Aquelas pobrezinha.”

⁵¹ Personal communication, Feb 19, 2013.

“important masses, and wedding masses, baptisms, and everything like that.”⁵² On the farm, on the other hand, Francinha and Mateus explained that many people walked about and worked barefoot—as the rubber boots that people wear today “didn’t exist” (*num inxistia*). Alonso reported that they never wore tamancos in their youth: “All of us lived with our feet on the ground. Walking everywhere. Sleeping on the ground.”⁵³ Such footwear appeared to be especially reserved for adults making trips to town and to attend special events. Among adults, it was not clear if they were equally worn by male heads of households, or if adult women wore them as well. Anabel recalled that not everyone who came to town to take care of business wore shoes, and children who traveled into town often came barefoot.⁵⁴

When traveling to town, Damião explained, people would wear their “ugly clothes” during the voyage, as “the road was pure mud,”⁵⁵ and then they would change clothes once they got near town. He recalled that his own father would bring “his clean clothes and shoes hidden away, because if not, they’d all get ruined on the road.”⁵⁶ Once in town, his father would find a place to bathe and then change into his clean clothing.

In general, if footwear was not common for children and young adolescents, walking around unclothed was not uncommon among younger children living in the countryside. Sebastião and Augusto, for example, explained that boys of 10 and even 12 years of age, and little girls of 7 or 8 years of age, would commonly walk about barefoot and naked (*nu, despido*). Caio, likewise, recounted his youth in a nearby region before migrating to Ituberá in the 1960s:

Young men were naked—walked around naked. I remember...we would always go to my uncles’ house—to deliver messages for my father, to go fetch whatever—naked and barefoot...We were grown and naked. And it wasn’t just us alone, no, it was the whole group.⁵⁷

I asked him how old he was at the time:

⁵² “Ia pa maior missa, e era missa de casamento, era batizado, era tudo.”

⁵³ “A gente vivia tudo com os pés no chão, andando pa todo canto, durmino pelo chão.”

⁵⁴ Personal Communication, Feb 19, 2013.

⁵⁵ “Roupa feia...a estrada era lama pura.”

⁵⁶ “Ele trazia a—a—a roupa escondida e o sapato escondido, porque senão estragava tudo na estrada.”

⁵⁷ “Ficava home nu—andano nu. Olha, eu me lembro que...nós cansava de ir pa casa dos meus tio—ver que meu pai dava um recado, va buscar qualquer coisa—nu, sem calça...Era grandão nu. E num era nós sozinho não, era o grupo todo.”

Big, big!—around ten years, twelve years old—naked, barefoot...Without shoes, really naked—without underwear...at that time, nobody even spoke about underwear...We were naked, we played, everybody—everybody naked...Shoeless, everybody with their feet on the ground.⁵⁸

If clothing children was not a priority, neither was acquiring clothes for them. Caio recounted a time, after he was a bit older, when he had lost his only shirt and had to go shirtless for several months:

I remember one time—I remember, I'm even embarrassed to tell this...There was one time when I lost my only shirt. I spent more than five months without a shirt. I didn't even have a shirt. My brother had two, and every now and then I'd wear one of his, you know? But I remained shirtless. Later on my father said—my father had gotten sick—and my father said:

“Boys, you go on ahead there—you boys go there and collect some vines.”

So, we went to get some vines, climbed some trees, cut some vines. Then he made some baskets [with the vines] and sold them, and then we went and bought a change of clothes [for me].⁵⁹

Because clothing was in limited supply, it was, consequently, well taken care of. Seu Pedrinho noted that if you owned “one pair of shoes,” after using them you always “cleaned them, put

⁵⁸ “Grande, grande!—de dez ano, doze ano—nu sem calça...Sem calça, nu mermo—sem cueca...naquele tempo ninguém nem falava em cueca...era nu, nós brincava todo mundo, todo mundo nu...Era, descalço, todo mundo com os pé no chão.”

⁵⁹ “Eu fiquei uma vez—eu me lembro, eu num tem vergonha de contar...Teve uma vez, que eu perdi a semente de camisa. Eu levei mais de cinco mês sem ter nenhuma camisa. Nem uma camisa num tinha. Meu irmão tinha duas, de vez em quando eu vestia a dele, né? Mas eu fiquei. Depois meu pai disse—meu pai doeceu—aí meu pai disse://“Rapaz vocês dão um jeito aí—vocês vão la tirar um cipó.”//Aí, nós foi tirou um cipó, subiu nos pau, cortou o cipó. Aí ele fez uns pau de panicum e vendeu, foi, comprou um muda de roupa.”

them away, and kept them for four, five, six, ten years.”⁶⁰ As a consequence of the relative scarcity of clothes, patching was commonly practiced as a well-refined craft. Jorge noted: “For those who knew how to patch clothes, the patching was done very well. You could go anywhere [without feeling ashamed].”⁶¹ Some clothes were so heavily patched, Damião explained, that “you didn’t know what the original color was!”⁶² Indeed, this became a marker of rural poverty. Heloísa, commenting on the stereotyped imagery of patching used in the contemporary June harvest festivals such as São João and São Pedro, suggested:

Here in Bahia during São João, they play like this: they cut up and patch—even nice new clothes—they’ll cut them up and sew on other pieces.⁶³

Whereas today, people cut up new clothes and sew on new patches to give them the appearance of being old and worn, in the past people patched their clothing as a necessity and out of frugality. Heloísa explained:

Those people in the old days who didn’t have clothes, or a bunch of clothes, well they took and tore a piece from one [garment] and sewed it onto another.⁶⁴

Patching has become a form of nostalgic play on the past, somewhat to the disbelief of older people who watch young people deliberately dismember new clothes in perfectly good condition in order to make them appear old. Seu Pedrinho commented, somewhat incredulously and critically:

⁶⁰ “Tinha um parzinho de sapato que ele guardava, lavava de novo, botava la, é 4, 5, 6,10 ano.” Today, in contrast, he noted, “there are people who own 10, 12, 20 pairs of shoes.” [“E hoje tem gente que tem 10, 12, 20 par de sapato.”]

⁶¹ “De remendo, quem sabia remendar aquilo era um remendo bem feitinho, voce entrava em qualquer canto.”

⁶² “Daqui a pouco não sabia qual era a cor original.”

⁶³ “Aqui na Bahia eles brinca São João assim. Corta, remenda—com a mesma roupa boa assim—eles corta pedaço e põe outro.”

⁶⁴ “Aí aquele povo antigamente que não tinha roupa, um monte de roupa, aí pegava, ia rasgano, eles pegavam um pedaço de outro e costurava.”

Today, they do it to play around or just because they're young, I don't know. They cut up their clothes to sew on other pieces of fabric...But in the early days, we did it out of necessity because we didn't have many clothes.⁶⁵

4. Poverty, Abundance, and the Struggle for Life

If life was characterized by relative scarcity, this gave rise to an economy of generosity that was based less on explicit accounting of debts, than the recognition that everyone shared the same kinds of physical frailties and material needs. This motivated the need for a generalized ethos of generosity. Just above, Mateus was cited as suggesting:

Everybody gets hungry here—if somebody catches some game, nobody was left hungry. Everybody ate.

What he meant to say there is not that everybody was going hungry, starving, or suffering for an absolute lack of food, but rather that the cyclical *experience* of hunger—the experience of a rumbling stomach—was a universally shared experience. There was no person that was exempt to feeling occasional hunger, and, therefore, everyone likewise shared in the need to eat. Recognizing this common condition, which was reciprocal and universally shared, and observing that this condition was more easily alleviated through common work and struggle, grounded various practices of sharing, notions of reciprocal debt, and a notion of struggle.

4a. Sharing and Reciprocity

Under such circumstances where the money economy was still out of reach for many people, the norms of a transactive economy based on sharing and generosity could have, at least

⁶⁵ “Hoje na brincadeira ou pela mocidade, eu num sei. Eles corta a roupa pa botar os pedaço de pano...Mas naquela época, era por necessidade, porque num tinha roupa.”

under certain circumstances, intervened in transactions that might normally be carried out through monetary exchanges. In the context of a conversation with Sebastião about the exchange of goods of greater value, for which there were objectified means of accounting for transactions (see Section 6d below), Sebastião explained that goods of relatively insignificant value could be readily shared among family members, friends, and neighbors. With items of smaller value, he explained, people did not keep accounts of such exchanges:

Now small things, no. Small things—those who could pay for them, paid—those who couldn't pay, no big deal—it was just given. In the old days, anybody could take something [of small value], and give it away.

“Take it friend, go on ahead.”

If I killed a pig, you took a quarter of it.

“Take it friend, go on ahead.”⁶⁶

Sebastião paused in order to comment that today, by contrast, “we can't even buy a cow's foot, because you have to pay for everything [in cash].”⁶⁷ What he meant was that while in the past, a cow's foot (*mocotó*) might be acquired through free giving and sharing, today, even the most insignificant items must be paid for in cash.⁶⁸ He continued with his example, suggesting that things like *farinha* might have been freely given, as he articulated an ethos of generosity and reciprocal sharing:

⁶⁶ “Agora coisa pequena, não. Coisa pequena é—o que pagou, pagou—o que não pagou, vai pra lá—ficava dado. Antigamente qualquer um pegava qualquer coisa e dava.”//“Toma camarada, vai embora.”//Matava um porco, pegava um quarto. //“Toma camarada, vai embora.”

⁶⁷ “E hoje que a gente não pode comprar um mocotó que tudo é pago.”

⁶⁸ Sebastião's assertion does not entirely reflect other social facts that can readily be discerned today. To be sure, the number of stores where you can acquire goods based on “personal” credit or instances of generous giving are fewer and fewer, especially as accounting techniques become more and more stringent; but it is not uncommon to see people in rural areas selling things “fiado,” or on personal credit. Indeed, one small store keeper noted that most of his debts will never be paid.

But in the old days, small things, we'd take them and just give them to one other. If I made some farinha—10 or 12 litres:

“Take it buddy, go on ahead.”

And soon afterward, another person would make some and pass it along to us. And that way we all could eat and drink.⁶⁹

So even in the context of an economy in which transactions were gradually becoming more monetized, items of smaller value (and perhaps the most necessary to life) were exchanged according to the norms of generosity and reciprocity instead of the precise accounting of the money economy.⁷⁰ This ethos of generosity took various forms, as will be seen in the forms of mutual aid and joint work.

4b. Poverty and Plenty

Despite the material poverty that many people experienced—perhaps recognized mostly in retrospect, and in the context of increasingly conspicuous forms of consumption—people who had lived and cultivated the forests and hills did not seem to recall unmitigated physical suffering. Francinha even recalled a relative plenty and abundance of food growing up in the region:

Food was very plentiful. We came here [to town] and bought meat, dried cod, fish, and then we'd go back to the roça. There, we'd go to the river with a fishing pole and catch a lot of fish. If it rained, we'd put out a *jequi* [fish trap] and catch lots of shrimp and

⁶⁹ “Mas antigamente, coisa pequena, agente panhava e dava outro. Fazia uma farinha—10, 12 litros://‘Toma fulano, vai embora.’//Mas logo, outro fazia passava pá gente. E aí agente ta comeno e bebeno.”

⁷⁰ See Chapter 8, Section 6 on “names” for an account of the way in which the money economy may also be subject to norms of generosity and the recognition of vulnerability.

*pitú*⁷¹...We caught a lot, we lived on the banks of a river and caught a lot of *pitú* and *traíra...acará*. All of these fish.⁷²

Francinha continued her reflections:

I was raised without my mother, and without my father, but with my aunt...Just my aunt and my siblings, we were three siblings...It was one girl and one boy, and with me, three. But we didn't have a [bad] life—concerning food, we didn't have a bad life, no. That is very clear in my memory, we didn't [go hungry], no. We'd set up snares, catch a forest rat, catch a *saruê*. We'd set up an *arapuca* trap to catch birds. All of this was a way to live, you see?⁷³

Similarly, in my interview with Alvina—while her grandson (or grandnephew) named José was nearby—she reflected on her earlier years, living and working about the countryside:

[Alvina]: You didn't see people suffering [from hunger], for lack of farinha, that sort of thing—no, everybody—

[José]: —everything was plenty—

[Alvina]: —it was, it was—you had your—everybody had their [food]. Those that lived on the roça [had food], but not those who lived near the center of town.⁷⁴

⁷¹ *Pitú* are a species (*Macrobrachium carcinus*) of large freshwater shrimp.

⁷² “Agora, cumida era muito farturento. Porque vinha aqui comprava cumida, era carne, bacalhau, peixe, ia pa roça. Ia no rio pegava muito peixe de anzol. Se dava uma chuva botava um negoço qui chama jiqui, pegava muntho camarão e pitu...Apois é, pegava muito, a gente morava na bêra do rio, pegava muito pitu e traíra.”

⁷³ “Eu me criei sem mãe, sem pai, cum a tia...Só a tia e os meus irmãos, três irmãos...Era uma mulé e um home, comigo eram três. Mas nós não passava a vida—sobre a cumida, nós não passava a vida mal. Não, isso aí eu tenho muita lembrança, não passava, era. Botava um laço, pegava um rato, pegava um saruê, armava uma arapuca, pegava um passarim. É tudo isso é modo de viver né?”

⁷⁴ “A: ‘Não se encontrava pessoa que vivia se bateno, às vez pur farinha, aquele coisa, não, todo mundo—’//J: ‘—tudo era de sobra—’//A: ‘—era, era tinha sua—cada um tinha sua. É quem morava na roça, quem morava na beira do cuméço, não—’”

Alvina was a migrant to the region and lived working about the countryside in search of work and places to plant (as will be seen in Section 7b below). In her reflection, she points to an important distinction between the conditions of life for the poor living in town, and those who lived in the countryside. Having land, or somewhere to plant, was a means for creating relative abundance that contrasted with the condition of those families who had migrated to town. Securing land was part of Alvina's quest, but even while she and her children lived and worked on other's lands, they still had enough. This was because wherever she worked, she was able to plant in many of those places. Alvina explained:

We also lived on other people's lands, but we didn't lack [places to plant] roças.⁷⁵

So even under conditions of relative land tenure insecurity, land was plentiful enough such that people like Alvina, who wished to plant and cultivate the land, would be able to make a life for themselves.

These conditions and experiences were not universal in the cacao lands, and they very likely worsened in towns to west where the climate was drier. Caio recalled greater difficulties in his childhood before migrating to the Ituberá region: "My father had to walk eight leagues (*léguas*⁷⁶) to sell one load (*carga*⁷⁷) of farinha—just to bring home salt and sugar." Growing up in the hills near a town of Corte de Pedra, Caio recalled his father traveling from their home for the marketplace in town:

That's where he sold. He'd go out from the place...that was pure forest, go out at night with two or three animals loaded up with farinha—just waiting for a jaguar to pounce! That's where he'd sell, but he hardly made enough to buy anything. Almost nothing—it was too cheap!⁷⁸

⁷⁵ "Nós morava também nos terreno dos outos, mas nós não faiava roça."

⁷⁶ Approximately 48 kilometers, or just shy of 30 miles. The "league" was never a standardized unit of measure in the Portuguese-speaking world. In Bahia, the *légua* was reckoned as being a distance of six kilometers.

⁷⁷ One *carga* of any product amounted to 100 kilograms in weight.

⁷⁸ "Vendia ali e sair nesses mundo...que era mata pura, e sair de noite vendo a hora da onça pegar—dois, três animal carregado de farinha. Vendia aquilo que não dava pra comprar nada. Quase nada, barato demais!"

The value of farinha was so little that he recalled an occasion when he had gone into town and saw people walking barefoot—“with their feet all full of mud”⁷⁹—over the massive piles of farinha that were being bought and sold in the open-air market. Surely, then, the proceeds from selling several loads of farinha could purchase very little.

4c. *The “Struggle” for Life*

If some accounts of life in the hills suggested a greater degree of abundance, Jorge offered a broader vision of life that included both well-being but also hardship. The problem of hardship was both conditioned and mitigated by the necessity for work, or what many people refer to as the *luta*, or “struggle.” In Jorge’s early years, he suggested:

Everything in life was all dark. We lived well, but we also went through hard times. We lived more hungry than with our stomachs full. But for what? In order to have.⁸⁰

Here Jorge is articulating an ethic of life—and ethic of making a life—through the interchange of struggle, labor, and hardship. Jorge’s statement is less a complaint about the “darkness” of the times, about experiencing hunger and hardship, and even less an articulation of “possessive individualism” in the form of the desire “to have.”⁸¹ Rather, he is pointing toward the interrelationships between hunger and toil as necessary steps in securing the means necessary for physical and social life. In order to “eat,” one might say, one must expend and through such expenditure one is thereby exposed to the risk of being “eaten” and various other forms of suffering.⁸² To be sure, people did experience hunger, difficulty, and suffering—and the previous focus on abundance is not to be romanticized. But the point to Jorge’s statement is less to highlight suffering itself, and more to point at something deeper about the interrelationship between suffering and struggle; namely, that life is given positive meaning by passing through,

⁷⁹ “Com os pé melado de lama.”

⁸⁰ “E um tudo na vida era tudo iscuero. A gente passava bem e passava mal também. Passava mais fome de que barriga cheia. Pa que? Pa ter.”

⁸¹ This expression is owed to C.B. Macpherson (1969).

⁸² I explore this idiom of “eating” in Chapter 7, Section 4, where I describe the multiple entities and hazards that one encounters when cultivating the forest, and then explore the idiom of “eating” in other spheres of social life.

and overcoming, suffering. In other words, it is precisely these experiences and the overcoming of them that constitutes the positive meaning of abundance.

Antônia, for example, recalled the “struggle” she faced after her husband died prematurely, and she was left to care for their children:

After he died, I had to struggle for the kids—so that we didn’t—didn’t die starving, so that we didn’t starve.⁸³

We discussed the circumstances of her husband’s death, the subsequent hardship she faced working for others, and her struggle to raise her children by herself. Later in the interview, however, she describes the longing (*saudade*) that she felt for her “struggle”—that is, for her work—which makes it clear that the notion of “struggle” cannot be understood in a strictly negative sense:

I feel longing for my—for my struggle. By five in the morning, I’d already be awake drinking my bit of coffee so that I could go out to work.⁸⁴

Some 20 years younger than Antônia, Jorge recalled his parents’ struggle to raise him and his siblings:

My old father burned his back, together with my old mother, beneath the hot January sun. They worked...so that on Saturday they had [money] to buy bundles of dried fish.⁸⁵

In order to make a living, to acquire the necessities of life, but also to make a life—that is, a meaningful life—he, his family, and their contemporaries had to work, experience hunger, and suffer (under the burning sun) in order to be able to eat. This, in Jorge’s view, seemed to encompass the wider connotation of the verb “to struggle,” or *lutar*.

⁸³ “Depois que ele morreu, eu tive que ficar luthano pur minino—pa num, num morrer à míngua, num ficar à míngua.”

⁸⁴ “Eu them sodade da minha—da minha lutha. Como—como—como dava cinco hora da manhã eu já tava tomano doi, doi dedin de café pa ir trabalha.”

⁸⁵ “O véiu meu pai queimou, queimou as costa, mas a véa minha mãe no sol no mês de janeiro. Trabaiano ...pa chegar o dia de sabo ter com que comprar um moiozinho ispeto.”

Struggling also meant giving thanks for what they already had, as they struggled to improve their condition. Jorge commented that young people today prefer finer cuts of meat, instead of the fatty pieces of sinewy leftovers that he grew up eating:

In the early days, we were still thankful to God that we could buy those pieces of fat to eat. Grill a little piece—to take a little *piabinha* fish—from a bundle of dried fish—place it over the embers. Throw a handful of farinha in the porridge—into the hot water—make a mixture of porridge with some fish...There was no doubt that I went out with a stomach full of porridge, you see?⁸⁶

5. Making a Living Together

Making a living in the hills and the struggle for life often meant working together, as an instance of sharing and reciprocal exchange. Labor arrangements varied depending on the work task to be completed, the amount of time that would be involved, and the number of people that would be required. Clearing a new roça in the forest, for example, might be an occasion to call upon one's relatives and neighbors. Larger or smaller groups of people meant different divisions of labor and different forms of sociality, such as festivities and courtship, that might be attendant to the work itself.

5a. Work Parties & Mutual Aid

⁸⁶ “E de pemero, ainda dava, ainda dava graças a Deus comprar aqueles pedaços de sebo pa comer ó. Assar um pedacinho, assar um—pegar uma piabinha—de ispeto, de, de peixe—enfiar na brasa. Jogar aquele taieiro de farinha dhento do pirão—dhento da água quente—fazer aquele tapegê triste de pirão de farinha e segurar aquela pipira pa tá...Vamo ver, que eu saía dali a barriga cheia de pirão puro, ta veno?”

Work parties and labor exchanges were an especially important domain in which social relationships grounded in this ethos of reciprocity played out. Historically, work groups and work parties in the region were referred to by the terms *ademão*⁸⁷ and *adjunte*.⁸⁸

An *ademão*, a term that is still in occasional use today, would consist of a small group of two or three people dedicated to a limited work task that might rarely go beyond one or two day's work. This might include activities like harvesting manioc, putting roof tiles on a house, or preparing farinha. In these cases, you could ask someone to "give you" an *ademão*. Damião gave me an example: "Can you give me an *ademão* to roast some farinha tomorrow?"⁸⁹

In Damião's recollection, an *ademão* was done with people that "were closer" and "friendlier,"⁹⁰ of good character and often selected from among one's "better neighbors."⁹¹ As Damião explained, "there are some neighbors that we don't—we don't even want them close."⁹² On the other hand, "there are neighbors who are like family members, everything that we want, they also want. If they need something, we can serve that need; if we need something, he can serve our need as well. That's how it is."⁹³ So an *ademão* was based upon what Damião called "a good friendship,"⁹⁴ which could refer to any person related by blood or otherwise, with whom one could engage in a reciprocal interchange of desires, needs, and their satisfaction. This interchange proceeded by being able to jointly shift from one another's perspective, and jointly bring about different goals.

Unlike the term *ademão*, the term *adjunte* appears to have fallen out of use and has become replaced by the term *mutirão*. Several people suggested that this latter term came into usage more recently. One person named Colodino suggested that the term *mutirão* is a "modern word," and estimated that it has been in use for around 20 or so years;⁹⁵ Damião suggested that the word has been around for ten or fifteen years; and Gilberto suggested that the term "mutirão is from recent times."⁹⁶ Antônia, however, who grew up in the region and whose family lives in

⁸⁷ Probably an abbreviation of *ademão*, which is likely a compound term derived from the terms *dê* and *mão*, or "give" and "hand," respectively.

⁸⁸ From *adjunto*, or "adjunct" or "assistant."

⁸⁹ "Tu pode me dar uma *ademão* pa ajudar a torrar uma farinha amanhã?"

⁹⁰ "Mais bem chegadas...mais amigo."

⁹¹ "Melhor vizinho."

⁹² "Tem uns vizinhos que a gente não, não quer nem tá perto."

⁹³ "Se precisa de uma coisa a gente serve, se a gente precisa ele serve também, é assim."

⁹⁴ "Uma boa amizade."

⁹⁵ Fn458.

⁹⁶ "Mutirão é no tempo de hoje."

an area that is now recognized as having been the lands that originated as part of a former *quilombo*, or maroon community,⁹⁷ suggested that they used both the terms *adjunte* and *mutirão* interchangeably.⁹⁸

An *adjunte* is a much larger, more elaborate, and potentially prolonged work party that could involve as many as 50 or 100 people. Work tasks often extended beyond one day, and were followed by festivities that began with prayer, food, drink, music and dance. *Damião* suggested that the duration and scale of the work, and the presence of food and festivities, are what distinguished an *adjunte* from an *ademão*.⁹⁹ In order to hold an *adjunte*, the host family had to plan ahead and spend several months to a year accumulating the resources necessary to hold the *adjunte*, which mean food and a healthy reserve of *cachaça*, a strong spirit distilled from sugarcane juice. Depending on the size of the *adjunte*, the hosting family would raise one or more pigs, or even a whole cow, that would be slaughtered on the day of the work party. *Damião* explained that a family might raise several pigs for several different *adjuntes*, raising one pig for each major stage of the cultivation process: one pig for the *derruba* (felling) stage; another pig for the *goiva*¹⁰⁰ (clearing) stage; and another for the *plantio* (planting) stage. Each of these tasks, *Damião* explained, constituted distinct stages in the process of “putting in a *roça*” (*botando a roça*), or preparing and planting the ground for a *roça*.

On the day of an *adjunte*, work would begin early in the morning:

They’d start at five in the morning and by the time it was two-thirty or three, people would start showing up [at the house] for lunch, to eat and rest a little bit. They’d drink a

⁹⁷ Commonly referred to as a “quilombo remanescente” (from “comunidade remanescente de quilombo”), or in other words a community formed from the remnants of a *quilombo*, or a maroon community that would have been established by escaped slaves.

⁹⁸ This is a curious terminological shift. As claims for social justice grew in Brazil during the dictatorship and culminated in the 1980s with a new constitution and democratic reforms, it is not hard to imagine a proliferation of political spaces in which the term *mutirão* might have been employed in public discourse. It seems likely that the term *mutirão* may have been adopted, for example, in political discourses among the left as a home-grown Brazilian term that captured various socialist-inspired concerns with the “collectivism” and collective action.

⁹⁹ Fn458.

¹⁰⁰ From the verb *goivar*. This verb does not have an adequate English translation, and refers to the process of collecting together the smaller debris that is left over after a bit of felled forest has been burned. This involves the small to medium sized branches that are readily moveable, but never larger tree trunks. After this debris is gathered into piles, they are then burned for a second time. Large tree trunks, otherwise left to eventually rot, will be used for firewood and sometimes to fashion wooden planks and boards for construction purposes. This is an important part of the clearing process that allows people to work and move freely in the fields. This will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 7, Section 2.

little *cachaça*, bathe, get dressed so that they could go into the night to dance a little, have some fun.¹⁰¹

If the work only lasted one day, the guests would return to their homes the next day. If work continued onto the next day, then festivities would be held each night for every day of work that was performed. In those cases when an *adjunte* lasted for more than one day and night, the visiting families would find a place to bed overnight, perhaps under some extant structure like a storehouse or in the *farinha* mill (if it was not in use), or perhaps under a makeshift shelter.

5b. Work, Gender, and Work Parties

While many agricultural tasks were carried out according to a gendered division of labor, many women did the same agricultural work that men did, and some may have been exceptional in this respect. Antônia, for example, suggested that she was as good on the *roça* as any man, and that she had a hunger for work on the *roça*:

The more I worked, the more I wanted to work. I wouldn't have traded myself for any man—with no man when it came to work—neither on the handle of a hoe, not with the machete to clear a field, nor with an axe to fell the forest. I did it all.¹⁰²

She reveled in how much she used to work:

AVE MARIA! Ave Maria, I worked! I worked hard enough to even make a crazy person afraid, do you hear what I'm saying? I worked hard enough to even make a crazy man feel fear! I wouldn't have traded myself for any type of man.¹⁰³

¹⁰¹ “Pegava cinco horas da manhã e quando era três horas, duas e meia, o povo ia chegano pa almoçar, comer, e descansava um pouco. Bebia um pouco de cachaça e aí tomava banho, se arrumava e aí ia pela noite. Dançava um pouco, se divertia.”

¹⁰² “Quanto eu mais eu tabaiava, mas vontade eu tinha. Eu não me trocava por home—tipo de home nenhum pa tabaiar—nem no cabo da enxada, nem no cabo do facão pa roçar a roça, no machado pa dirrubar a roça. Tudo era comigo.”

¹⁰³ “Ave Maria! Ave Maria, eu tabaiava! Eu tabaiava pa meter medo a dodho, num ta veno eu dizer? Tabaiava pa meter medo a dodho! Num me trocava por tipo de home nenhum.”

In collective work tasks like an *adjunte*, however, the general dynamics of labor appear to have been more clearly separated according to a gendered division of labor. Men focused on agricultural tasks—clearing, planting, weeding, or whatever agricultural tasks the host family assigned to the work party. Those who worked in the fields brought their own tools, notably their own machete (*facão*) and hoe (*enxada*), and perhaps an axe (*machado*) if trees were to be felled. Women and children, including young boys who were too young to work on the *roça*, helped preparing food, washing dishes, fetching water, and performing other tasks in preparation for meals and the festivities that would begin in the afternoon and continue through the evening.

Women like Antônia who were accustomed to—or even famous for—their work on the *roça* would not participate in the agricultural work of an *adjunte*. Antônia was renowned for her work on the *roça*, and she joyfully recalled a friend who used to refer to her, playfully, as a “woman-man” (*muié-home*), something in which she took great pride. She suggested that her non-participation in the work of an *adjunte* was not owed to a lack of desire to work:

It wasn't that nobody would let you—it's that I wouldn't go doing that...If someone asked me explicitly to go work, I'd go work. But now, for me to go where there was a bunch [of men]—to go work in an *adjunte* full of men—I wouldn't be caught in the middle of all that, no.¹⁰⁴

Antônia would have been afraid of gossip (*fofoca*) and shame, which shaped this division of labor and gender into separate spheres of activity. This built on and reinforced the constitution of social spaces built from separations based on gender and age, discussed above in Section 1b.

As Antônia herself suggested, this gendered division of labor in an *adjunte* was not absolute. For some women, at least, transgressing these boundaries afforded opportunities to earn acclaim and renown that Antônia seemed to have enjoyed. Alvina recounted a story about a small *adjunte* that she had hosted herself, very likely after her first husband had died at a young age, and she was left to raise their children alone. In Alvina's case, she both helped to prepare the food for the workers and would participate in the work itself:

¹⁰⁴ “Não é ninguém deixar—é que eu num ia fazer isso...Se a pessoa falasse pa eu ir trabaiar, eu ia trabaiar. Agora, pa, pa'eu ir assim them um bucado de a—aquele *adjunte* de home pa, pa trabaiar, pa—eu ta no mei, não.”

Well, I had put in a roça—a clearing—and I stayed at the house cooking. And the guys went out, they showed up there, and went clearing [the forest]. Then, after I cooked the food, I put it all in a sack and went out [to the clearing]—machete at my side. And when I showed up there, I sang out—¹⁰⁵

She struggles to remember the words of a samba that she had sang when she arrived in the clearing, but at 96 years old, her memory was failing her and she had forgotten the words. So Alvina continues with her story, describing the moment when she arrived at the new roça clearing. She began to work with such vigor that it appeared she would overtake the men's already advanced position in the clearing:

WELL THEN, then I put down [my load], and then raised up my machete. And then the people—the guys—when they saw me, [they declared]:

“OXENTE [HOLY COW], MAN! ARE WE GOING TO LET ALVINA PASS IN FRONT OF US!?”

And then we moved up the—HOT DAMN!¹⁰⁶

The process of clearing a new roça proceeds from the bottom of a hill, as each worker slowly walk up the hillside and clears a pathway or line in the vegetation in front of them. Each person works side by side, and therefore each clears their own line, in a way that could be conceived of as a race to the top. Seeing Alvina working hard and courageously, the group of men found renewed motivation—and a challenge—to work harder and faster:

All of a sudden, the line made it to the top [of the hill]. The line made it to the top [of the hill], then went back down and to start on another—and I was out in front.¹⁰⁷

¹⁰⁵ “Aí eu botei uma roça—um roçado—e aí fiquei cozinhando a cumida. Aí os minino foram, chegaro lá, ficaro roçano. E aí eu cozineei a cumida, botei no saco e viajei—com o facão do lado. Aí quando cheguei lá, aí gritei—”

¹⁰⁶ “E aí, arriei aqui e subi o facão. E aí os pessuá—os minino—quando viu://“OXENTE! VAI DEIXAR DONA ALVINA PASSAR DIANTE DE NÓS!?”//E aí subiu—OXENTE!”

¹⁰⁷ “De repente o eito chegou em cima. Botaram o eito em cima, vortaro e pegaro outo—e eu na maior.”

Alvina finally breaks out of the narrative¹⁰⁸ and, remembering a few words from the old samba, she begins to sing:

“Hey Maria! I will...Maria!”¹⁰⁹

Having recovered the vividness of her memory, of what was a moment of great joy and excitement, Alvina repeats the crucial moment of the story, recounting the moment when she arrived at the roça and began working next to the men. This time, she recounts this episode in a deep, powerful voice:

And then just as I put down the sack full of farinha, took out my machete, and then
RAISED UP MY MACHETE, THAT’S WHEN THEY SAW ME:

“*Oxente* [HOLY COW], MAN! WILL WE LET THE OLD DONA ALVINA PASS IN FRONT OF US?”

And they raised up their machetes, raised up their machetes—HOT DAMN!—then all the sudden the line reached the top.¹¹⁰

5c. *Work, Play, and Purposiveness*

Damião’s retrospective account describes the relationship between work and play:

You worked during the day and at night you danced a little, played, had fun, played—played drums, tambourine. Frame drums, ukulele, those accordion players. And during the day you worked.¹¹¹

¹⁰⁸ This appears to be a moment of “breakthrough” into performance, in the sense described by Hymes (1981).

¹⁰⁹ “Ê Maria! Eu vou...Maria!”

¹¹⁰ “E aí foi só arriei a sacola com a farinha, panhei o facão e aí SUSPENDEU O FACÃO, QUE QUANDO ELES VIRO://‘OXE! Vai deixar a véa, dona Alvina passar na frente?’//E aí subiro o facão, subiro o facão—oxente—de repente botaro o eito em cima.”

Here, work and play were distinct spheres. This did not necessarily mean that work was pure drudgery and that participants in the work party only performed the work begrudgingly.

Alvina's recollection recalled the excitement and sense of playful competition that might be involved in collective work. Indeed, Damião's own account similarly suggested that work and play, as distinct spheres of activity, were simply constituted by a clarity of purpose more than anything else:

People didn't drink much [while they were working] because they knew what they were doing. Because they went there for just that, to work and at the end of the day, they could drink a little cachaça. Those who wanted to drink cachaça, drank. There were also people who didn't drink. They only went there to help and to work, but they didn't drink, didn't dance, didn't do anything else. They only went to help, to work toward the day when they would need [the others] to come work for him as well.¹¹²

In Damião's account, people "knew what they were doing." This retrospective view suggests a social world in which categories, relationships and obligations between people were well defined, stable, and self-evident.¹¹³ One didn't drink while working because the work would suffer, and if the work suffered, or was not completed, then those who were supposed to be helping out would simply be availing themselves of food and festivity without properly sweating in exchange. In the end, respecting the boundaries of activities (and bringing them to completion) ensured the viability of mutual aid relationships. If you helped another person with

¹¹¹ "Trabalhava durante o dia e de noite dançava um pouco, brincava, se divertia, tocava—batia tambor, tamborim. É pandeiro, cavaquinho, aqueles tocador—sofona. E durante o dia trabalhava."

¹¹² Não bebia muito porque tava sabendo o que tava fazendo. Que eles iam pra ali, pra aquilo mesmo pra trabalhar e no final do expediente bebia um pouco de cachaça. Quem queria beber cachaça bebia. Tinha gente que também não bebia. Só ia ali ajudar e trabalhar, não bebia, não dançava, nem fazia nada. Ia ajudar só, trabalhar pra quando for num dia ele precisar e ir trabalhar pra ele também.

¹¹³ This kind of categorial stability or self-evidentiality is probably a common feature to many retrospective historical accounts in various parts of the world. Social theorists like Pierre Bourdieu even appear to accept the idea that "ancient societies" displayed this sort of categorial stability. This served as a model for what he called "doxa," which he describes in the following terms: "...when there is a quasi-perfect correspondence between the objective order and the subjective principles of organization (*as in ancient societies*) the natural and social world appears as self-evident" (Bourdieu 1977:164, my emphasis). These kinds of retrospective accounts probably have just as much to do with historical realities as they pertain to present-day hopes or longings for some form of categorial renewal in the face of ongoing acts of transgression, violence, and uncertainty.

their work, you could securely anticipate another day when those others would help with your own work, and by faithfully attending to that work, secure the enjoyment of the celebrations.

Adjuntes were not only productive arrangements, but they were a source of diversion, entertainment, and even courtship that could sometimes result in marriages. Damião noted:

The person who was holding—holding the festivities—they felt the greatest pleasure in giving food to all those people. They felt the greatest pleasure giving food to each and every one of those people. Drinking, welcoming those people with the greatest of care.¹¹⁴

Because adjuntes were an important and multifaceted source of sociality, an adjunte in long preparation might become so anticipated that friends and relatives of the host might decide to “steal” (*roubar*) the host’s roça, and thereby force the host family into holding the adjunte on that very day that the roça was stolen. When word had spread that preparations for the adjunte were nearly complete, then friends, neighbors, and relatives could conspire: “Let’s steal *compadre* Fulano de Tal’s roça today!?”¹¹⁵ If everyone agreed to “steal” the farm, then a group of people would show up at the farm in the middle of the night. As soon as the sun rose, the men would go off to work on the farm, with prior knowledge of the work that the hosts were planning. As the men went out to work, another group went directly to the host’s home where they began playing and singing a “samba at their front door,” perhaps firing off a round or two from a rifle to wake the family. The host of the adjunte immediately understood the meaning of the commotion, and everyone scrambled to prepare food for the adjunte that would be held that very day.

5d. *Work and Character*

Damião explained that a “disrespected” (*desrespeitado*) person—one who might disrespect women or children—was not the sort of person whom you would call to an ademão. The “correct word” (*palavra certa*) for such people, he explained, were words such as “vagabonds”

¹¹⁴ “Aquele pessoa que tava dano, fazeno a festa tinha o maior prazer de dar comida aquele povão todo, tinha o maior prazer de dar comida aquele povo todinho, é bebida, acolher aquelas pessoa com o maior carinho.”

¹¹⁵ “Vamos roubar a roça de compadre Fulano de Tal hoje?”

(*vagabundos*) and those people with whom “nobody wants half” (*ninguém quer meia*). To say “nobody wants half,” which is a literal translation, means that nobody would want to share half of anything with such people. In the local context of labor arrangements, “meia” also refers to sharecropping or to other labor arrangements through which work and harvest are divided among two or more parties that have agreed to a specific work arrangement—for example, when one is in need of an extra hand at the farinha mill to process a manioc harvest into farinha.

The reason one might seek to avoid such sharing or working relationships with some others is not because of hard-heartedness or stinginess, but rather because a person had somehow lost their standing in the community through some problematic conduct.¹¹⁶ The problem with “vagabundos,” Damião explained, is less their inability to work, but rather that if you ask for their help, “you will end up owing something to a bad person...[and] one day he will ask for something back.”¹¹⁷ Damião explained: “You don’t want someone you can’t trust on your farm or in your home.”¹¹⁸

In the context of an *adjunte*, on the other hand, there is less control over who shows up, and indeed “any type of person” can show up, including “bad” (*ruim*) people. Only good people are given invitations, but there are always other people—both good and bad—who might tag along after hearing about the festivities: ““Oh, there’s an *adjunte* at Fulano’s place, there’s going to be a party tonight!””¹¹⁹ Perhaps because of the quantity of *cachaça* that was consumed during the festivities, the evening celebrations sometimes led to fights. Therefore, according to Damião, the best type of people to call to an *adjunte* are those who also have *roças*, who like to work on the *roça*, and “who are interested in what they are doing,”¹²⁰ as opposed to those “who aren’t interested [in the work, and] only go interested in something else”¹²¹ other than the work. Those who also have *roças* will be interested in reciprocity of exchange, and thus will be focused on the work in a way someone who has no interest in reciprocity will not be.

¹¹⁶ See the discussion of “namehood” in Chapter 8, Sections 5 and 8 for a further discussion of this problem.

¹¹⁷ “Você vai ficar devendo uma coisa a uma pessoa ruim...Uma hora ele vai lhe cobrar aquilo.”

¹¹⁸ “Voce não vai querer uma pessoa que voce não confia dentro de uma roça sua ou dentro de uma casa sua.”

¹¹⁹ “Ah, tem um *adjunte* na casa de fulano, vai ter festa de noite!”

¹²⁰ “Que têm interesse no que ta fazendo.”

¹²¹ “As pessoas que não tem interesse só vai interessado em alguma coisa.”

There are at least two senses of “interest” here.¹²² First, one “has interest” (*tem interesse*) in the work activity itself, as there is a coincidence and mutual interchangeability of interests between the person offering their labor to the work party and the interest of the owner of the roça in getting the work done. There is a coincidence and reciprocity of purpose. In the case of someone who “is interested” (*está interessado*), they hold an ulterior purpose for which the present activity serves solely as a means—whether this be in stealing something from the host’s home or farm, getting in fights, drinking too much caçaca, or just “messing around” (*esculhambando*).¹²³

Work relations, then, were one site where the problem of social standing emerged. One’s social standing—whether as a person of worth or a “vagabond”—was grounded in relationships, like these work relationships, through which people were able to demonstrate their ability to mutually adopt, embrace, and fulfill the needs of one’s others, taking other’s needs as a shared end, and not merely a mean toward fulfilling one’s own ends. These were sites through which trust and respect emerged. In this context, social standing was mediated by ongoing forms of social interaction, and less through extra-local relationships with state institution.

6. Social Existence, Legal Documents, and the State

Up to this point, the state had a relatively limited presence in the posseiros’ lives, at least in the first half of the 20th century. This situation appears to have been partly owed to the sheer friction of distance, which simultaneously limited people’s ability to access the state and the state’s ability to take hold of social life. Furthermore, the move to the hills, as was suggested in the previous chapter, might have also been a deliberate effort to avoid any claims that the state might make upon people. Social interaction, “contracts,” and promise making, instead of being backed by the coercive power of the state, were reckoned intersubjectively and backed by different

¹²² In the absence of more detailed grammatical analysis, I will provisionally suggest that these two sense of “interest” roughly correspond to the relevant auxiliary verbs, *ter* (to have) and *estar* (to be), that accompany an *interesse* (interest).

¹²³ This is not to deny, as has already been discussed above, that many people participating in an adjunte did not look forward to the festivities that followed the completion of work.

forms of vulnerability, such as the threat of having a tarnished “word” and becoming ostracized, or even the possible threat of black magic.

6a. Birth Certificates & the State

For the posseiro families, personal identity and social standing was not reckoned through the legal documents that are almost ubiquitous today, which include birth certificates (*certidões de nascimento*), social security cards (*CPFs*), identification cards or registers (*registros de identidade*), work cards (*carteiras de trabalho*), voter cards (*título de eleitor*), among others. If someone did have a birth certificate, these were often sought out years after they were born. Consequently, if you ask someone how old they are, a common question in response would be to ask if you wanted to know their age in “real” terms or if you were asking their age as it is recorded “on the document” (*no documento*, i.e. the birth certificate). Gilberto, for example, explained to me that: “My age today, I am—I’m 63 according to my document.”¹²⁴ It is not uncommon for there to be discrepancies of a couple years between a person’s actual and legal age.

The inaccessibility of legal documents was partly owed to the sheer amount of time, distance, and effort required to access the necessary bureaucratic institutions. An older man named Sebastião explained that in his youth, it took at least one full day of travel to arrive at the nearest *cartório* (registry, or notary office) in the town of Taperoá, where documents such as birth certificates or land sale receipts could be made. Sebastião’s father would pack a sack of farinha to eat while on the road, and, before leaving, his father would say to his wife: “Woman, I don’t know when I will arrive.”¹²⁵ Sebastião explained that his father would leave town at five in the morning, only to return in the afternoon the next day.¹²⁶ This trek was mostly done on foot. Occasionally, trucks and jeeps might pass through the road, but “it took a lot of work to get

¹²⁴ “A minha idade hoje eu to—eu to com 63, no documento.”

¹²⁵ “‘Muler, não sei quando eu chego.’”

¹²⁶ This would be like driving from Ann Arbor to Washington D.C. to get a sales receipt notarized in the afternoon, and then making the return trip the very next day.

people to climb on top—they were afraid [of the cars].” Other people reported that one could walk “four or five days” before reaching a location where a birth certificate could be made.¹²⁷

The mere friction of distance required to arrive at the regional registry is to say nothing of the “friction” of bureaucratic mechanisms themselves. Sebastião describes a typical attempt of trying to prepare a document at the registry:

When you arrive there they say:

“Oh, you didn’t go to the forum!”

And when you go [to the forum, they say]:

“Oh boy—okay, the document is missing this and missing that, and you’ll need to get another document,” and so on.

So the person is just dancing [about].¹²⁸

6b. Avoiding the State

While the friction of both distance and bureaucracy hindered access to legal documents even if they were desired, in other historical periods documents such as birth certificates might have been deliberately avoided. One man named Cezar explained that as a result of a war with Paraguay,¹²⁹ his parents and others of their generation actively avoided acquiring birth certificates for their children so as to avoid conscription. During that interview, I asked Cezar his age, and he explained that the answer depended:

¹²⁷ Fn324.

¹²⁸ “Quando chega lá://‘Ah, não foi no froris!’//Quando chega lá://‘Ah rapaz, tá o documento fartou isso, fartou aquilo aí, agora precisa fazer outro documento,’ e coisa.//Aí a pessoa fica dançano.”

¹²⁹ Cezar may be referring to the Paraguayan War, or the War of the Triple Alliance, which occurred between 1864 and 1870.

I never had a birthday, no. Because of the document [birth certificate]. At that time, to get a document—my document was never correct. I was born in September 1929. When we went to Valença to get our identification, and the man put down December 1929. In other words, he added three or four months.¹³⁰

I asked him how old he was when he got his birth certificate:

When did I get my birth certificate? I don't remember anymore. It was my father who got it, maybe when I was one or two years old...At that time, it was hard [to get documents] because of the war with Paraguay. [Parents] didn't get documents for their children, they just wrote it down in a book. When someone turned 15—16—17 years old, [they] were called to war. That's why they didn't [birth certificates]...so that they wouldn't be called [to war]. There were many who went—who were called to war—and they never came back. There were many who went, and didn't return.¹³¹

He explained that an uncle of his had been sent to fight in a war, and had never returned. In some cases, then, explicitly avoiding legal documents might have been done with a view toward avoiding military conscription. Many people born into this generation might not have acquired documents such as birth certificates until they were adults, when many people were drawn into formal wage labor on plantations that required legal identification in order to grant authorization to work, as will be seen in Chapter 10, Section 2e.¹³²

6c. Documents and Social Existence

¹³⁰ “Nunca fiz aniversário não, porque, por causa do documento. Naquela época, tirar documento—o documento nunca ficou certo. Eu nasci em Setembro de 1929. Aí, a gente foi tirar a identidade em Valença, o, o, o senhor botou em Dezembro de 1929. Quer dizer que aumentou mais três mês, quatro mês, né?”

¹³¹ “O certidão quando, quando eu tava? Eu nem lembro mais. Foi meu pai que fez, parece que eu tava com 1 ano até 2 ano de nascido...Naquele tempo era difícil por causa da guerra de Paraguai. Não tirava os documento do filho, só botava no livro. A pessoa tinha 15, 16, 17 ano, ia chamado pa guerra, né? Por isso que num botava...pra não ir chamado. Tem muita gente que foi—foi chamado pra—pa guerra e—e não vortou mais. Teve muito que foi e não vortou.”

¹³² Fn107.

As Damião had suggested in the narrative in Chapter 1, Section 2a, it was precisely because the posseiros did not have legal documents that they were viewed as living like “indians” or “animals” in the woods. In that same interview, in Damião’s conversation with me and Murilo, he had painted a contrast to the present period:

I pay my taxes every year. I HAVE A DOCUMENT. I EXIST! And the people in the old days, Murilo, they didn’t exist!¹³³

The posseiros did not exist, in this view, not merely because they neither paid taxes, nor had any (or few) documents, but also because they were not recognized from the standpoint of the state. In local cosmology, then, to be an “animal” or an “indian” in the woods was at least partly understood as existing outside the sphere of the state, or from that latter standpoint, to have no existence at all.

In the interview with Alonso, Gilberto, and Josué, they offered an identical retrospective account of their childhood:

[Gilberto]: We weren’t raised much hunting with shotguns, but when it came to setting up snares, hunting with dogs—[we did all of that] to make our living, to [be able to] eat.

I asked them what they hunted, and they explained:

[Gilberto]: Any animal!

[Alonso]: Even if a jaguar came, we’d catch it! We were indians—we were indians! If it came nearby, we caught it.

[Josué]: Any animal that we came across when we went into the forest, whatever animal—

¹³³ “Porque eu pago imposto todo ano. EU TENHO DOCUMENTO. EU IXISTO! E o povo de antigamente não ixistia Murilo.”

[Alonso]: We were indians.

[Josué]: A kind of indian, wasn't it?

[Gilberto]: We lived as a kind of indian here in the forest. Always walking with our bare feet on the ground, we didn't have that business of wearing anything [on our feet]. I think the indians today are wearing [shoes] today, no?...So, you see? We didn't have none of that, no.

6d. *Strands of Hair, Contract, & Trust*

Although many of the posseiros did not have legal personal documents—as was also the case with slaves, as Damião noted in his earlier narrative—or at least documents were hard to come by, personality could be objectified and intersubjectively recognized in other ways. For example, one of the most significant ways in which various forms of social coordination—as in the exchange of work—were regulated was by means of an emergent relational property called “trust,” or *confiança*. In the early years, respect and trust were interrelated, and this allowed for the security of person and personal goods alike. Seu Pedrinho provided some interesting reflections on the status of trust in this period:

Those people that I knew at that time—this is some sixty five years ago now—there was a clove fazendeiro—the only person who had planted clove. He sold his cloves, put [the money] in his bag, and would even announce:

“There's money here [in this bag].”¹³⁴

¹³⁴ “O povo naquela época eu conheci—isso tem sessenta e cinco ano aqui dento—tinha um fazendeiro de cravo—é só quem tinha o cravo. Ele vendia o cravo, botava na capanga, ainda dizia://‘Aqui tem dinheiro.’”

Seu Pedrinho explained that after people sold their harvests and had some money, some people might squander some of that money drinking *cachaça* or even visiting the brothels in town. For some people, then, the return trip home might be undertaken while drunk. Sometimes, Seu Pedrinho explained, one of these people might pass out along the road:

They'd fall down drunk along the road—sleep on the ground, on the road—and nobody robbed him...Nobody touched his money.¹³⁵

In this reckoning of the past, people did not touch or take what was not theirs. Trust and respect served the same end as the forest in negating certain kinds of transgressive relationships; but, trust and respect, as immaterial dimensions of relationships, obviated the need for the material *forcefulness* that the forest imposed through its brute form of inchoate respect—through the prospect that one could lose “half one’s skin” in the forest. This allowed social life to grow in novel ways that no longer required a forceful separation from the other.

One of the crucial mediums for effecting contracts or agreements based upon trust and respect was through having a veridical (or truth-telling) word—of being able to “give one’s word” and to have it trusted in relations of social distance, or involving transactions of greater value. Those people whose “word” ceased to be recognized as truthful and trustworthy risked being ostracized and cut off from social relationships. The potential for losing one’s “word” meant risking various forms of social and physical vulnerability in the hills, and so the need to maintain one’s word could be motivated by risks that did not require the “backing” or force of the state. Beyond having a trustworthy word, another means of negotiating high-stakes exchanges might involve the exchange of physical mediums through which persons could be recognized and agreements could be enforced. Sebastião and Augusto explained:

In the old days—in my day, and [Augusto’s] day, and my father’s [day]—¹³⁶

He pauses to make a brief parenthetical comment on the relationship he had with his deceased father: “My father talked a lot with me. Today, he talks with God.”¹³⁷ (By the time of this

¹³⁵ “Caía na estrada bêbado, dormia no chão, nas estradas, ninguém robava. Ninguém pegava o dinheiro dele.”

¹³⁶ “Antigamente no meu tempo, e dele aqui, e de meu pai—”

writing, Sebastião has also passed, and he is very likely engaged in ongoing conversations both with his father and with God.) Sebastião continues with his example:

Let's say [my father] went and bought a bit of land...marked it like this.

“See, here to there, this from here to there is yours.”

And he sold it to that other person. That other person came [to get the land], and what was the document? The document was like this, *see!*¹³⁸

Sebastião points to the beard whiskers on his face:

A strand of hair.

[The buyer] removed a whisker from his beard and gave it to [the seller as a promise of future payment]. On the day that [the buyer] came to make the whole payment, [the seller] brought the beard whisker along. The [seller] who took the whisker kept it in a trunk so that it wouldn't get lost. If he lost it, he wouldn't receive the money for the land or any other product that he sold. So [the seller] would go home and put it into a trunk that same day. Thirty days passed, or two or three months, ninety days. Then, on the day that the [buyer] came—he would make farinha and work hard to make the money [owed]. Then when [the buyer] gathered all of the money together, he returned [to the seller, and asked]:

“Where is my beard whisker?”

When [the seller] presented the whisker [the buyer handed over the money]:

“Take it, here is all your money.”¹³⁹

¹³⁷ “Meu pai conversou muito, agora hoje converse com Deus.”

¹³⁸ “Ele chegava comprava uma área de terra...que marcava assim.//“Isso daqui pá lá, daqui pá lá é seu.”//Aí vendia aquele outro. Aquele outro vinha e como era documento? Documento era aqui, ó!”

As he narrated the story, Sebastião rubs his hands together—as though washing them—to indicate that they were relieved from the debt. Relieved of the debt, and successfully transacting, both parties were given a demonstrative example of their mutual trustworthiness that would bolster future exchanges and relationships. In order to clarify this kind of exchange, I ask about the significance of the strand of hair:

[Jonathan]: So, in this case, a strand of hair was a sort of promise (*compromisso*)?

[Sebastião]: It was a document.

[Augusto]: It was a promise.¹⁴⁰

So offering a beard whisker served as a sort of promissory note—trust in an objectified form—one’s word in an objectified form:

Now, these were men of their word. With that strand of hair, they neither strayed here nor there. They stayed on the right path. Because back in those days, there were men of their word...Today—I don’t mean to speak poorly of everybody—but not everyone has a word.

They come mark a property line here. But tomorrow it’s over there. Tomorrow it’s over there. Then tomorrow over there. So they neither make boundaries, nor let others make them.

In the old days, if you said it’s here, that’s where it really was.¹⁴¹

¹³⁹ “Fio do cabelo.//Tirava o fio do cabelo da barba e dava aquele camarada. No dia que ele viesse pra fazer o pagamento todo, ele levava o fio do cabelo. Aí quem pegava o fio do cabelo botava em casa guardava dentro da mala pá não perder. Se ele perdesse, ele não ia receber o dinheiro da terra ou qualquer mercadoria que vendesse. Aí chegava em casa botava dentro da mala no dia. Passava 30 dia, ou dois ou três, ou 90 dias. No dia que ele vinha lá—ia fazer farinha e lutava por riba de tudo pá fazer aquele dinheiro. Que ele fizesse aquele dinheiro ele vinha://“Cadê meu fio de cabelo?”//Quando ele dava o fio de cabelo://“Toma aqui seu dinheiro todo.””

¹⁴⁰ “Jonathan: Então, no caso, um fio de cabelo era um tipo compromisso?//Sebastião: Era um documento.//Augusto: Era um compromisso.”

So in this retrospective account, there was a sort of precision of contract and, in the example given, both in making agreements, which entailed specific forms of action and boundaries of action, or, in making property boundaries. This precision rested on people having, and keeping their word, or what a man named Adonias will later described as people having “limits.”¹⁴² Someone who always held true to their word was considered to be trustworthy (*de confiança*). To be trustworthy was a predicate that inhered in one’s name. To be untrustworthy was to be considered “false” (*falso*), as will be discussed later as a dimension of “namehood.”¹⁴³

As Sebastião had pointed out, giving a strand of one’s hair was not done in cases of small acts of giving, where mutual social recognition and an ethic of generosity kept social relationships balanced. Instead, he pointed out, strands of hair were used for the exchange of more valuable goods and larger amounts of money; transactions in which either social distance was greater, or the potential for the loss of value was possibly more disastrous. The strand of hair was a more elaborate form of trust in an objectified form, which helped mitigate the risks of lies, falsehood, and bad faith.

While legal documents backed by the power of the state were not easily acquired, other kinds of material objects like strands of hair served as ready medium for contracting and promise-making. In this case, the strand of hair was a sort of analogue to a legal promissory note that is used in short or long-term exchange contracts. In these cases, this veridicality of one’s “word” was bolstered by an external force that was immanent in the strand of hair. Literally offering a part of one’s physical body as a promissory note, or a sign promising future payment, involved an important commitment. If the contract was not properly executed and payment was not made, the owner of the bear hair might be exposed to the possibility of *macumba*, or black magic, which works through the causal tie that holds between the dismembered body part and the person from which it originated.¹⁴⁴ Once the contract was concluded, the bear whisker was returned to its owner and the risk removed.

¹⁴¹ “Aí agora, os homens tinha palavra. Aí por aquele fio de cabelo, ele não entrava nem pá lá, nem pá cá. Ficava na divisa certa. Que antigamente tinha homem de palavra...Hoje—não agravando todos—não é todos que é de palavra.//Vem marca uma divisa aqui. Amenhá tá ali. Amenhá ta ali. Amenhá tá ali. Aí nem faz, nem deixa os outros fazer.//Antigamente, se dissesse é aqui, é aqui mesmo.”

¹⁴² See Chapter 6, Section 3.

¹⁴³ See Chapter 8, Section 4, 5, and 8.

¹⁴⁴ I owe my reading of this form of contract to always enlightening conversations with John Thiels.

Now, [in those times] you had to respect the beard whisker. But today, nobody cares about that anymore.

The reason for this is that the paper document surpassed the word and the strand of hair.

In the time of my father, there was only the “word” of the strand of hair. Afterward, when we learned to raise ourselves as people, that was when they started moving onto paper...Now things are coming out on paper, but in the old days it was the word...In the old days, the man who spoke [his word], it was really spoke. The man in the old days who gave his word, it really was given.¹⁴⁵

7. Landholdings, Boundaries & Objectification

Landholdings and property relations, as with other dimensions of social interaction, were similarly mediated by intersubjective recognition, as well as specific interactions with the environment. Laboring or working upon the land established a claim to land. While social relations appear to have been dominated by men, women were also recognized as potential claimants to property because women, like men, also worked. The presence of the state in these relationships was similarly limited in the context of property relations. Instead of being grounded in legal documents and land titles, property was grounded in the same kind of “trust” that afforded people a good and trustworthy “word.”

7a. Land, Labor, and Mutual Attention

As Damião had reported in the previous chapter, landholdings were demarcated by mutual agreement that build upon mutual attention that was guided by forms of indexical

¹⁴⁵ “Na vez de meu pai, só existia mesmo as palavras do fio do cabelo. Adepois que agente pegou a se criar por gente foi que pegaram passar papé...É que agora ta saindo o papé, mas antigamente era palavra...E antigamente o homem que dissesse tava dito, tava dito mesmo. O homem antigamente que desse uma palavra tava dado mesmo.”

(attention-drawing) pointing to various features of the natural landscape like large trees, rivers, or hills. Specific kinds of trees like the *castanheira* or *castanha do reino* trees were planted as boundary markers, and where these may have been encountered, one might anticipate the boundary of another's roça.¹⁴⁶ In many respects, the boundaries of landholdings were determined by the space of one's activity, where one worked and planted.

Augusto suggested that each posseiro would "cut out a clearing"¹⁴⁷ in the forest, and by that transformative activity, declare it as their own space:

"I made [a clearing] inside the forest—from here to here is mine."

Another [person says]: "From here to here is mine." Another: "From here to here is mine." Another: "From here to here is mine."

And it was all divided up.¹⁴⁸

The declaration of "mine"-ness had to be preceded by an actual transformation of the forest, and the declaration was made to others, such that each person knew what belonged to each other person. As such:

Each person governed a piece of wild forest—they governed an endless world of forest—they governed there. Without having any documents at all.¹⁴⁹

Referring to "documents," Augusto means legally recognizable land titles that many of the posseiros did not possess. Instead, a similar kind of respect that was immanent in exchanges based upon trust was immanent in the recognition of boundaries. In this way, despite having no documents, the posseiros recognized one another's presence:

¹⁴⁶ This was reported to me by a man named Francisco, who was born in the region in 1931. Fn312.

¹⁴⁷ "Batia uma picada."

¹⁴⁸ "'Fiz na mata adentro—daqui pá cá é meu.'//Outro: 'Daqui pá cá é meu.' Outro: 'Daqui pá cá é meu.' Outro: 'Daqui pá cá é meu.'//Aí ficava tudo dividido."

¹⁴⁹ "Cada um governava um pedaço de mata braba—governava um mundo sem fim de mata, governava. Sem ter documento nenhum."

They respected one another. They didn't try to invade the other's yard.¹⁵⁰

A man named Adonias, who had migrated to the region from the *sertão*, explained how landholdings were reckoned in that region during his youth. He explained that his parents owned a small plot of land there, and I had asked how many hectares it was in size. Adonias replied by implying that my question presupposed too much:

There at that time, up until the time of my parents, we didn't have limits...You just showed up here, put in a *roça*, and from there you went expanding. Today here, tomorrow there, and that's where you died. When the father passed away—[when the father] died, it was left for the children. When the children passed away, it was left for the grandchildren—it was always like that. There, we didn't have limits—¹⁵¹

What Adonias meant here by “limits” were precise (state recognized) land measurements, though which one might calculate (in rectilinear fashion) the precise dimensions and size of a landholding. Land ownership was based upon the sites of dwelling, and the activity of “putting in” (*botando*) *roças*. I asked Adonias if there was any form of land divisions (*divisas*) with the neighbors:

[Adonias]: No, no—there wasn't any division [of the land], no.

[Jonathan]: Oh really? But so how did that work, then?

[Adonias]: Well, because there the land—it belonged to the government...There were no owners there. The owner is when I showed up here and put in a *roça*. You showed up [in the area] and perhaps—we'd put in another *roça* up ahead. And so, from there to there, you governed that area. And from there to here, I governed—I'd say:

¹⁵⁰ “Aí respeitava um o outro. Não invadia o quintal do outro.”

¹⁵¹ “Lá nessa época, até a época de meus pais, nós não tinha limites...Era, chegava aqui botava uma *roça* aqui e aí ia aumentando. Hoje aqui, amanhã ali e ali morria. Morria pai—morria, ficava p'os fio. Os fio morria e ficava p'os netos—e aí sempre naquele. Lá nós não tinha limite.”

“See, my boundary is there—there—there!”

There weren’t any limits. There weren’t any limits.¹⁵²

At this point, I began to see that he understood ownership in terms of active occupation and use of land—something like John Locke’s labor theory of property. In order to be sure, I attempted to elicit the logic of land tenure by providing an antecedent, to which Adonias, almost as a reflex, immediately states the consequent:

[Jonathan]: So, whoever put in a roça—

[Adonias]: —was the owner.¹⁵³

Seeing that I was attempting to understand the logic, Adonias clarifies the problem further:

Let’s say, for example, it’s that word “baldio.”¹⁵⁴

The term *baldio* can be translated as “vacant.” In this context, it would refer to any land that has been abandoned or left uncultivated, but it can also refer to any building that has fallen out of use and into a state of disrepair:

“Vacant”—because vacant doesn’t have an owner. It’s mine, it’s your—it’s wherever you showed up, sat down—you’re shackled up there. Because the land is vacant and doesn’t have—doesn’t have—a limit.

I arrived—I start—start working here—from here you’d go ALL THE WAY [UP THERE]—¹⁵⁵

¹⁵² “A: Não, não—não tinha divisão, não.//J: É mesmo? Mas como é que funcionava isso?//A: Porque lá é terreno—é terreno do governo...Aí lá ninguém tinha dono. O dono é que eu chegava e botava uma roça aqui. Voce chegava e às vezes—se a galera botava outra roça lá na frente. Então, dali pra lá, o senhor governava. E dali pra, cá eu governava até—disse://“Ó, minha divisa é lá—lá—lá.”//Naquele—não tinha limite. Não tinha limite.”

¹⁵³ “J: Então, quem botava a roça—//A: —era o dono.”

¹⁵⁴ “Vamos dizer assim, é aquela palavra ‘baldio.’”

The intonation in his voice rises at the end of this statement, by which he means to indicate some position at a distance. As the distance widens, so, too, does the physical space that he has transformed by his work.¹⁵⁶ The distance between *here* and *there*, in that case, is the space occupied by his work, and consequently the physical space upon which he has a claim. This claim extended as far as he was able to work, or until you reached another person's landholding:

And sometimes you'd run into another neighbor. So, you there: "See, mine is out there, over there and over there." There was no limit.¹⁵⁷

Adonias may appear to be contradicting himself. On the one hand, he is asserting that there were no property boundaries—or what he is calling *limites*, or "limits"—by which he can be understood to mean legal, state-recognized property boundaries. On the other hand, he is suggesting rather precise criteria through which the boundaries of land claims could be determined and coordinated among neighbors. In this context, the origination of property and the extent of one's claim is constituted by one's labor activity, and specifically through all of the various work tasks that are required to prepare and plant a roça. There are also elements of merely dwelling, residing, sitting down,¹⁵⁸ or being "shacked up" in a place, but sitting down or shacking up in a place would only establish a claim to precisely those spaces over which one's shack extended.¹⁵⁹

¹⁵⁵ "É 'baldio' porque baldio não tem dono. É meu, é seu—é aonde voce chegou, sentou—ali voce ta arranchado. Porque o terreno é baldio e não tem—não tem assim—limite.//Eu chegava—começa—começa aqui, aqui voce ia ATÉ—"

¹⁵⁶ Notice, however, the shift in pronoun in the previous statement from an "I" to a "you," as Adonias schematically describes the unfolding work. While this may be a wholly accidental switch, it does have the felicitous effect of showing that the work of creating a property claim is not an activity that is reserved for just one person ("I"), but is an activity that is open to others ("you").

¹⁵⁷ "E às vezes já encontrar o outro vizinho. Então, voce aí: 'Ó, o meu é por lá, por lá, por lá.' Não tinha limite."

¹⁵⁸ In a fascinating comment on the idiom of "sitting" across various cultural contexts, Michael Jackson notes that the German words for "property" and "possession," *besitz*, is derived from the German verb "to sit," or *sitzen*:

"All over the world, people objectify their sense of being and belonging in images of place. Among the Kuranko, for instance, neighbors are known as *siginyorgonu*, literally 'people with whom one sits.' In German the word for property, *besitzen*, is derived from the verb 'to sit upon,' a possible allusion to the fact that human beings are sitting animals whose specialized anatomy enables us to define territorial rights through squatting or sitting. This is why we speak of the seat of power, and why in so many societies stools, chairs, and thrones are made symbols of authority. Warlpiri people sometimes refer to themselves by saying 'Walyangka karnalu nyina,' which means, 'We sit on the ground.'" [Jackson 1995:19]

¹⁵⁹ Perhaps merely standing in place (say, standing in a park) represent a "basic" or "original" form of property, in this context to be understood as an individual's claim to occupy a particular space. If someone is physically

A second and perhaps more important dimension of this form of property is an intersubjective element that builds off of the use of attention-directing indexical markers of the form: “I worked here. You worked there.” The success of these indexical markers presupposed both the identifiability and recognition of another having labored in or occupied a particular place, and this means being able to account for (i.e. tell a story about) a series of activities that occurred over time in a particular place, whether that activity was the solitary or jointly undertaken activity of putting in a roça. With the recognition of having labored somewhere being granted, the rest of the work of reckoning boundaries was performed by pointing out the marks of one’s transformative labor in an interactional situation. Adonias demonstrated what this might look like:

The owner is when I showed up here and put in a roça. You showed up [in the area] and perhaps—say we’d put in another roça up ahead. And so, from there to there, you governed that area. And from there to here, I governed—I’d say:

“See, my boundary is there—there—there!”¹⁶⁰

The interaction in this imagined scenario is mediated by various (triadic) relations, that is, relations involving at least three interacting things. First, there is the *stretch of land* where *you* show up and begin working, and the *stretch of land* where *I* show up and begin working. These stretches of land are constituted by precisely those spaces where you and I worked, respectively. So the *stretch of land* that accrues to me and to you is mediated by our respective *activity* upon a stretch of land. As neighbors, however, we also recognize that the other has worked in order to

occupying a space by standing there, and another person comes along and simply pushes them out of that space so that they could stand there in their stead, this could be viewed as a transgression against the former person’s right to occupy a particular stretch of ground by the very fact of being embodied. Different forms of social spatial segregation would seem to require the historical elaboration of different social institutions. This idea could be related to the old notions of “original” property in Grotius’ discussion of the “original *suum*,” which had a distinct influence on Locke’s theory of possession. If, according to Grotius, the original *suum* included the physical body, and if the body necessarily and only exists in space, then it might follow that the person necessarily has a right to the space in which the body necessarily resides. See Olivecrona (1974) for a discussion of the idea of an “original *suum*” and Grotius’s influence on Locke.

¹⁶⁰ “O dono é que eu chegava e botava uma roça aqui. Voce chegava e às vezes—se a galera botava outra roça lá na frente. Então, dali pra lá, o senhor governava. E dali pra cá eu governava até—disse://“Ó, minha divisa é lá—lá—lá.”

constitute that stretch of land, and so the relationship between a person, their activity, and a stretch of land is further mediated by a neighbor *recognizing* that set of relationships.

Furthermore, Adonias's account points to the possibility that we might *work together* in establishing our respective landholdings. In his imagined account, when "you" show up with the aim of cultivating the land, he does not say that *you* do the work in order to govern your piece of land. Rather, the laboring subject is a form of a "we" (*a galera*) which could be translated as "the group":

Maybe you showed up [in the area]—let's say we (*a galera*) put in another roça up ahead.¹⁶¹

In other words, "we" help each other establish the respective spheres of our claims through the exercise of a "we" that does not eliminate or conflate the "I" and the "you." By helping one another, people clarify the relative spaces of "I" and "you," and by successfully performing a "we," people establish the possibility of a further "we" in future joint action.¹⁶²

Adonias's example, very similar to Damião's account of posseiro property in Chapter 1, Section 2, suggests some practical continuity in property relations across different regions of Bahia. In these accounts, property was similarly intersubjective, reciprocal, and directly tied to the recognition of persons and their activity. This is different from other notions of "absolute" property in which, once a property claim in land has been established, the owner might never again visit their property but still their claim remains absolute, valid, and intact.¹⁶³ This appears to eliminate both the active dimension, as well as the intersubjective dimension of property that is implicit even in Locke's account of the labor theory of property.¹⁶⁴

¹⁶¹ "Voce chegava e às vezes—se a galera botava outra roça lá na frente."

¹⁶² In actual practice, maintaining these boundaries would require ongoing social interaction and sustained familiarity, and it is easy to imagine this process becoming contentious and messy. In Chapter 5, I examine some cases where these boundaries were violated, both among posseiros themselves and among land grabbers.

¹⁶³ Robert Nozick (1974), for example, defends a notion of what might be called absolute property.

¹⁶⁴ For Locke, the recognition of property is above all recognition of persons, and specifically the extension of personhood in space, beyond the space that is occupied by the body. Locke is building here upon Grotius's notion of the "original suum," or each person's "original" spheres of property, which included life, limb, liberty, as well as honor and reputation (see Olivecrona 1974).

7b. Land, Gender, and Property

These abstract considerations about property, as the pertaining to the recognition of “persons,” raises important questions about just what kinds of persons could stake claims to property. We have already seen that the notion of property operative in this context appears to be based upon claims that are closer to something like a Lockean labor theory of property, rather than claims to land based upon precise rectilinear measurements. The locations through which people’s productive activities and dwellings extended—or could be expected to extend in the foreseeable future, as manioc cultivation was carried out through a swidden system of agriculture¹⁶⁵—were subject to property claims. Such claims are glossed in terms of claims to a roça, which is potentially separable from claims to the land, as was the case with slave provision grounds in the period before abolition.

In the discussion of gender in the context of work parties, we have already seen that women like Antônia and Alvina were not only active as laborers outside of domestic activities, but they were also able to make claims to property in the form of roças. This was seen, for example, in Alvina’s discussion of herself as host to a work party on what she took to be her own roça. This is important evidence that suggests a relative equality in men’s and women’s ability to claim both the fruits of their labor as well as the spaces in which that labor occurred.

Another example from Alvina’s narrative both affirms the claim-making capacity that women might exercise, but also suggests ways in which adult males might have attempted to control women’s access to land.¹⁶⁶ After her first husband had died, and she migrated to the

¹⁶⁵ See Chapter 2, Section 3a.

¹⁶⁶ Mahony (1996:15) notes that from a legal standpoint, women and men alike were legally entitled to property claims in terms of inheritance:

“In Brazil women inherited property equally with men, and they did not lose their property rights, at least formally, at marriage, although while living their husbands could exercise conjugal authority over their property. Still, married couples held property jointly and it was equally divided at the death of one of the spouses.”

Mahony provides evidence that women in the central cacao zone, in the frontier west of Ilhéus, could be party to property claims in the 19th century. Citing a Portuguese immigrant who, in 1871, had claimed legal possession to a stretch of land that encompassed the holdings of 19 squatter families, Mahony explained that in the court case that ensued, seven of the 19 plaintiffs were women of humble origins: “Of the 19 farmers listed in the survey, 12 of them were people whose last names were not listed, suggesting that they were extremely humble people, probably of mixed race. Of those 12, 7 were women farming cacao” (1996:311). This suggests that women were not only legally entitled to making property claims, but that such claims might have also been recognized in actual practice.

Attempts to control land, as will be seen in the present example, should not be thought of as exclusively aimed at controlling women’s access to land, but also children’s (future) claims, and perhaps other men’s claims as well—whether those men are kin or otherwise. See the first case presented in Chapter 5, Section 5 for another example.

Ituberá region in search of a place to work and plant, Alvina eventually “married” (*amasiar*) another man named Abel, whose family had land in the region.¹⁶⁷ Abel was chronically ill, and Alvina and her children helped to care for him:

We watched over him because he had nobody to take care of him, so we cared for him.¹⁶⁸

Over time, Abel developed a bond with one of Alvina’s sons, Artur. Consequently, Abel’s other family members grew wary that Alvina, who must have proven to be a hard worker, might seek to stake a claim of her own on the family’s lands.¹⁶⁹ One of Abel’s male relatives, in particular, a man named Ivo—the grandfather to the young man José, who was present for the interview¹⁷⁰—had grown suspicious that Alvina might seek to claim a piece of land through working on it. Eventually, Ivo convinced Abel that Alvina was a usurper, and eventually Abel sent her and her children away:

Well then, he left me because of the others, because of [José’s] grandfather. They said he should take me away—he should leave me—to leave me, for otherwise I would take a piece of the roça...And so [Abel] sent me away.¹⁷¹

Time passed, and Abel grew sicker as his health deteriorated. Another man, one of Abel’s neighbors, eventually advised him that he should ask Alvina to return. Alvina voiced the conversation:

“Abel, you’d better fetch Dona Alvina, if not the vultures will eat you.”¹⁷²

¹⁶⁷ Here Alvina says: “amasiei” (from *amasiar*), which means that she simply moved in with her second husband, rather than being legally married.

¹⁶⁸ “A gente tomou conta dele que ele não tinha quem tomasse conta, nós tomemo.”

¹⁶⁹ The fact that Alvina describes her relationship to Abel as “amasiado” rather than “casado” suggests one possible motive for the suspicions expressed by Abel’s family: she was not fully part of the family, and her children were not Abel’s own children. Furthermore, Alvina’s character as an especially hard-worker (who did not shun work on the roça outside of the home) might have made her an especially threatening figure, insofar as she presented a significant capacity to establish claims via her willingness to work and plant the land.

¹⁷⁰ The relationship between Abel and José’s grandfather—whether they were brothers, cousins, or father and son—is unclear in the narrative.

¹⁷¹ “Daí ele me deixou pu mode os outo, mode o avô desse. Aí disse pa me levar—pa me deixar—me deixar senão eu tomava um pedaço de roça...Aí, ele me dispachou.”

¹⁷² “Ei Abel, vai buscar dona Alvina, senão os arubu te come.”

Abel sent a message to Alvina, and her son Artur went to see him. After seeing Abel's condition, Artur went into town to buy him some food, and then returned to Abel's home to prepare the food for him to eat. Afterwards, Alvina's son returned home late that night to speak with his mother. She recalled their conversation:

[Alvina]: "Artur, you're arriving home at this hour, my son. What was it that you were doing?"

[Artur]: "Oh mother, I went by there and I saw Abel going hungry, mother. When I had come from town, mother, I stopped by there—you see mother, I brought him a little bit of food, mother. I brought a kilo—a half kilo of meat for the old man, mother. Oh mother, you need to see the condition that the old man is in."¹⁷³

Abel and his family had sent a message through Artur to ask Alvina to return. When Artur delivered the message, Alvina recalled her initial angry response:

I say: "I'M NOT GOING TO GO THERE SO THAT WHEN I SHOW UP, ALL I CAN DO IS JUST STARE AT THE GROUND AND NOT WORK."

[Abel] had sent word: "You can work wherever you want."

Well, my boy, when I showed up there, the house was already covered in weeds. I drew out my machete, and I cleaned up the house in the middle of that roça.¹⁷⁴

¹⁷³ "Alvina: 'Artur, uma hora dessa meu fio é que tu vem chegano. O que foi que tu fez?'//Artur: 'Ô mamãe, eu passei por lá vi seu Abel com fome mamãe. Eu quando eu vim da rua mamãe, eu cheguei lá—ô mamãe, eu trouxe um de comerzinho mamãe. Truxe um quilo—meio quilo de carne mamãe pu véiu. Ô mamãe, só que a senhora vê de que jetho tá o véiu.'"

¹⁷⁴ "Eu digo: 'Eu não vou não pa quando chegar lá ta olhano pa terra e não trabalhar.'//Aí ele mandou dizer: 'Que eu trabalhasse adonde eu quisesse.'//Aí meu fio, quando eu cheguei cá a casa tava já dento do mato. Eu meti o facão e botei a casa no meio da roça."

While this case clearly demonstrates that women like Alvina were capable of staking property claims through planting roças, it also illustrates ways in which men like Ivo might have sought to regulate women's and others' access to land. Alvina's problems did not stop after she returned to care for Abel. After Abel eventually passed away some time later, his male relative Ivo eventually sought to sell the lands where she had already planted some of her roças. I explore this episode in the next Chapter 4, Section 7d, and later in Chapter 10, Section 4b, where I finally explore the ways in which Alvina was able to ground her claims to her plants (and the land that they stood upon) by appeal to new provisions in the law.

7c. Land, Trust as a "Document," and the Appearance of the State

As has been seen, property claims in this context were regulated by a sense for the spaces occupied by one's others, the places where they dwelled and carried on their life-giving activity. While markers on the landscape might have been part of reckoning property (such as rivers, hills, or trees, which might have been planted or perhaps already been in place), property was not objectified by rectilinear property boundaries or cadastral mapping, which may have differentiated the posseiros in this region from smallholding cacao farmers that Anthony Leeds described in the central cacao lands.¹⁷⁵

¹⁷⁵ See the evidence presented by Leeds in Section 2a above, especially footnote 22. Leeds reported that smallholding cacao farmers in the central cacao lands were distinguished by whether or not they had legal title to their land. Those smallholders that had legal title to their land were referred to as *burareiros*, whereas those who did not have title were referred to as *roçeiros*, and whether or not a small cacao farmer had title affected the rate at which they were taxed. Although they did not have title to their land, some of the roçeiros did have a "measurement of the land" (Leeds 1957:228) upon which they squatted, and this served as a sort of guarantee (however tenuous) against trespass. For the Dendê Coast region, I have not found any evidence from oral historical sources that any of the posseiros controlled what might be called land "title" (*título*) and no reports of having any land "measurements," although some families such as Seu Pedrinho's, as will be seen below, reported having a "deed" (*escritura*) to their land. The legal status of those "deeds"—whether or not they were drawn up and exchanged informally, or officially notarized—is unclear and calls for further research in local notary offices and archives.

If, as a quantitative matter, it might be the case that most of the posseiro families in the Dendê Coast region neither had legal documents nor land measurements, as many people seem to recollect, this difference from the central cacao lands might be partly owed to the fact that the violent consolidation of land that will be described in Chapters 4 and 5 had already occurred in the central cacao lands several decades prior at the beginning of the 20th century. By the time Anthony Leeds had done his field work, many of the small cacao farmers in that region would have been acutely familiar with the various means of dispossession employed by land grabbers, and this, in turn, might have motivated small cacao farmers to acquire whatever legal means were available to them (e.g. land titles and measurements) to help protect their landholdings. The land grabs in the Dendê Coast, as will be seen in

Trust and respect were essential elements to this sense of property. In an unrecorded stretch of my conversation with Alonso, Gilberto, and Josué,¹⁷⁶ I was trying to clarify how posseiro families reckoned landholdings, and I had asked them about the kinds of documents (*documentos*) the posseiros may or may not have had: “What was the document at that time?” Alonso responded with a single word: “Trust.”¹⁷⁷ In his assertion, trust was not merely viewed as an equivalent or analogue to a “document,” but as a kind of document itself. Later in our recorded conversation, I again asked the brothers to elaborate how each posseiro family knew where their neighbor’s landholdings were located. Alonso and Gilberto replied together:

[Alonso]: They knew—the extremity—the extremity of the other. They knew where their extremities were, right?¹⁷⁸

[Gilberto]: Each one knew where [the division] was. From here to there, nobody entered in the other’s [land]. Nobody entered onto the other’s [land]. They respected [one another]...Among the posseiros, everybody respected one another.¹⁷⁹

By “extremities,” Alonso means the spatial extension of their roças. I recalled the theme that Alonso had introduced earlier—that the posseiro’s document was “trust” (*confiança*)—and they elaborated:

[Alonso]: Right, exactly. It was trust. They trusted one another.¹⁸⁰

[Josué]: Right, trust.

[Gilberto]: Trust—exactly—they trusted.¹⁸¹

subsequent chapters, occurred after the 1950s and intensified in the 1960s, and thus the importance of various legal “documents” would have been violently impressed upon posseiros families in the region somewhat later.

¹⁷⁶ I had forgotten to push the “record” button, although I had recorded the content of this conversation in my notes.

¹⁷⁷ “J: O documento era o que na época?//A: Confiança.” Fn339.

¹⁷⁸ “É sabia—o extremo—o extremo do outro. Sabia seus extremos onde era, né?”

¹⁷⁹ “Cada um sabia onde era. Dali pra lá ninguém entrava no do outro. Ninguém entrava no do outro. Respeitava...A parte de posseiro todos respeitava um ao outro.”

¹⁸⁰ “É, exato. Era confiança. Eles confiavam um no outro.”

If, at least for some families, boundaries were vague and grounded in trust, and, in turn, the respect that was necessary to upholding that trust meant not encroaching upon another's land, then Odebrecht's appearance in Damião's earlier narrative in Chapter 1 was a significant moment. Through Odebrecht's intervention, the state was able to forcibly introduce new ways of reckoning property and new forms of "documentation." In Damião's narrative, Odebrecht and his engineers had gone out measuring and "cutting pathways" (*cortando rumos*) in order to render and objectify the forest according to rectilinear boundaries. Establishing boundaries in this way portended a deepening relationship to the state that violated the intersubjective forms of property that were grounded in activity, mutual trust, and respect. In other words, through Odebrecht, the state suddenly appeared to the posseiros in a concrete, tangible, and transgressive manner that left them with no retreat. This will be explored in greater depth in the following Chapters 4 and 5.

7d. Land, Legal Documents, and the State

The extent to which posseiros in the Dendê Coast region controlled legal documents is unclear, but most of the evidence suggests that few of the posseiro families in the hills had legally recognized titles for the land they lived on. In the central cacao lands to the south, where Leeds suggested that a number of the smallholding cacao farmers (*burareiros* and *roçeiros*) controlled some form of documentation for their landholdings, many of the families there did not. Leeds noted:

[M]ost small establishment operators have no legal documents, other than the burareiros' deeds and the roçeiros' occasional measurement, which enable them to appear at law as legal persons. Many are not even entered in the civil registry as being born, and are legally nonexistent. Some are not entered in the tax lists. These persons are generally at a legal disadvantage, especially when competing with a member of the employing class over tenure of a piece of land. [Leeds 1957:290]

¹⁸¹ "É confiança." "Confiar, exato, confiava."

There are several possible reasons for this lack of documentation, including high illiteracy rates,¹⁸² impossible bureaucracies, and even likelihood that paper documents were probably difficult to preserve, as they were (and continue to be) subject to humidity and weathering. More importantly, some of the posseiro families may have well-founded reticence about engaging with, and being engaged by, the state.¹⁸³ After all, unlike one's neighbors, whose character and word were subject to various forms of scrutiny and evaluation, the state's "word" had very little weight in actual practice. Indeed, as Barickman notes, legal land titles were often unreliable and untrustworthy:

Bahians who held legal titles to land in the sparsely settled interior or along the southern coast could expect little effective protection for their property rights from the Brazilian State, which was particularly weak at the level of local government and all the more so in frontier areas. Against usurpers and squatters, the State could rarely secure its own rights to land that belonged to the public domain. [Barickman 1991:373]

Despite this, there is evidence that some of the posseiro families did exchange forms of paper documentation that could serve to legitimize their claims in the legal sphere. For example, in land transactions, some people reported that some posseiro families wrote up and exchanged "receipts" (*recibos*), private "deeds" (*escrituras*), or contracts that could be registered with local notary offices (*cartórios*) or land registries. Private deeds (*escrituras*) were not equivalent to state-administered land titles (*títulos*) based on cadastral mapping, but they could be recognized in a legal dispute.

Seu Pedrinho suggested that his own family's holdings rested on an 80-year-old *escritura*, or private deed, that his parents acquired when they purchased their land, probably sometime around 1930, from an old man named Camilo. Seu Pedrinho explained:

¹⁸² James Holston (2008:101) reports high illiteracy rates in Brazil's rural areas throughout much of the 20th century. In 1950, for example, 66.9% of the rural population (above 15 years of age) was illiterate, whereas in 1991 rural illiteracy rates remained as high as 40.5%.

¹⁸³ See Section 6b above. The discussion of the early land commissioner in this region, presented in Chapter 4, Section 6a, also suggests that many of the posseiro families were hesitant about acquiring measurements for their lands.

This little plantation that is called Morro Plantation today, at the time it belonged to an old man, and the old man had an *escritura* [deed] that was many years old. That's where we lived. And the *escritura* had been around for many years.¹⁸⁴

Precisely what this *escritura* was is unclear—whether it was a hand-written receipt that a literate person had helped make for the transaction, whether or not it was publically notarized, and so on.¹⁸⁵ Together with the fact that his family had this document, it is also significant that Seu Pedrinho remembered that his family had owned upwards of 4,000 cacao trees, which was probably an atypical holding for the region. As will be seen,¹⁸⁶ having control over this document was consequential in his family's struggle to hold onto their land in the face of the coming land grab. In the end, Seu Pedrinho's family did not succeed in holding onto their land—and this corroborates Barickman's claim seen above—but he and his family did put up a greater fight, and this seems to be directly tied to their control over this particular document and the way in which it enabled them to more forcefully press their claim.

7e. Families, Collective Property, and Documents

This preceding example suggests that families like Seu Pedrinho's occupied and cultivated land over which they shared a joint claim that was based on some sort of "originary" document, and this document would have served for the family as a whole. In some cases, these may have been extended families living on a broad stretch of land. In cases like these, subsequent divisions or distributions of land could have been effected through precisely the kinds of intersubjective and labor-based conventions described above. It does not appear, however, that those *posseiros* who controlled documents for their land sought out *separate land documents* as each subsequent generation repartitioned and distributed the land.¹⁸⁷ In this sense, it might be said that *posseiros* that had documents for their lands held that land "collectively" and

¹⁸⁴ "Essa tal fazendinha que é Fazenda Morro hoje, era de um velho e o velho tinha uma escritura muitos anos. É que a gente aí morava. E a escritura muitos anos."

¹⁸⁵ See Chapter 4 for discussions of the public notaries in the region.

¹⁸⁶ See Chapter 5, Section 3c.

¹⁸⁷ This is not to say, however, that land could not be partitioned on the basis of intersubjective notions of property. See footnote 167 above, where Mary Ann Mahony suggests that inheritance law meant that all family members, men and women, were entitled to an equal share of inheritance in land.

on a family basis. To say that it was held collectively, however, is not to say that family members could not make individual claims grounded in those places where they worked to plant roças. These considerations help to make sense of seemingly contradictory statements when people like Adonias, as seen above, claimed that there were no “limits” on landholdings, at the same time that he suggested clear intersubjective conditions for determining boundaries. On those terms, land claims were always (literally) in the making and to be determined by the course of people’s activity upon the landscape. In this sense, “vagueness” was a constituent and productive dimension of the posseiros’ logic of property, and claims were subject to intersubjective denial or confirmation.¹⁸⁸

Exploring the documentary situation of posseiros’ land claims tested the limits of memory. The following section of the interview with Francinha and Mateus illustrates this dynamic:

[Jonathan]: Did people have land documents at that time, or—?

[Mateus]: They always had them, because whoever possessed land, they paid their [taxes]—

Francinha interjects, incredulous that he is suggesting that the posseiros paid taxes,¹⁸⁹ and Mateus becomes confused:

[Francinha]: WHAT ARE YOU TALKING ABOUT?

¹⁸⁸ The term “vagueness” should not be read in a pejorative sense. Another way of thinking about this is simply to say that no one person could make a claim to any part of the world *in advance of* what were taken to be the property steps toward establishing a claim.

¹⁸⁹ Today, most smallholders and property owners pay a nominal land tax that amounts to only a few dollars. When smallholders pay a nominal land tax (they say, “*pagar o INCRA*”) this results in the production of a small receipt, or proof of payment, that can be used for various bureaucratic purposes. Having a series of tax receipts over the course of many years, effectively creating a paper-trail, can help a person, for example, secure retirement benefits from the state. This is why paying the nominal land tax is so important in Mateus’s view.

Anyone can pay this land tax on any landholding; there is no land survey involved, no government agent visits the property, etc. In short, the farm may not even exist. Once a land tax receipt is in hand, however, this amounts to a tacit recognition, on the part of the state, that one’s land holding exists somewhere in the world, even if it is a fiction. In terms of pragmatic analysis, one might say that the entailment of paying the land tax on a property that has been given a nominal proper name and location is to create the presupposition that a property exists in the world.

[Mateus]: Huh?

[Francinha]: WHAT ARE YOU TALKING ABOUT?

[Mateus]: Paid the—

[Francinha]: WHAT!?

[Mateus]: Paid land taxes—

Francinha interjects again and elaborates emphatically:

[Francinha]: AT THAT TIME, EVERYONE HAD A WHOLE WORLD ALL ABOUT THEM—A
WORLD OF LAND WITHOUT PAYING ANYTHING!¹⁹⁰

What appears to have occurred in the conversation was that Mateus was conflating time periods in his recollection, both pre- and post-land grab, after which small landholders began to more actively seek documentation for their landholdings. At this point, Mateus assents, and agrees with Francinha's account of posseiro landholdings in their youth. Mateus elaborates:

God—God and everybody had land. Everybody governed a world. It was theirs, but afterward things changed. Many people bought land. Those that did not have land bought it from others.¹⁹¹

Here Mateus acknowledged the transition period more clearly, after which documented transactions in land became more common. He explained that before the transition, people had bartered (*trocava*) pieces of land, perhaps trading a mule for a tiny piece of land, after which

¹⁹⁰ “J: E as pessoas tinha documento da, da terra naquela época, ou?//M: Tinha, porque toda vida quem pissuía terreno, pagava o—//F: O QUE?//M: Hã?//F: O QUE?//M: Pagava o—//F: OXE!//M: Pagava imposto de terra—//F: NAQUELE THEMPO, TODO MUNDO TINHA O MUNDO TODO A REDOR, DE TERRA SEM PAGAR NADA.”

¹⁹¹ “Dheus—Dheus e o mundo tinha terreno. Um mundo governava o mundo. Era deles, mas depois mudou. Munthos comprava. Quem num tinha comprava a posse na mão dos outo.”

exchange, people might draw up a sales receipt (*recibo*) to finalize the transaction. He added a caveat to his memory, however:

I witnessed those sorts of things. I witnessed these things when I was a little older, I saw those things. But when I was little, you know, small people don't remember much of anything.¹⁹²

To summarize, the legal situation of most of the *posseiros*' landholdings was, from the perspective of the state, largely "irregular" with some exceptions. This "irregularity" was very likely an artifact of the state's relative unresponsiveness to the rural poor, and the *posseiros*' historically justified mistrust of the state. Still, some families did have access to some forms of paper documentation, and ongoing exchanges of landholdings seem to have resulted in the creation of deeds and receipts. This relationship to paper documents deepened as bureaucratic forms took increasing hold in the region.¹⁹³ Just as importantly, however, families and neighbors appear to have mediated their respective land claims intersubjectively, and these modes of reckoning property relations, in the relative absence of legally documented land claims, were perfectly "regular" as they were grounded in what were, for the *posseiros*, wholly intelligible forms of social recognition.

8. The Condition of a Good Life

At this point, we have a cursory view of a world, some of its relationships, and constitutive dimensions and elements. This world was created by and for the *posseiros* in order to meet the historical need of securing places where they could create lives away from the plantations. Their world was not by any means perfect, and it is perhaps easy to idealize, especially as the retrospective accounts from which I have drawn, as Mateus suggested above, were recounted by

¹⁹² "Esses tipo de coisa eu arcanço. Eu arcancei no thempo qui eu peguei ficar maiozinho, eu arcancei. Agora, quando era piqueno, cê sabe, a pessoa piquena num lembra de nada."

¹⁹³ See Chapters 4, 5, and 10.

people who were children and young adults in that period. Consequently, it seems likely that their view of the world may have been partial and shielded from certain kinds of realities.

While women like Alvina were clearly able to make claims to roças, her claims were contested by affinal patriarchs, and children, in general, appear to have occupied marginal positions in what appear to have been a patriarchal family structure. Nonetheless, for some of these posseiro families, the world and relationships they had created offered some measure of social meaning, recognition, and an approximation to wholeness—however tenuous and fragile—in what was otherwise the massively unequal world that persisted after emancipation. Material poverty was certainly an obstacle to achieving wholeness, but then the recognition of poverty seems to occur in retrospect and perhaps in relation to contemporary standards of material wellbeing. Despite this, as was seen above, several people recalled a certain degree of abundance through their lives in the forested hills.

Those who were able to derive a living in the hills—whether by availing themselves of natural wealth or by bringing small sections of the forest into cultivation, with all of the challenges, hardship, and struggle that this entailed—were able to find a certain degree of happiness. Material poverty did not necessarily amount to spiritual poverty or despair.

8a. Poverty, Independence, and Happiness

My conversation with Caio continued into the late afternoon. The sun quickly disappeared and the house where he lived became dark. There was no electricity in the workers' housing on the plantation where he worked, and so without losing a beat, Caio lit some candles that dimly illuminated the room. Our conversation turned toward the experience of poverty during his youth. As occurred in many of these conversations, his recollections displayed acute contrasts:

Now, in that time—things were bad in that time. But people still lived laughing, singing, going to festivals.¹⁹⁴

¹⁹⁴ “Agora tempo era naquele—ruim era naquele tempo. Inda o povo inda vivia dano risada, cantano ia pa festa.”

One of Caio's neighbors, a young man named Silvano who was present for the conversation, suggested that poor people enjoyed their lives more than the rich. Caio agreed:

They enjoyed [life] more than the rich...[People] always lived happily even though they were poor. And nobody complained—saying that they didn't have enough—nobody complained.¹⁹⁵

Antônia, similarly, suggested that in her youth people lived well, despite their poverty. She joked, ironically, that there were no more poor people—people did not wish to appear poor. In her youth, by contrast, she explained that people were truly poor and that they did not (and could not) hide it. Still, they lived better:

We lived—we lived better than today. Because we lived more at peace...We were—we were poor—but not in the graces of God...We didn't have—we didn't have—we didn't have anything—AVE MARIA!—BUT WE LIVED!¹⁹⁶

Caio and Antônia seem to be suggesting that people were categorically happier in old times. I posed this as a question to Caio, and he emphatically responded in the negative, but he immediately qualified his response:

“NOOOO! Some people at that time were happy because they were independent, on their own lands, right? Each one had their land and they were able to—to say, “I am—I am my own owner!” Except life was difficult, right? You had everything because you had some land—a kind of good. Money, forget about it. Those who were rich, they were really rich. Those who were poor, were poor, really poor!”¹⁹⁷

¹⁹⁵ “Curtia mais de que o rico...Sempre vivia alegre que mermo pobre. Mas ninguém se conformava—dizer porque num tinha—ninguém se conformava.”

In the context, the use of the verb *conformar-se*—to conform, obey, accommodate—means *lamentar-se*—to complain or whine. It is not clear to me if this usage of *conformar-se* has become generalized to have this meaning.

¹⁹⁶ “Vivia—vivia milhó do que hoje. É, que vivia mais sossegado...Nós era—era pobre—não das graças de Deus...Num tinha—a gente num tinha—num tinha—AVE MARIA!—VIVIA!”

¹⁹⁷ “Nãaaa! Alguem naquele tempo era feliz porque eles era independente, das terra dele, né? Cada um tinha suas terra, aí tinha como, aquele, dizer eu sou, sou dono de mim mesmo. Mas só que a vida era difíci, né? Ce tinha tudo

There are several notable threads in this statement. The notion of “independence” and the claim of self-ownership (“I am my own owner!”) appear as a crucial dimension of these families’ quest for happiness. Having land was a condition of that independence, which is to say that “independence” depended upon access to productive resources. Indeed, this was part of the motivation for departing to the hills in the first place, and material independence appeared as an especially important dimension of creating happiness. But as Caio noted, having land did not mean an ease of life or eliminate the experience of hardship and struggle.

Caio’s statement also highlights a social gulf between the rural poor and those who might have been considered regional elites, and the subtle differences in material wellbeing among the posseiros might have been cancelled in relation to these rich others. As a quantitative matter, most of the posseiros were materially poor, and, as a matter of social interaction, those with whom they might have interacted on a daily basis would have also been considered poor. The rich, on the other hand, could have been considered to inhabit another world and may have been counted as different in social kind. As a quantitative question, then, most of the posseiros were equals in poverty, and as a matter of course, those who dwelled in the hills encountered a world of equals. Indeed, several people expressed a sort of latent notion of a basic kind of equality, both a relative equality of condition and an equality of status. This experience of relative equality may have provided another ground for the experience of happiness. In these final two sections, I will conclude by exploring the idioms of “struggle” and “equality” in relation to the experiences of satisfaction and happiness.

8b. Suffering, Struggle, and Satisfaction

Hard labor was necessary to life, but hard labor was not in itself constitutive of unhappiness. Antônia explained that hard work was necessary, and when meaningful forms of work and living were available, they afforded satisfaction:

porque tinha um terreno, agora, um bem. Moeda, já foi. Quem era rico era rico mermo; quem era pobre era pobre, pobre mermo.”

In some respects, we lived better because everything went further. Whatever we had to eat—whatever we had to eat, it was satisfying. But today—today there’s a lot—lots of things, but I don’t know, I don’t know.¹⁹⁸

What Antônia means at the end of her statement is that people no longer appeared satisfied with what they had, and this could be seen in the notion of work. For Antônia, through her work, she found the rewards of self-recognition and self-worth. Reflecting on her decaying body, Antônia recalled her work in her youth:

I was not afraid to work. I had joy in my life, and I knew who I was. I had a joy—I had an enormous joy... AVE MARIA! I was only well when I was working.¹⁹⁹

For Antônia, her labor was tied to the experience of joy and satisfaction. While her work never brought about excess, it did provide enough, and a life with enough was better than one of excess. The quality of having *enough* was what enabled people to find satisfaction, and desire was something that could be fulfilled.

Mateus similarly found that he and his contemporaries had been satisfied in their youth, and this was partially because of the inescapability of work:

We lived satisfied—we lived satisfied because—well, that’s all that we or anyone could really do. Because for each person to live [and earn] their daily bread—wherever you lived, you had to work—you had to work so that you could dress, eat—have something to wear and something to eat. Well, it’s really just the same work as today, because today, if someone doesn’t work, what does he live from? From nothing, right? Well, he’ll suffer from hunger.²⁰⁰

¹⁹⁸ “Bom, num certo, num certo tipo de, de coisa, vivia era milhó. Porque tudo rendia. Quoquer coisa a gente, qui a gente tinha pa cumer sartisfazia. E hoje, hoje, muntha, muntha coisa qui thenha. Mas sei lá, num sei.”

¹⁹⁹ “Eu num tinha medo de trabaiair. Tinha prazer na minha vida, e eu sei quem eu era. Eu tinha um prazer—eu tinha um prazer enorme...AVE MARIA! Eu só tava bem qonde eu tava trabaiano.”

²⁰⁰ “Vivia sartisfetho—vivia sartisfetho porque—então, o qui eles tinha pa fazer e quorquer um era aquilo mermo. Porque o, o passadiço pa pessoa viver—aonde morasse, tinha qui trabalhar—fazer o ribuliço pur mode se vistir, cumer—dar o qui vistir, dar o qui cumer. Bem, vem seno o mermo ribuliço de hoje, porque, se a pessoa hoje em dia num trabalhar ele convéve de que? De nada, né? Bom, ele vai passar má de fome.”

The interplay between the potential for suffering, the necessity of struggle, and the possibility of satisfaction are all crucial across these passages seen in this and the previous section.

Alonso, Gilberto, and Josué similarly articulated a view of the interrelationship of suffering, struggle, and their satisfaction and happiness. They suggested that life in their youth was *sofrido*, or “suffered,” or constituted by suffering. Gilberto and Alonso elaborated on the meaning of this suffering, which was connected to a notion of work:

We worked. Life was work.²⁰¹

Alonso sought to clarify the meaning further:

Now, it was “suffered” because of the kind of work—of struggle—because we struggled a lot. That was our suffering. But to claim that we lived sick, or that we were ordered around—“You have to do this!”

No, we worked for ourselves—to survive.²⁰²

Gilberto suggested that while they did not have people ordering them about, they were still, in a sense, prisoners to their own work and necessity:

And we were prisoners [to that work], see? We were prisoners. Prisoners in our infancy. The sun rose, and we worked. The sun rose, and again we worked.²⁰³

They explained that if they were not working on a particular day of the week, for example on Sunday, they would be out in the forest hunting or setting up traps. All of their effort was aimed at “acquiring life” (*adquirir a vida*), so that they could eat. We talk more about what they hunted, how they hunted, what things they bought and sold in town. They again compared their

²⁰¹ “Trabaiava, a vida era trabaiá.”

²⁰² “Agora, sofrido porque o tipo de trabalho—de luta—que a gente lutava muito. O sofrimento era esse. Mas a gente dizer que a gente vivia duente, era cartigado—“Tem que fazer isso!” Não, a gente trabaiava por conta própria—pa sobreviver.”

²⁰³ “E era prisioneiro, viu? A prisão tinha a infância. Era prisioneiro. Manheceu o dia trabalhava, manheceu o dia trabalhava.”

own lives to how they imagined “indians” (*índios*) must have lived in the past. I ask them if they were happy, and Alonso replied succinctly: “We were.”²⁰⁴ Gilberto completed his thought: “We felt that we were happy. Whatever we faced before us, that’s just what there was.”²⁰⁵ All three brothers assented, and Alonso continued:

That [work] was all there was, that’s all there was. We worked to provide for ourselves.²⁰⁶

Gilberto elaborated:

The sun rose and we worked. The [work] was all we knew and the command that we heeded, given by our fathers and mothers. We ate well whenever we could—we ate, filled up our stomachs, and went back to the roça to work.²⁰⁷

They discussed how work techniques had changed over time; for example, they used to pull weeds by hand instead of with a hoe or using herbicides. They surmised that if they knew then what they know about working now, their efforts would have been met with better results and they would have been better off today. Alonso concludes by juxtaposing their suffering and toil with what they took to be their happiness:

Life here was suffering, it was suffering. We lived happy, you know? We lived happy, but however tired, exploited—exploited from work.²⁰⁸

In saying that they were “exploited from work,” Alonso does not seem to be suggesting that they were being taken advantage of, used, or mistreated, but rather that they experienced fatigue through the exertion and expenditure of their energies. Talking about the fatigue and toil of their work occasioned other moments in which they explained how they used to make farinha by hand

²⁰⁴ “Tava.”

²⁰⁵ “Se achava feliz. O que nós topava em frente, era aquilo.”

²⁰⁶ “Era aquilo mesmo, era aquilo. A gente fazia pa se manter.”

²⁰⁷ “Manhecer o dia e trabalhar. Era só aquilo que nós sabia e nós escutava, dado por nossos pai e mãe, a ordem era essa. Comer bem quando tinha—comer, encher a barriga e ir pa roça trabalhar.”

²⁰⁸ “Era sofrida aqui, a vida aqui era sofrida. A gente vivia feliz né? mas vivia feliz, mas porém, cansado, explorado, explorado de trabalho.”

(*no braço*), whereas today much of the process is mechanized. Gilberto clarified the situation further:

But there was no bad malice—nobody felt that way. Because life was work...People didn't have the malice that there is today...Thank God—this is a happy place. But outside here, people only sleeping and thinking about killing others—killing others, no? But here, those things didn't exist—it was only work, my friend. Work. Today you get home from the roça, and tomorrow [it was back to work]...Everyone took care of their lives.²⁰⁹

The themes of physical necessity, work, and fatigue, filled by some measure of happiness, recurred again and again, and these themes will be explored in subsequent chapters. For these posseiros families, work and struggle were necessary parts of their effort to create good and satisfying lives. Because that work was done with and for one another, and not under the yoke of an overseer, the burdens of suffering and struggle that their lives entailed could be borne without malice, resentment, or despair.

8c. Equality & Satisfaction

In the past, everyone's poverty was clear, manifest for everyone to see, and seemingly not associated with any sense of self-conscious shame:

And in the beginning, you came into my house, and if the wife was there with a torn dress, you were there and witnessed everything—bedrooms, kitchen, everything, pole

²⁰⁹ “Não tinha maldade ruim—ninguém tinha. Porque a vida era trabalhar...O povo não tinha aquela maldade que existe hoje...Graças a Deus é um lugar feliz. Mas pra fora o pessoal só durmino e pensano só matar os outro—matar o outro, né isso? E aqui não existia essas coisa, que era só trabalhar meu amigo. Trabalhar. Hoje voce chegava da roça, amanhã já...Cada qual cuidar da sua vida.”

beds, sleeping mats made of banana leaves, whatever was there! In the early days, there was poverty, my brother, in those days there were poor people.²¹⁰

Antônia expressed a similar sentiment:

What else could you do? If you knew that's all there was? If you went over here, it was [poverty]. If you went over there, it was [poverty]. You came over here, that's really all there was. Well, then? We had to raise ourselves in that custom.²¹¹

Antônia is not expressing a resignation to poverty when she asks: "What else could you do?" Here she is merely suggesting that poverty was present wherever you went and, as such, there was little basis for comparison. While there were certainly variations in the material conditions among the posseiro families—some owning a farinha mill, some having more cacao trees, a small country store, or more than one extra change of clothing—these variations did not necessarily present a social gulf and difference among social kinds.

Seu Pedrinho, who was already a young man by the time the old world began to slip away, reflected:

So you see, it was a life—it was a life, I will tell this to you—it was a satisfying life. It was a weary life, you see? But satisfied...Because following the Bible, we must be thankful to the Lord for that, no?²¹²

He continues, and gives an example to explain one element of its satisfaction:

What I mean is, at that time you showed up here in my house—say I was a half - *fazendeiro*²¹³—you arrived here in my house, you slept there on the ground on a grass

²¹⁰ "E de premero, voce passava na minha casa, se a mulé tivesse lá com um vestido rasgado, voce de lá tava veno tudo, quarto, cozinha, tudo, cama de ripa, a istêra de paia de banana, seja lá de que troço for, pronto! A pobreza foi de premero, meu irmão, gente pobre é de premero!"

²¹¹ "Ía fazer o que? Se sabia que era aquilo mermo? Saltasse pr'aqui é aquilo. Saltasse pr'ali é aquilo. Saltasse pra cá era aquilo mermo? E aí? A gente tinha qui se criar naquele custume."

²¹² "Quer dizer, era uma vida, era uma vida, eu vou lhe dizer pra você, era uma vida sartisfeita. Era uma vida cansada, entendeu? Mas sartisfeita...Segundo a Bíblia é pra nós tudo dar graça ao Senhor por aquilo, né?"

²¹³ What he means here is that they were neither very poor, and neither very rich.

mat. Understand? On a mat. Except that you were satisfied. Do you know why? Because in your home it was the same thing. Do you understand? In your home it was the same thing.²¹⁴

He gives another example to illustrate his point, and begins by asking me if I know what “espeto” is, or the bundles of dried fish—a food that is associated with humility (see above). I initially misunderstood him, thinking he had said *respeito* (respect) instead of *espeto*. Heloísa interjects: “He doesn’t know what espeto is.” She and Sílvia explain what *espeto* is (dried fish); they tell me where it comes from (coastal villages); where it’s sold (open-air market); how it’s best prepared (roasted over a fire); what they’re good to eat with (bananas). As these explanations are elaborated, Seu Pedrinho continues with his example:

[Seu Pedrinho]: If I gave you some of dried fish, you’d eat it just like I’d given you the best food in the world. Because in your home—²¹⁵

[Heloísa]: It was the same thing.²¹⁶

[Seu Pedrinho]: You also had the same. Have you understood well? Well, then we were satisfied with everything, we gave thanks for everything.²¹⁷

So it was for the quality of sameness, equality in material poverty, and the shared condition of struggle that people were able to find satisfaction.

8d. Independence as Depending Rightly

²¹⁴ “Quer dizer, naquela época você chegava aqui em minha casa, eu era meio, meio fazendeiro, você chegava aqui na minha casa, ce ia dormir aí no chão com a esteira. Entendeu? Com a esteira. Mas só que você ficava satisfeito. Sabe por que? Porque na sua casa era a mesma coisa. Deu pa entender? Na sua casa era a mesma coisa.”

²¹⁵ “Se eu lhe desse daquela comida, voce comia tão igual que eu desse a melhor comida do mundo. Porque na sua casa—”

²¹⁶ “—Era a mesma”

²¹⁷ “Tambem usava a merma. Deu pa entender bem? Aí, agente ficava satisfeito por tudo, dava Graça por tudo, mas hoje.”

Across these various reflections, the notions of suffering, struggle, and satisfaction appear as interconnected moments that were crucial to the process of making a good life. Making sense of the interrelationships *between* these moments can help to make sense of what appears to have been a people's struggle to find substantive freedom and independence, as when Caio suggested that the posseiros families, despite their poverty, were able to find happiness because they had found independence and could declare "I am my own owner!" Property configuring the relationship between these different moments of suffering, struggle, and satisfaction appears to have been the key to independence, and thus a substantive form of happiness.

The unequal world that remained in the aftermath of slavery left these moments distributed in an asymmetrical fashion. The formal, legal freedom that was granted to freed slaves, and the freedom already enjoyed by the rural poor, was merely the "freedom" to continue working for the former masters—the Lords (*Senhores*), Doctors (*Doutores*), plantation owners (*fazendeiros*), and plantation managers (*gerentes*). Little in the post-emancipation they inherited had changed to rectify the asymmetrical distribution of the moments that were part of life-making. In this world, the masters and their descendants continued to experience the immediate satisfaction of their needs, but with no suffering or struggle. The slaves and their descendants continued to suffer from a relative lack of satisfaction of any of their needs, and the burden of all struggle was placed upon them, but only for the sake of their new masters. In other words, the distribution of suffering, struggle, and satisfaction continued to be asymmetrical and pathological. The attempt to escape that world was an attempt to reconfigure this maldistribution of suffering, struggle, and satisfaction, and becoming "independent"—separating oneself out from those pathological relationships—was a crucial moment in the larger task of building new forms of social meaning and goodness.²¹⁸

²¹⁸ The joint articulation of the notions of suffering, struggle, and satisfaction can be connected in interesting ways to G.W.F. Hegel's (1977[1807]) account of the master and slave, or the lord and bondsman, in the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, where the lord enjoyed the "pure enjoyment," consumption, and satisfaction of consuming without the experience of suffering or struggling, which was all consigned to the slave or the bondsman who experiences little satisfaction. The relevant passage from the *Phenomenology* follows: "[T]he lord, who has interposed the bondsman between it and himself, takes to himself only the dependent aspect of the thing and has the pure enjoyment of it. The aspect of its independence he leaves to the bondsman, who works on it" (Hegel 1977 [1807]:116).

Subsequent readings and recent interpretations of this moment in the *Phenomenology* emphasize the imbalance in the master's debased form of consumption and the slave's degrading form of laboring. Charles Taylor (1975) writes: "The relation of the master to what surrounds him is that of a pure consumer; the hard task of transforming things and preparing them for consumption is that of the slave. The master's experience is of the lack of solid reality (*Unselbständigkeit*) of things; the slave is the one who experiences their independence and resistance as he works them" (1975:154). More recently, Andrew Cole (2004) writes: "The lord enjoys the fruits of the bondsman's

In the world that the posseiro families had created in these hills, they had found resources and spaces through which they could create and sustain new social relationships. In this chapter we have seen some of those relationships as people made a living, exchanged, shared in work, and coordinated access to land. These relationships hinged upon social relationships grounded in trust, mutual recognition, and various forms of interdependence upon one another. The world was not an Eden where fruit was freely plucked from the forest trees—although something like this might be said of the rivers and estuaries—but life was rather *sofrido*, or “suffered,” and depended on hard work, toil, and struggle. It was a world that was remembered, at least by some, as one of material poverty. By suffering and struggling for themselves and for one another, however, some people could recall this struggle fondly, undertaken with humility and without malice. Through their joint struggles, some people recalled a life that permitted new measures of wholeness, abundance, and satisfaction.

negation or labor through his extraction of this labor, his forcible dispossession and his powerful possession, by which he installs himself between the bondsman’s labor and its yield...This is a social relationship: the one who enjoys is not the one who works. The one who enjoys is the one who consumes with a labor of expenditure, of negation of another sort” (2004:593-594). Finally, Paul Redding’s (2012) recent research on the role of “work” in the *Phenomenology*: “The master is a non-labouring consumer, whose desire is closer to that of the non-human animal—one immediately expressed in the negation, that is the consumption, of the objects of the world. The slave, of course, cannot act on his impulsive desires, as he has to negate or suppress his own natural desires and replace them with the actions required to serve the master’s conceptually conveyed will” (Redding2012:55).

This asymmetry identified in Hegel’s account, according to Taylor’s reading, informed the early spirit of Marx’s appropriation of Hegel: “And this brings us to the theme which is later one of the central ideas of Marxism. The master we saw above has the advantage that his relation to things is that of simple enjoyment (*Genuß*); it is the slave who experiences their resistance and independence. But with time, the advantages reverse. The master being in face of a world which offers him no effective resistance tends to sink back into a stupor of self-coincidence. He approaches the stagnant pole where I=I. He is simply a consumer. The slave however has to struggle with things to transform them, and sooner or later he achieves a mastery over them. And in so doing he imprints his own ideas on them. The man-made environment thus comes to reflect him, it is made up of his creations” (Taylor 1975:156).

CHAPTER 4:
POLITICAL ECONOMY OF LOSS

1. A First Approximation of Loss

“Odebrecht showed up here, and well...He was the Big Owner, he wanted everything.”¹

This and the following chapter are about the theft of the hills; the collapse of the world that the posseiros had made; and the expansion of a plantation economy. The account is divided into two parts. The present chapter traces the local instantiations of broader political and economic changes that occurred in the region. This began with transformations of transportation infrastructure that facilitated new extractive activity, followed by the expulsion of the posseiros and the accumulation of land, and finally the expansion of new rubber and cacao plantations in the region. The evidence for this chapter draws together narratives from and about those people who were involved in this process; evidence from policy papers and government documents that were published in that period; and secondary research, notably work by Warren Dean (1987) that helps trace the expansion of rubber plantations in Brazil, and allows me to trace the appearance of rubber in municipalities surrounding Ituberá and Camamu. The next chapter explores this process as it was lived and encountered by the last posseiro families, through narratives that recount various moments and dimensions of this dispossession.

The hills were initially split open through state-sponsored infrastructure building projects that were carried out between the two World Wars. These included the expansion of a vast network of new roads, as well as a number of new ports that were built throughout the cacao zone, including several municipalities in the Dendê Coast. Shortly after the Second World War, and with the completion of these infrastructure building projects, the posseiros faced two phases

¹ “Odebrecht chegava aqui e pronto...Ele que era o dono, ele que queria tudo.”

of agro-industrial expansion that would occur over the course of the next few decades.² The aggregate process, which began in the mid-1930s and culminated in the 1970s, could be accurately described as what Karl Marx called “primitive accumulation,”³ and what David Harvey perhaps more evocatively (and accurately) calls “accumulation by dispossession.”⁴ The first phase, beginning at the end of the 1940s and into the 1950s, included an intensification of timber extraction throughout the region, followed by the first state-sponsored land-colonization project in the municipality, and the arrival of Firestone to establish the first large rubber plantation in the region. This first phase was immediately followed by a subsequent phase of agro-industrial expansion beginning sometime around 1960, which most notably occurred through the vast expansion of rubber plantations deeper into the hills. Both of these phases of expansion led to encounters with posseiros who were already living in the hills, and in almost all cases resulted in their removal.

The epigraph for this chapter is a description of Norberto Odebrecht, the Brazilian construction giant who arguably started his career in the Dendê Coast region, particularly focused around the town of Ituberá, and played a crucial role in the overall transformations described here. The epigraph to this chapter is a description of Odebrecht, which was offered by a woman named Felícia who had migrated to Ituberá with her parents at the age of 11, sometime around 1944. From her own vantage point, living in and around town as she grew up, Felícia witnessed many of the processes described in this chapter and was well acquainted and in some cases friends with some of the people who will appear in this chapter. In her words, Odebrecht was the “Big Owner” who wanted it all, a person whose ambition crucially contributed to the rupture of the posseiros’ world. In many ways, Odebrecht is remembered as something like a “prime mover,” and will be remembered as an ambivalent persona in the region’s larger story. He was not a member of region’s local elite families, or descended from the old *coronéis*, and in many respects he was an estranged outsider who would ultimately surpass local elites in terms of his influence and the generation of wealth. While he played a crucial role in the transformations that would ensue, and despite his status as an outside, he was did not act alone in the processes of transformation and he largely acted through a series of local intermediaries. These

² I divide this process into two broad phases, which partly attempt to track changes in how particular public institutions—the land commissioner’s office, and the public notary—were occupied, as well as two distinct phases in the expansion of rubber cultivation. See Sections 5 and 7 below.

³ Or “original” accumulation, from *ursprünglich*. See part eight of Marx (1976).

⁴ See Harvey (2003: 137-182).

intermediaries, in turn, were often interested in taking their own share of the wealth that was generated through this process. These relationships were not frictionless, however, as some people worked at cross purposes and in conflict with Odebrecht in the competition that ensued over the land, as will be seen in sections 7b below.

The expulsion of the posseiros was a legal process on the face of things, and hinged upon a disjuncture between the legality of the posseiros' land claims, from the perspective of the state, and the legitimacy of their land claims from the perspective of their own understandings of property. In other words, the expulsion of the posseiros hinged upon a disjuncture between notions of the *legal*, on the one hand, and the *right* and the *just*, on the other hand. The narratives in this chapter focus on those people who were involved in the execution of the law at various institutional levels, including (1) a man named Jeremias, who was involved in procuring lands and negotiating indemnifications for the posseiros' possessions to which they might stake legal claim, such as their crops and their houses, but which did not include the land; (2) the public notaries, named Dr. Oseas and later Dona Márcia, who respectively gave or resisted giving legal sanction to these transactions; and (3) the land commissioners (*delegados de terra*), named Dr. Caetano and later Dr. Severino, who were publically appointed functionaries that were responsible for regulating and legalizing landholdings on what were publicly owned state lands (*terras devolutas*) that had never been officially and legally transferred into private hands. As I show, the particular ways in which these institutional positions were occupied and executed by officials mattered in how the law was executed, and thus the prospects for the posseiros, as the execution of the law was not a straightforward or mechanical process.

2. Splitting Hills, Splitting Face

“He came and squatted nearby, and started to cut a cigarette...

I heard a voice say, ‘TAKE THAT.’

Then I saw the machete...”⁵

⁵ “Ele chegou e se acocou, e pegou a cortar o cigarro...Eu vi dizer: “TOMA Ó.” Eu vi bem o facão...”

The story that I begin with is one version of this transformation, as it was recounted to me by an elderly man named Jeremias. Jeremias played a direct role in procuring land for Odebrecht, and was instrumental in removing the posseiro families that were living in the hills. He is infamous in the region for the role that he played in this process. From the standpoint of people like Odebrecht, his role was something to be celebrated as he had helped to “develop” the region. As such, Jeremias has been memorialized by Odebrecht in the form of a public statue, located on a municipal road that passes through a plantation that is still owned by Odebrecht, called Suor Plantation. The statue, pictured below, portrays Jeremias on horseback, with a rifle strapped to his back and a machete hanging from his hip, as can be seen in Figure 7.

Figure 7: Statue of Jeremias



The plaque in front of the statue reads:

The man who didn't talk, but made it happen...An exceptional guide, who offered data and facts that facilitated actions and results that impacted the lives of those municipalities that integrate the road of communication, technology, and citizenship.⁶

The statue also accurately reproduces a scar on Jeremias's face—across his right cheek—that resulted when he was attacked by one of the posseiros. The scar on his face, I would like to suggest, can be understood as metonymic of the relationship between splitting open the hills and the expelling of the posseiros, on the one hand, and the splitting of Jeremias's face—both in a literal and social sense—on the other hand. The loss of “face” could be described in the sense developed Goffman (2005[1955]), or in terms of what I will later describe as the loss of control over his “name” (see Chapter 8, Section 5). In other words, by splitting open the hills and contributing to the dispossession of the posseiros, Jeremias can be said to have split open his own face through a process of recursion. In other words, his action toward others was reproduced in others' actions toward his himself.⁷

Jeremias's memorialization by Odebrecht, however, points to some of the ambiguities of face, an ambiguity that similarly points to the basic failures of recognition that pervade this episode, as will be suggested below. Because this episode is about the contested nature of transgression and the contest of face, Jeremias's narrative ends in a moment when he offers forgiveness to the man who had cut him, which simultaneously appears as a roundabout attempt to ask forgiveness for himself—by claiming that he had done no wrong and had always

⁶ “O homem que não falava, fazia acontecer...Guia diferenciado, ofereceu dados, e fatos que permitiam atos e resultados impactantes nas vidas dos municípios que integram a estrada da comunicação, tecnologia e cidadania.”

⁷ An alternative epigraph to this section—which raises fascinating questions about the problems of nonviolence, violence, and retribution, which I cannot explore here—might have been drawn from the following passage of a speech given by Martin Luther King, Jr. on August 16, 1967 at the Southern Christian Leadership Conference:

“And I say to you, I have also decided to stick to love. For I know that love is ultimately the only answer to mankind's problems. And I'm going to talk about it everywhere I go. I know it isn't popular to talk about it in some circles today. I'm not talking about emotional bosh when I talk about love, I'm talking about a strong, demanding love. *And I have seen too much hate. I've seen too much hate on the faces of sheriffs in the South. I've seen hate on the faces of too many Klansmen and too many White Citizens Councilors in the South to want to hate myself, because every time I see it, I know that it does something to their faces and their personalities and I say to myself that hate is too great a burden to bear.*” [King 1986:250, my emphasis]

conducted himself rightly. That is, he seems to be claiming that he was merely acting in accordance with the law and under the directive of another.⁸

2a. Opening the Forest

I had gone to meet Jeremias on a Sunday afternoon with Damião, who had known Jeremias from the years when Damião was still a worker at Suor Plantation. Jeremias was from the neighboring municipality of Camamu, and recounted that he came from a family of humble origins. His family may have even had ties to the posseiros themselves, although this was not clear. In going to interview Jeremias, I did not have to ask him many questions, as he already knew the story that he would recount. Jeremias's narrative begins at the point when he first came into contact with Norberto Odebrecht, who had become interested in acquiring the public lands—the hills and the forests—between the municipalities of Camamu and Ituberá. Jeremias describes his initial recruitment by Odebrecht, owed to his extensive knowledge of the hills and the forests.⁹ He recalls one of his first conversations with Odebrecht, who sought to discover the extent of Jeremias's knowledge of the region's various rivers and streams:

[Odebrecht]: “Do you know the headwaters of the Juliana?”

[Jeremias]: I said, “I do.”

[Odebrecht]: “Do you know the headwaters of the Mina Nova?”

[Jeremias]: I said, “I do.”

[Odebrecht]: “Do you know the headwaters of the Lajedo?”

[Jeremias]: “I do.”

⁸ There are parallels here to Hannah Arendt's (1963) analysis of the “banality of evil.”

⁹ Jeremias's extensive knowledge of the hills and forests is what suggests that he may have had personal ties to the posseiros.

[Odebrecht]: “Do you know the headwaters of the Pimenta?”

[Jeremias]: “I do.”

[Odebrecht]: “Do you know the headwaters of the Terra Cortada?”

[Jeremias]: “I do.”

[Odebrecht]: “Well then, this valley is what we are interested in. You will conquer and buy this entire valley until you reach the BR-101 highway.”¹⁰

This is how Jeremias remembered his first conversation with Odebrecht—a conversation in which Odebrecht had charged him with the task of traveling on horseback throughout the hills in order to buy out any and all of the posseiros living there. The lands upon which these families were squatting had finally come into the purview of capitalist expansion, and the posseiros who lived there had to leave. In the interview, Jeremias recalled the forest as being uninhabited, and when he did speak of the posseiros, he provided a less-than-flattering characterization of them that implied a justification for their removal:

All of this here was forest. There wasn't anyone here, there wasn't anything. I've been here for 50—49 years I've been here. It was just pure forest—just like this forest you see here—there wasn't anything. Sometimes you'd encounter a straw hut on the margins of the rivers that belonged to people who didn't like to work very much. So, that's why all of these lands were left over here. They liked to fish and to hunt...but producing—planting, that wasn't really their thing.¹¹

¹⁰ “‘Voce conhece o nascente da Juliana?’//Eu disse: ‘Conheço.’//‘Conhece o nascente do Mina Nova?’//Eu disse: ‘Conheço.’//‘Conhece o nascente do Lajedo?’//‘Conheço.’//‘Conhece o nascente do Pimenta?’//‘Conheço.’//‘Conhece o nascente do Terra Cortada?’//‘Conheço.’//‘Então, esse vale é que a gente tamo interessaado. Voce conquistar e comprar esse vale todo aí, até sair na BR-101.’”

¹¹ “‘Isso aqui tudo era mata, num tinha ninguém aqui não, não tinha nada, porque eu to aqui cinquenta e—quarenta e nove anos eu thenho aqui. Aqui só era mata pura—como ta aí essa mata lá—não tinha nada. Às vezes voce

Jeremias's job was to go from one posseiro homestead to the next, and negotiate the indemnification for whatever immovable goods each family possessed, including their "little straw hut[s] and their little manioc plants."¹² Technically, Jeremias was not buying any land because, in many cases, the posseiros were not legally recognized owners of the land. Their legal claims only extended to whatever immovable goods they possessed—their manioc fields, small cacao groves, houses, and the like—in short, whatever improvements they made upon the land, but which they could not take with them. He explained that, from a legal standpoint, the land could not be bought or sold from the posseiros because they were squatters upon state-owned lands that did not legally belong to them. What the posseiros were compensated for, therefore, were those things they could not take with them once they were expelled.

After these negotiations were completed and the posseiros removed, the land was measured: "We went about buying and measuring; buying and measuring; buying and measuring."¹³ At length, the region was drawn into a new mode of reckoning ownership and landholdings that circumvented the intersubjective and labor-based forms of property that were practiced by the posseiros. In the end, Jeremias reportedly bought the posseiros out of nearly 5,300 hectares of land for Odebrecht. Out of these lands, Odebrecht would eventually establish the plantation called Suor Plantation in the early 1960s. In order to arrive at that point, much ground had to be covered, so Jeremias advanced the narrative:

Well, what do we do next? Doctor Norberto had never been through here before. So he said:

[Odebrecht]: "Look, clear some pathways [in the forest] so that I can walk around Suor Plantation with you."

encontrava uma casinha de palha—nas margens dos rios, das pessoas que também não gostavam muito de trabalhar. Então, por isso que sobrou essas terras toda aqui. Eles gostavam mais de pescar e de caçar. Mas produzir...plantação, isso não é muito com eles não."

¹² "...casinha de palha e pezinho de mandioca."

¹³ "...nós fomos comprano e midino; comprano e midino; comprano e midino."

Suor Plantation only existed on paper, in name, but there was nothing else here.¹⁴

Once the land base was secured, the next step in establishing the plantation was to open up pathways where vehicles and people, unaccustomed to wading in the forest, could travel. This led to the building of roads starting around 1965, when Suor Plantation came into legal being.¹⁵

Soon after Jeremias began to build the roads through the forest, Odebrecht came to visit the new plantation to inspect progress:

[Odebrecht]: “Who made this road?”

[Jeremias]: I said, “I was the one, Dr. Norberto.”

[Odebrecht]: “And you build roads, you know how to build roads?”

[Jeremias]: I say, “No, I’ve never built a road before.”

[Odebrecht]: “Well, but it was you who built it?”

[Jeremias]: I said, “It was.”

[Odebrecht]: “Then continue, continue making your roads.”¹⁶

Jeremias continued making roads:

¹⁴ “...aí agora o que faz?//Doutor Norberto nunca tinha vindo aqui. Aí, disse://‘Ó, faça umas picadas pa que eu possa andar com voce em torno da...Suor.’//Existia no papel, no nome, [mas ainda] não existia nada aqui.”

¹⁵ Jeremias recalled the road-building beginning “some 40, 42, 45 years ago.” (“Isso ta uns 40 anos, 42, 45 anos.”) If this was 45 years prior to the date of the interview in 2010, then this suggests a date of about 1965. Other materials corroborate this date for the founding of Suor Plantation, and hence help to place the interview in the regional time-frame.

¹⁶ “‘Quem fez essa estrada?’//Eu disse: ‘Quem fez foi eu doutor Norberto.’//‘E voce faz estrada, sabe fazer estrada?’//Eu digo: ‘Não, eu nunca fiz estrada.’//‘Oie, foi voce que fez?’//Eu disse: ‘Foi.’//‘Continue, continue a fazer suas estradas.’”

It was day and night, everything built by hand. I worked here with 60 or 70 men, depending [on the work]...Some worked during the day, others worked at night.¹⁷

Odebrecht periodically visited the plantation to see how the work was progressing. When he visited, Jeremias recalled, sometimes Odebrecht brought bring food and drink to share with the workers:

He'd come at that scheduled time. He enjoyed bringing a roasted chicken, some beans...a little bit of Cinzano—a liter of Cinzano for more than 50 men. Well, he had—he divided the chicken with the workers, they ate and workers became really excited [about his presence]. And then we continued working.”¹⁸

After the completion of the roads, they began clearing the forest so that they could begin to plant rubber trees, pasture grass, and later cacao trees:

We began to fell blocs of forest—when we began to fell the blocks, it was just me [administering] things. At the time there were some 200 or 300 men. We felled those blocs, planted rubber, planted grass. Afterward, we had some plots of cacao—some remaining cacao groves that had belonged to the posseiros I bought out. We decided to start harvesting from those groves.¹⁹

Partly through Jeremias's efforts, the Suor plantation expanded and eventually became one of the single largest single rubber and cacao plantations in the region.

¹⁷ “Aí continuei a fazer a estrada, aí virava de dia e de noite, tudo na mão de homem. Eu trabalhava aqui com 60, 70 conforme...Porque, um trabalhava de dia outro trabalhava de noite.”

¹⁸ “Porque ele vinha naquele prazo. Ele tinha o prazer de trazer uma galinha assada, um feijão...um pouco de Cinzano, um litro de Cinzano pra mais de 50 home. Aí ele tinha—dividia aquela galinha ali com o pessoal, comia e ficava—aí o pessoal tambem ficava todo empolgado. E aí nós continuamos.”

¹⁹ “Começamos a derrubar bloco—quando começamos a derrubar bloco, aí ainda era eu só. Aí tinha mais de 200 ou 300 home. Aí derrubamos esses blocos, plantou seringueira, plantou capim. Depois, nós tinha algum pedacinho de cacau—alguma grota de cacau que era do posseiro que eu comprava e ficava aquilo lá. Passamos a querer aproveitar aquelas grotas.”

2b. *The Structure of the Transactions*

I asked Jeremias more about the details of his transactions with the posseiros families. I asked him, for example, if he ever encountered posseiros who had “documents” (*documentos*) for the lands where they resided. He explained that he had never bothered asking because, to his understanding, the land belonged to the state:

I didn't seek that out because the land belonged to the State. We had requisitioned it from the state as we'd made all the measurements and paid half the money to the state. [The posseiros] didn't have anything, and it wasn't necessary to ask for a document. You only saw to it that he received some money for this, this and that—[whatever immovable goods they had]. But documents, they didn't have any.²⁰

He explained that when he went to an area to buy out the posseiros, he would first buy out one family that lived near others. From there, he suggested, it was easier to have contact with other people who then understood that he was in the region looking for land. He explained that in one location, he bought out a man whose family lived on lands situated near a field where children frequently played. This was an ideal place for him to make contact with other families. Jeremias explained:

Well, one person came to talk with me and so on, or they'd come to meet me, and then I'd tell them what my purpose was—to buy that [land] there, to see if they wanted to sell. I'd just ask:

[Jeremias]: “Do you want to sell? Do you want to sell? If you don't want to sell, then be in peace.”

Many didn't sell right away. But then, they started to sell. When they saw that many who sold [their land] did well for themselves, they came and sold to me.

²⁰ “Eu também não procurava isso, que a terra era do Estado. Nós requeria ao Estado que fazia a medição e pagava a metade ao Estado. Ele não tinha nada e nem precisava procurar documento não. Voce só queria que ele recebesse o dinheiro por conta disso, disso e disso. O documento eles não tinham.”

Thank God, [Suor Plantation] here never stole anything from anybody.²¹

Jeremias elaborated upon and resisted this theme of theft:

The people say: “Oh, Norberto [stole the land]!”

No, not Norberto. Nobody can put Norberto’s name here, because he never took anything from anybody. If anybody took anything, it was me, because Norberto wasn’t here. I was the one who did it. Now, I give thanks to God that there is not one person here who says:

“Look, Jeremias took a bit of my land.”

No, I bought it. If you wanted to sell to me for ten, I wasn’t going to pay twenty.²²

After initial negotiations were done on-site, cash payment for the land would be made in town at a local land registry (*cartório*), where a legal document was drawn up to finalize and legalize the transaction. Jeremias recalled that he took many posseiros to the land registry himself:

Upon arrived there, he’d declare what he was selling to me—but the land, he didn’t have a say in because it didn’t belong to him. Just the crop I was compensating them for— [their] straw houses. I compensated them for that sort of thing and that was all. That was what they were paid for.²³

²¹ “Aí, um vinha conversar comigo e la vai, ou pa me conhecer, e aí eu ia conversano a minha finalidade qual era, era comprar aquilo ali, se ele queria vender. Também pergunto://“Quer vender? Quer vender? Se não quer vender, fique em paz.”//Munthos não vendeu na hora, mas depois, veio vender. Quando eles viram que munthos que vendiam se davam bem, aí vinham e me vendiam.//Graças a Deus aqui nunca ninguém agrediu nada de ninguém.”

²² “O pessoal diz://“Ah, Norberto.”//Não, Norberto não. Ninguem bota o nome de Norberto aqui que nunca tomou nada de ninguém, porque, se tomasse quem tomava era eu, que Norberto não tava aqui. Quem fazia era eu. Agora, eu graças a Deus não tem um aqui que diga://“Ó, Jeremias tomou um parmo de terra minha.”//Não, comprei. Se voce quiser me vender por dez, eu não ia comprar por vinte.”

²³ “Chegar lá, ele dizia o que é que tava me vendeno—e a terra ele não podia saber, porque não era dele. Só o pé de planta que eu tava indenizano—casa de palha. Isso aí eu indenizava e pronto. Era isso que ele recebia.”

Jeremias reported that he often did this with groups of three, four, or five different posseiro families at a time, so that he could finalize several of their transactions all at once. After the transactions were documented, then the families received some payment.

After this was done, he explained that many of the posseiros who lost their land left for other regions, while others may have gone to work on the newly emerging plantations themselves. He suggested that they even permitted some of the former posseiros to stay in their old homes and work for Suor Plantation:

Many stayed in the same place where they lived before. We bought [their possessions], drew up the documents, and they [could stay]...We permitted them to stay there, but they had to work for us.²⁴

A number of posseiro families, then, returned to plantation life, both as tenants and wage laborers, without having to leave their homes. Allowing the posseiros to remain in their former homes, from which they were now legally alienated, solved an early housing problem for the plantation:

But since we still didn't have lodging [for workers], they stayed in the area that was bought [from them]. When we no longer needed them to live there—they had to move from there when we went to plant some new crops or something similar—we dismantled that straw house, and we built our own.²⁵

Other posseiros that did not remain, Jeremias explained, effectively disappeared because they did not know what to do with their money:

Others never came back, but stayed there [in town]: gambling, drinking and women. Sometimes when they finally returned [to the countryside], they no longer had any

²⁴ "...permanecia até no mesmo lugar onde foi deles. A gente comprava, tomava os documentos e eles...A gente permitia que ele ficasse lá. E aí ele precisava trabalhar com a gente."

²⁵ "Mas como a gente também não tinha estalagem ainda, permanecia na área que foi comprada. Quando não precisava mais que ele morasse ali—que ele tinha que sair dali, porque nós ia levar um plantio ou outra coisa semelhante—a gente desmanchava aquela casa de palha, e fazia a nossa."

money. It all stayed in town. These [are the people who] went about talking [bad] about Suor, went about talking [bad] about us:

“Oh, they took what was mine.”

[To which I say]: “No, not taken, I bought it for how much was agreed upon. Now, you didn’t know how to use your money.” Well, I said, “Look at Fulano, look at Beltrano in such and such place, look at the farms they have now.”²⁶

Some people, Jeremias explained, even asked him to help them purchase land in other places. He gave the example of an old *posseiro* named Ivan. He narrated what happened when he tried to pay Ivan for the land:

[Ivan]: “No sir, I won’t take this money.”

[Jeremias]: “But Mr. Ivan, you are selling to me.”

[Ivan]: “No, but I won’t take this money. With this money, you’re going to buy another area for me.”

[Jeremias]: “But Mr. Ivan—me? Buy the place? I don’t know what your taste is [in land].”

[Ivan]: “No, you know more than I do, Mr. Jeremias. I want you to buy a place for me with this money.”²⁷

²⁶ “Outros já não vinham mais, ficavam lá: baralho, bebida e mulé. Às vezes quando chegava aqui já não tinha mais dinheiro, já ficou tudo na rua. Esses, aí saía falano da Suor, saía falano da gente: ‘Ah, que tomaram o que é meu.’ Não, tomou não, comprei por quanto foi combinado. Agora, voce não soube aproveitar seu dinheiro. Aí, eu dizia: ‘Olhe pa Fulano, olhe pa Beltrano que ta em tal lugar ou ta em tal lugar, as roças que ele já tem.’”

²⁷ “Não senhor, eu não recebo esse dinheiro.’ ‘Mas seu Ivan, o senhor ta me vendeno.’ ‘Não, mas eu não recebo esse dinheiro. O senhor com esse dinheiro vai me comprar um outro lugar pa mim.’ ‘Mas seu Ivan—eu? Comprar o lugar? Eu não sei o gosto do senhor.’ ‘Não, o senhor conhece mais do que eu, seu Jeremias. Eu quero que o senhor me compre um lugar pa mim com esse dinheiro.’

When the transactions in this region were completed, and he was done helping Odebrecht open Suor, Jeremias explained that he went to work for Odebrecht in another distant municipality—inland to the west near the BR-101 highway—where he spent another five years undertaking the same process: “I bought everything there, felled [the forests], made roads, planted pasture grass. Then I returned to Suor, and here I am to this day.”²⁸

Jeremias’s narrative has a tight structure with a flat and simple progression. The forest was empty. Wherever he encountered people inhabiting “little grass huts” scattered about the forest, he found that their only interest was in fishing and hunting (despite coming upon the occasional cacao grove). Like the American Indians in John Locke’s account of the origins of property, the posseiros had no real interest in the land, and, more importantly, no real claim to it since they did not appear to invest any labor in transforming it. Instead of planting and transforming nature, the posseiros merely plucked its fruits. In view of the previous Chapter 3, it is hard to maintain such a flat view of the posseiros’ lives in the hills.²⁹

The structure of legal claims, responsibility, fairness, and agency are all very straight forward in Jeremias’s accent. Through these turns of narrative, Jeremias sought to construct his own activity in the region as having helped the posseiro families, whether by giving them jobs on the new plantation, or by helping them find new places to live. This allows him to deny any claim that there was treachery, theft, or coercion involved in any of these transactions. As would be expected of any other celebratory frontier narrative, Jeremias’s story fails to capture the experiences of loss faced by those families inhabiting the hills as new roads and plantations expanded into the region. In Jeremias’s narrative, those posseiros who fared poorly after being expelled from the land met this fate because of personal irresponsibility, as they had squandered all of their money through drinking, gambling, and prostitution. To be sure, some people who lost their land may have met with such a fate, but the claim of personal irresponsibility is not

²⁸ “Comprei lá tudo também, dirrubei, fiz estrada, plantei capim, depois eu retornei pa GRISA novamente. E estou aqui até hoje.”

²⁹ The appearance of being unused might also be an artifact of not understanding the land extensive, rather than labor intensive, nature of manioc production. While the posseiros had not converted the entirety of the forest into fields of manioc or other crops, they did make extensive use of the forest by rotating manioc fields throughout different stretches of forest. This rotation would occur over a period of years and decades, and, over the course of time, an old plot would eventually regenerate into secondary forest. Therefore, the need for fallows, and the regrowth of the forests, might have contributed to a view that the posseiros had no use for the forest. This view would be mistaken, and as a native to the region, Jeremias certainly should have understood this.

proportionate to a full understanding and evaluation of the moral worth and fairness of these transactions. Jeremias's narrative fails at a number of levels that will become clearer throughout this the next chapter.

Despite the tight and clean narrative structure, there is a moment in Jeremias's narrative that remains unexplained, and seemingly unintelligible, to the narrator himself. This moment seems to be the end-point toward which the rest of his story was leading, and the reason why he has probably told this story numerous times throughout his life. Jeremias has a large scar across his face, and this scar almost seems to demand an explanation.

2c. Violence

Jeremias begins this phase of the story by suggesting that, although he is not wealthy, he is recognized in the community:

I don't have wealth, but I have much recognition (*conhecimento*). Many people, big people, come looking to talk with me, just like I'm here with you now. And thanks to God, I live well.³⁰

He explained that he has no enemies and that he lives in peace, At this point, he enters into the culmination of his story:

I don't have enemies here, I have been [here] this whole time and I don't have enemies here. Now, there was one thing that happened to me that was unjust.³¹

He began to recount the story of one posseiro community where he had begun negotiations with the local posseiros. He had set up camp nearby, and began to establish contact and rapport with the families there. He described the community thus: "It was a very poor

³⁰ "Não tenho riqueza, mas tenho muito conhecimento, muita pessoa, como pessoas grandes me procuram pra conversar, como eu to aqui conversano com voce, e graças a Deus eu vivo bem."

³¹ "E eu não tenho inimigo aqui, tenho esse período todo e não tenho inimigo aqui. Agora, teve uma coisa aqui que se passou comigo que foi uma injustiça."

place...all you really saw there was misery.”³² Jeremias would establish various kinds of relationships with the local families, sometimes recruiting them to work with him, or perhaps engage in other exchanges that involved money or other goods. He described a relationship he developed with a man named Celso, whom he began to see somewhat regularly, and with whom he had entered into a sort of quasi-patronage relationship:

He never worked with me because he had a tiny little roça, but I always gave things to the kids—he had a bunch of kids, they all lived naked, with big stomachs—and I gave them things.³³

One day Celso showed up at his camp:

[Celso]: “Mr. Jeremias, I came to ask you, sir, buy a piece of meat for me.”

There was going to be a slaughter on Saturday. Well I said:

[Jeremias]: “Hold on there, meat for you? You don’t work for me.”

[Celso]: “No, I know that I don’t work with you, sir, but it’s that my children are all going hungry.”

Well, that moved me. I went, got a piece of paper, made a note for the guy who worked at the butchery telling him to tend to the man, to give three kilos of beef and two kilos of pork.³⁴

Celso left and went to pick up the promised meat:

³² “É um lugar muito pobre...só via miséria mesmo.”

³³ “Nunca trabalhou comigo porque tinha uma, uma bobagem de uma rocinha, mas eu sempre dava as coisas aos meninos—que ele tinha um bocado de menino assim, vivia tudo nu, com a barriga grande—eu dava as coisas.”

³⁴ “‘Seu Jeremias, eu vim aqui lhe pedir ao senhor, compre uma carne de boi pa mim.’ Ía ter açougue no sábado. Aí eu digo: ‘Per’ aí, carne pra voce? Voce não trabalha comigo.’ ‘Não, eu sei que eu não trabalho com o senhor, mas é que meus filho ta tudo passano fome.’ Aí me moveu. Eu cheguei, peguei um papel, fiz um bilhete para o cara do açougue dizeno pa despachar ele, três quilos de carne de boi e dois quilos de carne de porco.”

He went [to the butcher], and they attended him. He went home, ate his meat there with his children.

Then on Sunday, I was going to leave for another area.³⁵

Jeremias was sitting outside on a stool, talking business with three other people when Celso arrived. Celso sat close by and began to occupy himself:

Well, he took out a machete—he took out his machete, took out a piece of tobacco—a piece of rope tobacco—and started to cut the tobacco [to make a cigarette]. But he was only pretending to cut the tobacco.³⁶

Jeremias describes how the people talking with him were seated facing one another, and explains that when Celso showed up, he sat off to the side out of Jeremias's view:

He came and squatted nearby, and started to cut a cigarette. Well, I was talking with the guy here in front of me, and then when I looked over this way here, I heard a voice say:

‘TAKE THAT.’

Then I saw the machete, it split my head into ribbons...When I saw it, it was the machete—PA!

He imitates the sound of the blow.

It descended here.

He points to the scar that spans across his face.

³⁵ “Ele foi lá, o rapaz despachou. Ele foi pa casa comeu sua carne lá com seus filhos.//No domingo, eu ia mudar pa outro trecho.”

³⁶ ““Aí ele pegou o facão, tirou o facão, pegou um pedaço de fumo, que é aqueles fumo de corda, pegou a cortar o fumo, mas ele cortano o fumo de treitha.”

There I was in the middle of the woods...[bad] roads, lots of brush...difficult to travel...I couldn't see anymore. I couldn't see anymore, my whole face was covered in blood, and there he was.

Someone said:

“Look!”

Celso was fleeing.

The insides [of my face] came out. There was a woman...she grabbed a towel with the other people, they pushed the insides back in and tied it together with the towel. They had already made a stretcher...Then they lifted the stretcher on their shoulders and we left [for town].³⁷

They took him to Ituberá and from there to the hospital in Valença.

2d. The Unintelligible Encounter, Mercy, and Forgiveness

Jeremias recalled a quick recovery and return to his work, even as his wound was still healing. Sometime later, Jeremias received a summons from the local police lieutenant, and Jeremias went to attend the call:

[Jeremias]: “Well, I’ve come to attend to the summons.”

³⁷ “Ele chegou e se acocou e pegou a cortar o cigarro. Aí quando, esse aqui eu conversei com ele aqui ta aqui na minha frente, quando olhei pr’o de cá, eu vi dizer://“TOMA Ó.”//Eu vi bem o facão, abriu minha cabeça em banda...Quando viu foi o facão—PA!//E desceu aqui.//Dento de uma brenha...estrada [ruim], muito mato...[difícil] de passar...Eu não vi mais nada, não vi mais nada, o sangue cobriu o rosto todo e ele aí://“Ó!”//O fato saiu. Aí tinha uma senhora...[ela] pegou uma tualha mais o pessuá, empurraram aquele fato pa dento e atracaram com a tualha. Já fizeram um bangüê...Aí botaram o bangüê nas costas e viemos.”

[Lieutenant]: “Right, I had them call you so that we could talk, because I want you to explain this situation to me, how this happened to you.”

I say: “Look lieutenant, I don’t know how to explain—how this happened.”³⁸

I asked Jeremias if he knew what Celso’s motive was, why he had attacked him.

No, to this day nobody knows. Well—I don’t think he had a reason, I mean, why would he come ask me for meat to eat with his children?³⁹

He continued:

Well, I said: “Look Lieutenant, I couldn’t tell you anything about this. All I know is that I had an accident, but why? I don’t think I gave him any reason [to attack me].”⁴⁰

He explained to the lieutenant that he had given Celso food the day before, and that Celso subsequently attacked him. While Jeremias was still at the jail, the Lieutenant took him to see Celso who was still locked up. Jeremias found that Celso had been “very mistreated, with his feet all inflamed, very yellow,”⁴¹ having been beaten and suffering from hunger. The lieutenant asked Celso:

[Lieutenant]: “What did [Jeremias] do—what led you to do this to Jeremias?”⁴²

³⁸ “J: ‘Pronto, vim aqui atender a intimação.’//L: ‘É, mandei lhe chamar pa gente conversar que eu quero que voce explique essa situação, como é que aconteceu isso com voce.’//Eu digo: ‘Ó tenente..., eu não sei como explic..., que aconteceu isso...’”

³⁹ “Não, até hoje ninguém sabe também. Aí, eu acharia que não tinha motivo, quer dizer, porque ele veio me pedir carne pra comer com os filhos?”

⁴⁰ “Aí eu disse: ‘Ó tenente..., eu não sei dizer nada sobre isso. Eu sei que fui acidentado, agora, por que? Eu acho que não dei motivo.’”

⁴¹ “Muntho matatado com os pés inchados, muito amarelo.”

⁴² “O que fez, o que levou o senhor a fazer isso com Jeremias?”

Celso replied, in Jeremias's narrative, expressing the same incredulity that Jeremias had expressed himself:

[Celso]: "Oh, I don't know."

That was all he said.

[Celso]: "And this man was very good to me, whatever I needed—he sent things for my children, and this, and that. And I don't know what it was that made me do that."⁴³

The lieutenant asked Jeremias what they should do with the man:

[Lieutenant]: "Well, Mr. Jeremias, what do you think we should do with this man?"

I say: "Let him go, let him go because he's in this condition—all swollen [and sick]—and I'm already in a better condition. But his children are there in misery. So, I think you should let him go."

Well, after about 15 days they let him go. I never saw him again.⁴⁴

Jeremias's narrative is instructive on several levels. In one sense, his narrative documents the introduction of a range of new social forms and institutions into the hills. These included new ways of objectifying space through measuring land; a deepening of the relationship between persons and places through the mediation of paper legal documents; a new focus upon forms of writing, especially the signature⁴⁵ of one's name upon a receipt or deed; and the recognition of

⁴³ "“Ah, eu não sei.”//Foi só o que ele disse.//“E esse homem pa mim era muito bom no que eu precisava, ele mandava coisas pa meus filhos e isso e aquilo e não sei o que foi que fez eu fazer isso não.”

⁴⁴ “E seu Jeremias, o que é que voce acha que vamos fazer com esse homem?” Eu digo: ‘Sortá, sortá porque ele ta nessas condições aí, inchado e eu já to bom, mas os filhos dele tão lá passano miséra. Então, eu acho que o senhor deve sortá.’ Aí passou mais uns 15 dias e sortaro ele. Tambem nunca mais vi.”

⁴⁵ Or in lieu of a signature, a thumbprint.

these various relationships through the notary and other bureaucratic offices. These forms were not wholly absent or unheard of in the wider cacao lands or in the Dendê Coast, as was seen in various sections of the previous chapter, but Jeremias's movement through the hills gave these social forms greater acuteness and insistency, which was undeniable to the posseiro families living there. Now posseiro families were faced with legal document that claimed the ground from beneath them. The world Jeremias helped shepherd into the hills clashed in basic ways with the world that the posseiros had created; their worlds seemed to speak past, or were unrecognizable to, one another.

This disjuncture led to the moment of violence that, at least in Jeremias's narrative, was unintelligible both to himself and, curiously, to Celso as the perpetrator of the physical violence. Jeremias's narrative concludes with a moment where he shows mercy and compassion to Celso, but it is easy to fathom that Jeremias's "mercifulness" only showed his basic failure (or refusal) to recognize that the "unintelligible" violence against him was motivated by a transgression that was obvious to many others. A former plantation worker named Orlando, whom I had interviewed sometime between 2003 and 2004,⁴⁶ recounted a contrasting version of Jeremias's story:

[Celso] had many children and he said to him—to Jeremias—that he shouldn't measure his land there...because it didn't belong to [Jeremias]. It was his to raise his children...

So, he said: "Don't measure this, man, because this [land] is for raising my children."

[Jeremias] replied: "No, I'm going to measure it."

Well, [Jeremias] measured his little bit of land, [Celso's] little area. He measured it and then came the machete...[Celso] cut him in the face—Jeremias's face.⁴⁷

⁴⁶ This was the first time I had encountered any story about Jeremias, but I did not fully appreciate its significance at the time, as I was focused upon other research questions.

⁴⁷ "Ele tinha muito filho e aí disse a ele—a Jeremias—pra não medir o terreno que ali...Que não era dele. Ali era dele pra ele criar os filhos...//Aí o rapazinho disse: 'Não meça rapaz, que aqui é pra eu criar meus filhos.'//Ele disse: 'Não, vou medir.'//Aí mediu a pocinha dele, a área dele. Aí mediu e eles entraram em facão...Aí cortou o cara—Jeremias na cara."

For Orlando, Celso’s violence was an obvious form of retribution against Jeremias’s transgression against him and his family. Several months after I interviewed Jeremias, I interviewed Damião about Jeremias’s recounting of events, since Damião had accompanied me to Jeremias’s home that afternoon. Damião dismissed Jeremias’s version of the story. He explained that Jeremias and Odebrecht had taken advantage of the posseiros—people “who didn’t even have birth certificates, let alone identification cards”⁴⁸—and had swindled them out of their lands. Damião recounted the story as he understood it:

[Damião]: Jeremias was cunning, and Odebrecht was even more cunning. They entered into that area, measured everything, and left the posseiros imprisoned.

[Jonathan]: Within—within the measurement, you’re saying?

[Damião]: In the measurement. They locked everything down and then presented a document [declaring] that the posseiros didn’t own anything there...Then they started to expel them. Posseiros that were there for many years—for 10, 15, 20, 30, or even 50 years—they had no defense.

They’d go to a lawyer, but the lawyer would say:

“No, this belongs to Odebrecht.”⁴⁹

Damião suggested that Jeremias would go out to the posseiro communities with cachaça to drink with the posseiro families. When the adults were drunk, Jeremias convinced them to sign papers

⁴⁸ “Que não tinha nem certidão de nascimento, nem carteira de identidade.”

⁴⁹ “D: Jeremias sabido e Odebrecht na sabedoria maior ainda. Entrou lá naquela área, mediu tudo, deixou os posseiros presos.//J: Dentro, dentro da medição que voce fala?//D: Da medição. Prendeu tudo e apresentava um documento que aquilo ali o posseiro nao tinha nada...Aí começava a expulsar. O posseiro que tava ali há muitos anos—há dez, quinze, vinte, trinta, até com cinquenta anos—não tinha defesa nenhuma.//Ia pr’um advogado, o advogado://‘Não, isso aqui é de Odebrecht.’”

that nullified their rights to stay on the land, but eventually, Jeremias's treachery resulted in violent retaliation:

I know they finally got Jeremias with a machete—the guy said:

“I'm not selling to you and you won't [take anything from me neither]. I'm not selling, and I don't care if I'm ruined in the process, but you're not going to take what's mine!”

And he tried to kill Jeremias with his machete, but he only gave him a huge gash across his face!...The truth is that he wanted to kill Jeremias...because he had already taken from so many of the posseiros. But he was the only one who resisted, who did anything against Jeremias, understand?⁵⁰

In these latter narratives, the violence against Jeremias could be interpreted as what E. Valentine Daniel understands as “a check on the narcissistic expansiveness of infantile impulses, impulses that fail to recognize that the whole world is not one's own and that all of being is not encompassed within the boundaries of an ever-expanding identity” (Daniel 1996:68). Daniel cites Piotr Hoffman (1989), who, in developing some Hegelian themes, explores some forms of violence as potentially productive moments in the process of gaining social recognition. Hoffman suggests: “Violence alone was able to (brutally) persuade the one that the whole world was not its own private domain...[V]iolence educates me to the inescapable reality of others; and so I finally begin to view myself as being only one particular self among other selves” (Hoffman 1989:144). In this case, Jeremias would have been the object of violence for Odebrecht's attempt to claim the “whole world” as his own “private domain”—to be the “Big Owner,” as Felícia had described him. Jeremias, however, bore all of the brunt of being “checked”—violently drawn to the recognition of the other—while Odebrecht remained shielded from any of the violence that might have forced his acknowledgment of those posseiro families whom he had dispossessed. While Jeremias appears duplicitous in the claim that he did not understand the

⁵⁰ “Eu sei que meteram o facão em Jeremias—o cara disse://‘Eu não vendo e também você não. Eu nem vendo, e eu me lasco, agora você não fica com o que é meu!’//E picou o facão pra matar Jeremias, mas deu um talhaço na cara dele da porra!...Ele queria matar Jeremias na verdade...porque já tinha tomado muitas posses dos posseiros. E só tinha ele que resistiu, que fez alguma coisa com Jeremias, entendeu?”

motive for Celso's violence (and even more duplicitous in claiming that Celso did not understand his own action), Jeremias's attempt to show mercy to Celso might also be interpreted as a moment through which he recognized (albeit tacitly) that Celso's actions were justified. His attempt to show mercy toward Celso, and Jeremias's emphasis that he was merely carrying out the law and his mandate, could be read as an appeal for his own forgiveness.

3. The Political Economy of Loss

The events that Jeremias recounted above were directly related to a wider series of capitalist transformations that converged on the region in the second half of the 20th century. As suggested above, Jeremias's narrative would have section would have occurred sometime around 1965, during the second period of expansion that will be described below in Section 7. Before Jeremias and Odebrecht could arrive upon the scene, however, a number of significant transformations occurred throughout the cacao lands. One of the most significant transformations in the region was the establishment of a system of new roads throughout the cacao lands, which would bring about a significant reduction in what David Harvey (1990:258) calls the "friction of distance," and an increase in what he describes elsewhere as social "time-space compression" (Harvey 1989: 284-307). This basic infrastructural transformation would make the posseiros residing in the hills of the Dendê Coast vulnerable to new incursions that would proceed in various phases.

The rest of this chapter scales outward in time and space in order to build a broader interpretive framework within which to situate Jeremias's narrative. Section 4 describes the early arrival of Odebrecht in the region in the late 1940s and early 1950s, including his efforts to establish new kinds of infrastructure and extractive activities to the region. Section 5 describes the first period of rubber expansion in the region over the course of the 1950s, while Section 6 describes some of the public officials who helped decide the fate of some posseiro families during these initial periods of expansion. Section 7, finally, describes changes in those public offices in the 1960s, which accompanied the second period of rubber expansion into the region in the 1960s and 1970s.

The present section describes the expansion of new road infrastructure through the cacao region led by various cacao interests, most notably by the Cacao Institute of Bahia. This had significant consequences for the Dendê Coast, especially the region between Ituberá and Gandu where many posseiro families lived. These roads permitted an intensification of timber extraction in the region following the Second World War. Timber extraction was facilitated by these new roads that provided large trucks access to the hills, and the construction of a new port in Ituberá in 1949 through which timber could be exported.⁵¹ This early extractive period would eventually lead to the expansion of rubber (and cacao) plantations into the region. All of these activities involved various interests that were anything but concerted, but which, as an aggregate, collaborated to undermine the spatial underpinnings of the social world that had been created by the posseiros.

3a. Inroads & the Cacao Institute of Bahia

The new road building projects were conducted under the auspices of the Cacao Institute of Bahia,⁵² which was established in 1931 through the Secretary of Agriculture⁵³ for the state of Bahia, which was headed by a man named Ignácio Tosta Filho.⁵⁴ Given the high level of debt and insolvency among cacao planters in the cacao region, compounded by the financial crisis of 1929, the Institute was formed with the primary purpose of providing viable agricultural credit to planters. Whereas many planters were only able to borrow at interest rates of between 12 to 34%, the Institute was initially able to offer interest rates of 8% followed by a rate of 6.2% (Garcez & Freitas 1979:36-37). The Cacao Institute was not only involved in providing rural credit (see Garcez & Freitas 1979:37). Up until 1946, it was the exclusive legal entity that could legally purchase raw cacao until the market was finally opened to private buyers after 1946. Toward this end, the Institute had constructed a series of warehouses and other infrastructure in towns throughout the region, one of which was situated in the municipality of Ituberá. The Institute also sought to advance earlier efforts to “rationalize” and industrialize cacao production

⁵¹ According Felícia, the port in Ituberá and along numerous other parts of the Brazilian coast was the result of a federal port-building project aimed at preparing Brazil for the war-effort.

⁵² *Instituto de Cacau da Bahia*.

⁵³ *Secretaria da Agricultura*.

⁵⁴ The Institute was legally established by Decreto Estadual No. 6.430 on June 8, 1931.

in the wider cacao-producing region. It established an experimental research station in the town of Uruçuca⁵⁵ where it coordinated pest-control campaigns,⁵⁶ cacao breeding programs, and efforts to rehabilitate old plantations by replacing aging cacao trees with newly bred varieties of cacao (Silva 1947). The Institute was also key to helping producers gain access to chemical agricultural inputs—fertilizers, pesticides, fungicides—for which the new strains of cacao were increasingly adapted.

Of all of its programs, however, the Institute's road-building program was perhaps the most significant and transformative. Over the course of the 1930s, the Institute built some 450 kilometers of new roads throughout the cacao zone (Garcez & Freitas 1979:37). The Cacao Institute's efforts occurred in the context of intense road-building programs throughout the state of Bahia between the First and Second World Wars.⁵⁷ This was partly enabled by new road-building techniques, and the availability of new machines toward that end, such as tractors and road graders (*niveladores*). In this period between 1917 and 1946, a series of four increasingly powerful state institutions were created to implement the construction of new roads throughout Bahia, and to improve and provide upkeep for existing ones.⁵⁸ Early on in this period, major arteries were constructed between Salvador and Feira de Santana, and between Ilhéus and Itabuna; from these, smaller regional routes were established. By 1925, 100 kilometers of new roads were in use in the state; by 1928, 270 kilometers of new roads; by 1935, there were 1,339 kilometers of new roads—309 kilometers of which had been built in partnership with the Cacao Institute. By the end of 1945, 2,057 kilometers of good quality roads had been built in the state, in addition to another 800 kilometers of lower category roads. During this period between 1917 and 1946, and of this total, the Cacao Institute alone was responsible for building 450 kilometers of road, or nearly 21.9% of all new roads built in the state.

New transport and freight options became available as new roads opened. In 1933, the South Bahian Travel Company,⁵⁹ or SULBA, was established as a subsidiary of the Cacao

⁵⁵ The contemporary town of Uruçuca was formerly referred to as Água Preta, which was the earlier site of Anthony Leeds's dissertation field research, which he conducted between 1951 and 1952. In his dissertation, Leeds referred to Água Preta as "Cururú."

⁵⁶ For example, Silva (1947) reports that between 1944 and 1946, the Institute exterminated 9,787,234 nests belonging to an ant locally called the "formiga de enxerto."

⁵⁷ The rest of this paragraph is based on Teixeira 1998:61-76, 90-105.

⁵⁸ *Serviço de Estradas de Rodagem* (1917); *Seção de Estradas de Rodagem* (1925); *Diretoria de Estradas de Rodagem* (1928); and *Departamento de Estradas de Rodagem da Bahia* in 1946, following the creation of the federal *Departamento Nacional de Estradas de Rodagem* in 1945.

⁵⁹ *Companhia Viação Sul Bahiano*.

Institute (Teixeira 1998:103). In 1934, SULBA established a bus route for passengers between Ilhéus and Itabuna.⁶⁰ According to Zorzo (2000:113), who cites figures available from 1936, this bus line transported upwards of 200,000 passengers per year. Later, by July 15, 1945, another company made a test-run of the first direct route between Ilhéus and Salvador, thereby linking Bahia's capital city to the regional center of the cacao lands.⁶¹ A man named Bernardo, whose family moved to Ituberá in the 1940s, recalled that this bus route travelled from Ilhéus, through the towns of Itabuna, Itajuípe, Gongogí, Ubatã, Ibirataia, Gandu, Santo Antônio de Jesus, Governador Mangabeira, Cachoeira, São Felix, Santo Amaro, and finally to Salvador.⁶² This route eventually passed through what would later become the municipality of Gandu, which was still a district of, and economically dependent upon the municipality of Ituberá for its access to Salvador-bound sea transport.

As a result of the Cacao Institute's road-building efforts in the cacao zone, Filho (1936:149) reported drastic reductions in transport costs per 60 kilogram bag of dried cacao. For example, on the Itabuna-Ilhéus route, transport costs dropped from 3\$000 to 1\$500 *réis* per bag (a 50% reduction); costs on the Panelas-Ilhéus route dropped from between 8\$000 and 12\$000 *réis* to between 3\$000 4\$000 *réis* per bag (a 62-67% reduction); costs on the Pirangi-Itacaré route dropped from 6\$000-10\$000 to 1\$500-2\$000 *réis* per bag (a 75-80% reduction). Before newer roads were built or upgraded in other parts of the region, Teixeira (1998:95, 105) reported anecdotal stories of car and truck caravans that required 20 hours to travel between Itabuna and Ilhéus, and 9 hours to travel between Ilhéus and a small town called Macuco.⁶³ The distance from Ilhéus to these towns is only 32 and 53 kilometers, respectively, and today these trips might only take 30 and 50 minutes.

Presumably, the transport cost reductions reported by Filho were derived from comparisons between mule and truck transport. Schwarz (1947:30) provided some more specific costs for mule transport: to move one 60 kilogram bag of cacao 2 kilometers, between the towns of São Carlos and Pedrinhas, cost Cr\$2.00 (or Cr\$1/kilometer); to transport a 60 kilogram bag 6

⁶⁰ See http://www.ilheusamado.com.br/?page_id=1213 Last accessed April 25, 2014.

⁶¹ See http://www.ilheusamado.com.br/?page_id=1213 Last accessed April 25, 2014.

⁶² Bernardo, personal communication, May 6, 2013. The federal highway BR-101, which was completed later in the 1960s and 1970s, followed significant stretches of this older route between Ilhéus and Salvador. According to Bernardo: "The traces of this road gave rise to the BR-101 [in Bahia], with some sections being modified." ["O Traçado dessa rodovia deu origem a BR-101 com alguns trechos modificados."]

⁶³ These anecdotes were likely worst-case-scenarios, probably occurring after periods of heavy rainfall. Under better conditions, travel times between these locations may have been faster.

kilometers, between Ibirapitanga to “the river at Orico,” cost Cr\$11.00 (or Cr\$1.83/kilometer). By mule-back, according to these figures, it appears that the greater the distance covered, the higher the cost to transport each bag of cacao. By comparison, Schwarz (1947:35) cites various freight costs to transport one 60 kilogram bag of cacao by truck on the new roads. The prices Schwarz cites range mostly between Cr\$0.10 and Cr\$0.13 per kilometer. For example, from the town of Ubatã to Ilhéus the cost per bag is about 10.8 cents per kilometer (totaling Cr\$13.00 to cover 120 kilometers between the towns); from the town of Gandu to Ituberá the cost is about 13.1 cents per kilometer (totaling Cr\$8.00 to cover 61 kilometers between the towns). In these cases, the greater the distance, the cheaper the cost. Following Schwarz’s figures, the cost difference from mule-back to truck amounts to a 90-92% reduction in transport costs for cacao producers.

Although significantly less dramatic, Schwarz also cites the reduction in freight costs from train to truck transport. For example, the cost from Itabuna and Ilhéus dropped from 16.3 cents per kilometer by train to 10.6 cents per kilometer by truck—or a 34% reduction in transportation costs (Schwarz 1947:35); between Itajuípe and Ilhéus, the cost reduction was far less, dropping from 10.7 cents per kilometer by train to 10.4 cents per kilometer by truck—or a mere 2.8% decrease in costs. While the introduction of roads did seem to represent a categorical improvement over mule transport, the advantage over train transport appears to have varied in significance. The advantage of the new roads for potential producers, however, was that it opened up new frontiers of land that had previously been difficult to access, as a great deal of lands were situated at a remove from navigable rivers and the few train lines that crossed the region.

Between all of the figures and anecdotes cited by Filho, Schwarz, and Teixeira, it becomes clear that transport costs dropped dramatically in this period. Even if these figures and anecdotes could have been exaggerated, it seems clear that this vast reduction in transport costs amounted to a dramatic reduction in the “friction of distance” that had previously afforded posseiro families space to build lives away from the region’s plantations.

These compressions in travel costs occurred in a period when other production costs were increasing. Between 1932 and 1940, general “living costs” in the cacao zone increased by at least 54% (Garcez & Freitas 1979:38). Between 1937 and 1947, wages increased from a reported Cr\$2.50 or Cr\$3.00 per day to Cr\$10.00 or Cr\$12.00 per day, or a wage increase of

300% (Schwarz 1947:26). And while vehicle transport became more widely available, the cost to purchase a single mule for transportation purposes continued to increase from between Cr\$350 and Cr\$450 in 1937 to about Cr\$2000 in 1947, or an increase of between 344-471% (Schwarz 1947:30). Considering the rise in living costs, wages, the cost of mule transport, and the price for mules themselves, this overall reduction of transport costs becomes all the more dramatic.

Schwarz suggested the potential consequences of these basic changes in transportation infrastructure:

The changes wrought by these roads within the short span of a decade are startling. Freight rates, of course, dropped sharply. But advantages other than this began to show up as the system grew. Roadside farms required less labor, fewer mules, and correspondingly smaller pasture areas. *More cocoa land was brought within the economic marketing circle.* Moreover, farm life was vastly enriched because of the socializing influences that swept along the new highways. [Schwarz 1947:30-31, my emphasis]

Schwarz's own piece was part of a larger report prepared by the "Special Committee on Cacao," of the Inter-American Social and Economic Council (IASSEC), which sought to promote cacao production and capital investment throughout the cacao lands. The change in transport infrastructure was one among several changes that, despite drops in cacao production before and during the Second World War, reflected and supported a rapidly expanding cacao market in Bahia. Schwarz's writings evince an optimistic outlook for cacao production—an optimism that would give rise to an ever increasing number of reports, committees, research programs, educational scholarships in cacao agronomy, and analyses of cacao production around the world:

Currently the idea is rather prevalent that cocoa is a good crop with a good future. Supports for this optimistic outlook—apart from the recent price rise—rest on the sharp production decline in West Africa, the belief that consumption is certain to rise well above pre-war levels, and the circumstance that there are no cheap substitutes for cocoa. It is essentially due to these considerations that Bahia is now experiencing a revival of interest in the crop and an urge to plant at a quickened tempo. The extent to which this

will go and the rate at which expansion will take place is anyone's guess. Some hold that the crop will total 2,500,000 bags in seven or eight years. Others, more hopefully inclined, regard as reasonable the attainment of production levels up to 3,000,000 bags within a decade if an adequate supply of labor is available and wages are not boosted. [Schwarz 1947:25]

The scientific "rationalization" of cacao production was another source of great hope. Another contributor to the IASEC report suggested:

Cacao is in most countries entering a new epic. The days of forest culture must now be replaced by scientific farming. As has been the history of most tree crops, the time has come when seedling trees grown with a minimum-of attention must be replaced by vegetative reproduced stock managed according to proven horticultural practices. [Alee 1947:7]

While rationalization may have been the goal, cacao production in this period would still proceed by the traditional method: by expanding into new stretches of uncultivated land and forest. Schwarz noted these opportunities for expansion:

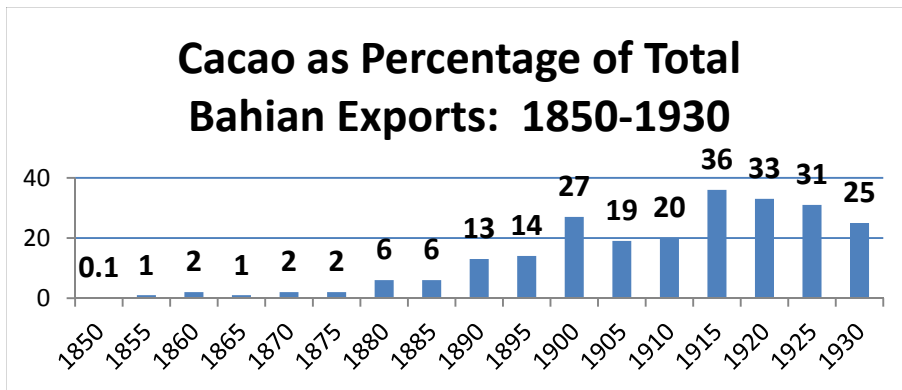
Certainly there is enough good cocoa soil in the state to produce crops two or three times the size of current harvests. Only in the Ilhéus-Itabuna zone is there but little room for new plantings. The area originally demarcated for cocoa growing in that district comprised 200,000 hectares of first class and 50,000 hectares of second class soil. Now all but 20,000 hectares of the first class land is occupied, but as yet none of the second class blocks have been taken up. However, what remains can be bought from the state at 10 to 20 cruzeiros per hectare, depending on the classification. [Schwarz 1947:26]

As an aggregate, the previous passages indicate a growing interest in expanding cacao production in the region, which would occur over the next several decades.

The creation of the Cacao Institute, the IASEC report, all pointed toward efforts to overcome stagnation in cacao production after a cacao boom that occurred in the first part of the

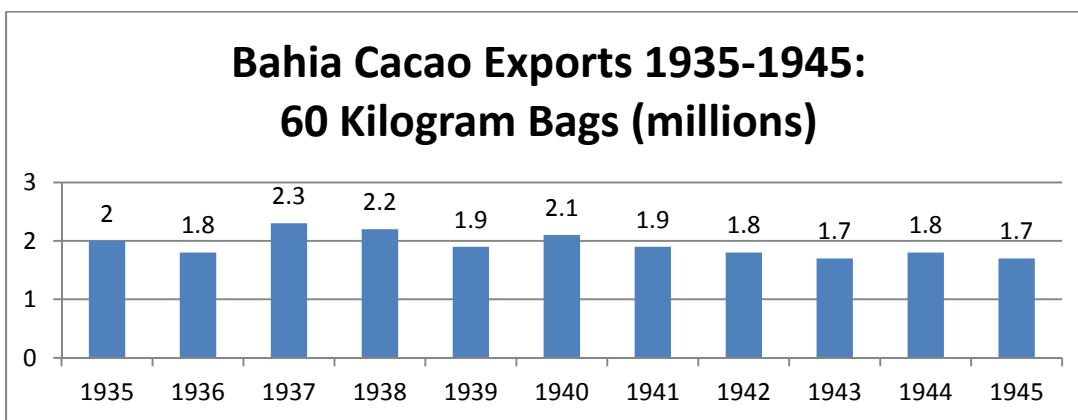
20th century.⁶⁴ In the decades preceding the Second World War, cacao production in Bahia skyrocketed relative to other productive activities in the state, as seen in Figure 8.

Figure 8: Bahian Cacao Exports as Percentage of Total Bahian Exports: 1850-1930⁶⁵



However, after the 1929 economic crisis and during the Second World War, the absolute amount of cacao production stagnated and slightly declined, as seen in Figure 9.

Figure 9: Bahia Cacao Exports 1935-1945: 60 Kilogram Bags (millions)⁶⁶



⁶⁴ This early cacao boom, and the land grabs that it entailed, would have provided much of the source material for Jorge Amado’s historical fiction, based upon his childhood in the region (see Amado 1933, 1945).

⁶⁵ This figure is adapted from Baud & Koonings (1999:297-298). Other exports against which these figures for cacao measured would include products like tobacco and sugar.

⁶⁶ This figure is adapted from Schwarz (1947:39). Schwarz reports these figures in metric tons, which I converted into 60 kilogram bags as a common metric for discussing regional cacao production.

By the time the IASEC held its meeting in 1947, they estimated that 2.8 to 3.0 million bags of cacao could be reached if infrastructure continued to improve, and if production could be further rationalized by rigorous production methods:

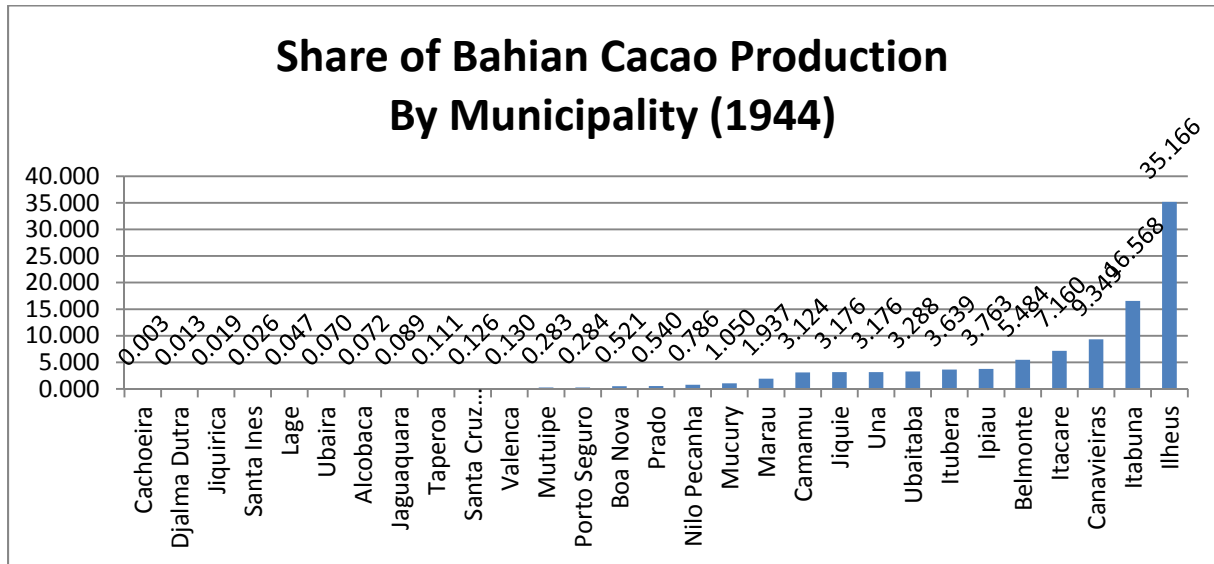
The estimated area now under cocoa could produce a harvest of 2,800,000 to 3,000,000 bags if it were subjected in its entirety to sound agricultural practice. Useless old trees would have to be replaced by promising young stock. [Schwarz 1947:24]

The opening of new roads that accompanied a growing interest in expanding Bahian cacao production meant the expansion onto new lands that had formerly been marginal or just too hard to reach. The turn of this expansionist gaze would finally mean that the lands, such as those occupied by the posseiros described in earlier chapters, would become the target for these plans at expansion.

3b. The New Road & the Consequences for Ituberá

Up until the 1940s, Ituberá was a relatively small cacao producer among cacao-producing municipalities in the broader cacao zone. However, throughout the 1940s, Ituberá was one of the only places in the northern cacao lands where the Cacao Institute had a warehouse for receiving and buying cacao. The reason for this was that from Ituberá, the Institute could send the cacao it had purchased to Salvador by canoe and by steam boat. In 1944, the municipality of Ituberá still incorporated the territories of the present-day municipalities of Gandu, Piraí do Norte, Nova Ibiá, and Itamari. All of these districts, as well as other municipalities further to the interior such as Jequié (158km) and Ipiaú (114km) (Silva 2006:3), depended upon the port in Ituberá to market their cacao to Salvador. In this year, Ituberá was the 7th largest producer of cacao among Bahian municipalities, although it only accounted for 3.6% of the total production in the state, as can be seen in Figure 10 below.

Figure 10: Share of Bahian Cacao Production by Municipality (1944)⁶⁷



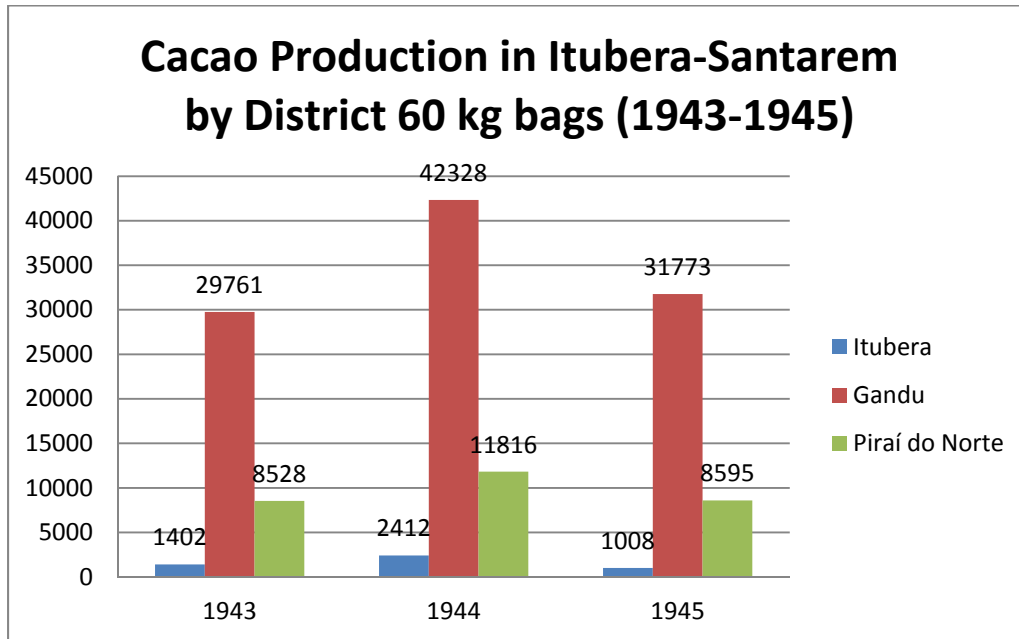
The outlying districts of Piraí do Norte, and especially Gandu, were the primary contributors to Ituberá’s cacao production, far more so than the lands immediately surrounding Ituberá.

Between 1943 and 1945, the district Gandu⁶⁸ was by far the most significant producer of cacao in the subregion, as can be seen by looking at production figures provided by Schwarz (1947:39), represented in Figure 11 below.

⁶⁷ This figure is adapted from Schwarz (1947:23).

⁶⁸ At this time, Gandu also incorporated the present-day municipalities of Nova Ibiá and Itamari.

Figure 11: Cacao Production in Ituberá by District 60 kilogram bags (1943-1945)⁶⁹



The towns of Ituberá and Gandu were separated by the stretch of were those posseiros described in Chapter 3 resided. The posseiros' lands can be seen in the space between those marginal cacao lands immediately surrounding Ituberá, and the main cacao producing lands to the west of Ituberá, which include the towns of Gandu and Pirai do Norte, as can be seen in Figure 2.

The Cacao Institute's road-building initiatives that occurred throughout the cacao lands in 1930s opened up this specific stretch of land between Ituberá and Gandu. The road that was built between Ituberá and Gandu was formally inaugurated in 1935, according to an old photograph of the road's inauguration, at which Ignácio Tosta Filho (then president of the Cacao Institute) was present, as can be seen in Figures 12 and 13 below.⁷⁰ This road was called the BA-250.

⁶⁹ See Schwarz (1947:39).

⁷⁰ Flesher (2006:128) reports that work on the road began in 1930, and was completed in 1934. See also Silva (2006:5).

Figure 12: Inauguration of the BA-250⁷¹



Figure 13: One stretch of the new BA-250

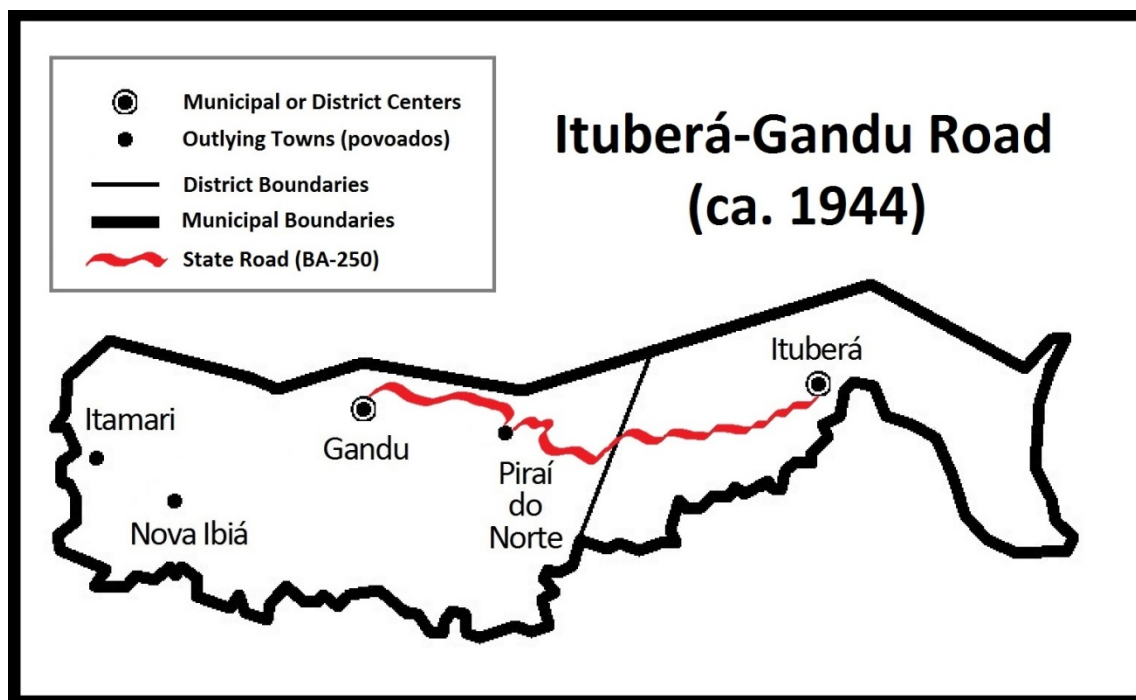


This new route significantly improved transportation from Gandu to Ituberá, and by 1948, it may have contributed to the initial expansion of those cacao plantings that can already be seen at the

⁷¹ The images in Figures 11 and 12 are reproduced here with the permission of Roberto Baiardi, the director and owner of the *Casa do Colecionador*, Ituberá, Bahia. The original source and author of these images is unknown.

margins of Ituberá. Prior to the completion of the BA-250, cacao was transported to Ituberá by mule-back, as described in Chapter 2, Section 4c. Felícia recalled that after the road was completed, the Cacao Institute operated two trucks that brought cacao from Gandu to Ituberá on a daily basis.⁷² The road probably intersected at various points with the old mule paths that formerly linked these towns. After the road was completed, the small town of Pirai do Norte, which had historically served as a mid-way resting point where muleteers could stop to rest and pasture their mules, continued to serve as a location where truck drivers could stop to rest and refuel their trucks or other vehicles before continuing on their journey. The road can be seen below in Figure 14.

Figure 14: Map of the Ituberá-Gandu Road (BA-250)



The network of new roads provided cacao producers with new inland routes through which they could market their harvests to Salvador through inland routes, bypassing the old sea routes. At some point in the 1940s, the Cacao Institute opened a new warehouse in Gandu. This deepened a process through which Gandu and other districts to the west of Ituberá were able to

⁷² Silva (2006:5) corroborates this point.

establish increasing economic independence from Ituberá. Instead of channeled their cacao harvests to Salvador through Ituberá's sea route, producers could direct their harvests to Salvador through Gandu by following another inland route, the BA-002,⁷³ which had been recently completed and connected Ilhéus to Salvador (Silva 2006:7). As a result of increasing economic independence, Gandu was eventually able to achieve political emancipation from Ituberá, and it became a separate municipality in 1958. Over the next few decades, the other districts that were formerly administrative districts of Ituberá would also become independent municipalities.⁷⁴

As has been seen, up through the 1930s and 1940s, the town of Ituberá was connected to commercial plantation activity only as an intermediary for receiving cacao and sending it to Salvador by boat. Actual cacao production in the hills immediately surrounding Ituberá was limited, whereas the productive districts to the west only depended on Ituberá to access the cacao markets in Salvador. While the building of the BA-250 initially strengthened this connection to Ituberá by improving transportation through the intervening hills, the road-building activities in the wider cacao region, and the establishment of another Cacao Institute warehouse in Gandu, had overall negative consequences for Ituberá in the post-war period (see Flesher 2006:127-128; Silva 2006:7). Silva cites passages from an interview with a long-time resident of Ituberá, Roberto Baiardi, who describes some of the consequences for Ituberá:

Ituberá was finished. From that moment on, nobody—not one cacao buyer from the region, including my uncles, my relatives—would manually carry their cacao [to Ituberá] so they could spend three days at sea, when instead they could send it [to Salvador] by road in just a few hours. Well, it completely killed [the Ituberá route]. Ituberá...started to enter into a period of decadence—really a terrible decadence. Commerce began to close, the Italians left, including my father. [Silva 2006:7-8]⁷⁵

⁷³ This route would later be transformed into the BR-101, which would be inaugurated in 1973 (see Flesher 2006:71).

⁷⁴ Nova Ibiá and Itamarí became districts of Gandu, while Piraf do Norte remained a district of Ituberá until it became a separate municipality in 1989. Itamarí later became a municipality in 1962, and Nova Ibiá eventually became a municipality in 1989.

⁷⁵ The original text reads: “Acabou Ituberá, daquela hora ali em diante ninguém mais, nenhum comprador de cacau da região, inclusive meus tios, meus parentes iriam mandar o cacau de braço pra levar três dias no mar, podendo despachar em horas pela estrada, matou completamente, então Ituberá . . . começou a entrar num estado de decadência na década de 40, de decadência, mas decadência terrível mesmo, o comercio começou a fechar, os italianos foram embora, inclusive meu pai.”

By the end of the 1940s, Ituberá had lost the commercial basis for its existence, and it had a new road that has split open the hills and drew commerce inland. By 1951, when the anthropologist Anthony Leeds was conducting his dissertation research in the central cacao lands to the south, this area immediately west of Ituberá was still a “blank” space on the map of the cacao lands seen in the map in Figure 2. Increasingly, this intervening region came into view as one site for productive expansion, which had been identified in the IASEC report as among Bahia’s “virgin” lands where new cacao could be produced:

At present virgin cocoa soil reserves within the area from Valença to São José do Mucurí are estimated at about 30,000 hectares, or approximately 9 percent of the cultivated area. Such reserves are more abundant at the extreme north and south fringes of the present cocoa belt of Bahia. They are scattered spots of variable sizes but never long continuous stretches. The fact that they have not so far been put to use is to be largely ascribed to the prevailing lack of transportation and labour shortage. [Miranda 1957:81]

Before cacao took hold on the hills west of Ituberá, especially in the 1960s and 1970s, the region first became the focus of other kinds of commercial activity unrelated to cacao production.

4. Letters to the Editor & the Arrival of Norberto Odebrecht

“In the same way that he is deified, he is also hated.”⁷⁶

José Fortunato de Oliveira arrived in Ituberá sometime around 1942 or 1943 to work as an administrator at the regional branch of the Cacao Institute. Fortunato was originally from Ilhéus where he worked as a journalist. He was a member of the communist party, familiar with Bahia’s leftist intellectual circles, and had personal connections to people like Jorge Amado.⁷⁷

⁷⁶ “Na forma que ele passa a ser é endeusado, é odiado também.”

⁷⁷ One of Fortunato’s family members suggested that Amado always delivered copies of his books to Fortunato, and, apparently, had offered a small homage to him in his book *Jubiabá* (1935), by briefly referring to a person name “Zé Fortunato.”

Born in 1912, Jorge Amado was from the town of Itabuna in the central cacao lands, and would become one of Bahia's most famous fiction writers. Amado was also a member of the communist party and, growing up, he witnessed firsthand the violent social history through which the central cacao lands were formed. Many of his fictional works (e.g., Amado 1933, 1945) drew upon and explored this history.⁷⁸ The political atmosphere for communists and socialists during the Vargas dictatorship was unfriendly to say the least,⁷⁹ and for that reason it appears that Fortunato had run into political trouble in Ilhéus. Through personal political connections from his early education at the gymnasium in Salvador, Fortunato was able to leave Ilhéus after he was given a public appointment at the branch of the Cacao Institute located in Ituberá.

Meanwhile, in 1945, a young Norberto Odebrecht had founded a new construction firm in Salvador, which was built from the ruins of his father's engineering firm that had gone bankrupt.⁸⁰ Odebrecht quickly made a name for himself in Salvador, "earning great prestige in the community, and, in particular, among cacao planters, business people and politicians" (Odebrecht Informa 1983:27).⁸¹ Through these personal and political networks, Odebrecht secured an important building contract that was part of a larger effort, advanced by the state of Bahia and Brazil's federal government, to build a series of ports in the southern coast of Bahia.⁸² According to Bernardo, the port-building projects included the construction of four quays and piers in the cacao lands, including one in Canavieiras around 1948, as well ports in the towns of Taperoá, Graciosa (near the town of Valença), and Cajuíba (near the town of Camamu).⁸³ Like the road-building activity that had occurred in the same period, port-building gained significant momentum from the early 1930s onward, when the first national department was established to carry out these projects.⁸⁴ According to Felícia, the Second World War seemed to have drawn

⁷⁸ In many ways, this and the following chapter could be thought of as a recapitulation of this history in the northernmost stretches of the cacao lands, however several decades after the period about which Amado wrote.

⁷⁹ See Lins 2007.

⁸⁰ See <http://www.odebrechtonline.com.br/materias/00201-00300/262/> Last accessed April 13, 2014.

⁸¹ The original text reads: "...ganhando sólido prestígio junto à comunidade, e, em especial, aos cacauicultores, empresários e governantes."

⁸² See Odebrecht Informa (1983:27).

⁸³ See also: <http://www.odebrechtonline.com.br/materias/00201-00300/262/>

⁸⁴ These specific port-building projects were directed by the National Department of Ports, Rivers and Canals (*Departamento Nacional de Portos, Rios e Canais*, DNPRC), which was created in 1943. The DNPRC was preceded by the first organization of its kind, the National Department of Ports and Navigation (*Departamento Nacional de Portos e Navegação*, DNPN), which was created in 1934, and later underwent other institutional transformations. See Pimentel (1999) and Filho (2007) for further discussion of port legislation in Brazil.

attention to the need for greater transport efficiency between different parts of the state, especially in the event of a national emergency, and this appears to have given further impetus to these port-building projects.

Sometime around 1946 or 1947, Felícia and another man from Ituberá named Júlio, similarly reported that Fortunato had written a series of three articles that were published in the regional newspaper called the “Voice of Gandu Newspaper” (*Jornal A Voz de Gandu*). Each of Fortunato’s articles presented a different request to the state government, including the construction of a secondary school, an airstrip, and finally, a maritime port. At the same time when Fortunato published his articles, Odebrecht was already in the process of building the port in Graciosa near Valença. Evidently, Odebrecht had read Fortunato’s article and saw further opportunity. Júlio recalled the story, as he had learned it: “Well, when [Odebrecht] read the newspaper from Gandu, he sent a telegram to [Fortunato] asking him to publish [the articles] in Salvador.”⁸⁵

Fortunato was friends with a state representative (*deputado estadual*) named Nelson David Ribeiro, and had become a sort of “political consultant” (*consultor político*) to him. Júlio recalled that Ribeiro frequently visited Fortunato:

He would come [to see Fortunato]...ask for opinions—Fortunato would give him his opinions—they’d develop opinions—work on projects, and more projects—they did everything because Fortunato knew how to write well—he had knowledge.⁸⁶

Although the connections in the oral histories are obscure, it appears that through both Odebrecht’s and Ribeiro’s influence, Fortunato was successful in getting the port and other projects approved:

Doctor Norberto took advantage of the situation and got the state representative, Dr. Nelson David [Ribeiro], to approve the port-building project here—taking advantage of the articles that [Fortunato] had written, and [the port] came.⁸⁷

⁸⁵ “Então, ele lendo o jornal de Gandu, ele passou um telegrama pra [Fortunato] pedindo que publicasse aquilo em Salvador.” Felícia suggested that Fortunato’s original article was republished in Rio de Janeiro in the *Jornal do Brasil*, but I have not been able to recover any versions of the original articles.

⁸⁶ “Ele vinha...conversar e pedia opinião, [Fortunato] dava opinião—fazia opinião—fez projetos, fazia projetos—fazia tudo, que Fortunato sabia escrever, era—tinha conhecimentos.”

The funds for the port were eventually approved in the *Diário Oficial* of January 1947 at the cost of Cr\$1,000,000, and Odebrecht had won the building contract.

4a. *Extracting Timber & New Industry*

Odebrecht arrived in Ituberá sometime in 1948, and the port was completed and inaugurated sometime in 1949. Evidently, Odebrecht had taken note of the region's various natural resources—particularly timber—which had gone relatively unexploited up until that time. A publically available account of Odebrecht's history describes his initial impression of Ituberá:

An area rich in natural resources, including Pancada Grande Falls, a 63-meter-high waterfall on the Serinhaém River, Ituberá was surrounded by dense tropical rainforest. It was an invitation to diversify the business by generating power and working with forest products.⁸⁸

An earlier journal published by Odebrecht's parent company attempted to offer a more lyrical account of Odebrecht's first impression of the region: "Norberto Odebrecht confesses that he became enchanted with the riches and the beauty of the region."⁸⁹

With the new infrastructure that was available to Odebrecht, including the new port he had just built that was capable of receiving vessels that could transport 1,500 tons,⁹⁰ and the new BA-250 that had been built by the Cacao Institute some fourteen years prior, Odebrecht saw opportunities for further expansion. Timber was the first product to draw Odebrecht's attention.

Timber extraction was not new and had been a perennial extractive industry in the region, albeit on a comparatively small scale. According to Flesher (2006: 70-71; 118-129), timber extraction had been a constant but small-scale extractive activity in the region as early as the

⁸⁷ "Doutor Norberto aproveitou e conseguiu que o deputado, doutor Nelson David, fizesse o projeto pra ter essa ponte aqui, aproveitando os artigos que [Fortunato] tinha feito e veio."

⁸⁸ See <http://www.odebrechtonline.com.br/materias/00201-00300/262/> Last accessed April 13, 2014.

⁸⁹ "Norberto Odebrecht confessa que ficou encantado com a riqueza e a beleza da região." (Odebrecht Informa 1983:27)

⁹⁰ <http://www.odebrechtonline.com.br/materias/00201-00300/262/>

17th century with Jesuit missionaries, and continued through the early twentieth century by a local logger who was especially active in the area in the 1930s. Odebrecht's arrival intensified these extractive activities. Júlio explained the circumstances of Odebrecht's arrival:

When he arrived here, he had already seen that Ituberá had greater potential. So he took advantage of the great potential that was there, and since he was very smart—very intelligent, very intelligent—he saw that things in the area, things in the region here was a bit slow. So by means political connections, Doctor Norberto created SAICI here in Ituberá...to exploit the timber that there was here. He exploited the timber from Ituberá all the way to the south of Bahia.⁹¹

Odebrecht established SAICI, or the Anonymous Industrial and Commercial Society of Ituberá,⁹² in 1952, and through this small corporation, he began extracting timber more systematically and on a much wider scale. According to Bernardo, Odebrecht had established some important contacts during the post-war reconstruction efforts in Germany. Through these connections, Odebrecht was reportedly able to import some 13 metric tons of high quality milling equipment from Germany, and brought in a team of German technicians to help install and operate the mill (also see Flesher 2006:130). The timber mill and factory included a saw mill, an autoclave for treating the timber, and equipment for creating plywood and other wood laminates. Odebrecht built these facilities right next to the new port so that he could easily transport semi-processed wood products to Salvador. Bernardo also recounted that Odebrecht had received two boats, trucks, and other machinery and implements (see Flesher 2006:130; Lima n.d.:50). Bernardo recalled that the trucks that operated in the region included the DeSoto and Fargo lines made by Chrysler, and vehicles from the Federal Motor Truck Company. Through political connections with the state government, Odebrecht was able to have further improvements made to the already existent road between Ituberá and Gandu.

Once his timber business was established, Bernardo suggested that Odebrecht was able to import high-quality timber from as far away as 250 kilometers, from municipalities such as

⁹¹ “Ele chegando aqui, ele já verificou que Ituberá tinha um campo maior, aí ele aproveitou esse campo maior existente e como ele era muito sabido, muito inteligente, muito inteligente, ele viu que esse negócio, essa região aqui tava, tava meia assim e doutor Norberto puxou na época, através da política, pra ser feito aqui em Ituberá a SAICI...pra explorar as madeiras que tinham aqui. Que ele explorou madeira de Ituberá até o sul da Bahia.”

⁹² *Sociedade Anônima Industrial e Comercial de Ituberá.*

Poções, Vitória da Conquista, Itambé, Itapetinga, Maiquinique, Macarani, Tarantin, Itacaré, and Boa Nova. Flesher (2006:130-131) reports that at its height, SAICI employed nearly 1,000 people throughout the region, and that within seven years, the remaining old growth trees in the region were gone. When transportation costs had become too steep to import high quality timber, Odebrecht apparently shifted his focus to lower-quality timber to manufacture plywood, and he focused his extractive efforts on the forests immediately surrounding the town of Ituberá.⁹³

The mill and factory required a stable energy source, trucks needed diesel fuel, and Odebrecht needed to improve his capacity to export the timber products. Consequently, Odebrecht began to experiment with different forms of vertical and horizontal integration in the region by building an industrial complex. In order to supply energy for the factories, he built a hydroelectric power plant on the local waterfall, called Pancada Grande, which was called the Hydroelectric System of Pancada Grande. The plant operated on a 24 hour basis and produced 11,000 kilowatt hours of energy, which was sufficient to operate all of the machines at SAICI (Lima n.d.:51). Odebrecht also built an airstrip and contracted with a small air company from Salvador, Air Transports of Salvador (TAS),⁹⁴ to make daily flights from Salvador to Ituberá. Odebrecht also expanded into transporting different fuels—gasoline, diesel, and kerosene—to supply the new trucks and other vehicles that were operating in the region. Toward this end, he had purchased an oil tanker that he operated through the newly built port. According to the corporation’s own official retrospective account, Odebrecht’s goal was to create an integrated agro-industrial complex:

Motivated by the region’s natural potential, he decided to implant an agroindustrial complex there, for which he was able to attract heavy-weight economic groups like Firestone and Matarazzo, each one with their own undertaking—the first focused on planting rubber trees for the extraction of latex, and the second on the cultivation of dendê palms for the production of palm oil. [Odebrecht Informa 1985:15]⁹⁵

⁹³ See the official account at <http://www.odebrechtonline.com.br/materias/00201-00300/262/>

⁹⁴ *Transportes Aéreos de Salvador*.

⁹⁵ The original text reads: “Motivado pelo potencial natural da região, ele decidiu ali implantar um complexo agroindustrial, para o qual chegou a atrair grupos econômicos do peso de uma Firestone e de um Matarazzo, cada qual com seu próprio empreendimento - o primeiro voltado para o plantio de seringueiras para a extração do látex e o segundo para o cultivo de dendezeiros com vistas à produção de óleo de dendê.”

Flesher (2006:131) similarly observes:

Odebrecht envisioned the timber harvest as only the first step in developing a plantation agriculture economy in Ituberá and he invited wealthy investors to buy properties along [the] BA-250 between kilometer 15 and 29 and along a newly constructed road that led 14 kilometers south from kilometer 25 to the Cachoeira Grande River. Most of the investors arrived between 1954-1964 buying 100s-1000s hectare properties (the largest being the Fires tone plantation covering 9,000 ha) on which to plant cacao and rubber groves.

Toward this end of establishing an industrial complex, Odebrecht attracted both governmental entities, and private companies from Rio de Janeiro, São Paulo, Rio Grande do Sul, and from abroad. The first entities he helped bring to the region included a federal land colonization scheme, locally referred to as the *Colônia*, or the “Colony,” which had settled Japanese immigrants in the post-war period, as well as the companies Firestone, Matarazzo, and ESSO Standard Oil.⁹⁶

Bernardo explained that Odebrecht had “arranged land for ESSO, arranged land for Matarazzo, arranged land for Firestone, and with those lands there he went enriching himself.”⁹⁷ Both the *Colônia* and Firestone were among the early pioneers of rubber production in the region, and were part of the first period of expansion between 1950 and 1960. The Matarazzo group had come to establish a palm oil plantation, but unlike Firestone, it quickly failed for technical reasons.⁹⁸ Matarazzo’s landholdings were eventually purchased by a rubber-planting consortium called “Agro Industrial Ituberá,” which emerged during the second phase of expansion discussed further below. These phases of expansion stimulated an influx of

⁹⁶ According to Bernardo, ESSO (*ESSO Brasileira de Petróleo S.A.*) opened a terminal in Ituberá in 1955. During its time in Ituberá, he reported that ESSO owned three separate storage tanks for gasoline, diesel and kerosene. The gasoline tank was reported to hold 2.5 million liters; the diesel 1.6 million liters; and the kerosene tank 780,000 liters. Bernardo suggested that ESSO remained in the area for nine years until the terminal closed in 1964, and the company moved to storage and distribution facilities in Ilhéus.

⁹⁷ “Arranjou terreno pra ESSO, arranjou terreno pra Matarazzo, arranjou terreno pra Firestone, e evidentemente com aquelas terras devolutas dali ele foi se fazendo.”

⁹⁸ According to Felícia, the new palm oil (*dendê*) tree cultivars that the administrators planted ended up being unproductive.

immigration to the region from all around the country, and together they would significantly transform the agrarian character of the region as a whole. Bernardo summarized the broad transformation of this time period:

It was a great movement...He was able to bring in Japanese immigrants when the federal government opened up the—when they opened up the colonial centers for them. That was the time when there was the hydroelectric plant—everything was there. There was the sawmill—the sawmill exported—it manufactured and exported all over. The port...of Ituberá was receiving ships, it already even received petrol tankers. It was [Odebrecht] that brought ESSO there, he was the one who brought the airport, he was the one who brought Firestone, and he who brought Matarazzo. He gave a darn big boost to the region, understand?⁹⁹

This progressive sequence of events is captured in various ways in local narratives. Felícia, for example, explained: “The people say—he acquired—he set up the factory, he set up the saw mill...and started to buy land up there to remove the timber. And then he sold off those lands to Firestone.”¹⁰⁰ As will be seen in the next chapter, this progressive series of events is be similarly captured in different posseiros’ narratives, where each stage of these (and subsequent) transformations are encountered as a progressive series of transgressions.

5. The First Period of Rubber Cultivation: 1950s

Of all these early transformations, one of the most significant was the introduction of natural rubber cultivation into the Dendê Coast. The arrival of rubber in the region resulted from a broader national effort to establish Brazil as a self-sufficient natural rubber producer as demand

⁹⁹ “E era um movimento...Ele também conseguiu trazer os imigrantes japoneses que o governo federal abriu aí...abriu os núcleos coloniais pra eles. Foi na época que tinha hidrelétrica, tinha tudo lá, tinha essa serraria, que a serraria exportava—ele fabricava e exportava por aí...O porto...de Ituberá já recebia navio, já recebia até petroleiro. Foi ele quem levou pra lá a ESSO, foi ele quem levou o aeroporto, foi ele que levou Firestone, foi ele quem levou a Matarazzo. Deu um pulso da porra naquela região, entendeu?”

¹⁰⁰ “O povo fala—ele conseguiu—ele montou a fábrica, ele montou a serraria...e começou a comprar terras aí dentro pra tirar a madeira pra isso...e essa, essas terras ele passou pra essa a, a Fariston.”

for rubber products quickly rose following the Second World War. The expansion of plantation rubber into this part of the cacao lands had direct consequences for the posseiros. The lands they lived upon had become the target for speculative accumulation, as they were bought out and pushed off the land, which was then resold to large firms, like Firestone, that were seeking out sites where they could invest in plantation rubber.

5a. The Background of Rubber Production in Brazil

If road-building, port-building, and timber extraction—with all of their attendant activities—were among the early activities that transformed the region, they did not yet result in the widespread investment of plantation capital in the Dendê Coast region. This process was initiated with the arrival of Firestone in the region and the establishment of the Colônia. Their arrival must be understood as part of a larger state-driven investment scheme aimed at augmenting Brazil's rubber production capacities.¹⁰¹ Efforts to rationalize the production of rubber in the Americas began early in the 20th century, after the rubber tree (*Hevea brasiliensis*) had already been established as a plantation crop in Southeast Asia at the end of the 19th century. Previously, rubber was a traditional part of the extractive economy in various part of the Amazon basin, where rubber tappers worked under a highly exploitative systems of debt-driven patronage (see Dean 1987:39-41).

The economic viability of extraction from wild rubber was undermined by the establishment of plantation-grown rubber in Southeast Asia in the late 19th century, in parts of Ceylon, Malaya, Sumatra, Java, and Cochinchina. The first harvests of plantation rubber stimulated a further boom in rubber planting, and global rubber supplies spiked. Whereas 1907, a mere 1,000 tons of plantation rubber were sold on the world market, by 1913, production reached 47,618 tons (Dean 1987:34-35). By this point, the productivity of plantation rubber had already surpassed the natural ceiling for wild rubber extraction in Brazil, which peaked at around 40,000 tons per year (Dean 1987:22).¹⁰² The sudden influx of plantation-grown rubber brought

¹⁰¹ The general historical narrative about rubber cultivation in Brazil, especially in Section 5 and 7, draw extensively upon Dean (1987).

¹⁰² The “natural ceiling” was the result of several factors, which included the physiological limits of wild rubber trees to produce latex in a given period, and the limited number of naturally occurring rubber trees in the forest.

about an overall reduction in international prices with which extractive rubber could hardly compete.

Despite this reduction in the cost of rubber, leaders in rubber-dependent industries like Firestone and Goodyear sought to bring the price of rubber down further through efforts to undermine the ability of the Southeast Asian rubber cartels to set prices. To do so, they sought to establish rubber plantations in different parts of the Caribbean, Central, and South America. However, planting efforts in the Americas were vexed by a series of seemingly intractable problems—and in particular, a disease called the “South American Leaf Blight,” caused by the fungus *Microcyclus ulei*.

Leaf Blight is endemic to the Americas and aggressively attacks rubber trees, especially when they are planted in dense stands under monocrop conditions (Dean 1987:57-59). Consequently, early attempts to plant rubber under plantation conditions failed throughout the Americas. As Dean documents, early ventures to develop plantation rubber in the Americas, including the famous case of Fordlandia in the Amazon, were crippled by Leaf Blight. In Southeast Asia, however, where the rubber tree was an exotic species and could thrive in the absence of natural pests such as Leaf Blight, rubber planters benefited from ideal conditions.

With the outbreak of the Second World War, renewed efforts were undertaken by the U.S. Department of Agriculture to develop rubber production in Central and South America, as Southeast Asian sources became increasingly precarious. After the war was over, these efforts continued as demand for new rubber products rose. International consumption of rubber skyrocketed, and the United States, in particular, was seeking out new sources of cheap rubber. National demand for rubber products in Brazil was also growing, especially with the rapid expansion of new roads in the interwar period and a quickly rising demand for tires. By 1946, Brazil was already producing a half million tires between the companies of Firestone, Goodyear, Pneu Brasil, and others (Dean 1987:108). Dean reports that in both 1949 and 1950, demand for new tires alone grew by 16% each year (1987:115). Meanwhile, wild rubber production dropped from 32,930 tons in 1947 to 18,619 tons by 1950. By 1951, Brazil imported the first shipment of Malayan rubber (Dean 1987:115).

Drawing more trees into the extractive economy that might have been found further into the interior of the Amazon would have proven problematic due to sheer distance and transportation. Wild rubber was not subject to breeding programs, large scale planting or replanting, and there were few incentives to improve tapping technology that might have been one source of improvement.

5b. *Early Rubber in Bahia*

Attempts to plant rubber on a wide scale were not entirely foreign to Bahia. According to different sources, rubber was first introduced into Bahia sometime between 1900 and 1910. A report by the Executive Commission for the Process and Treatment of Cacao (CEPLAC),¹⁰³ a federal organization that coordinates agricultural research and extension services for cacao growers, cites one source (Goereeder 1958) suggesting that the first rubber trees were reintroduced to the South American continent from saplings brought from Southeast Asia in 1900 (CEPLAC 1976:13). The same report cites other sources (Superintendência da Borracha 1971), which cites state initiatives to plant rubber in Bahia as early as 1906. Dean (1987:48)¹⁰⁴ similarly cites some limited plantings from young rubber trees brought from Southeast Asia between 1909 and 1910, including 200 rubber trees brought from the Dutch East Indies, which were planted at the state agricultural school in São Bento das Lages. In 1910, another 4,100 trees were imported from Ceylon by a German shipping agent, and these were planted between the municipalities of Una and Canavieiras (Dean 1987:48).

The CEPLAC report cites several publications from the mid-1920s, all of which mention the existence of small rubber plantings in the cacao lands that had been promoted by the state. These authors included Bondar (1923), Ferrão (1927), and Filho (1925), who would later head the Cacao Institute. Filho, for example, referred to an area of 4,100 trees planted in the Serra da Onça near Canavieiras (CEPLAC 1976:13). By this time, rubber was already being intercropped in cacao groves as a shade tree, although this practice was still limited. In 1926, the state was offering cheap land secessions and 10,000 rubber saplings to whomever wanted to cultivate rubber (CEPLAC 1976:13). This appears to have been effected through a state law that was meant to promote rubber production. The law, according to Dean (1987:71), guaranteed low freightage, eliminated export taxes on rubber, and gave a 50% discount on state lands for those proposing to cultivate the crop.¹⁰⁵ Dean suggested that nearly 100,000 trees were planted in this period, and that many were already being intercropped with cacao. In Dean's account, efforts to

¹⁰³ *Comissão Executiva do Plano da Lavoura Cacaueira.*

¹⁰⁴ Dean, in turn, cites Bondar (1926), Carvalho (1981), and Ferrão (1926).

¹⁰⁵ Dean refers to the law as "No. 1876."

expand rubber cultivation in Bahia entered a brief hiatus until the Second World War. In 1942, field technicians from the Rubber Development Corporation (RDC) traveled to Bahia in search of new areas to plant rubber, where they encountered those trees that had been planted a couple decades prior (Dean 1987:98).

5c. The First Phase of Plantation Rubber in the Dendê Coast

This renewed interest in plantation rubber eventually reached the region around Ituberá and Camamu in the early 1950s, as a consequence of new federal legislation. In 1952, the Brazilian federal government put forward new legislation with the aim of expanding rubber cultivation in the country. A government Decree 30.694, which passed on March 31 of that year, required any industries involved in the manufacture of rubber products—such as tires—to invest 20% of their profits in rubber plantings. A number of tire companies in Brazil, beginning with Firestone, campaigned against the steep terms of this requirement. Firestone was eventually able to negotiate a new deal with the government whereby they agreed to plant 1,200 hectares of rubber trees in order to fulfill the requirement. The terms of this agreement were made law in 1954 through a new decree.¹⁰⁶ Other tire companies, including Goodyear, Pirelli, Dunlop and General, followed Firestone's precedent and eventually agreed to similar terms (see Dean 1987:120; CEPLAC 1976:13).

As a result of these developments, the region around Ituberá and Camamu was being examined by the U.S. Department of Agriculture as a site for rubber expansion, after the same region had been rejected as a candidate several decades earlier. In 1953, Dean notes:

Firestone, influenced partly by Keith Truettner, one of the USDA field technicians assigned to Bahia, decided to buy in that state a property 9,580 hectares in extent, occupying parts of the municipalities of Camamu and Ituberá, where there were many small properties already cultivating some rubber. That site, interestingly enough, had

¹⁰⁶ The relevant decrees include Decree 30,694, passed on March 31, 1952, followed by Decree 35,371, passed on April 12, 1954.

been visited by the 1923 USDA survey team. They had ruled it out for plantation development, however, because of its hilly terrain. [Dean 1987:121]

With the new roads, port, hydroelectric plant, and other infrastructure, as well as the presence of ESSO by 1955, the hilly region around Camamu and Ituberá had become an ideal site for new investment. An editorial in the *Akron Beacon Journal*, published near Firestone's corporate headquarters in Akron, Ohio, suggested that the reason the region around Ituberá and Camamu "was chosen because of the availability of labor, plentiful rainfall, even climate, nearness to ocean transport and hydroelectric power" (Editorial 1956), the latter of which Odebrecht had helped bring to the region. The editorial continued:

The land was surveyed for Firestone in early 1954 and since the end of that year more than 700 acres have been cleared and some planted with high-yielding rubber trees brought to Brazil from the vast Firestone plantations in Liberia, West Africa...The Firestone tract includes land that was a sugar plantation years ago. The plantation, roughly rectangular, covers the floor of a long valley bordered by timbered hills.
[Editorial 1956]

According to this editorial, the plantation covered 12,500 acres, or 5,059 hectares, and had planned to expand its rubber groves to 3,000 acres, or 1,200 hectares in size. According to a later editorial in *Firestone News*, the company reported "a 22,000-acre rubber plantation near Ituberá" (Firestone 1961:1), having nearly doubled to just over 8,900 hectares in size.

5d. The First Phase of Smallholding Rubber in the Dendê Coast

Up until this time, Felisberto Cardoso de Camargo had long been proposing colonization projects to promote rubber production on a smallholding basis, as he was an especially vociferous critic of the feudalistic and highly exploitative productive relationships under which wild rubber tappers worked in the Amazon region.¹⁰⁷ Camargo had been largely ignored

¹⁰⁷ See Dean (1987:99-103).

throughout the 1940s. When it became clear that the extractive rubber industry would be unable to meet (let alone keep up with) increases in national demand, and especially after Brazil was forced to begin importing rubber in 1951, smallholding models such as those promoted by Camargo were finally given more serious attention.¹⁰⁸ Among these early efforts to promote smallholding rubber production were efforts through the National Institute of Immigration and Colonization (INIC), which would eventually be transformed into the National Institute of Colonization and Land Reform (INCRA).¹⁰⁹ While most of INIC's colonies had been established in the Amazon region, one of the new colonies was established in Ituberá.

The Colônia was established sometime around 1953 on approximately 4,000 hectares of lands that were legally owned by the state (Flesher 2006:132). According to Júlio, officials from INIC had been convinced by Odebrecht, together with the influence from the state representative Nelson David Ribeiro, to open one of these land colonization projects in Ituberá. This was partly effected through the donation of lands from both the municipal government and from Odebrecht's SAICI organization:

[T]he town government (*prefeitura*) and SAICI donated a large tract of land for this purpose in 1953...INICI allotted 7-40 ha parcels to each family, initially settling 10 Japanese families and an equal number of nordestinos, and at the same time formalizing the land claims of the posseiros already living there. [Flesher 2006:132]¹¹⁰

Flesher suggests, likewise, that this redistribution of lands by attracting colonization schemes was a way for Odebrecht to improve access to timber in the region:

Farmers received their land forested and sold the timber rights to SAICI who built roads to extract the timber and employed three logging crews to clear the land. The settlers then cut and burned what was left and planted clove, black pepper, rubber, oil palm,

¹⁰⁸ See Dean (1987:115-127).

¹⁰⁹ *Instituto Nacional de Imigração e Colonização (INIC); Instituto Nacional de Colonização e Reforma Agrária (INCRA).*

¹¹⁰ Lima (n.d.:47) suggested that the Colônia was originally 2,000 hectares in size, and that plots were 7 to 22 hectares in size. Júlio recalled the plots ranging from 5 to 40 hectares in size. The reason for the range in plot size is unclearly, although it may have depended on the size of each family that was being settled.

tomatoes, pineapples, and cooking spices. By 1965 most of the forest in the Colônia south of the BA-250 was gone. [Flesher 2006:134]

As the Colônia was settled, trucks traveling from the interior of Bahia, and from the northern states of Brazil of Paraíba, Pernambuco, and Ceará, brought large numbers of migrants to Ituberá. Through funds provided by INIC, the local administration at the Colônia would provide fertilizer, fungicides, insecticides, and food to the settlers for the first six years. After this period the lots would be “emancipated” and placed under the ownership of the settlers, who would then have 20 years to repay the government for their lots.

Júlio, who eventually began working at INIC, suggested that many of the first people who arrived were “lazy people who didn’t want anything.”¹¹¹ Most of the first families that arrived left after the first rainy season: “The colonists arrived there, they had never seen rain before—it rained for 30 days and they couldn’t take it.”¹¹² The government also brought in Japanese immigrants: “The Japanese that arrived here in this same time, but the mentality was different. They had come to work.”¹¹³ He explained that the Japanese settlers were “really were agriculturalists by tradition. In a short time after they arrived—after three, four months—they were already earning money with agriculture.”¹¹⁴ They focused on selling garden produce, such as tomatoes and lettuce, but initially encountered different local culinary habits:

The people of Ituberá didn’t know how to eat tomatoes, they didn’t know how to make salads...And it was the greatest difficulty for the Japanese to do commerce here, because the people didn’t know what these things were!¹¹⁵

Eventually, he suggested, these novelties caught on, in part through envious imitation:

But since we are a somewhat envious people [someone might observe]:

¹¹¹ “Aí trouxeram muita gente, preguiçosos que não queriam nada.”

¹¹² “Mas os colonos chegavam aí, nunca tinha visto chuva, chovia 30 dias aí eles não aguentava.”

¹¹³ “Os japoneses que chegaram aqui nessa mesma época, mas a mentalidade é diferente. Eles já vieram pra trabalhar.”

¹¹⁴ “Os japoneses são agricultores por tradição mesmo. Com pouco tempo que eles chegou aqui eles—três, quatro meses—e eles já estavam ganhando dinheiro com agricultura.”

¹¹⁵ “O pessoal de Ituberá não sabia comer tomates, não sabia fazer saladas, não conhecia salada...E foi a maior dificuldade para os japoneses fazer comércio aqui, porque o pessoal não sabia o que era isso!”

“The Doctor ate it, the Father ate it. Well, then, I will eat it.”¹¹⁶

In addition to these new food stuffs that the Japanese migrants introduced to the region, one of the head administrators at the Colônia, an agronomist named Antônio Lemos Maia, also promoted rubber planting among smallholders at the Colônia, in addition to other cash crops such as guaraná and black pepper.¹¹⁷ These eventually caught on in the region, albeit to a lesser degree than either rubber or cacao.

Arguably, the Colônia was a model after which, or against which, future land colonization and land reform projects in the region would be modeled—both in positive and negative respects. On the whole, the Colônia appears to have been poorly administered and it ran into complex financial and administrative difficulties before the colonists were emancipated. As such, it could also be said to provide a model of public malfeasance and corruption. Júlio recalled that the Colônia’s administration initiated a cooperative through which all produce was to be channeled. The cooperative would market the settlers’ harvests, from the proceeds, the administration “discounted 12% from the sale and charged another 12%—some 6% or 12%—for transportation costs.”¹¹⁸ For reasons that are not entirely clear, Júlio explained that administrators eventually ordered the Japanese settlers to halt any increases in their productivity:

The Japanese had production, the others didn’t, but the Japanese produced. So they obligated the Japanese to turn over their production to the association—whatever they produced, they delivered to the cooperative.¹¹⁹

Despite these administrative complexities, the smallholdings at the Colônia were eventually emancipated and the families that were settled there eventually gained legal tenure and control over their land. Together, the new Firestone plantation and the Colônia offered model of landholding that differed quite radically from that of the posseiros, and the combined transfer of

¹¹⁶ “Mas como nós somos um povo meio invejosos: ‘O doutor comeu, o padre comeu? Ah, então vou comer.’”

¹¹⁷ According to Dean (1987:118): “Smallholding colonists were taking up Hevea, with the encouragement of two other state officials, Oswaldo Bastos de Menezes and Antônio Lemos Maia, who had set up a nursery at Ituberá.”

¹¹⁸ “Descontava 12% da venda e cobrava mais 12%—ou 6% ou 12% do transporte.”

¹¹⁹ “Os japoneses tinham produção, os outros não tinham, os japoneses produziam... Obrigou os japoneses a dar pra a associação...o que produzirem, entregavam na cooperativa.”

land involved a total of some 13,580 hectares of land, or a total of 135 square kilometers of land.¹²⁰ To be sure, these transfers of land affected a number of posseiro families whose fates were uncertain and largely unremarked upon in official accounts of these transformations, with exception of the Colônia, where it appears that at least some of the posseiro families were resettled and remade into legal “smallholders.”

The fate of the posseiro families, however, appears to have depended in part upon those people that were held specific public offices at different points over the course of these transactions. The way in which these individuals executed the law will appear to have been consequential.

6. The Structure of Land Transactions in the First Period

Although the precise relationships and the structure of the transactions are somewhat obscure and would require further research,¹²¹ oral histories about Odebrecht’s involvement in the region place him at the center of a series of these land transactions. In order to gain access to this land, however, Odebrecht required the collaboration of at least two public officials: (1) the land commissioner (*delegado de terra*), the first named Dr. Caetano, later followed by a man named Dr. Severino; and (2) the public notary (*tabelião*), the first named Dr. Oseas, later followed by a woman named Dona Márcia.

6a. Measuring Land & The First Land Commissioner

The regional land commissioner (*delegado de terra*) would have been involved in all of these transactions. The land commissioner was a public functionary who would have been involved in transferring and legalizing claims to public lands (*terras devolutas*) into private

¹²⁰ This figure is based on Dean’s figure of 9,580 hectares for the Firestone plantation, and Flesher’s figure of 4,000 hectares for the Colônia.

¹²¹ The opacity of the land transactions may have been a deliberate dimension to some of these transactions, as will be suggested below.

hands, including surveying and measuring the boundaries between landholdings that would be used to draw up land titles and other forms of legal documentation. If there were land disputes, the land commissioner would have served as a mediator.¹²²

During the 1930s and 1940s, the land commissioner in the Ituberá and Camamu region was a man named Dr. Caetano, according to a man named Francisco who had become close with Dr. Caetano when he was growing up. Dr. Caetano arrived in the region sometime around 1929 or 1930, and served as a land commissioner in what was referred to as the 7th District, which, Francisco explained, extended all the way to the town of Belmonte, more than 200 kilometers to the south. Dr. Caetano often acted as an intermediary in local land disputes, and frequently acted in favor of the posseiros. According to Francisco, Dr. Caetano was reportedly responsible for helping many posseiros legalize their lands:

A large number of them were legalized because he forced [them to]—he did [his work] for free [and let the posseiros] pay later. When he died in 1965, a large part of the posseiros still never paid him, because he never sought it out.¹²³

Francisco described Dr. Caetano in the following manner:

He was always a very humble person, he was in favor of the small [posseiros]. He had—he had some *compadres* who were *fazendeiros*, and many of them wanted to take land from the small [posseiros] and would come [to him] to legalize [their false claims], but he was against that.¹²⁴

Francisco explained that Dr. Caetano did not allow any of his family members or children to purchase public lands, so as to avoid any perception that he or his family members were

¹²² The land commissioners were empowered by new land laws that were passed in Bahia in the 1890s. Wright (1976:68-77) describes various details of a land law passed in 1891, while Mahony (:441-443) describes various details of the 1897 land law.

¹²³ “É uma grande parte era legalizado porque ele forçava—fazia de graça pra pagarem depois. Quando ele morreu nos anos de [19]65, ainda ficou a maior parte de posseiros sem pagar, porque ele não cobrava.”

¹²⁴ “Ele sempre foi uma pessoa muito humilde, ele era favor dos pequenos. Ele tinha—ele tinha—já fazendeiros chamados, que eram compadres dele, e vários deles queriam tomar a terra do pequeno e vinham pra legalizar e ele era contra.”

accumulating land through any abuse of his public office. Francisco recalled Dr. Caetano saying to his children:

“With me as land commissioner, you’ll never have land in the region, because I won’t permit it...Anybody that ever accuses me of being a thief, I’ll kill them.”¹²⁵

Even if Dr. Caetano only pretended that he would be willing to take such extreme measure to avoid accusations of land grabbing and abuse of office, Francisco’s remarks suggest abuse of office among other land commissioners in the office must have been relatively widespread.

Francisco explained that Dr. Caetano frequently advised poor rural families if he had caught wind of someone’s plans to usurp posseiros’ land. Francisco recalled him saying:

“Look, Fulano wants to take your land, go find a lawyer.”¹²⁶

Francisco recalled one such case that actually involved one of Dr. Caetano’s *compadres*, one of the godparents to his own children. With the help of the local prosecutor, Dr. Caetano helped the possiero family win the case. Francisco recalled the case, when a widowed posseiro woman showed up at Dr. Caetano’s house one day, looking for his help:

One day a widow showed up with two of her children sitting in the baskets—those baskets they use to carry manioc, you know?¹²⁷

The baskets he was referring to would have been large wicker baskets called *panacuns*, woven from natural materials such as vines or other plant material, which would have been attached to either side of a mule or donkey she must have ridden into town. The woman said:

[Woman]: “Dr. Caetano, the Coronel Zé wants to take my land...”

¹²⁵ “Eu como Delegado de Terras, vocês não terão terra na região, que eu não quero...Quem me chamar de ladrão, eu mato.”

¹²⁶ “Olha, Fulano quer tomar sua terra, procure um adevogado.”

¹²⁷ “Ele estava aqui que...morava aqui nessa rua mermo, e chegou uma viúva com dois filhos nos panacuns, era aqueles panacuns de carregar mandioca né?”

[Dr. Caetano] said: “Coronel Zé wants to take your land? Ma’am, do you or your husband know where the boundary is [for your land]?”

[Woman]: “Oh, I know where it is.”

[Dr. Caetano] said: “Go on home, and tomorrow I’ll be there.”¹²⁸

The next day he got together some mules for the trip, collected up his surveying instruments (*aparelhos*), and went to visit the Coronel Zé’s plantation that bordered the woman’s roça:

When he arrived there, he asked for the overseer of the plantation, the administrator.

[Dr. Caetano] said: “Sir, do you know where Coronel Zé’s boundary is?”

[The administrator] said: “Yes sir, I know where it is.”

[Dr. Caetano]: “Well sir, will you show it to me?”

When he showed him, [Dr. Caetano said]: “So it’s through here?”

[Administrator]: “That’s right.”

[Dr. Caetano] made the measurement for the widow, he legalized it, and gave the land to the widow...Afterward, the Coronel became angry with [Dr. Caetano], as the Coronel wanted to encroach upon the widow’s land, but [Dr. Caetano] wouldn’t permit it.¹²⁹

¹²⁸ “W: ‘Doutor Caetano, o Coronel Zé quer tomar minha terra.’//Ele disse: ‘Coronel Zé quer tomar sua terra? A senhora sabe onde é o rumo, o seu marido?’//W: ‘Ah eu sei onde é e tal.’//Ele disse: ‘Vá embora que amanhã eu estou lá.’”

¹²⁹ “Quando chegou lá procurou o feitor da fazenda, o administrador. E disse: ‘O senhor sabe onde é o rumo do Coronel Zé?’//Ele disse: ‘Sei sim senhor.’//‘Então, o senhor vai me mostrar.’//Quando mostrou: ‘É por aqui?’//‘É.’//[Dr. Caetano] fez a medição da viúva, ele legalizou e deu a terra à viúva...O coronel ficou até zangado com ele, o coronel queria entrar na terra da viúva e ele não deixou.”

Beyond helping the posseiros legalize their land holdings, Dr. Caetano also advised the posseiros to cultivate permanent crops apart from manioc, which would help them to secure their landholdings:

“Look...If you don’t plant anything else [other than manioc], plant some piaçava palms...Because it’s native to the region, you should plant piaçava palms. When you put in a manioc roça, plant a piaçava tree.”¹³⁰

As described in the previous chapter, manioc was cultivated in the region through a form of swidden cultivation. The posseiros would clear and plant manioc in one section of the forest. After they harvested a couple manioc crops from that plot, and the soil became less fertile, they would move on to a new plot of forest where they would begin the cycle over again. This system of agriculture appeared impermanent and constantly on the move, and from the perspective of Dr. Caetano, who was interested in helping the posseiros legalize their land claims, this system of agriculture might have contributed to destabilizing the posseiro’s land claims. Dr. Caetano’s goal was to promote what he took to be a more permanent form of cultivation. Francisco remembered him saying:

“When you put a roça here, and then go put in another elsewhere, plant them in sequence right next to one another, so that you go forming a little plantation (*fazendinha*). Always planting—and if you don’t plant anything else, plant piaçava.”¹³¹

In this manner, by planting piaçava palms after they harvested their manioc, the posseiros’ land claims would remain visible to outsiders and potential usurpers.

Dr. Caetano’s activity in the region seemed to mitigate some of the land disputes. People who arrived in the region to purchase state land could do so legally, but if there were any posseiros squatting on those land there, Dr. Caetano intervened to mitigate any potential conflicts. In order to minimize the potential for conflicting claims, Dr. Caetano frequently

¹³⁰ “Olha...que vocês não plantem nada, plantem piaçava...Que é coisa nativa da região, vocês plantam piaçava. Botou uma roça de mandioca, plante uma piaçava.”

¹³¹ “Quando vocês botarem aqui, e vai botar outra, bote em sequencia, pegada aquela, pra ir formando uma fazendazinha né. Plantando sempre—nada que vocês plantem, plantem a piaçava.”

admonished the posseiro families he knew to legalize their landholdings. It appears, however, that a number of the posseiros refused to legalize their holdings, despite Caetano's frequent recommendations. Francisco recalled the frequent conversations between Dr. Caetano and a number of different posseiros:

[Dr. Caetano]: "Hey man, you should legalize [your land]."

[Posseiro]: "No, Doctor."

[Dr. Caetano]: "You should legalize."

In Francisco's recollection, Dr. Caetano was not always able to convince posseiro families to legalize their landholdings, and many posseiros remained without title. This circumstance appears to have changed when Odebrecht arrived in the region and began requisitioning large amounts of land. Francisco recalled:

When Dr. Norberto came, well, that's when the posseiros came [to see Dr. Caetano].

But by that time, however, there was little more that Dr. Caetano could do:

[Dr. Caetano]: "Well, I can't do anything anymore because Norberto [Odebrecht] requested [these lands] from the state."¹³²

6b. Front Persons and the Public Notary

With the exception of some notes in Mahony (1996) and Wright (1976), there is little published material about the land commissioners (*delegados de terra*) in Bahia. One recently published thesis (Pinto 2004) that collects together oral histories from the municipality of

¹³² "'Ó rapaz se legalize.'" "Não Doutor.'" "Se legalize.'" "Quando veio doutor Norberto então, aí os posseiros vinham.'" "Aí eu não mais posso fazer nada, que Norberto requereu ao Estado.'"

Camacã, located in the southern part of the cacao zone, provides a few details about the land commissioners that were active in this that part of the cacao zone between the 1910s and 1920s (Pinto 2004). The land commissioners in that municipality were two men by the names of Dr. João Marques and Dr. Boaventura Ribeiro. The latter lived between 1882 and 1974, had graduated with a degree in civil engineering, and eventually began working as land commissioner (Pinto 2004:115). Oral histories from that region describe how Dr. Boaventura Ribeiro viewed the politics of his work as land commissioner:

Philosophically, he did not permit large areas, he didn't permit *latifúndios*...As land commissioner, he gave out 30 or 40 hectares, and whoever wanted more afterward, [he would only be permitted it] after they had utilized the area that was already given...In this way he prevented the action of *caxixeiros*¹³³ and others greedy for land, as well as future conflicts over land like those recounted in literature from other municipalities of the region. [Pinto 2004:81]¹³⁴

The kind of literature to which Pinto is referring would be the historical fictional by famous regional authors such as Jorge Amado, briefly discussed above, whose historical fiction recounted violent tales of land theft in cacao lands in the early 20th century. If there were any political and philosophical similarities between Dr. Boaventura Ribeiro and Dr. Caetano, as the previous section seems to suggest, then it seems unlikely that Dr. Caetano would have permitted such large aggregations of state lands by single individuals like Odebrecht, unless larger landholdings were aggregated through private transactions. Such transactions would have required the collaboration of the public notary.

Júlio, for example, explained Odebrecht's involvement in the opening of the Colônia, suggesting that Odebrecht had made a "donation" for the Colônia. He was explicit that this donation was to be understood "in quotation marks," implying that he received some sort of

¹³³ *Caxixeiro* appears to be a regional term for *grileiro*, or land grabber.

¹³⁴ "Ele filosoficamente não admitia grandes áreas, não permitia latifúndio...Ele como Delegado de Terra dava 30 a 40 hectarese quem quisesse depois mais, isto é, depois que tivesse explorado a área dada...Com isso prevenia ação dos caxixeiros e gananciosos de terras, bem como futuros conflitos de lutas pela terra tão literariamente narrada em outros municípios da Região" (Pinto 2004:81). The pagination refers to the PDF document at <http://www.pousadarainhadosul.com.br/pdf/monografia.pdf> and <http://www.yumpu.com/pt/document/view/12995735/historias-contadas-sobre-camaca-filha-prodiga-de-canavieiras>, both last accessed on June 13, 2013.

payment for the land.¹³⁵ He explained, furthermore, that another large tract of land had similarly been “donated” to the Colônia by the local notary, Dr. Oseas:

Dr. Oseas was the other party to deliver [land to the government], but he claimed that the land was his—because actually the lands were state lands, belonging to the state—but he claimed:

“No, I’m the owner.”¹³⁶

These “donations,” in Júlio’s account, were conspicuous acts that pointed toward some form of collaboration between Odebrecht and the notary.

The precise details of which are somewhat unclear, and one possible reason for this opacity, Júlio explained, is that Odebrecht made these transactions by means of “front persons,” regionally referred to as a *testas-de-ferro*, which literally translates as a “foreheads-of-iron.” Other local terms for such front persons include the terms “orange” (*laranja*), “shield” (*escudo*), or “procurers” (*procurador*). Employing “front persons” was a form of legal subversion that was not unique to Bahia’s cacao lands,¹³⁷ as Foweraker (1981) has described the widespread use of “false petitions” for land in other agrarian frontiers throughout Brazil.¹³⁸ In the case of these transactions of land, the front person assumes responsibility for transaction in the interest of

¹³⁵ “Fez uma ‘doação’ de um terreno...entre aspas.”

¹³⁶ “Outra parte foi Dr. Oseas que entregou [as terras ao governo] dizendo também que era dele—que a terra era devoluta do Estado—mas dizia: ‘Não, sou dono.’”

¹³⁷ Wright (1976) reports: “When established planters wished to extend their original holdings to encompass land ideally suited to cacao, they found their political influence useful in bending land laws, appointing officials to run land offices, and corrupting or terrifying recalcitrant officials” (Wright 1976:24). These legally recognized means for recognizing land title were “subject to some obvious methods of subversion and a number of less obvious methods which ingenuity did not fail to devise” (Wright 1976:70). The use of false testimony was one common means of subversion:

The traditional use and occupation requirement was easily falsified by collusion of a planter with three friends or business associates. What was worse was the notion that the witnesses should be men of good reputation, i.e., men of wealth and social position. The probity of the witnesses was to be decided by the land office official, almost always a friend and ally of the large planters and exporters. [Wright 1976:70]

¹³⁸ Foweraker reported upon the practice in the southern state of Paraná during the 1950s, where the governor of the state had abused its administrative power in order to engage in land speculation:

He titled on top of estates which already had title; he titled to buy political support and pay political debts. He would survey and title land to applicants who in reality did not exist, and then these phantoms gave power of attorney to economic interest groups allied to the state administration. If any other title-holder complained, then police and local authorities would be expected to uphold the new title. These ‘false petitions’ (*procurações falsas*) were just one of the mechanisms which complicated and confused the legal situation — reaping multiple and violent repercussions in the region. [Foweraker 1981:91]

another person that sponsors the transaction, but whose identity remains obscure. After front persons completed finalized their transactions with the state and the land title issued, then they could have transferred land title to the sponsor through a private transaction, which would have been legally recognized by the public notary. If, in the present case, Odebrecht was attempting to transact large quantities of land, but the land commissioner was either philosophically opposed, or legally unable to permit him to amass large amounts of state lands,¹³⁹ then Odebrecht could have proceeded by sponsoring front persons to buy up the land for him. The interest of the front person in all of this would be to gain the patronage of the sponsor, perhaps through employment, political favor, financial gain, and so on.

In Júlio's account, this was the procedure through which Odebrecht acquired what began as public lands, and subsequently resold them to Firestone and the Colônia:

Well, he put some front persons in there, and then went to measure the lands.¹⁴⁰

According to Júlio, Odebrecht did this in collaboration with Dr. Oseas, the local notary (*tabelião*) who owned and operated the municipal real estate registry. Dr. Oseas would have been crucial to recognizing receipts for each of these private transactions between the front persons and Odebrecht. It may not have been a matter of mere chance, as Júlio explained, that Dr. Oseas had made his own "donation" of land to the Colônia, as the notary's collaboration in the process may have been secured through the guarantee of his own financial gain.

A man from Ituberá named Gilvan, who works as a real estate broker in the region, suggested that Odebrecht "earned his fortune in Ituberá"¹⁴¹ through these land transactions, and emphasized the importance of acquiring receipts for any of the posseiro's improvements before seeking title for the land from the state. In Gilvan's account, instead of Jeremias being the agent

¹³⁹ Wright's generalized account of the land commissioners (or "land officers") suggests that commissioners like Dr. Caetano who sought to support posseiro families, or those described by Pinto (2004) who were against the aggregation of large latifundia, would have been extremely rare:

"Even where the land officers were not so closely related to the powerful planters and politicians and financiers of the area, as politically appointed officials they could hardly fail to aim to please the men of importance in their districts. . . . The honesty, competence, and objectivity of the surveyor was another weak point in the law. Bribery of surveyors is legendary in the cacao zone, and there is every indication that there is truth in the legend, though it is by the nature of the documents and their administration impossible to prove." [Wright 1976:71]

¹⁴⁰ "Então, ele botou uns testa-de-ferro por ai, foram pra, pra, pra medir terras."

¹⁴¹ "...conseguiu a fortuna dele praticamente em Ituberá."

of the transactions, Odebrecht's name was substituted for Jeremias's, as Odebrecht was identified as the true sponsor for these transactions:

He showed up there at [Firestone]¹⁴² and bought 10 hectares from one posseiro:

[Odebrecht]: "How much?"

[Posseiro]: "R\$10,000."

[Odebrecht]: "Okay, take the money."

He signed a receipt and went on his way. Then he went to another posseiro:

[Odebrecht]: "You've got 20 hectares, how much do you want?"

[Posseiro]: "R\$30,000."

[Odebrecht]: "Here, take R\$25,000."

And signed the receipt.¹⁴³

He concluded that Odebrecht "bought a great deal of lands by means of these receipts. Then he went to the state government...and measured all of these lands...He ended up with a figure of some 10,000 hectares of land there."¹⁴⁴ While Odebrecht had paid the posseiros a "pittance" (*mixaria*) for their improvements, and acquired the land from the state for cheap, he resold the land for a much higher price to companies like Firestone: "Well, then the Americans

¹⁴² That is, he showed up at those locations that would later be resold to Firestone.

¹⁴³ "Ele chegou ali na [Firestone] comprava desse posseiro 10 hectares:// 'Quanto é?' // 'R\$ 10.000.' // 'Tome.' // Assinava o recibo e ia embora. Aí ia pra outro posseiro. // 'Voce tem 20 hectares, quanto você quer?' // 'R\$ 30.000.' // 'Tome R\$25.000.' // Assinava o recibo."

¹⁴⁴ "...comprou um montão de terras através do recibo, ele foi ao governo...mediu todas essas terras...Chegou a cifra de mais ou menos 10.000 hectares ali."

came...They bought it all for a lot of money.”¹⁴⁵ It was in this way, Gilvan explained, that “Norberto Odebrecht yanked a fortune from the region.”¹⁴⁶ Unlike many other accounts of Odebrecht’s newfound wealth, his “yanking” a fortune from the region was not something that Gilvan viewed with disdain. As Gilvan himself was in the business of making money from real estate transactions, he viewed Odebrecht’s success as exemplary of entrepreneurial cunning. For this reason, Gilvan (like Jeremias) emphasized the legality of the transactions: “He didn’t ‘take.’ He didn’t take, but bought for cheap... ‘Take’—he didn’t ‘take’ [from the posseiros]”.¹⁴⁷

The creation of receipts figured centrally in both Gilvan’s and Jeremias’s accounts of Odebrecht’s fortune. As was noted above, these receipts would have been drawn up to cover whatever indemnifications the posseiro families were offered for those goods (e.g., houses, crops) that they could not take with them, but not the land itself. Crucially, however, these receipts would have definitively dispossessed the posseiros of any subsequent claim to remain on the land. Dr. Oseas would have been instrumental in validating these receipts, and if he was even remotely cognizant of these receipts’ significance, he would have known that they were being used to dispossess families that might not have had clear knowledge about their legal rights, and who may have felt coerced into selling whatever goods they had for cheap.

There are precedents in the cacao lands for the role of public notaries in these kinds of transactions and dispossession. Leeds, for example, cites one case wherein a public notary in the central cacao lands had threatened a family to sign a transfer deed:

In talking with working class persons on the fazendas away from Cururú and other towns, many incidents are revealed in which burareiros or roçeiros have been coerced or cheated through abuse of the law. Thus a district notary was party to a land-grab when he threatened to have a widow beaten if she did not sign a transfer of deed for a fraction of the real value. Later she was forced to sign her name again and forge that of her long-dead husband because the land-grab could not have been effected without the signature of her husband or her co-heirs, her children, who would not have countenanced the swindle. [Leeds 1957:289-290]

¹⁴⁵ “Aí veio Americanos de lá...Comprou tudo por um dinheiro bom.”

¹⁴⁶ “Norberto Odebrecht arrancou uma fortuna daqui da região.”

¹⁴⁷ “Ele não ‘tomou,’ ele não tomou, ele comprou barato... ‘Tomar’—ele não ‘tomou.’”

Not all of these transactions, however, hinged upon a willingness to make violent threats, but instead upon some official's willingness to simply execute the law in a shrewd and callous manner. As has been seen in the previous two sections, however, the way in which these public offices were inhabited by Dr. Caetano as land commissioner, and Dr. Oseas as public notary, appears to have made some difference (if not the sole difference) for the posseiros' chances at holding onto their land during these early periods of expansion. As plantation rubber and cacao continued to expand into the hills, these offices were eventually transferred to others who would exercise their mandates in ways that differed from their predecessors, and this would affect subsequent phases in the accumulation of land and the expulsion of the posseiros.

7. The Second Period of Rubber Cultivation: 1960s-1970s

The expansion of rubber into the region, and the dispossession of the posseiros from their lands, proceeded in full force into the 1960s and through the 1970s, as new financial incentives were made available to firms and private individuals seeking to invest in plantation rubber. These changes were also accompanied by changes in the public offices of land commissioner and public notary, which were eventually occupied by people who had very different attitudes and orientations toward the posseiros. Dr. Caetano was replaced by a new land commissioner named Dr. Severino, while Dr. Oseas was replaced by a new public notary named Dona Márcia. Unlike the previous land commissioner, Dr. Severino exercised his office with great disregard for posseiro families. Unlike the previous public notary, Dona Márcia sought to use her office to defend posseiro families from dispossession whenever possible. Before describing the rapid expansion of rubber into the region through the 1960s and 1970s, the following sections describe further conflicts in the exercise of public office and further conflicts in the usurpation of land. This will show that the process of dispossession did not proceed from an inexorable and impersonal process of capitalist expansion, but depended upon the ways in which public office was exercised and the law was executed.

7a. The New Land Commissioner

According to Francisco, the previous land commissioner, Dr. Caetano, was pressured into retirement in 1960 after 48 years of public service. He eventually passed away by 1965. After Dr. Caetano was retired, Júlio explained, Dr. Severino eventually received an official appointment to take up the position as land commissioner for the region. According to Felícia, Dr. Severino was an architect from the municipality of Rui Barbosa, who had arrived in the region several years prior to work opening the lands at the Colônia and Firestone. Some of this work included doing land measurements, and building row-houses during the opening of the Colônia. He worked together with another person who was referred to as Dr. Igor.

Like Odebrecht, Dr. Severino is reputed as having taken a great deal of land from posseiros. If Dr. Caetano's presence in the region appears to have placed at least some constraints on local land-grabbing activity, these circumstances changed when Dr. Caetano was no longer in the picture. Like Odebrecht before him, Dr. Severino had started to aggregate lands for himself and for others who were close to him, and he did so through abuse of his public office. Júlio explained that Dr. Severino had also employed front persons to aggregate public lands: "He started to measure—well, he started to measure [lands], put them in the names of front person, and then sold [those lands]...to big businesses."¹⁴⁸ Dr. Severino did not do this alone:

There was a Dr. Igor here who took out land, there was Dr. Nestor, there was [Dr. Severino] himself. There were many others who showed up here and stayed, who were friends—managers of the Bank of Brazil...That whole group who arrived there and requested [state lands].¹⁴⁹

Dr. Severino had married Dr. Nestor's sister, and therefore sought to benefit his brother-in-law's family. Júlio worked as a low-level administrator at the Colônia, and he explained that on several occasions, Dr. Severino would use him as a front person:

¹⁴⁸ "Ele começou a medir e aí começou a medir e botar em nome de testa-de-ferro e vender...a empresas grandes."

¹⁴⁹ "Tinha um doutor Igor aí que tirou terra, tinha doutor Nestor, tinha [doutor Severino] mesmo. Tinha muitos outros que chegou por aqui que ficava lá que era amigo, gente—gerente de banco do Brasil...Essa turma toda que chegava la e fazia."

He put me in [as a front person] many times.¹⁵⁰

Júlio recalled that on one occasion, Dr. Severino measured lands for Dr. Nestor, the head administrator of the Colônia through INIC. Dr. Nestor was not legally entitled to own public lands, given the conflict of interest with his public office, and so Dr. Severino called upon Júlio on one occasion:

[Dr. Severino]: “Hey Júlio, you’re position is here, you’ll procure the land for Dr. Nestor over there.”

[Júlio]: “Okay, whatever you say.”

...Well, they passed the procurement of land onto me, and I thought that was just a normal thing. Since they were state lands, I didn’t think too much of it.¹⁵¹

I asked Júlio if he ever kept any land that was put in his name. Júlio replied:

No—me keep the land? No, the land belonged to Dr. Severino.¹⁵²

Júlio meant to say that those particular lands belonged to Dr. Nestor, but in the same manner that people like Gilvan substituted Odebrecht’s name, as sponsor, for those who others who were involved in the land grabs, Dr. Severino was likewise seen as a mere mediator. Felícia knew Júlio well, and elsewhere she recalled this occasion when Júlio had been solicited to procure lands for Dr. Nestor through Dr. Severino’s office. Like Júlio, she similarly substituted Dr. Severino’s name, who merely measured the land, for Dr. Nestor’s name, who had sponsored the measurement of lands that would be transferred to his name. At the end of the transaction, Felícia explained, Júlio finally “passed the land along to Severino, because they belonged to

¹⁵⁰ “Ele me botou [como testa-de ferro] várias vezes.”

¹⁵¹ “Dr.S: ‘Ó Júlio, você fica aqui, você é, é, é procurador de doutor Nestor nessa parte.’//J: ‘Pode ser, não tem importância.’//Então me passou a, a procuração pra mim, eu achei isso normal. Que era terra devoluta, eu não via nada demais.”

¹⁵² “Não, a terra, eu vou ficar?...Não, a terra é de doutor Severino.”

him.”¹⁵³ This is a common substitution error in these narratives. While these errors may be thought of as a mere hazard of narrating events that occurred several decades prior, they reproduce, more importantly, the non-accidental opacity that is built into these transactions, which obscure the different relationships between front persons, mediators, and sponsors.

Indeed, many of the specific relationships and names in such narratives are forgotten over time, names like “Odebrecht” and “Severino” serve as meaningful shorthand to gloss the complex and obscure structures of relationships. The cast of characters involved in these land grabs was broad and varied, and many names of those who were involved have been forgotten over time. Since people like Dr. Severino, and especially Odebrecht, were at the center of these transactions and transformations, their names came to bear increasing responsibility in local narratives.

I asked Felícia if she thought that Dr. Severino—or Odebrecht, or any others involved in these land grabs—felt any pity for the posseiros that they were taking land from:

[Jonathan]: And do you think he felt any pity for the posseiros they took from?

She laughs as she responds:

[Felícia]: What pity, young man? What pity? Only chickens feel pity (*pena*).
These people don’t concern themselves with such things.¹⁵⁴

Felícia’s comment is a play on words. The term “pity” in Portuguese, *pena*, also translates as “feather.” By stating that only chickens feel *pena*, she is implying that people like Dr. Severino, Odebrecht, and those others who were involved in taking land from the posseiro families were less capable of sympathetic engagement and social feeling than that of which a chicken is capable. She continued:

¹⁵³ “Passou as terra pa, por Severino que era dele.”

¹⁵⁴ “J: E você acha que ele sentiu pena da dos posseiros que eles tiravam?//F: Que pena menino? Que pena? Quem sente pena é galinha. Esse povo não se preocupa com isso não.”

I didn't know up to what point he—if he regretted any of that or not. Now, that these people don't care much about such things, no, they don't care. They took [the land] and when it was done, they were gone.¹⁵⁵

Although these land grabs may have been legal, at least in some technical legal respect, many people's retrospective accounts of these transactions saw them as acts of theft that violated the posseiros' understandings of property,¹⁵⁶ which can be seen clearly in the fact that many of the posseiros tried to resist these incursions.¹⁵⁷ Furthermore, as the case of Dr. Caetano showed, there were some public office holders who similarly opposed these land grabs as a matter of justice, and were in favor of the posseiros. Felícia similarly explained that one of the previous mayors of Ituberá, named Humberto, had taken a group of posseiro families directly to the capital city Salvador, where he helped them register their lands. These families live in a rural community that today is called Água das Almas. Felícia recalled Humberto's intervention:

One time Humberto went—many years later—he took a group from Água das Almas, because everybody wanted to take the lands from them at Água das Almas—they all nearly died [from the shock]. Well, Humberto went with all of them—he took a truckload of people, a car full of people—he took them to the Secretary [of Agriculture] there in Salvador. He took them to Salvador to receive the title for the land...And they received it, because although the lands were state lands, they had lived there for many years and so the government gave them title.¹⁵⁸

To be sure, Humberto garnered a great deal of political capital by helping the community, and he would eventually serve several terms as mayor of the municipality, but the example illustrates

¹⁵⁵ “Eu não conheci até o ponto dele—se ele se arrependeu ou não. Agora, que esse povo não liga pra isso não, não liga. Tirou e pronto e se foi.”

¹⁵⁶ This was described in the previous Chapter 3, Section 7.

¹⁵⁷ This will be seen in the Chapter 5.

¹⁵⁸ “Humberto uma vez foi—isso já mais tarde—levou uma turma da Água das Almas que tava todo mundo querendo tomar as terras da Água das Almas deles. Todos eles só faltaram morrer. Aí, Humberto foi com todos eles—levou um, um caminhão cheio de gente, um carro cheio de gente, levou pra Secretaria la em Salvador. Ele levou em Salvador pa poder receber o título de terra...Eles receberam, porque as terras eram devolutas, eles já moravam ali muitos anos e aí o governo deu título de terra pra eles.”

the multiple conflicts that occurred in the accumulation of different kinds of capital,¹⁵⁹ whether political, financial, or productive capital in the form of land. One person's attempt to gain economic capital, whether through extracting timber or speculating on land, was an opportunity for another to win political capital by opposing the former's efforts.

7b. Conflicts in the Accumulation of Capital

The accumulation of land by dispossession that occurred in the region, across the early and late periods, was not a process that was seamlessly coordinated by Odebrecht and other parties to the land grabs. If two general parties to the struggle over land were in obvious conflict—namely, the posseiros and usurpers like Odebrecht and Dr. Severino—the usurpers themselves appear to have acted in conflict with one another in the struggle to accumulate as much land as possible. If the posseiro families were subject to various forms of treachery and deceit, similar forms of deceit were employed among and against the usurpers themselves.

Perhaps as a further attempt to build his claim for innocence, and to demonstrate that he had merely acted faithfully both in executing the law and the mandate that he had been given by Odebrecht, Jeremias recounted an occasion when he had been approached by Dr. Severino, who sought to recruit Jeremias to procure lands for him instead of for Odebrecht. Jeremias recalled that afternoon near a posseiro community where he had been procuring land:

It was late one afternoon, when I saw two animals coming down the road that goes to Camamu...two people mounted, and one on foot.

Well, they arrived to greet me and said: “Jeremias!”

¹⁵⁹ The precise date of Humberto's intervention in this community is unknown, but this would be significant for understanding the kind of political capital he might have hoped for. Holston (2008) points out that since a large proportion of the rural population was illiterate, and literacy was a requirement for the right to vote, large portions of Brazil's rural population would have been disenfranchised and thus relatively insignificant in national politics: “Although this rural isolation contributed to the persistence of local oligarchic rule (*coronelismo*) in the countryside, it also led to its increasing insignificance in broader state and national politics” (2008:107). Although Holston suggests that there were some ways to circumvent the literacy requirement, the requirement was only fully revoked in 1985 (2008:329). Bearing this in mind, this raises an empirical question of what kind of immediate political gain Humberto could have hoped for by coming to the community's aid, if this event had occurred prior to 1985 and he could not expect a great deal of votes from the community.

I knew who it was, it was Doctor Severino.¹⁶⁰

As it was late in the afternoon with the evening quickly approaching, Dr. Severino asked if his party would be able to join Jeremias's camp for the night:

[Dr. Severino]: "Jeremias, can you give me shelter here tonight?"

I say: "I sure can, there's no problem."¹⁶¹

Jeremias explained that Dr. Severino had invented some excuse for being there in the hills, but Jeremias knew that he had come looking for him. They went to a nearby waterfall to talk and bathe before the sun set. Dr. Severino had brought a bottle of *cachaça* to share with Jeremias, and Jeremias said to himself:

"You're saying that you want one thing, but I see that it's something else."¹⁶²

They arrived at the waterfall, talked, drank, and later returned to Jeremias's camp where his wife had prepared dinner for them. After dinner, Dr. Severino and his party called Jeremias to talk with them in private outside the house:

[Dr. Severino]: "Jeremias, look, I came here..."

First he opened up a suitcase—one of those cases—he opened it up, just like you see in the soap operas—you know, full of money. Then he said:

[Dr. Severino]: "Look, I came to deliver this case to you."

¹⁶⁰ "De tardezinha, quando eu vi desceu dois animais, na estrada que ía de Camamu...duas pessoas montadas e um de pé...Aí chegou disse: "Jeremias"...Eu conhecia quem era, Doutor Severino."

¹⁶¹ "Aí ele disse: 'Jeremias, voce me dá um arrancho aqui?'//Eu digo: 'Dou, pois não.'"

¹⁶² "Vocês estão quereno uma coisa, mas eu to entendeno que é outra."

[Jeremias]: “Deliver to me?”

[Dr. Severino]: “Yes, now look...I know that Norberto is interested in buying all of this land here, and I know that you’re the one who is doing all the buying.

Then he handed me a bunch...of documents for people whose names he wanted to use to buy up the land.¹⁶³

The documents that Dr. Severino handed to Jeremias were those of people who were to serve as front persons, through which he planned to buy up land. Instead of buying out the posseiros for Odebrecht, Dr. Severino was asking Jeremias to buy them out for his own party instead.

Jeremias thought for a moment:

I said: “Very well, Doctor. Now, sir—Dr. Severino, let me ask you: look at my face and tell me if I have the face of a crook.

If I’m here working here for Dr. Norberto, and you come offering me money so that I’ll betray Dr. Norberto? I don’t do that kind of thing, no, Doctor.

You can leave with your money, I don’t want it.”¹⁶⁴

This brief episode simultaneously illustrates Jeremias’s attempt to regain control over his name and reputation by demonstrating his faithfulness to Odebrecht, just as he attempted to demonstrate Odebrecht’s positive character in contrast to what he took as Dr. Severino’s real

¹⁶³ “Dr.S: ‘Jeremias, oie, eu vim aqui...’//Primeiro abriu uma maleta—dessas maletas—abriu assim, como voce vê na novela—oie, cheia de dinheiro. Aí disse://Dr. S: ‘Ó, isso aqui eu trouxe pa lhe entregar.’//J: ‘Me entregar?’//Dr.S: ‘Sim, oie...Eu sei que Norberto tem interesse de comprar isso tudo aqui e sei que é voce que ta comprando.’//Aí me deu um bocado...de documento da pessoa que tinha que comprar no nome daquelas pessoas.”

¹⁶⁴ “Eu digo: ‘Muito bem, Doutor. Agora, o senhor—Dr. Severino, eu pergunto ao senhor: olha pra minha cara pra ver se eu tenho cara de bandido.//Se eu to trabalhano aqui pa doutor Norberto, o senhor vem me oferecer dinheiro, pa eu trair Dr. Norberto? Eu não faço esse tipo de negócio não, doutor.//Pode ir embora com seu dinheiro, não quero não.’”

treachery. At a broader structural level, while this episode demonstrates that the means of the dispossession were largely identical—pressuring posseiro families into signing receipts, and employing front persons to aggregate large landholdings—the march of greed through the hills was not something that can be adequately understood as a singular process that proceeded according to a unified set of interests. If the contrast between Dr. Caetano and Dr. Severino, and the way in which they occupied and exercised their public office as land commissioner, similarly demonstrated that the role of “the state” was not monolithic in the process of dispossession. The new public notary, as will be seen, similarly suggested that “character” and a sense for “justice” mattered in what was manifestly not a mechanical execution of the law.

7c. The New Public Notary

Dona Márcia worked at the local land registry, and had eventually replaced Dr. Oseas as public notary. The way in which she would exercise her office as public notary was very different from the manner in which it had been exercised by Dr. Oseas. This may have been owed to personal familiarity with dispossession. Felícia explained that Dona Márcia was younger, she and her sister had suffered at the hands of some of their own relatives, who had taken their family’s lands owed to some exploitative debts that their mother had incurred. Consequently, Felícia recalled that by the time she became notary, Dona Márcia was consistently opposed to the land grabs that were occurring in the region:

Whenever she talked about this—she became so full of anger, and she fought with everybody because of these things. She had a great affinity for the poor, the humble people. She was very, very close to this. Because she was—when her father died, she was still young, from Igrapiúna—her father had left a plantation for her and her sister, and her own relatives stole it from her.

The two girls worked like slaves...Harvesting cacao, preparing and drying the cacao to sell. She used to make sweets to sell. She did all of this on the plantation that her father had left.

Except that their mother was accustomed to making purchases from [a store owned by] a friend—a relative of theirs—and he basically robbed her. He left her with nothing, without a penny. He stole all that she had. It was some of her own relatives.¹⁶⁵

Unclear on the manner in which they had been robbed, I asked Felícia to clarify the process:

They robbed her like this: if she bought something [in their store], he raised the price. Her mother could no longer work but—those who worked were her and her sister, they were two young sisters working like crazy. And he—when they looked for him—he had already taken everything. They were in debt to him and—and what was left of her plantation—they had taken it. She never set foot there again...She never took—she said she never looked at that place again, from the anger that she felt. So she left it and it was done...And they were even her relatives! She felt dreadful about these relatives. She never even spoke of them. Afterward, the sisters experienced poverty.¹⁶⁶

Stories such as this—members of one’s kin group dispossessing other members—were not an uncommon occurrence in the region, as will be seen in the next chapter.

In another conversation, Anabel explained that it was not uncommon for store owners to raise the prices on goods (*superfaturar*) to such a level as to incur unpayable debts, after which the store owner could make a claim on the debtor’s property. These debts amounted to a problematic form of bondage, and an unwillingness to show regard for the other or their circumstances—a stance toward debt that is at odds with other possible relationships between

¹⁶⁵ “Ela falava isso—ficava louca de raiva, brigava com todo mundo por causa dessas coisa. Ela gostava muito das pessoa pobre, das pessoa humilde. Ela era muito, muito chegada a isso. Porque ela foi, ela recebeu quando o pai morreu, ela tava pequena, era de Igrapiúna—deixou uma fazenda pra ela mais a irmã, e os parentes dela mesmo roubaram ela.//As duas trabalhavam feito escravas...Cortava cacau, ela quebrava cacau, ela secava cacau pra vender. Ela fazia doce pra vender. Tudo isso na fazenda que o pai deixou.//Mas a mãe comprava na mão de la de um amigo desse—aparentado—e ele roubou ela. Deixou ela sem nada, sem eira nem beira. Roubou tudo que tinha. Uns parente ainda dela mesmo.”

¹⁶⁶ “Roubaram assim: se ela comprava uma coisa ele aumentava. A mãe dela não trabalhava mais—quem trabalhava era ela mais [a irmã], eram duas irmãs jovens e trabalhano feito umas louca. E ele—quando, quando procurou ele—já tinham tomado tudo. Ficou deveno tanto—e ficou, o resto que ficou da fazenda dela—eles tomaram. Ela nunca mais pisou os pés...Ela nunca tomou, disse que nem olhava mais pro lugar, de raiva que ficou. Abandonou e pronto...Ainda eram parentes dela. Ela tinha horror desses parentes. Nem falava. Elas passaram pri—privações.”

debtor and debtee, as will be explored in later chapters.¹⁶⁷ In Felícia's view, these experiences with debt and dispossession played an important role in forming Dona Márcia's character.

Through this theft of land, Dona Márcia and her sister had lived through a period of poverty, and Felícia explained: "She had pity for [those who lived in] poverty...She was very religious, the two [sisters]."¹⁶⁸ I asked if it was because of the privation that she and her sister had experienced in their youth that Dona Márcia had such strong social sympathy:

No, she already had a good nature, she was humble in that way...And she had also suffered a lot, and so she understood how someone suffers—poor, working, honest, wanting to live honestly—but living in this, living in this world where people steal like that. So, she felt a lot of sympathy for people.

She worked. When Saturday came, there were so many poor people in the streets, seeking alms. She and her sister would purchase their fare [in the market], something very simple. And then she would buy other little things to distribute to—to those people she liked, those old women who'd come to her door. She would already be waiting for them—on Saturdays, she waited—a little bit for each one, there were a bunch of them that Dona Márcia helped in that way.

It wasn't—she couldn't offer in great excess (*grandeza*), but she always gave a bit of meat, always gave some dried fish, and always some manioc flour, beans, always—Dona Márcia always did this herself. Both her and her sister. She was a really good person. Both of them are really wonderful people. Today there aren't any more people of that kind, no. That's a thing of the past.¹⁶⁹

¹⁶⁷ For debt in the plantation context, see Chapter 10, Section 3d; for debt in the moral economy of what will be explored as "namehood," see Chapter 8, Section 8.

¹⁶⁸ "Ela tinha pena da pobreza...Ela era muito religiosa, as duas."

¹⁶⁹ "Não. Ela já tinha natureza boa assim de humilde, né?...E também sofreu muito e aí entendeu como a pessoa sofre depois—pobre, trabalhano, honesta, quereno ser honesta—e vive nessa, nessa coisa que alguém roubano desse jeito. Então, ela tinha muita pena das pessoa.//Ela trabalhava. Quando chegava dia de Sábado, que tinha tanta gente pobre, esmoler. Ela fazia a feira dela mais [a irmã]—muito simples—e aí comprava aquelas coisinhas pra distribuir com—com as pessoa de que ela gostava, aquelas velhas que vinha na porta. Ela já tava esperano—dia de Sábado ela esperava—um pouco pa cada uma, tinha um bocado delas que dona Márcia ajudava assim.//Não era, dava grandeza não, mas sempre dava uma carne, sempre dava um espeto, sempre dava uma farinha, feijão, sempre—

Before this time when Dona Márcia and her sister had found themselves in this position where they were able to offer charity to others, Felícia explained that shortly after the two sisters were dispossessed, Dona Márcia was eventually able to find a position as a school teacher on a nearby island of Timbuca. Since she was able to read and write, and as Dr. Oseas had known their father and felt pity for the sisters, Dr. Oseas eventually called Dona Márcia to work with him at the notary office in Ituberá. Although the time frame is not clear, Dona Márcia would eventually assume Dr. Oseas's position as public notary and become head of the notary office. Although her position did not afford her the same power as Dr. Severino, as land commissioner, this was the point at which Dona Márcia was able to have at least some influence over the ongoing land grabs.

7d. Charity & the Exercise of Office

By this point, the offices of public notary and land commissioner were occupied by people who had exercised their roles in ways that differed greatly from their predecessors. Whereas Dr. Caetano offered his services freely to posseiro families—allowing many of them to postpone payment for his services, knowing full well that many would never be able to pay him back—Dr. Severino worked in a much shrewder manner. Dona Márcia had replaced Dr. Oseas as public notary, and, as will be seen, brought a very different stance, both in the execution of her role as notary, and in her attitude toward posseiro families. Dona Márcia and Dr. Severino knew each other, and were even friendly with one another for some time. Dona Márcia, however, vehemently disapproved of Dr. Severino's dubious activities and transactions with the land, and eventually they had a falling out.

Felícia recounted a version of a story in which Dona Márcia tried to defend a woman against Dr. Severino and one of his clients, who were trying to expel the woman from land that they were attempting to acquire. This woman turned out to be Alvina, who was already seen in

sempre dona Márcia fez isso por ela mesmo. Ela mais [a irmã]. Era uma pessoa muito boa. Todas as duas são pessoas maravilhosas. Que hoje não existe mais gente desse tipo não. Aquilo foi passado.”

the previous chapter,¹⁷⁰ in a struggle with one of the male patriarchs of the posseiro family into which she had remarried with the man named Abel. There, it should be recalled, one of Abel's male relatives named Ivo tried to refuse Alvina any place where she could plant for herself, and so she left with her children. Eventually, Abel overrode his Ivo's wishes, asking her to return to him, and telling her that she could plant wherever she wished. After Abel passed away, however, Ivo sought to expel Alvina by simply selling the family's lands to a man named Veridiano, including those areas where she had been planting her own roças. This was where Dr. Severino entered into the picture, helping to facilitate the transaction as land commissioner. The transaction appears to have occurred sometime between 1975 and 1977.

Felícia recalled Dona Márcia's injunction that Dr. Severino (and Veridiano) leave Alvina's lands out of the transaction:

[Dona Márcia]: "Listen, Dr. Severino, don't let—don't let them steal Alvina's lands—no. Because there are people up there, they're taking the lands and selling them to Dr. Norberto."¹⁷¹

Felícia explained:

They had taken Alvina's land, they had come into conflict there and they took it. They measured the whole area, and she lost her land. That was why Márcia had such great anger. She'd become very angry with Severino—they had a falling out—because she had implored him:

[Dona Márcia]: "Don't include Alvina's lands [in these measurements], because she is a poor woman, a poor black woman, hard-working, and she lives from this—from these lands, from planting the land."

But he didn't—he didn't listen, and she became so angry with him...and it was over.¹⁷²

¹⁷⁰ See Chapter 3, Section 7b.

¹⁷¹ "Oie doutor Severino, num deixe, num deixe que, roubarem as, as terras de Alvina não. Que tão um pessoal, ali dento tão tomano terras e vendeno pa doutor Norberto."

Later on in the interview, Felícia once again recalled Dona Márcia's reproach:

[Dona Márcia]: “Look Severino, they’re taking—they doing these things, they’re taking the posseiros off their lands there, from these state lands...Don’t forget that there are lots of poor people who’ve always lived there in those hills—all of them with their little farm. Don’t mess with these people, no. This area, leave it for these people, don’t mess with them. They’re poor and they need it.”

He [replied]: “Okay Márcia, don’t you worry about that.”

Well, then Dona Márcia—one day Alvina showed up weeping, telling Dona Márcia that [Dr. Severino] had included her roça, her little farm [in the measurements]—I don’t think it was even two hectares—one hectare, a half hectare—well, it had gotten all mixed up [in the measurement] and she lost her land. It was included in a large area—I don’t know who it was sold to, or who had asked [Severino] to do this.¹⁷³

Felícia generalizes the story beyond Alvina’s case:

And well, [Dona Márcia]—she got really angry about this. [Dr. Severino] did the same thing to Alvina that he’d done to many other people living there. They were posseiros...Whenever somebody wanted some land, they took [Dr. Severino] to measure some area—and he frequently included [the posseiros’ lands in the measurement]. He

¹⁷² “Na [terra] de Alvina eles tomaram, brigaram la e tomaram, botano a medição toda, e ela perdeu a terra dela. Por isso dona Márcia tinha uma raiva danada, ficou zangada com Severino, ficou de mal, que ela pediu://“Não inclua essas terra de Alvina, que é uma senhora pobre, uma negra pobre, trabalhadeira, que vive disso, dessa terra, de plantar a terra.”//Mas ele não, não atendeu não, aí, ele ficou de mal com ele.”

¹⁷³ “Ô Severino, tão tirano, tão fazeno esse assim, é, tão tirando os posseiro dessas terra daí, dessas terra devoluta...Presta atenção que tem muita gente pobre que sempre viveu ali nesses canto—todo mundo tem seu sitiozinho, num bole com esse povo não. Essa área deixa pra esse povo, num bula, são gente pobre que precisa.”//Ele [respondeu]://“Ta Márcia, não se preocupe com isso.”//Aí, quando dona Márcia, quando Alvina chegou aí chorano, dizeno a dona Márcia que ele tinha incluído a roça dela, o sitiozinho dela de—acho que não chegava nem a dois hectares—um hectare, meio hectare—e aí, misturou tudo e perdeu. Foi incluído numa área grande. Eu num sei a quem foi vendido, nem a quem pediu pra fazer isso.”

did this both for smaller [measurements], just as he included [posseiro lands in larger measurements] that were sold to companies that requested it.¹⁷⁴

Alvina's story does not end here, however. In Chapter 10, Section 4b, I briefly explore Alvina's own version of the story, which shows that she had been able to resist Dr. Severino's and Veridiano's incursion, in part by an appeal to a provision in the 1964 Land Statute (*Estatuto da Terra*). By 1977, it appears that some of the provisions in the statute were being enforced in the region, and, at least in this case, to the benefit of people like Alvina. With the support of Dona Márcia as notary, and a young lawyer from the region, Alvina succeeded in preventing her plants—and the ground that they stood upon—from being incorporated in the land measurements that Dr. Severino had made for his client.

7e. The Surge of Plantation Rubber in the Dendê Coast

After Firestone the Colônia was established in the region, which were in the hills much closer to town, Odebrecht continued purchasing more lands further inland during a subsequent period of expansion. Like the lands that were aggregated to form the Colônia and Firestone, many of these were lands that belonged to the state, and many of them included lands upon which posseiro families had been residing. This would have been the period when Jeremias was active helping Odebrecht buy up lands for himself. Odebrecht bought out all of the posseiros who had not legalized their landholdings, and subsequently sold these lands to outside investors from around Brazil and abroad, who were interested in planting more rubber. Alonso, who was still living in the hills at this time, and would have been about 20 years old at the time, described the situation in the following manner:

When Dr. Norberto realized that—this forest, these woods—that it was public state lands, he came in with an engineer...and came down—measuring toward the river below...He

¹⁷⁴ “Então, ela, ela se zangou por isso. Como ele fez com Alvina, fez com várias pessoas que tava dentro. Era posseiro, e [Severino] botou—quando na hora que fulano quer, levou pa medir aí nessa área daqui—aí ele incluiu. Tanto ele incluía numa, numa parte menor, como incluía pa ser vendido por alguma firma que pedia.”

enclosed this area—he enclosed Ituberá into SAICI...I know that he divided up the whole forest into lots, and sold those lots off...to the plantation owners.¹⁷⁵

Here Alonso is describing a stretch of land that would have stretch over some twenty kilometers. These were lands that went beyond those that he had measured for himself at Suor Plantation with Jeremias's assistance. By saying that he closed Ituberá into SAICI, Alonso seems to mean that Odebrecht first established a claim to the region's timber, which he intended to process at the SAICI timber mill. Afterward, once the timber had been extracted, he resold those very same lands to people seeking to invest in the region in rubber plantations. Júlio elaborated:

He was able to get this whole region—which was state land—and through the land commissioner here, he measured an entire ocean of land, and started to sell it and to transfer title. He used the land for his sawmill first, as his objective was to supply his sawmill—wood for the sawmill—and then he sold to businesses looking to plant rubber.¹⁷⁶

These new waves of investors that he sold lots to were taking advantage of new financial incentives from the state government to promote rubber planting. In this period, according to Dean (1987:140), the Bahian Governor Juracy Magalhães established an organization the Rubber Expansion Service in 1960, which made a series of loan monies available to private producers through the National Development Bank. Both Firestone in the Dendê Coast, and the Institute for Agricultural Research and Experimentation in the municipality of Una to the south, were actively distributing seeds and seedlings to new planters who were cultivating rubber on both large and small scales. Dean notes that, through these efforts, some 8.1 million new rubber trees were planted in southern coastal Bahia by 1964, of which 5.1 million were in the municipalities of Camamu, Ituberá, and Una alone. This extensive effort to promote new rubber plantings suffered a series of setbacks, notably owed to an overreliance on certain tree varieties that ended

¹⁷⁵ “Quando doutor Norberto sentiu que—essa mata, essa mataria—era comum, era do Estado, ele entrou com o ingeiro...e desceu pur—pur o rio abaixo midino...Fechou Ituberá na SAICI...Eu sei qui ele lutiou a mata toda e vendeu os lotes aos...fazendero.”

¹⁷⁶ “Ele conseguiu pegar essa região toda—que eram terras devolutas—e através do delegado de terras aqui, mediu uma imensidão de terras aí e começou a vender pra fazer transferência. Ele utilizava terra pra serraria dele, que o objetivo dele era a serraria...a madeira pra serraria e as terras ele vendia, fazia negócio com as empresas pra plantar seringueira.”

up being susceptible to new Leaf Blight, which needed to be re-grafted with new varieties or else uprooted and replanted with new varieties. Still, by 1967, approximately 11.7 million new trees had been planted in the state of Bahia (Dean 1987:141).

In 1966, the Superintendency of Rubber (SUDHEVEA)¹⁷⁷ was created at the federal level, which launched several rubber planting initiatives under the Natural Rubber Production Incentive Program (PROBOR).¹⁷⁸ The formation of the 1973 oil cartel only gave renewed incentive to the effort to establish rubber independence, and new lines of credit were being channeled into rubber production (Dean 1987:144). By this time, the first PROBOR initiative had already been launched in 1972. According to Dean, this program sought to establish 18,000 hectares of new rubber through loans with 7% interest rates—low considering rapidly rising inflation rates at the time. Repayment of these loans would be waived until planters could begin tapping their trees. If projected yields were not achieved, then the loans would not have to be repaid. In 1977, the next credit line called PROBOR 2 was established. This program sought to expand 120,000 hectares of new rubber groves in a 5 year period, while providing funds to recuperate 10,000 hectares of extant rubber groves and 10,000 hectares of wild groves. Interest rates for these new loans remained at 7% for any planting over 100 hectares. A total of \$202 million (USD) was directed toward this end. Finally, in 1982 the next credit line called PROBOR 3 was launched, with the aim of planting an additional 250,000 hectares of new rubber groves (Dean 1987:145). Together, these planting programs were aimed at making Brazil independence from rubber imports, and eventually providing a rubber surplus that would allow it to begin exports.

The actual planting rates were more modest than what was proposed. Dean reports that of the 18,000 hectares proposed under the original PROBOR, 13,538 hectares were actually planted. By 1984, PROBOR 2 had planted 83,333 hectares of the proposed 120,000 ha, and PROBOR 3 had planted a mere 20,882 hectares of the proposed 250,000 projected hectares (1987:146). In sum, 117,753 hectares had been planted of the total 388,000 hectares that were envisioned, or about 30% of the proposed total. Of those areas that had actually been planted, it seems likely that many of these new groves were eventually abandoned, and an even smaller percentage of these new groves actually came into production. Dean (1987:146) reports that 12

¹⁷⁷ *Superintendência da Borracha.*

¹⁷⁸ *Programa de Incentivo à Produção de Borracha Natural.*

years after the first PROBOR, only 1,850 hectares of new rubber groves had actually come into production.

In southern Bahia's cacao lands, the amount of land that had been planted in new rubber was steadily growing. Dean (1987:156) reports that in 1973, there were 15,200 hectares planted in the cacao zone, and by 1981 there were 26,500 hectares planted in Bahia. Between the municipalities of Camamu and Ituberá, production continued to expand. In Ituberá, a local firm called Agro Industrial was established in 1972. By the early 1980s, Firestone was undergoing internal restructuring, and sold its rubber plantations to the Michelin Tire in 1983, which had only recently established its presence in Brazil (Dean 1987:156). In 1975, with a total of 19,390 hectares of rubber planted in the cacao zone, the municipalities of Camamu and in Ituberá had the second and third largest areas planted in rubber, with 5,517 hectares and 2,219 hectares, respectively. Other municipalities within or to the west of the Dendê Coast—such as Nilo Peçanha and Valença, or Gandu and Wenceslau Guimarães—only had planted areas ranging from 10 to 40 hectares in size (Menezes et al. 1975:19). Odebrecht's, Severino's, and various others' efforts to open up the hills and forests of the Dendê Coast directly contributed to the region's appearance as a site for both the extraction of capital (through timber) and intensive investment of new capital in rubber plantations. The federal report by CEPLAC concluded:

Rubber cultivation is most commonly found in a range averaging 25 km wide by 30 long, which has the following references as natural limits: the stretch of state road between Camamu and Ituberá (aprox. 25 km), and the first 30 km of road that connects Ituberá and Gandu. [CEPLAC 1976:99]¹⁷⁹

The locations described here encompass precisely the hills and forests that had been home to the posseiros in this region. The lands where they resided had quickly become enveloped into a major new corridor of rubber production in the state of Bahia.

¹⁷⁹ “A seringueira é mais encontrada numa faixa média de 25 km de largura por 30 de comprimento, a qual tem como principais limites naturais as seguintes referências: o trecho da rodovia estadual entre Camamu e Ituberá (aprox. 25 km), e os primeiros 30 km da rodovia que liga Ituberá a Gandu.”

CHAPTER 5: LOSING THE WORLD

1. Transgression & Ethical Life

“The Bible says that it’s no use to gain the whole world and lose your salvation.”¹

This chapter explores the processes described in the preceding chapter, as they were experienced as living and transformative social facts that have been captured in local narratives. Taken together, these narratives comprise a significant story about land theft and loss that occurred in the region between the 1950s and 1970s. In this chapter, stories about the posseiros and their world, which were explored at length in Chapter 3, and included tales about work parties, the ethics of sharing and generosity, and norms of trust and intersubjective recognition, will be countered by stories about greed, avarice, coercion, and various forms of transgression. The acts of transgression that occurred against the posseiros can be understood as occasioning historical reflection on different dimensions of posseiro life that, in retrospect, are accorded their full value and social significance.² Narratives about these acts of transgression inform contemporary social life and land politics that will be discussed in later chapters.

The epigraph to this chapter is a statement that Seu Pedrinho had made over the course of our interview and expresses an ethical insight that is common in the region, which suggests that those who attempt to be “all”—to be everything there is, and all that matters—often end up being “nothing” in the end. The logic of this notion will be interpreted in terms similar to what

¹ “A Bíblia diz que não adianta ganhar o mundo todo e perder sua salvação.”

² Draw upon Hegel’s (1977[1807]) *Phenomenology of Spirit*, Axel Honneth suggests that moments of transgression and conflict have a constitutive role to play in developing notions of ethical life and, presumably, notions of goodness. Honneth writes: “There is good reason to believe that Hegel granted criminal acts a constructive role in the formative process of ethical life because they were able to unleash the conflicts that, for the first time, would make subjects aware of underlying relations of recognition. If this were the case, however, then the moment of ‘struggle’ within the movement of recognition would be granted not only a negative, transitional function but also a positive (that is, consciousness-forming) function” (Honneth 1995:26).

Habermas (1968), drawing upon Hegel (1961[1798]), called the “causality of fate” as a notion of retributive justice. I explore this in more detail below, first in Sections 5, 6, and 7 of this chapter, and later in Chapter 7. While this chapter is about the kinds of loss faced by posseiro families, it is also about the problem of aggrandizement—or trying to be “all”—and the consequences of such a social orientation, as will be seen.

The historical narratives presented here help to elucidate the phenomenological and lived dimensions of what might otherwise be described as an abstract and impersonal political economic transformation. The narratives show that particular and local details matter when attempting to understand generalized social transformations. As was seen in the previous chapter, for example, questions about people’s actions and character—such as the character and actions of the different land commissioners or public notaries—were relevant to understanding particular historical processes and outcomes. To understand and reconstruct historical processes, then, the ways in which institutions were structured turns out to be no more important than understanding how people inhabited those institutions, and wielded the social power that such institutions afforded them. Finally, detailed narratives about posseiros’ experiences with dispossession provide a useful scaffolding for piecing together what often times appear as disparate historical details, enabling us to place them in a more specific temporal and historical framework.

2. An Encounter in the Forest

Alonso, Gilberto, and Josué were among the last generation of posseiros living in the hills before the plantations arrived. They recalled their early encounter with Jeremias’s workers as they were clearing the forest near their family’s farm, but in retrospect, they situated that encounter with their father’s earlier efforts to sell the farm and effectively dispossess all of his children. Several years before their actual encounter with Jeremias’s work crews, they learned that their father had already sought to sell the family’s roça to Jeremias. The social theme that appears here is that of

the miserly father, who is acting against members of his own family.³ Their father's actions, in this case, threatened to leave the boys without anywhere to live, and so they acted against him:

We found out immediately that he had sold [the farm]. We found out and stopped it. We went and talked with the judge in Camamu and we impeded it, right? But you know eggs don't fight with rocks.⁴

They explained that they had gained support from a local politician, who was able to help them impede the sale, very likely in return for political loyalty.⁵ The story would not end there, however. The brothers reported that after some six years had gone by, their father again attempted to sell the family's farm to Jeremias without their knowledge, and this time he finally succeeded:

Well, some six years passed without [our father] being able to sell [the farm]. But later, when he made a deal with Norberto there, they sorted things out, and when we found out—dad had already sold [the farm], [and the workers] were already coming, cutting [through the forest] toward this area where I live.⁶

As Jeremias had reported, they employed large numbers of men in transforming the forest into plantation groves and roads. The brothers witnessed this, from the other side:

We were home and heard axes, machetes [at work]. They were clearing [the understory] and felling [the big trees] all at once, right? Clearing and felling.⁷

³ This theme was already seen in Lázaro's case, found in the Introduction, and also Alvina's case in Chapter 3, Section 7b. It will be developed further in Chapter 7, Sections 5 and 7, and Chapter 9, Section 2a.

⁴ "Logo nós soube que ele tinha vendido. Aí nós soube e impombemo. Nós foi e conversemo com a juíza em Camamu e impombemo, né? Mas sabe que ovo não briga com pedra."

⁵ The politician's name was Marcionílio Cursino Barbosa, who would serve as the mayor of Ituberá between 1968 and 1971. As seems to have been the case with the former mayor Humberto, who was mentioned in Section 7a of the previous chapter, it seems possible that by helping the three brothers, Barbosa was either enacting or perhaps seeking to establish some kind of patronage relationship.

⁶ "Aí passou uns seis ano e sem poder vender...Mas depois que ele entrou com doutor Norberto aí, aí ajeitaram lá, quando nós viu já—ele já tinha vendido, já vinha cortando, já pa sair nesta área onde eu moro."

⁷ "Nós tava em casa escutando machado, facão. Eles tavam roçando e derrubando logo de uma vez só, né? Roçando e derrubando."

For a smallholding *posseiro*, clearing space for a new *roça* in the forest would have been a task for several days' work. This would have first involved clearing the understory of vines, smaller trees and shrubs, and then felling the larger trees. Depending on the size of the new *roça*, these tasks would have been done on separate days, or even over the course of multiple days, unless the family had summoned a larger work party (an *adjunte* or *mutirão*, described in the previous chapter). For these brothers, then, witnessing a large group of strangers coming through the forest with such speed—both clearing and felling at once—would have been a sight to behold:

We heard it from here. Clearing, felling, trees falling. We took off in that direction, and already—AVE MARIA! They weren't about to stop clearing, they were coming straight away.⁸

The narrative continues:

They came clearing, felling. They were already here in our area. When we heard it—we were at home at that moment—all we saw was them cutting and felling—trees falling!⁹

He imitates the sounds of the trees falling.

We heard all that hooting and hollering [of men working]. We ran over there, they were already coming, working toward where the air strip is today—they were already coming up, coming there, working away. That was when we showed up and impeded them and we said to stop. Then they pushed back, they didn't want to stop. That was when we confronted them.

“Pass or don't pass.” “Pass or don't pass.”

And then, they left.¹⁰

⁸ “Nós aqui sintimo. Roçano, derrubano, pau caino. Nós batemo pra lá, já—Ave! Eles não iam barrar aquele roço, eles vianham direto.”

⁹ “Eles vinham roçano e derrubano, chegando, já tava dento dessa área da gente aí. Quando nós sintimo—nós tava dento de casa—nós ta veno cortano, só derrubar—pau caí!”

At one point during this first encounter, Gilberto recalled that one of the workers had gotten angry and accosted him, threatening to cut or to kill him: “He came at me all crazy with a machete in his hand.”¹¹ Alonso continued the story recounting the next day, when the workers had returned once more, and again he and his brothers impeded their advance:

Then when it was the next day, that same hour, we heard the same thing. They were back.

[We said]: “No, nobody enters here.” “Don’t enter.” “Don’t enter.”

Well after three days, they finally stopped. Then we went to the...the [plantation] manager sent for us and we went there [to talk]. [We] negotiated.¹²

The brothers finally negotiated boundaries with the plantation, and they were eventually able to get a topographer, whom they referred to as an “engineer” (*engenheiro*), from the town of Camamu to help measure the land for them.

From the perspective of the men working and clearing the forest, and from the perspective of the plantation managers, the forest was uninhabited, and when the parties encountered one another in the forest, everyone was surprised as the situation escalated. I asked the brothers to help me better understand why their father had sold the farm in secret, and why he did not let either of the interested parties—neither the plantation, nor his children—know that they would soon have an encounter in the forest. They explained,

No, he didn’t care for us—nothing, nothing, nothing.¹³

¹⁰ “Aquele falatório danado, que nós batemos pra lá, já eles vinham com trabalho no campo, já vinha subino, já vinham ali, trabalhano ali. Aí foi que nós chegemo e barremo e falemo. Eles ripunaro, não queriam parar, aí foi que demo a testa. ‘Passa, não passa.’ ‘Passa, não passa.’ Tambem eles saíram.”

¹¹ “Veio doido com um facão na mão.”

¹² “Quando foi no outro dia no mesmo horário a mesma coisa, tornaram a chegar. ‘Não, aqui não entra ninguem.’ ‘Não entra.’ ‘Não entra.’ Aí depois de tres dias foi que eles barraram, aí nós fomos lá na...a gerente mandou chamar nós e nós fomos lá. Niguciamo.”

¹³ “Não, não ligou pra gente—nada, nada, nada.”

He could have, they explained, said something to the plantation owners to whom he sold the farm:

“See, this part from here to there, you can’t clear, this is left for [my children].”

He didn’t say anything like that, he didn’t explain anything [to the buyers]. That is, the truth is the [plantation workers] there came in [here] without knowing anything [about us], right? Because [our father] didn’t let them know that he [still] had us here. For—for those people there [at the plantation], we didn’t exist in the region, in these midsts. That was when we faced them there head-on, not letting them pass. That was when they came to recognize that we [were there]—but on the part of my father, he didn’t let anyone know that we lived here, that he had us here, no sir.¹⁴

They explained that he had become angry with them the first time they had impeded the sale of the farm. At that time, the brothers would have been in their late teenage years through their mid-20s. By then it seems likely that they would have been establishing families and roças of their own, which is why the possibility of a sale would have been so threatening to them. Their complaint was grounded, evidently, in their father’s civil law marriage to their mother, which meant that they had rights to equal shares in the farm through both of their parents. Their father had evidently separated from their mother, and, in order to get around his sons’ resistance, their father had arranged for the new woman he was with to give a false signature, as though she was their biological mother, with the intention of keeping all of the money for himself:

He was in a civil marriage with my mother. Well, that was why he wanted to sell [it all] for himself, without owing, without dividing...He got this [other] woman, took her to the

¹⁴ “‘Oie, essa parte daqui pa lá vocês não roça, essa parte ficou.’ Ele não falou nada disso, ele não explicou nada disso. Quer dizer, na verdade o povo lá vinha entrando quase sem saber também, né? Que ele não avisou que ele tinha nós aqui. Pa—pa o povo lá não ixtia nós aqui nessa região, nesse meio. Aí foi que nós demo a testa aí, não deixano eles passar, foi que eles vieram reconhecer que nós—mas pela parte do meu pai, meu pai não avisou pa ninguém que nós morava aqui, tinha nós aí, não senhor.”

land registry, and the woman signed as though [it was] my mother who was signing. The woman signed and it was already sold. Suor Plantation bought it.¹⁵

This narrative augments what might otherwise be regarded as an abstract political economic transformation with an experiential and phenomenological quality. Transgression was experienced both in unexpected sensations, as in the sounds of axes and falling trees; in unanticipated encounters with others in the forests, in which the brothers risked physical violence in order to protect what they took to be theirs; and bureaucratic forms, “signatures” and “documents,” that mediated social life in increasingly deeper ways and portended new kinds of treachery.

3. Organized Land Theft

The above moment of land theft was novel in terms of how it proceeded, but such theft and dispossession was not wholly new to the region. One case was already seen in the previous chapter, where Dona Márcia and her sister had been dispossessed of their land by relatives to whom their mother had gotten into debt.¹⁶ Before continuing to other moments of land theft in local historical memories, I explore another instance of this form of land theft and accumulation that occurred through the establishment of debt relations.

3a. Debt and Land Theft in the Earlier Period

Jorge recounted that his grandfather, named Milton, had accumulated land by incurring debt relations with other posseiro families in part of the region that was more densely populated

¹⁵ “Ele era casado civilmente com minha mãe. Então, por isso que ele queria vender pa ele sozinho, sem dever, sem dividir...pegou essa mulher, levou no cartório, a mulher assinou como fosse minha mãe que tava assinando. A mulher assinou e já vendeu. A Fazenda Suor comprou.”

¹⁶ See Chapter 4, Section 7c.

by posseiros families. Jorge began with a hypothetical scenario, in order to illustrate the relationship between debt, accumulation, and dispossession:

In the beginning, it was like this—let’s just suppose as a hypothesis:

I was a man that got along well, see? You were weaker. You had whatever you had—a tiny bit of land with some plants on it. Then your wife—either your wife or your children fall ill, or someone died, but you didn’t have the means [to care for them]. You would come to me, and then I would assume all those costs. And in the end, you had to leave [your land] and I kept it. The bit of land that was yours, it was now mine because I had covered the costs for your family.

That’s how I kept on expanding. That’s how my grandpa did things.¹⁷

In other words, Jorge explained, Milton had accumulated land by preying upon poorer families in times of need. He was something like a loan shark. In order to cover unanticipated costs, for example, associated with illness, neighboring posseiro families might go to Milton for help in paying for medical services or funerals. In some cases, the debts that such families incurred to Milton were repaid by handing over whatever small landholdings these families possessed. Jorge explained that visitors, who came up Milton’s relatively large landholdings without understanding how he had acquired them, might think to themselves:

“That old man worked a lot.”

What a lie! It came from other peoples’ inheritance.¹⁸

¹⁷ “Aqui de premero era assim—uma ipótica://Eu era um home que eu me guentava um pouco, né? O senhor era um fraquinho. O senhor tinha qualquer coisa—um terrenozinho, com umas prantinhazinha dento. Aí sua mulé—sua melé ou seus filho caía duente, acontecia morrer o senhor não tinha condição. O senhor vinha a mim, aí eu corria com aquelas dispesa toda. E quando cabar, o senhor saía e eu ficava com aquela. Aquela área que o senhor tinha já era minha, que eu corri com a dispesa do seu pessoal.//Aí eu ia cresceno, assim era vovô.”

¹⁸ “Aquele véiu trabaiou um bucado.’//Mentira! Veio da hereança dos outo.”

Jorge explained that Milton had gotten his start by first acquiring land from his siblings, which they had all inherited from their own father, or Jorge's great-grandfather:

[When my great-grandfather] died, he left a bunch of cacao...When his father died, he [paid for] the funeral and everything else for the old man. The others didn't have money to [pay for the funeral], so they sold [their part of the] *fazenda* [to their brother] to pay for the costs that he [assumed himself]...[The land] should have been divided...But in the end, [since he paid for their father's funeral by himself,] he kept the other [siblings] roças. And from there, he started to grow [bigger].¹⁹

In other words, because Milton had paid for his father's funeral by himself, as his siblings were financially unable to contribute, they repaid Milton by giving him their share of land that they would inherit after their father's death. Milton's first act of land accumulation, therefore, hinged upon his father's death and at a cost to his siblings. Such stories, like this one or Dona Márcia's, are not unheard of in the region. The form of dispossession that occurred in these narratives balanced upon a fine line between debt, obligation and coercion.

3b. Burning Houses

Stories about burning houses are common in the region. They are often brief fragments that, in themselves, rarely present a detailed narrative structure. They are often embedded in broader narrative structures about regional transformation, and generalized narratives about conflict between the rural poor and regional elites. The kinds of houses that the posseiros built—a wooden frame overlaid by lattice made from saplings and vines; walls covered with either grasses or mud; roofs thatched with palm fronds; beds padded with grasses; pillows stuffed with grasses and herbs²⁰—would have quickly caught fire and they would have burned fast and bright. Placing many of these narrative fragments in a robust spatiotemporal framework takes patience,

¹⁹ “Morreu, deixou a maloca de cacau...O pai morreu, ele fez o funeral do véiu e tudo. Os outos que não tinha o dinheiro pa fazer, vendheu a fazenda pa pagar aquela dispesa que ele fez...Era pa ser dividido...Quando acabou ele ficou com as roça dos herdeiro. Pronto! Aí foi cresceno.”

²⁰ See Chapter 3, Section 3.

as one has to dig for details that are not often forthcoming. Sometimes people recall place names, or the names of the people who were involved, but what is most readily retained in such narrative fragments is the outlined structure of events, typified into narrative forms that draw on a generally recognized historical-narrative scaffolding that provides a common ground for narratives that are readily recalled and recounted today.

The selected fragments that follow are gathered from interviews with Felícia, Cezar, and Damião, none of whom identified as posseiros, but who were deeply familiar with the posseiros' fate. Felícia was born in 1933, and her family had moved to Ituberá in 1944. She grew up in town, and during her early years, she had heard many stories about posseiro's homes being burned as their land was taken away. In an ongoing discussion about the history surrounding Odebrecht, Dr. Severino, and others, she explained:

Well, there were people who entered there in these forests and went—people say this, I didn't see for myself because I didn't walk about there, it was the voice coursing through the city—they say that they put those people out running, removed people who were born in [the hills] there. They were, they were posseiros, [Odebrecht] bought out their lands...They say that whoever didn't want to sell, they burned [down their] house. They burned everything, [they destroyed] everything so that everybody would leave by whatever means...In those lands up in there, it was always said:

“Hey, [a house] was burned down there on Firestone.”...[That's what happened] when the people didn't want to [sell], they would go out [into town] and when they got back home—they had come to the market [in town]—and when they got back home, it was all burned, the houses burned.²¹

²¹ “Aí, tinha gente aí que entrava nessas matas e for[am]—dizem, que eu não vi porque eu não andava por lá, era voz corrente na cidade—que eles botavam as pessoas pra correr, tirava o pessoal nascido dentro, eram, eles eram posseiro, ele comprava a posse... Dizem que quem não queria vender, eles queimavam casa. Eles queimavam tudo, tirava tudo pra todo mundo sair de lá de qualquer jeito...Aquelas terras de lá de dentro aí que sempre dizia assim: ‘Oie, foi queimada lá na Fariston’ ...Quando o pessoal não queria, ele saía e quando chegavam, vinha pra feira, quando chegava tava tudo queimada, as casas queimadas.”

Later in the interview, Felícia recalled hearing people in the streets talking about these episodes, as people like Odebrecht had aggregated lands together before reselling it to companies like Firestone. She imagined what people used to talk about in town:

“Hey, Such-and-Such burned down I don’t know how many houses, houses there to remove I don’t know who from there, and the people had to leave, left running.”

And it was afterward that they collected together all these—these houses, these things from there—and then it was sold to Firestone.²²

In a separate interview with Cezar, who was born in 1928, and migrated to Ituberá in 1955 to find work on the plantations emerging there, he recounted a similar story. Unlike Felícia, whose life was more closely oriented around town, Cezar had met and lived among many posseiro families before, and as, they were being expelled. Cezar recalls the burning houses, and at the end of this section suggests that such episodes were akin to a return to slavery:

The Colônia, many years ago they sent—sent gunmen. If you lived here in the forest, Firestone encircled you. Then you had to leave the house where you lived in by force. Often times they took the children out of the house and set fire to the house...I knew a bunch of [posseiros], even today I still know [people] because there are still people here... [The firms] bought them out cheap...bought and took [the land], dismantled the houses, and the people left for other horizons...Many became [angry], because they left under pressure...

[The buyers would say]: “Oh, I—I—I am—I am going to pass the boundary [right through your land].”

Because, you know, that’s how the law is for the rich, right?

²² “‘Oie fulano queimou num sei quantas, casas la pa poder tirar num sei quem de lá e o pessoal teve que sair, saiu corrido.’ E foi depois que juntou toda essas, essas casas, essas coisa de la, aí foi vendida à Fariston.”

[They would say]: “I’m going to pass a boundary [through your land]. Either you sell [the land] here, or I’ll just dismantle the house.”

It was like that...It was practically the law of slavery.²³

In a different interview with Damião, he begins by imagining a typified conversation between a posseiro and an imagined usurper removing them from the land. In this imagined dialogue, the usurper demands “proof” for the posseiro’s land claim, by which Damião means to suggest some form of legal title or other document for the land:

[Posseiro]: “I won’t leave here from my area!”

[Usurper]: “But this here isn’t yours, it’s Odebrecht’s.”

[Posseiro]: “Oh, but I’ve been here many years!”

[Usurper]: “Prove that you have so many years! If you don’t want to leave on good terms, then leave on bad [ones]. Today you can, can—or you leave or I’ll come to set your house on fire with everything inside.”²⁴

In the next section, I examine Seu Pedrinho’s more detailed narrative about the dispossession that he and his family had faced, in order to place these more generalized fragments about dispossession into a broader and more specific spatiotemporal framework. The teleological structure of Seu Pedrinho’s narrative captures the periodization of these experiences of loss.

²³ “Colonha mermo, muitos ano atrás mandou—mandou pistoleiro. Voce morava aqui dento da mata, a Firestone rudiou. Aí você tinha que sair dali à pulso daquela casa que morava. Muitas vez botava as criança pa fora e botava fogo na casa...Conheci um bucado, até hoje ainda conheço que ainda tem gente aqui...comprar barato...comprava e tirava, dismanchava a casa, o caba se mudava pa outo canto...muitos ficaram [com raiva], saiu à pulso... ‘Ah, eu, eu, eu vou, eu vou passar o rumo.’ Que você sabe a lei de rico né? ‘Vou passar o rumo. Ou você vende aqui ou vou dismanchar a casa.’ Era assim...era quase lei do cativoiro.”

²⁴ “‘Eu não saio daqui da minha área, não sei o que.’ ‘Mas isso aqui não é seu, isso aqui é de Odebrecht.’ ‘Ah mas eu tenho tantos anos.’ ‘Prove que você tem tantos anos! Voce não quer sair não por bem, sai por mal. Hoje pode, pode—ou voce sai ou venho botar fogo em sua casa com tudo dentro.’”

Several important themes emerge in this narrative, which, as a whole, provides a useful historical scaffolding for understanding the broader scale of events described in this chapter.

3c. Seu Pedrinho's Dispossession

Over the course of more than three hours, Seu Pedrinho recalled details about his family's early life in the hills. These recollections were interspersed with different moments where he detailed how his family had gradually, through different forms of prohibition and incursion, lost their lands to Odebrecht:

These lands that we lost—we'd lived in that region for many years. Pay attention to how it was done:

Well, there was a family by the name of Roque, Wanderlei, and Cassio de Anjo, and they said that they were the owners of—of the whole region. Then there was a time that Dr. Norberto appeared, and he bought that whole area of land...from there at [kilometer] 10 to kilometer 32.²⁵

The first three names are only mentioned once in the narrative, and they refer to members of a local elite family that, before Odebrecht arrived, claimed to be the rightful owners over all of the region's hills. This family does not appear to have been powerful enough to prevent the posseiros from occupying these lands. By juxtaposing their names with Odebrecht's, Seu Pedrinho appears to be signaling the passing of the torch from a local elite family that used to claim all of the region for themselves, if only on paper, and the new claim that Odebrecht was staking to the region. Odebrecht's appearance in the narrative signaled the arrival of one that could, in fact, prevent the posseiros from living in the hills.

The first part of Seu Pedrinho's narrative relates to Odebrecht's intensified timber extraction in the region, prohibitions that were eventually imposed on the posseiros' use of the

²⁵ “Essas terra que nós perdemos, nós moramos aqui há muitos anos, nessa região. Repare bem://E aí tinha um povo por nome de Roque, Wanderlei, e Cassio de Anjo, e dizia que era dono do, da região toda. Quando foi uma época apareceu Dr. Norberto, comprou aquelas áreas de terra toda...dali dos 10 aos 32 quilômetros.”

forest, and roughly corresponds to the first period of agro-industrial expansion described in the previous Chapter 4, Sections 4 and 5. When Seu Pedrinho’s family had caught wind that Odebrecht was aiming to buy up land in the region, he and his father went to see Dr. Caetano in town, who was still land commissioner, so that they could find out what was occurring:

We came here [into town]—there was an engineer here—and we went to see the engineer.

I said: “Doctor [Caetano], how’s this? That these lands were sold?”

He said: “No, this was just to take out timber.”

And timber they took.²⁶

This would have been sometime between the late 1940s, when Odebrecht first arrived in the region, and 1952, he established his saw mill in the region.²⁷ As explained in the previous chapter, Dr. Caetano was responsible for “regularizing” (measuring and titling) new claims to state lands, and also mediating conflicting land claims. Dr. Caetano, Seu Pedrinho repeated, “proved to us that this was to only take out timber. Dr. Norberto didn’t have any—nothing [to do] with land. It was only to take out timber.”²⁸ That this guarantee came from Dr. Caetano was significant, since he appears to have regarded as trustworthy and having good character.²⁹

However, as was also reported in the previous chapter, Dr. Caetano was forced into retirement around 1960,³⁰ and the new land commissioner that replaced him, Dr. Severino, appears to have viewed the posseiros with indifference if not contempt. It does not come as a surprise, then, that some 10 years after Seu Pedrinho’s initial conversation with Dr. Caetano—during which time he would have left his office—local officials eventually started to prohibit the

²⁶ “Quando a gente vinha—aqui tem um engenheiro—a gente ver o engenheiro.//Eu disse: ‘Doutor, por que isso? Essas terra foi vendida?’//Ele disse, ‘Não, isso é pa tirar madeira.’//E madeira foi essa.”

²⁷ See Chapter 4, Section 4a.

²⁸ “Ele provou a nós que só era pra tirar madeira. Não tinha nada do Dr. Norberto, nada com terra, só era pra tirar a madeira.”

²⁹ See Chapter 4, Section 6a.

³⁰ See Chapter 4, Section 7a.

posseiros from engaging in various productive activities that involved the forest. Seu Pedrinho explained:

Then after 10 years, they prohibited us from taking firewood [from the forest] to dry our cacao in the drying ovens. That is, 10 years after [Odebrecht] measured [the land], he put in some [forest] guards, and they prohibited [us from taking firewood]...Because [to dry] the cacao, we had an oven, right? And we'd cut wood and put it in the fire. They prohibited us from taking any.³¹

Whereas Odebrecht's initial appearance in the region create some initial disquiet, which was calmed by Dr. Caetano, the transgressions and prohibitions against Seu Pedrinho and other posseiro families became more repressive as Dr. Caetano's influence began to wane. Seu Pedrinho described the forest guards that were appointed to monitor the posseiros' activities in the hills:

They were uniformed with revolvers on one side, with all of the [official] marks, as though—today—as though they were sergeants today. All marked.³²

Seu Pedrinho summarized the range of offenses up to that point:

Well, he prohibited us from taking out firewood. Prohibited [people] from putting in roças to plant their manioc. He didn't want [anybody] to plant [any roças] at all.³³

The prohibitions that the guards imposed upon the posseiros, from extracting firewood and planting any new roças in the forest, brought Seu Pedrinho to the first moment of conflict:

³¹ “Com 10 anos proibiu a gente tirar até lenha pa secar cacau na estufa. Quer dizer com 10 anos que ele mediu, ele botou uns fiscais, proibiu...porque o cacau tinha estufa, né? E a gente corta a madeira e bota no fogo. Eles proibiram tirar.”

³² “Eles eram fardados com o revolvão de um lado, é, com as marcas toda, como seja um, hoje, como seja um sargento hoje. Todos marcado.”

³³ “Aí, ele proibiu a gente tirar lenha. Proibiu botar roça pa prantar suas mandioca. Não queria de jeito nenhum que botasse.”

And this was a big fight with me, like there never was—[a fight of the] poor with the rich, like nobody ever saw before.³⁴

From here, the narrative shifts to the second period of agro-industrial expansion that was described in Chapter 4, Section 7. In this second period, there was a transition from mere repression of posseiro productive activity to their outright expulsion from the land. At this point, Dr. Severino, the new land commissioner, appears in the narrative. Seu Pedrinho begins to describe the transition to the second period, from repression to expulsion:

Well, [Odebrecht] got an engineer, Dr. Severino, and they went out to everyone's [homes], counting our improvements. They even counted things without us being at home...[They counted] whatever plants we had...

They would count all of it up and put the money in the bank, a little trifling amount like that. If you wanted [the money] fine, if you didn't want it, you still had to vacate the land...The land, in their language, they'd already taken it. They didn't want us to do anything [there]. Nothing, understand?³⁵

The prohibition of the activities that were characteristic of the posseiros' lives³⁶—planting manioc, collecting firewood to use in their drying ovens, whether to roast their manioc flour or dry their cacao, all of which mediated various kinds of other social relationships—is significant here. These prohibitions portended the loss of a way of life.³⁷ Seu Pedrinho explained that many of the posseiros capitulated to these new forms of pressure. They accepted the minimal

³⁴ “E isso foi uma grande briga comigo, como nunca teve—pobre com rico nunca teve, nem pa imitar.”

³⁵ “Então, pegou um engenheiro, Dr. Severino e saiu pelas portada gente, contano a benfeitoria da gente, até sem a gente ta em casa eles contava...O que a gente tinha em pranta...//Eles contaria todo e botava o dinheiro no banco, aquela mixaria tanto assim. Se quisesse bem, se não quisesse desocupasse a terra...As terra, na linguagem dele, já tinha tomado. Não queria que a gente fizesse nada. Nada, entendeu?”

³⁶ Compare this to Jonathan Lear's (2006) account of the prohibition of “characteristic” or socially meaningful activities among the Crow as they were forced into reservation life:

“With the destruction of this way of life came the destruction of the end or goal—the *telos*—of that life. Their problem, then, was not simply that they could not pursue happiness in the traditional ways. Rather, their conception of *what happiness* is could no longer be lived. The characteristic activities that used to constitute the good life ceased to be intelligible acts.” [Lear 2006:55, emphasis in original]

³⁷ See Chapter 11 on the ends of various forms of social relationships and activities, and concomitant discovery of new and renewed forms of social life.

compensation that was offered to them, and they left the land. Seu Pedrinho and some of his relatives and friends, however, prepared themselves to resist these new incursions:

But me and some of my colleagues, we didn't agree.

“We'll die, we'll kill, we'll do anything.”

But, now, to say: “I'll hand it over and even kiss their hand”—“No, I won't.”³⁸

Seu Pedrinho explained that when his family was initially pressured to leave, they tried to sell their land to a local lawyer for a price they thought was fair. That way, they could simply leave and buy land in a more hospitable region. The sale fell through, however, and Seu Pedrinho was not able to find any willing buyer. Unable to find a buyer, Seu Pedrinho took up a new route to confront the usurpers by exercising the activity that was characteristic of their life, and that grounded their claim to the land:³⁹ Seu Pedrinho began *planting*. He explained:

Well, I made a [new] clearing, for a very big roça. I put in a really big clearing. [When they found out,] they came, they persecuted me. They sent the police there, and arrested me and four other guys.

But we didn't give in to the police, we still...disrespected [their orders]...[They] persecuted us a lot, except I didn't respect [them]. They handcuffed some colleagues, and we disrespected everything.⁴⁰

The theme of “disrespecting” emerges in the face of what Seu Pedrinho and his neighbors take to be illegitimate exercises of authority. “Disrespect,” through the act of planting, appears as an exemplary action demanding genuine respect, foreshadowing the loss of illegitimate “respect”

³⁸ “Mas eu e uns colega meu não combinou.//‘Nós morre, nós mata, nós faz tudo.’//Agora dizer que: ‘Vou entregar de mão beijada’—‘Eu não vou.’”

³⁹ See Chapter 3, Section 7.

⁴⁰ “Aí eu botei um roçado, muito grande. Botei um roçado muito grande. Eles vieram, me presiguiram. Mandou a puliça lá, me prendu eu mais quatro rapaz. Não entregamos a puliça, ainda...disarespeitamos...Presiguiu a gente muito. Mas só que eu não respeitei. Agemaram uns colega e já a gente disarespeitou tudo.”

and the reoccupation of plantation lands that will be explored in Part Three. The forest guards initially came to Seu Pedrinho's roça with a lawyer, whom Seu Pedrinho addressed directly:

I said: "I'm going to put in a clearing because I'm not going to go without planting manioc—what will I eat [otherwise]?"

Their lawyer [said]: "You can't put in [the clearing]." ⁴¹

But Seu Pedrinho proceeds anyway. He calls upon his neighbors to hold a large work party, and together put in a large, new manioc roça in the forest:

I went and I put in [a roça] with 40 men. I put in a clearing [of about four hectares]...And well, the sheriff came to arrest me. ⁴²

He recalled the day when they came for him at his home:

Well, I was in the woods working. Then they sent—they sent [someone] to call me. I came. When I arrived [at the house], [the sheriff] left the soldiers [outside the house]...and he came into the house and me alone. Well, when I came, I said:

[Seu Pedrinho]: "Good afternoon."

[Sheriff]: "Good afternoon. Look, I am the sheriff and I came with information that you put in a clearing."

I said: "I did put [one in], look over there, look."

Well he came and interrogated me.

⁴¹ "Eu disse: 'eu vou botar um roçado, por que eu não vou ficar sem plantar mandioca, de que é que eu vou comer?'//O advogado deles: 'Não pode botar.'"

⁴² "Eu fui e botei, com 40 home. Eu botei roçado...E aí, o delegado foi me prender."

I said: “Mr. Sheriff, look, I have a deed of 80 YEARS—not [just] 80 days—from my father.”

He said: “Can you show me this deed?”

I said: “Yes, I can.”⁴³

He procures the deed from his father:

Well, I sent word to my father’s house. My father came...with the deed, showed it to him. [The lawyer] came and said:

“Look, if Norberto is the one in the right—the one who’s [in the] right is you. If [they say that] you’re invading what belongs to Norberto, Norberto is [actually] the one who’s invading what’s yours...I’m not going to take you in. The day after tomorrow, you [need to] go into Ituberá and get a lawyer for yourself.”⁴⁴

He goes into town on the scheduled day, and when he arrives, someone warns him that the police had put out an order to capture him “dead or alive.”⁴⁵ He went to consult the prosecutor of the city, who told him that he need not bother with their orders:

“Whatever, whatever, forget about all that. That is—pardon my saying—but whatever he does, you can clean [your ass with their papers] like this and throw them away.”⁴⁶

⁴³ “Aí, eu tava no mato carreano. Aí mandaram, mandou me chamar, eu vim. Quando chegou ele deixou os soldados como daqui lá, três soldados, e ele entrou dentro de casa e eu sozinho. Aí, quando eu cheguei, eu://‘Boa tarde.’//‘Boa tarde. Oie, eu sou delegado e eu vim com a intimação que você botou um roçado.’//Eu disse: ‘Botei, olhe lá ó.’//Aí ele chegou e me interrogou.//Eu disse: ‘Seu [Delegado], oie, eu tenho uma escritura com 80 ANO, não é 80 dias, de meu pai.’//Aí ele disse: ‘Voce pode me mostrar essa escritura?’//Eu disse: ‘Posso sim.’”

⁴⁴ “Aí mandei na casa de meu pai, meu pai veio...escritura, mostrou a ele. Ele chegou e disse: ‘Olha, se é que tem razão ser Norberto, quem tem razão é você. Se é de você ta invadino o que—de Norberto, Norberto é quem ta invadino o seu...Eu não vou lhe levar. Amanhã de manhã você vai em Ituberá procurar um advogado pra você.’”

⁴⁵ “...nem que saiba a cabeça.”

⁴⁶ “‘Que nada, que nada, deixa isso pra lá. Que é—perdão da palavra—o que ele fazer, você pode limpar isso assim e jogar fora.’”

He explained that the police came looking for him and four of his other friends on four occasions, but that they never gave in. The case eventually went to the tribunal, and Seu Pedrinho won the case. He was able to sell his land for the value that he wanted, and he bought a plot of land in another area.

Winning the case was dependent on his family having some sort of deed on hand, and in this respect, his case seems relatively exceptional. I asked him if other families had documents like his own family. He explained that while some actually did, many were afraid to exert their rights:

Many didn't have documents but they also didn't have the courage [to meet their threats]—they didn't have courage to die or to kill. Many had [documents], many had documents—many. But they were afraid of the man's fame—of Odebrecht's fame. And so they lost. [Odebrecht's people] gave [the posseiros] however much they wanted to give. But I wasn't afraid and I won, thanks to God, I won.⁴⁷

His family was not able to keep their land, but they were able to sell it for the amount that they wanted. Most of the other families, however, were only offered a small amount for the improvements they had made to the land: “a trifle, a trifle, a trifle.”⁴⁸ The value was so little, he suggested, that many never even bothered to go receive the money. He concluded:

Well then, it was through these stories that we lost the land.⁴⁹

4. Land Documents, Signatures, and Dispossession

Seu Pedrinho, and the three brothers Alonso, Gilberto, and Josué, were able to resist incursion in different ways, and either hold onto some part of their land, as in the brothers' case, or else

⁴⁷ “Muitos não tinha e também não teve peito, não teve coragem de morrer ou matar. Muitos tinha, muitos tinha documento, muitos. Mas ficou com medo da fama da, do home—do Odebrecht. E aí, perdeu. Deu quanto eles quis dá. E eu não tive medo e ganhei, Graças a Deus, eu ganhei.”

⁴⁸ “Mixaria, mixaria, mixaria.”

⁴⁹ “Então, foi através dessas história que nós perdemos a terra.”

receive fairer compensation for their land, as in Seu Pedrinho's case. By literally standing their ground, or else planting the ground, they were able to demand that their presence on the land be recognized. Between these two cases, legally recognizable documents played an ambivalent role in the process of social recognition. In Seu Pedrinho's case, the family's deed (*escritura*) bolstered their claim to the land, whereas in the brothers' case, legal documents (including forged signatures) threatened to expel them. In both cases, their ability to resist seemed to be somewhat exceptional.⁵⁰

There are reports of some other posseiros who were able to resist, and in their cases, their resistance hinged upon the recognition of their plantings, which enabled them to eventually measure and acquire legal documents for their landholdings. Júlio, who had worked at the Colônia, recalled a specific case of a posseiro family who had similarly been able to resist incursion, and remained living on their land that eventually became encircled by the Firestone property.⁵¹

There was one case like this at Firestone—at Firestone there were cases there of a posseiro that fought...He went to Salvador and through the Department of Lands he had them measure [his land] and he remained there. The posseiro in the middle—in the middle of that plantation, Firestone, there's a posseiro there. But only he had the courage to do this. He went to Salvador, showed up there and complained:

“This land here, I have it for twenty or thirty years, I already have plants and I don't want to sell, and I want you to measure it [for me].”

They measured and he remained there stuck there inside of Firestone. He didn't have—he didn't have a land document, as owner of the land, but had his plants, the things that he didn't want to sell:

⁵⁰ It is perhaps for this very reason that I was able to find and interview Seu Pedrinho, Alonso, Gilberto, and Josué, precisely because neither of their families had been cast into plantation life, as would have happened to many of the posseiros. In other words, their ability to stand their ground rendered them memorable and exemplary of social resistance, but also somewhat exceptional to the local historical trend.

⁵¹ It seems very likely that Júlio is referring to the same case that Jorge describes in Section 5 of this chapter below.

“No, these plantings here, this is mine and I don’t want to sell.”⁵²

As a whole, though, many people appear to have lost their lands in this period of most rapid transformation. As Alonso, Gilberto, and Josué were present during this period, they witnessed many families lose their lands. Several posseiro families had been expelled from lands that were eventually incorporated into a plantation named Sofrida Plantation, which was established during this second phase of rubber expansion in the region. The loss of land there occurred in a more violent manner. Gilberto, in particular, recalled one episode:

There were many inhabitants, many inhabitants, but nobody had a document for anything, it was a state forest. There were just some inhabitants who entered in the forest, opened up their landholding (*posse*) and lived there.⁵³

Because they had no documents, the people had no means to press their land claims, and they were forced to leave. They explained that most people left voluntarily, having made an agreement, or an *acordo*, to receive a small amount of money—a small total (*totalzinho*) or a little trifling (*bobajinha*)—for whatever losses they incurred. Of those that did not want to leave, negotiate, or who did not reach any agreement, many lost whatever rights they had through treacherous legal means. Gilberto, who lost a small piece of land to Sofrida Plantation, explained how he and others living there previously had been tricked out of their land:

Pay attention to see how it was done, how they did it, okay? Well, [they] would say, “Today”—there was a call today—[let’s say] it was on the first of the month. Well, they

⁵² “Houve um caso assim na Firestone, na Firestone que houve casos aí de que um posseiro brigou...foi pra Salvador e através do departamento de terras ele mandou medi e ele ficou lá...O posseiro, no meio—no meio daquela plantação da Firestone tem lá um posseiro...Mas somente ele teve coragem pra fazer isso. Ele foi pra Salvador, chegou lá e reclamou://’Essa posse aqui eu tenho há vinte ou trinta anos, eu tenho já plantio e não quero vender e quero é que meça.’//Mediu e ele ficou la preso la dentro da Firestone. Ele não tinha—ele não tinha o documento de posse, como dono da terra, mas tinha as plantações as coisas que ele não quis vender://’Não, essa plantação é minha aqui e eu não quero vender.’”

⁵³ “Tinha moradores, muntho moradores, mas ninguem tinha documento de nada, era uma mata do Estado, só tinha uns morador que entrava dento da mata, abria suas posse e morava dento.”

convened all of us here—[all of us] who were posseiros here—to go, to show ourselves in Ituberá because there was to be [negotiation to reach] an agreement.⁵⁴

So on the scheduled day, all of the posseiros who lived in the area would go to the courthouse (*fórum*) in town, but the new land owner failed to show up:

Well, the fazendeiro who was the owner of this roça—this [man named] Fábio Franco—he didn't show up. Well, what did the judge do? [He wanted] us all to sign—see, because we didn't know how to read, didn't know anything, right, [we] didn't have certain understanding—for us to sign [a declaration] that we had been present and that the judge didn't show up—or, [rather, that] the owner of the [plantation] didn't show up. Well, we went [along with it] like idiots...We signed [the papers].”⁵⁵

Eventually another call came to reappear at the courthouse in town:

Another time, once again, after some time passed they called us again...The boss of the—the owner of the [plantation]—who'd bought it—he didn't show up again, and so we signed again.⁵⁶

This scenario repeated itself yet one further time, and the truth about their visits to the courthouse eventually became clear:

I think after three signatures there—I think it was after two or three signatures—they arrived and carried out the expulsions.⁵⁷

⁵⁴ “Assunte como é que fazia, eles fazia viu? Aí dizia, ‘hoje,’ tinha chamado hoje—fosse o dia primeiro do mês, aí intimava nós todos aqui, que era posseiro lá de dentro, pa ir, pa se achar em Ituberá que era pa ter acerto.”

⁵⁵ “Aí, o, o fazendeiro que era o dono da roça, esse Fábio Franco não se aparecia. Aí o juiz fazia o que? Nós todos assinar, quer dizer, quando nós que num sabe ler, que num sabe bichinho né, num them, num them certo intindimento, pa nós assinar como nós se acumparicimo e o juiz num apareceu, ou, o dono do bichinho não se cumpariceu, aí nós vinha em cima lá fetho bestalhado...Assinava.”

⁵⁶ “Outa vez, novamente, passava o tempo, tornava a chamar...O chefe, do, do—dono da, da—que tinha comprado num aparecia, aí nós tornava a assinar.”

⁵⁷ “Acho que com três assinaturas aí, acho que na base de duas a três assinaturas, chegaram e fizeram o despejo.”

He speculates about what kind of paper it was that they were signing, precisely:

In other words, I think that instead of signing that [we] had [fulfilled the summons]— [declaring] that we were in our rights since he didn't show up—[we] were [actually] signing [or declaring] that we didn't have any rights [to the land]. That's what happened. We even got a lawyer from the state. I think [what occurred was that] we had signed our names, our own names. It was all my uncles...only the heirs, which were my uncles. Well, we signed and that was it! Then they arrived and did the evictions.⁵⁸

Later in the interview he explained that, at the time, they thought they were signing papers somehow guaranteeing their rights:

We were thinking that it was some sort of—a guarantee. As if we had gone [to fulfill] and he didn't [fulfill his duty to] appear [in court]. It was a lie. We were signing as [if saying that] we were selling.⁵⁹

Gilberto laughs at the situation, in retrospect. They did not know what they had signed. They had signed the papers, he clarified later, with their finger prints (*no dedo*) since they were unable to read or write their names. When it became clear that they had signed away their rights to stay on the land, they were eventually able to get help from a lawyer who worked for the state. The details of how they were able to find this lawyer are unclear, whether through local syndicates, public servants working at the Colônia, or through patronage ties with the local politician who had initially helped them prevent their father from selling all of the family's land.⁶⁰ When the lawyer came, however, Alonso explained that the judge tried to keep the papers from the lawyer:

⁵⁸ “Quer dizer, acho que ao invés de assinar como estava—como nós tava teno diretho com que ele num tinha cumparicado, tava assinano como nós num tinha diretho. Foi o qui acunteceu. Aí, ainda botemo adeogado do Estado. Nós tinha assinado acho que nosso nome, próprio nome. Foi todos meus tio...só os herdeiros que era meus tio. Aí assinou pronto! Aí eles chegaro pa fazer dispejo.”

⁵⁹ “Nós tava pensando que era como fosse uma, uma garantia...Como nós ia e eles não se comparecia, era mentira. Nós tava assinano como nós tava vendeno.”

⁶⁰ See Section 2 above.

When the lawyer from the state arrived—I think the judge even said—[the judge] even tried to play some tricks so they didn't have to show the papers. That was when the lawyer came and said:

“No, you have to show all of these papers, all of them.”⁶¹

The lawyer forced the judge to show him the papers, and examined the papers:

And then he came and invaded [the judge's office] and took all the papers, and when he went to look, he said to everybody:

“Oh, now there's no way. All of you already signed here. Look—your signatures here.”

It was the signatures that the people gave to show they were 'present.'⁶²

Alonso, Gilberto, and Josué explained that the lands that each new plantation took over might have had some 10, 15, or 20 families spread about the forest, and they explained some crucial details about variations in the patterns of expulsions. Each of the new plantation owners, they explained, purchased their land from Odebrecht, but each new owner was responsible for clearing the area of its posseiros. Except in the case of his own plantation, Suor Plantation, Odebrecht was not behind the expulsions throughout the region as a whole. Each of the different new planters took different routes. Most of the posseiros seemed to have left the land through agreements with the new owners, and they received minimal compensation for whatever immovable goods they could not take with them: their homes, trees, and other plants. In most cases, it appeared that their exit was pacific. The owner of a neighboring plantation, Gilberto suggested, had reached agreements to compensate each of the posseiros living there: “Every

⁶¹ “Quando o advogado do estado chegou—acho até que o juiz ainda diz, ainda queimou ruim com mode não apresentar os papéis. Foi que o advogado chegou e disse://‘Não, tem que botar esses papéis pra fora, tudo aí.’”

⁶² “E chegou aí e invadiu e entrou e pegou os papéis tudo, e quando vai olhar, disse que o povo://‘Ah, aqui não tem mais jeito não. Vocês já assinaram aqui. Oie—a assinatura de vocês aqui.’//Era a assinatura que o povo dava como era presença.”

[posseiro there] left under an agreement.”⁶³ These were not favorable agreements, and not for a fair sum of money:

[Josué]: He paid everyone, very little money, right—that business of a tiny pittance—however much he wanted to give, but...it was all through agreement.⁶⁴

His brother Gilberto, who was sitting next to him, suggested that it was only enough “for the trip” (*pra viagem*) into town.

Not every exit was pacific, however. The brothers cited the name of a planter named Fábio Franco, who was the most brutal of them all.

[Josué]: These planters who bought these areas from Dr. Norberto...[among] those that we know of, the most rebellious that there was—the one who caused the most suffering (*necessidade*)—was this Fábio Franco.⁶⁵

They described him as “the sad” or “the saddest one” (*o triste*)—which, to most adequately represent the meaning of this expression, might best be circumlocuted as “the greatest maker-of-sadness”—and Josué elaborated:

[Josué]: Now, the sad one was Fábio Franco here, [he] didn’t pay one cent to anybody and [he] even brought the police and set fire to the houses and ruined everything.⁶⁶

Before he had taken to burning people out of their homes, Fábio Franco had imposed other sorts of prohibitions on the posseiros’ activities there. Alonso, who had not been living there at the time, recalled what his brothers and others had told them:

⁶³ “Todo mundo saiu com acordo.”

⁶⁴ “Ele pagou a todo mundo, dinheirín pouco, né, esse negócio de mixaria, quanto ele quis dar, mas...foi tudo com acordo.”

⁶⁵ “Esses fazendeiros que comprou essas áreas na mão de doutor Norberto...o que nós conhece, o mais rebelde que teve—que fez mais necessidade—foi só esse Fábio Franco.”

⁶⁶ “Agora, o triste foi o Fábio Franco aqui, que não pagou a ninguém nem um centavo e ainda trouxe a puliça e meteu fogo nas casas e regaçou com tudo.”

[Alonso]: When he took possession of this [area] here, [he] punished us [saying] that [we] weren't [allowed] to...harvest any plants that they had [there], to not cut anymore weeds in any place, and [then there] even came the time here when they expelled everyone. This one here lost a house and a roça [that he had there].⁶⁷

He points to his brother sitting next to him, and continued:

[Alonso]: My father lost a part of cacao that he had over there—there at Sofrida Plantation, the place where Sofrida Plantation is today. He had a plot of cacao [there], [he] lost it. My grandfather and my uncles lost everything they had.⁶⁸

Gilberto, whose house had been burnt down, elaborated:

[Gilberto]: There wasn't any of that [effort] to take things out of the house, no—understand, friend?⁶⁹

So whatever small goods they had stored inside the house were all lost. I asked them to elaborate on what the invaders did to the houses:

[Gilberto]: Knocked them down and burned them.

[Alonso]: Right, they knocked them down and burned them.⁷⁰

⁶⁷ “Quando ele se apossou-se desse lado aí, cartigou a gente que era pa não...culê uma plantação que tinha, num cortar mais um pé de mato em lugar nenhum, e até aqui chegou o tempo que ele deu dispejo, esse daí perdeu uma casa e uma roça.”

⁶⁸ “Meu pai perdeu uma parte de cacau que ele tinha do lado—do outro lado na Fazenda Sofrida, onde é a Fazenda Sofrida, ele tinha uma parte de cacau, perdeu. Meu avô e meus tios perdeu tudo que tinha.”

⁶⁹ “E não tinha negócio de tirar nada de dentro não viu amigo?”

⁷⁰ “G: ‘Derrubar e quemaro.’//A: ‘É, derrubar e quemaro, é, é.’”

They explained that the invaders first cut down the central supports, or the *esteios*, that held up the middle of each house:

[Alonso]: At that time it wasn't with a chainsaw, it was with an axe. Three or four [men] came with axes, they show up, the others remain [standing] there with the police, the [police] detachment, right. And they dropped the axe.⁷¹

The groups of men carrying out the expulsions would often come when nobody was home—when the adults were out working or had gone to market in town—so as to avoid outright conflict:

[Gilberto]: It always was like this in the middle of the week. When the day started, everybody went out, looking for something to do. One worked here, another worked on the roça, another was out—traveling. I know that almost nobody was home, just maybe some young children. They took advantage [of the adults' absence], knocked down [the house]—took the children outside—knocked down the house and set it on fire. They were all [destroyed] like that.⁷²

I asked him where he was when this happened, and he recalled being in Ituberá, perhaps on a Friday or Saturday at the market. The expulsions at Sofrida Plantation occurred very quickly, from one day to the next: “It was less than one day to the [next] night.”⁷³ He remembered the police:

[Gilberto]: The police were on duty early on, went out in the middle of the night...[and] were [stationed] at the points [along the road] for nobody to

⁷¹ “Naquele tempo num era motor-serra, era machado. Vinha três ou quatro de machado, é chegar, os outro ficar lá com a, a policia, o destacamento, né, e ele mitia o machado.”

⁷² “Sempre que assim no meio de semana. Quando o dia amanhece todo mundo saía, procura o que fazer. Um trabalhar aqui, outro trabalhar pela roça, outro tava pelo—viajando. Eu sei que quase ninguém ta em casa, só talvez as criancinhas. Aproveitaro, derrubaro, tiraro as crianças lá pro mato, derrubaro a casa embaixo e tocaro fogo. Todos foi assim.”

⁷³ “Foi menos de um dia pa uma noite.”

enter. You couldn't even go back from here to there—we had this bit of road that crossed the river to the other side—nobody [could] pass by there.⁷⁴

Josué adds that the police had been firing shots into the night: “Right, FIRING SHOTS!”⁷⁵ The gunshots were meant to frighten people, but nobody was injured or killed, in part, they suggested, because nobody tried to fight back.

We tried to figure out how long ago it was that this occurred, and one of the brothers calculated the date based on the age of one of his nephews, who had just been born at the time of the event, and he figures that the event must have occurred some 40 years ago. This would have been when he was about 23 years old in about 1969, which roughly corresponds to the time when rubber was really beginning to expand in the region.

As suggested above, not all of the expulsions were so violent, and in many cases, it does seem that the posseiros were minimally compensated. Gilberto recalled that at Suor Plantation, among those posseiros who had been bought out by Jeremias, none of their houses were burnt down: “Suor Plantation didn't knock down anyone's houses.”⁷⁶ Indeed, as Jeremias has suggested in the previous chapter, some of the former posseiros were allowed to remain in their old houses as they were eventually transformed into wage laborers.⁷⁷

In cases where the posseiros did not want to negotiate, sell, or leave their land, they would be pressured out by indirect means. Gilberto explained how these other forms of pressure might proceed. After all of the other posseiros had sold and departed, and all of your neighbors were gone, you remained alone on your land and your lands would become completely encircled by the plantation:

⁷⁴ “O puliciá ficou de plantão aqui cedinho, saiu e na boca da noite...tava nos pontos pra ninguém entrar. Nem voltava daqui pra lá—nós que tinha essa boca de estrada que atravessava o rio pa o outro lado—aí não passava ninguém.”

⁷⁵ “É, DANO TIRO!”

⁷⁶ “A Fazenda Suor não dirrubou casa de ninguém.”

⁷⁷ See Chapter 4, Section 2b.

[Gilberto]: You stayed there inside. What I mean, [Odebrecht] passed [all] around [your farm], your open area was small—[they] circled it off, you remained there [encompassed inside the plantation lands].⁷⁸

His brother elaborated that after this occurred, they “prohibited you from walking on the roads”⁷⁹ that passed through the plantation, limiting your movement and making it difficult for you to market your harvest.⁸⁰ This was even the case with neighbors who depended on the road that runs through the plantation to get to town. Even though the road technically belonged to the municipality, its free use was cut off at the entrance to the plantation.⁸¹ Any vehicle that wished to pass through the plantation lands had to get permission from the plantation managers. Gilberto suggested the prohibitions on travel internal to the plantation were more severe than they are today:

[Gilberto]: In the beginning [of Suor Plantation], AVE MARIA! You had to turn back. They endlessly fenced us in, and made us go back.⁸²

Gilberto continued to explain that the problem was less Odebrecht himself, than the plantation managers who exercised their authority with severity:

⁷⁸ “Voce ficava dentro, quer dizer, ele passava por aí, sua área aberta era pequena—coroava aqui voce ficava aí.”

⁷⁹ “Proibia andar nas estradas.”

⁸⁰ Leeds (1957:242-243) reported that identical means of expropriating land were used in the central cacao lands to the south when he was conducting his fieldwork between 1951 and 1952:

“Many cases occurred where a man, perhaps a fazendeiro, invested in property encircling and including the *roçeiro*’s. The upper class buyer then had several possibilities. He might wait a few years before he entered a complaint that the *roçeiro* had trespassed and evicted him. By waiting, he could claim that he had himself made the improvements on the property. Since the generally illiterate *roçeiro* rarely had records or legal documents to prove they had made the improvements, they had no recourse but to move without compensation. The buyer might also drive the *roçeiro* off by force, a procedure frequent in former days but rare now. The buyer might force the *roçeiro* to sell his cacao to him below market price because he controlled all the transport paths away from the *roça*. This favored the buyer by giving him a middleman’s profit at no expense, and ultimately squeezed out the *roçeiro*. He might also demand a share of the profits or the crop, particularly where his lack of funds made it more convenient to keep the *roçeiro* on the land until his presence was no longer useful. Sharecroppers (*meeiros*), however, are practically non-existent. Finally he might buy the *roçeiro*’s improvements outright. According to informants, most of these techniques are still used now and then.”

⁸¹ Even today, people who depend on roads internal to the Suor Plantation have to get permission to transport goods across plantations lands. “Cacao without an order, not one grain [can pass through].” (“Cacau sem orde, nem uma grama.”)

⁸² “De primeiro, Ave Maria! Tinha que vortá, cansou de cercar a gente aí e fazer vortá pa trás.”

[Gilberto]: At that time, let me tell you! The manager—the manager there was a woman—and if she was out there on the road, either in her car or mounted on an animal, and she came upon some poor little man on the road with an animal—AVE MARIA!⁸³

Gilberto explained that such unlucky people would have to turn back. The same was true, another added, even if they were walking down the road without any animal or cargo. I asked them why this was, why the plantation administrators were so restrictive. In their reply, the brothers were careful to distinguish that these specific orders, as far as they knew, were not coming directly from Dr. Norberto, but from the managers of the plantation themselves. Alonso explained:

[Alonso]: These things weren't done by Dr. Norberto, this was the manager. It was the plantation manager.⁸⁴

Apart from wanting to prevent the possibility of theft—and consequently, treating any of the plantation's neighbors as potential thieves—the motives of the managers were not entirely clear. Gilberto speculated that maybe they were afraid of former posseiros who might seek to exact “vengeance” (*vingança*) on the plantation for having taken away lands from them.

5. Cunning & the Causality of Fate

“Fools only work for the cunning, no? But in the end, the cunning always end up worse off than the fools.”⁸⁵

⁸³ “Mas naquele tempo, oxente, o gerent—a gerente daí que era uma mulher—se ela fosse aí estrada afora, ou no carro dela ou montada num animal dela e topasse um pobre coitado aí, com o animal na estrada, Ave Maria!”

⁸⁴ “Isso aí já não era doutor Norberto, isso era o gerente. Isso era o gerente.”

⁸⁵ “Os besta só trabalha pu sabido, né? E no fim o sabido vorta a ser pior do que os bestalhado.”

In his *Knowledge and Human Interests*, Habermas (1968) offered a notion that he refers to as the “causality of fate,” through which he sought to develop the logic of retribution and punishment with which agents of transgression were eventually met as a result of the violence that they perpetuated against others and upon social life, generally. Habermas drew upon and developed this notion from Hegel’s (1961[1798]) essay on the “The Spirit of Christianity and Its Fate.”⁸⁶ In that early essay, Hegel wrote:

The illusion of trespass, its belief that it destroys the other’s life and thinks itself enlarged thereby, is dissipated by the fact that the disembodied spirit of the injured life comes on the scene against the trespass. . . . The trespasser intended to have to do with another’s life, but he has only destroyed his own, for life is not different from life, since life dwells in the single Godhead. In his arrogance he has destroyed indeed, but only the friendliness of life; he has perverted life into an enemy. [Hegel 1961:229]

In other words, as the transgressor suppresses and fails to recognize the reality of other people’s lives— as Habermas suggests, “putting himself as an individual in place of the totality” and failing to recognize the “common life context” (1968:56)—the transgressor not only undermines people’s lives, but also his or her own life, and thus social life generally. J.M. Bernstein (2003:394) succinctly captures this notion in the following way: “To act against another person is to destroy my own life, to call down upon myself revenging fates; I cannot (ethically) harm another without (ethically) harming myself. In this way the flourishing and foundering of each is intimately bound up with the flourishing and foundering of all.” These ideas provide a useful framework for understanding local notions of justice and retribution, which will be explored in this and the following two sections (and further in Chapter 7). From the standpoint of people like Seu Pedrinho, Alvina, Damião, and Lázaro, people such as Jeremias, Dr. Severino, Odebrecht, among others, are all understood as having contributed in various ways, and with varying degrees of responsibility, to the suppression and destruction of others’ lives: the posseiros’ lives most directly, and the lives other many members of the rural poor who were, by various routes, thrown into plantation life. For people like Damião or Alvina, narratives recounting the fates suffered by people like Jeremias, and especially Dr. Severino, as will be seen

⁸⁶ See Ormiston (2002) for a helpful discussion of this early essay.

below, can count as one line of evidence (among others) for the rightfulness of their claims for justice and a place in the social world.⁸⁷ In a further sense, the fate suffered by transgressors also serves as a normative model that renders explicit the conditions under which the “friendliness of life” might be restored. As we will see, when relationships of inequality and domination threaten to reemerge in an otherwise emancipatory context, as will be seen Chapter 13, community members can draw upon such historical and social understanding as they seek to shape and reshape their communities in ways that can affirm and encourage their lives together.

The quote that opens this section, which captures the logic of the causality of fate, is a statement that Jorge had made after reflecting upon the conflicts he and his siblings had experienced at the hands of some of the patriarchs in his extended family. When word came that Firestone was going to be arriving in the region, Jorge’s grandfather Milton sought to have his land measured. He did not have the resources to do so by himself, so he asked for help from a relatively wealthy merchant named Mr. Wilson, who bought agricultural products in the region. Jorge recounted the story:

[Milton]: “Hey Mr. Wilson, I would have measured my place, but I won’t measure it, because I don’t have the [financial] resources.”

[Mr. Wilson]: “Why is that, Milton?”

[Milton]: “Because there are engineers involved, all that business, and I don’t have the resources [to pay them], no.”

[Mr. Wilson]: “It’s to measure your place?”

[Milton]: “It’s to measure [my place].”

[Mr. Wilson]: “You can [go ahead and] arrange for an engineer.”⁸⁸

⁸⁷ Claiming a place in the world, I would suggest, is simultaneously a claim for recognitive and distributive justice.

⁸⁸ “‘É seu Wilson eu ia medir o meu lugar, mas eu não vou medir não, que não tenho condição.’//‘Por causa de que, Milton?’//‘Porque tem engenheiro, esse negócio, eu não vou ter condição não.’//‘É pa voce medir o lugar?’//‘É pa medir.’//‘Pode arrumar o engenheiro.’”

With Mr. Wilson’s financial support—very likely a loan taken out on his future production—Milton was eventually able to have his land measured, and it totaled 754 hectares. For a reason that was not clear in the interview, but probably owed to Milton’s debt for Mr. Wilson’s financial support, the title (*título geral*) for the land remained in the hands of a local lawyer named Dr. Bartolomeu. Jorge suggested that eventually, the lawyer disappeared with, or “ate” the title—“Dr. Bartolomeu, *CREU!*”⁸⁹—but Jorge’s grandfather still controlled his lands.⁹⁰

Time passed in the narrative. Jorge’s grandfather was ailing and nearing death, and the question of inheritance would soon present itself. Jorge’s only uncle, Welton, had gotten together with two other men, Ricardo and Adriano, and together they were scheming to sell the whole farm to a potential buyer named José Maranhão. (A man overhearing our conversation in the background says, “Adriano is a thief.”⁹¹) Jorge’s father had died at a young age, leaving Jorge and his siblings without any inheritance, and without anybody to advocate any claim the grandchildren might have had to the family’s inheritance. Jorge’s aunt, Olívia—Welton’s sister and Welton’s only other living sibling—was illiterate to the point that she could not discern different denominations of money: “[His] sister couldn’t even recognize 500 réis, so everything was in [Welton’s] hands.”⁹² Consequently, Welton was in a position to manipulate, and personally profit from, the family’s inheritance.

Jorge explained that one of their neighbors, a man named José, caught wind of Welton’s scheme, and he came to warn Jorge and the other family members:

[José]: “Jorge, wake up because [your uncle] Mr. Welton is going to sell the fazenda and leave you all [with nothing and] in misery...”

I say: “What’s that?”

⁸⁹ “Dr. Bartolomeu, **creu*!*”

⁹⁰ The expression “creu” is an onomatopoeic term that indicates an act of eating, perhaps voracious eating, by imitating the sound of eating. The notion of “eating” is an important evaluative idiom in the region, especially for relationships based upon greed and avarice. See Chapter 7, Section 4.

⁹¹ “Adriano é um ladrão.”

⁹² “A irmã não conhecia quinhentos réis, então, tava tudo pelas mãos dele.”

[José]: “Well, it’s [your grandfather] Mr. Milton, [Welton] got together with Milton, [and they] organized things there and Ricardo and Adriano—the whole group—all [of them] already in agreement to sell [the fazenda].”⁹³

Jorge informed his other family members, and they went to confront Welton. Jorge continued the narrative:

The next day we organized ourselves and came to [grandfather’s house]. When we got there the whole group [of them] was there. I came and I sat down. [My] old [aunt] Olívia entered [the house], me, Hélio, Ezequiel—all of us. In one corner our uncle was seated like this, grandpa laying down like this, and Ricardo—a beast of a guy—sitting like this. Well, they were working out the sale. I showed up and just kept quiet to myself. [I] waited, waited and waited, and not one of our names were mentioned...I said,

[Jorge]: “Uncle Welton, and [what about] us?”

[Welton]: “You are new offshoots.”⁹⁴

His uncle was trying to avoid the question by implying that they did not matter, but Jorge asks him again and his uncle gives the same response. Jorge continued waiting:

I [remained] quiet, I stayed quite. Shortly after, [my] blood started to get me agitated. Soon after that again:

[Jorge]: “Uncle Welton, and [what about] us, man? You’re there negotiating and we don’t hear [anything mentioned] about us...”⁹⁵

⁹³ “‘Jorge, voce se acorda que seu Welton vai vender a fazenda e vai deixar vocês tudo nas piquena.’//Eu digo: ‘O que?’//‘É. Então é seu Milton, ajuntou mais seu Milton, ajeitharo lá e Ricardo e Adriano, a turma toda, já tudo em trato pa vender.’”

⁹⁴ “‘Quando foi no outro dia nós se arrumemo tudo e se mandemo p’ aqui. Quando chegemo aí tava a malocada todinha. Eu cheguei e me sentei. A véia Olívia entou pa dento, eu, Hélio, Ezequiel, a gente tudo. E num canto, ta titio tava sentado assim, vovô detado assim, e Ricardo—que é o cabra bichão—sentado assim, certo. Tão, tavam acertano aquela, aquela venda. Eu cheguei e fiquei bem na minha. Fiquei, fiquei, fiquei e nada de falar no nome da gente...Eu disse://‘Titio Welton, e a gente?’//‘Vocês são renovo.’”

His uncle finally becomes angry with Jorge's meddling. As Jorge voices his uncle's words, he starts to yell:

[Welton]: "I'M NOT—I'M NOT DAD, NO. THE OWNER OF THE PLACE IS DAD, SEE. YOU ALL— ISN'T [YOUR GRANDFATHER] THE OWNER OF THE PLACE? IT'S DAD. I'M NOT THE [OWNER]."96

Welton is implying that he is merely acting on his father's behalf as the owner of the farm, and that whatever they were negotiating was in his father's interest. Jorge's grandfather, Milton, asks Welton about the commotion, and he explains that Jorge and his group—women and children, at least in relation to Welton—were inappropriately questioning their elders. The old man Milton became angry:

The old man was lying down, BUT THEN he got up and the shit hit the fan.⁹⁷

A young man sitting nearby, overhearing the interview, laughs. He readily recognized the image of an elderly male authority losing his temper, and he knew what was to come next. The situation remains stable, however, and in the narrative, Jorge then calls upon those with him to specify their relationship to Milton, in order to make clear the familial obligations that Milton had to them all:

I say [to my aunt]: "Olívia, come over here."

Olívia came over. I say: "Ma'am, what are you to grandpa?"

[She] said: "I'm a daughter."

⁹⁵ "To quéto, fiquei quéto, quando foi mais logo mais o sangue foi me agitano. Quando foi mais logo mais:// "Titio Welton, e a gente rapaz, que o senhor ta acertano e não vê falar na gente..."

⁹⁶ "Eu não sou, eu não sou papai não, o dono do lugar é papai, oie. Vocês—ele não é o dono do lugar? É papai, não sou eu não."

⁹⁷ "Ah, o véiu tava dethado e levantou e o pau quebrou."

[Jorge]: “Yeah?”

[Olívia]: “Yeah.”

[Jorge]: “Grandpa, old Olívia is your daughter, isn’t she?”

[Milton]: “I don’t know.”⁹⁸

Milton seems to already know where the line of questioning was going, and so he tries to avoid its entailments by invoking indeterminacy of paternity. An overhearer to the story declares: “The old man is tricky!”⁹⁹ Jorge continues, asking Hélio and then Ezequiel what their relationship is to grandpa. They both reply, individually:

[Hélio/Ezequiel]: “I’m a grandson.”

And I say: “And me grandpa, what am I to you, am I not a grandson?”

[Milton]: “Yes.”

[Jorge]: “And [my] dad’s part [of the inheritance]? You have to buy our [part], you have to give our value too, keep that in mind.”

And boy, the old man lost it!

[He said]: “Look, get that disgrace!”¹⁰⁰

⁹⁸ “Eu digo, ‘Ô Olívia, chega aqui.’//Aí Olívia chegou. Eu digo: ‘O que é que a senhora é de vovô?’//Disse: ‘Eu sou fia.’//‘É?’//‘É.’//‘Vovô, a véia Olívia é fia sua é?’//‘Eu não sei.’”

⁹⁹ “O véiu é carrasco!”

¹⁰⁰ “‘Eu sou neto.’//Eu digo: ‘E eu vovô, o que é seu, não sou neto?’//‘É.’//‘E a parte de papai, hem? Tem que comprar a da gente, o senhor tem que dar o valor da gente também, fique sabeno.’//Ah, o véiu pirou, rapaz!//‘Oie, pegue aquela desgraça.’”

He described how the old man became dizzy with anger, his uncles eyes turned red with anger. Jorge's uncle, Welton, eventually repeats the question as to whether or not his father—Jorge's grandfather—was the owner of the land, and could thereby do whatever he pleased with it. Jorge turns to his grandfather, and he declares:

“You are the owner, you're the one who's the owner, we aren't the owners. No. We are offshoots. Now, the offshoots also need a part, because that was dad's part. I have [a share], we all have [a share]. You're not the only one, no.”¹⁰¹

Everyone saw that Jorge was right, and the situation began to wind down. Ricardo, Adriano and the others who were there to profit the deal—those that Jorge he called the *cumelão*, or “big eaters”—they all left and the situation calmed down further. Eventually, their grandfather Milton¹⁰² came to them and told them they could take their part:

“Hey Jorge, look, you go there and take—with this group here—go there and take your share.”¹⁰³

The others began to discuss how they would divide their share of the land, and the situation seemed to be resolved. But then Jorge begins to think differently. He saw how their claims for their share of the land—claims that, it seems likely, were not stated with such explicitness—had affected their grandfather:

But then, man, I thought that we shouldn't take what we didn't make, [what we] didn't give or didn't help [to make]. So, to me, it would have been forced. It was against the nature of the old man because [that land] cost him his sweat.¹⁰⁴

¹⁰¹ “O dono é o senhor, é o senhor que é o dono, nós não somos dono não. Nós somos renovo. Agora, o renovo precisa de uma parte também que é a parte de papai. Eu tenho, nós tem. Não é só o senhor não.”

¹⁰² It is unclear in the interview whether the subject here is the grandfather or the uncle, but this is relatively inconsequential at this point in the narrative, since both were opposing Jorge's challenge.

¹⁰³ “É Jorge, ó voce chega lá e toma..., mais esse pessoa e tira lá a parte de vocês.”

¹⁰⁴ “Mas eu achei, seu minino, que a gente não pode invadir o que a gente não fez, não deu, não ajudou. Então, para mim aquilo ia ficar forçado, contra a natureza do véiu que custou o suor dele.”

Although his grandfather may have initially faltered in recognizing his own obligations, Jorge noted that his grandfather was already suffering enough: he was sleeping poorly, eating poorly, and he had already worked enough earlier on in his life to measure and secure the land for his family. To ask him to divide the land up before he died, he repeated, would be “forc[ing] his nature and [forcing him to divide the land] before the old man died.”¹⁰⁵ Jorge changed his mind:

“No man, let’s forget about that. If our dad died and didn’t leave anything [for us], didn’t leave any land, didn’t leave anything. [Let’s just] leave it be. When [grandpa] dies, well, then all the heirs have to split it.”¹⁰⁶

Everyone agreed, and very shortly thereafter, the old man died.

The story does not stop here, however. Once again, Welton had secretly gotten together with Adriano and the other “big eaters,” and they successfully sold the farm to José Maranhão, who was previously interested in buying the land. Adriano and another person went to advise Jorge and the rest of them:

“Look there, kids, Welton already sold the fazenda and [wanted me to] give a message for you to go receive your share because his [part] has already been sold, he already received his [share].”¹⁰⁷

They went to meet Adriano in a place just outside of Ituberá called Fazenda Velha, where they met with the new owner by the name of José Maranhão.

[Adriano] told us to sit down like this, dragged up the chair, each one [of us] sat in the chair, the table in the middle, and he sat down like this [on the other side of the table, and said]:

¹⁰⁵ “...forçar a natureza e antes do véiu fartá...”

¹⁰⁶ ““Não rapaz, deixa isso pa lá. Se papai morreu e não deixou nada, não deixou terra, não deixou nada. Deixa pa lá. Quando ele morrer, aí todos os herdeiros tem que repartir.””

¹⁰⁷ ““Ó, os minino, Welton já vendheu a fazenda e mandou recado pa vocês irem receber a parte de vocês que a dele já ta vend[ido], que a dele ele já recebeu.””

[Adriano]: “You [all] sign here, but you are going to sign [declaring] that you sold, but have not [yet] received [payment]. Because [José Maranhão], eight days from now, he will come to do the payment, because the money he brought [this time] was [too] little [to pay everyone]. And if [he] doesn’t come in eight days, [he] will come in fifteen days, but the payment is coming for everyone.”

We were fools and didn’t know anything [about what we were doing]. He [went]—*PA-PA, PA-PA, PA-PA, PA-PA, PA-PA*—¹⁰⁸

Jorge is imitating the sound of a pen writing paper. An overhearer to the interview declared: “[He] got everyone’s signature!”¹⁰⁹ Jorge continued:

And Welton didn’t let us receive one cent. [Days] passed, my brother! Eight days passed, fifteen days passed, one month passed, two [months] passed. It went [on for] five years...[Jorge Maral] got those documents together with other documents of [our] declaration, but [he couldn’t] get the general document [the general land title] because it was still in Dr. Bartolomeu’s hand.¹¹⁰

Dr. Bartolomeu, it may be recalled, was among those who originally helped their grandfather measure their land. At the end of the episode, José Maranhão had traded the land (for a tractor) to another party—a “gringo”¹¹¹ named Miguel—even though he did not have all of the legal documents in order. He left the region when it became clear that the documents were not in

¹⁰⁸ "Mandou a gente sentar assim, arrastou a cadeira, cada um sentou na cadeira a mesa ficou no meio, ele sentou assim: ‘...vocês assina aqui, mas vocês vão assinar como vendeu, mas não recebeu, que ele de hoje a oito, ele vem fazer o pagamento, que o dinheiro que ele trouxe é pouco. Então, se não vier de hoje a outro vem de hoje a quinze, mas vem o pagamento pa todo mundo.’ A gente burro que não sabia de nada, ele *pa-pa, pa-pa, pa-pa, pa-pa, pa-pa...*"

¹⁰⁹ “Pegou a assinatura de todo mundo!”

¹¹⁰ “E deixe que não recebeu um centavo, o Welton. Passou meu irmão, passou outro dia, passou quinze dia, passou um mês, passou dois. Foi pa cinco ano. Ele lá pegou...[José Maranhão] pegou aqueles documento, mas outro documento de declaração, mas não deu o documento geral que é o que tava na mão de Dr. Bartolomeu.”

¹¹¹ In this part of Brazil, the term gringo does not only refer to North Americans (vis. from the United States), but may include anyone who is not from Bahia, who speaks differently or a different language altogether, whether that person is a *gaúcho* from southern Brazil, or an Italian, German, American from the United States, and so on.

order. He died shortly after for reasons that were not clear.¹¹² Now, Jorge and his party had to find the man named Miguel, the newest party that was in control of their documents. Jorge continues through the rest of the detailed narrative, the subsequent dispute that he and his family had with Miguel to finally receive what they felt was payment for their family's land. After more conflict, they finally, after many years, received what they had been owed.

Jorge concluded and recounted the fate of his uncle, Welton, who had been the source of their misery. Welton had sold his share of the farm for what he recalled was 10,000 or 11,000 *mil-réis* (*contos*). All of those who had been involved in the secret transaction to sell the farm had enriched themselves:

My boy, I know that they filled up their pockets. [Welton's] part, he sold it [for a good price]. He put [his money] in the bank, [but then] a [bank] robber came and—PSSSH! Cleaned everything [out].¹¹³

Welton had lost everything that he had won through his cunning, and he died in misery:

[He] died—it appears that he died [while living] on alms. Do you hear what happens? Avarice and desiring evil onto those who don't deserve it. And we cannot take and steal that which is not ours.¹¹⁴

He expresses an ethic here, a way of reckoning the division of goods. At first it appears as a divine mandate, but he explains:

Because God gave, each one—if God gave you your own—if God gave you more, [and] gave me less, gave him less, and already gave him more because—you had more because

¹¹² José Maranhão's death had already been predicted by a *raizeiro*, or a traditional healer, that Jorge's wife had gone to consult. The healer told them that they had to find José Maranhão quickly and recover the land documents, because otherwise, the curer predicted, Jorge was going to be dying soon and they would lose everything: "Look daughter, you can tell [your husband Jorge] to move quickly because José Maranhão is going to die, and if [he] dies, you will all lose [your land]." ["Ó fia, pode dizer a ele que ele ande ligeiro que o José Maranhão ta pa morrer e se morrer vocês vão perder."]

¹¹³ "Eu sei, meu fio, que eles encheu os bolso, o dele ele vendeu bem vendido. Picou no banco, o ladrão veio de lá e—psssh! Limpou tudo."

¹¹⁴ "Morreu—parece que morreu nas ismola. Ta ouvino o que acontece? A usura e desejar o mal a quem não é merecedor. E a gente não pode pegar e róbá o aleis [alheio] que não é do dito."

you had more merit, [you] worked [for it] and God gave [you] the comfort. But you cannot take from us—just because we are lesser—and keep everything for yourself, so that we fall into smallness. What [kind of attitude] is that? Do you hear? [Well,] that was the case...¹¹⁵

By falling into “smallness,” Jorge meant falling into poverty and misery. In a quick reading of this passage, Jorge seems to be suggesting that the division of goods is grounded in some sort of divine mandate, and that inequalities in the distribution of goods was owed to God’s will. A more careful reading, however, reveals the causal mechanism involved, which is labor. Like the Lockean labor theory of property,¹¹⁶ which faced the problem of accounting for how the land was to be distributed among different people, Jorge suggested that the only legitimate means for the acquisition of personal property was labor, and not the coercive and usurious means that both his uncle and grandfather had employed in the past. As Welton had not, evidently, respected God’s will, and thereby created his own fate, Jorge’s attempt to live more honestly, while not leading to greatness or riches, allowed him to live with satisfaction:

Well, [Welton] died—he ended up eating only what others gave [to him]. And thanks, thanks to God, we are—we only got a little bit [of money]...[but] we knew how to manage it, and thanks to God, I’m eating, I’m dressing, I have enough to eat, [I] eat, drink, dress. It’s enough to dress, enough for [a bit of] luxury, and done! And [Welton] is underneath the earth, [he] died young, you see? [He] didn’t leave anything of this life for his daughter, for nobody. Oh, my brother, the people in the beginning were—they were usurious [or greedy].¹¹⁷

¹¹⁵ “Que Deus deu, cada um—se Deus deu o seu—se Deus deu ao senhor a mais, me deu a menos, deu a ele a menos, já deu a ele a mais porque—voce teve mais porque teve merecimento, trabalhou e Deus deu o conforto. Mas o senhor não pode tirar o da gente—que somos de menos—pa jogar tudo pu senhor, pa gente ficar nas pequena. O que é isso? Ta ouvino? O caso foi esse...”

¹¹⁶ See the brilliant account of John Locke’s theory of property in Jeremy Waldron (1988).

¹¹⁷ “Aí ele morreu, passou ele cumeno aí o que os outo dava dano. E graça, graça de Deus nós tamo—que fiquemo com uma merreca...soube apurar, e graças a Deus, to cumeno, to vistino, to dano a comer, como, bebo, visto. Dou a vestir, dou a luxar, pronto! E ele ta dibaxo da terra, morreu muderno, ta veno? Não deixou nada dessa vida pa filha, pa ninguém. Ah meu irmão. O povo de premero era—era usurento.”

The overhearer to our conversation enters onto center stage as he crystallizes the entire conversation into a simple statement that embeds its own normative entailment:

Usury was his destruction.¹¹⁸

6. Greatness, Misrecognition & Social Death

*“I met a traveller from an antique land
Who said: Two vast and trunkless legs of stone
Stand in the desert. Near them, on the sand,
Half sunk, a shattered visage lies, whose frown,
And wrinkled lip, and sneer of cold command,
Tell that its sculptor well those passions read
Which yet survive, stamped on these lifeless things,
The hand that mocked them and the heart that fed:
And on the pedestal these words appear:
“My name is Ozymandias, king of kings:
Look on my works, ye Mighty, and despair!”
Nothing beside remains. Round the decay
Of that colossal wreck, boundless and bare
The lone and level sands stretch far away.”¹¹⁹*

Many of those who had enriched themselves during this period experienced dramatic gains in status and wealth; but some who had risen would eventually fall just as far into both material and spiritual poverty. The land commissioner, who had accompanied many of the land grabs in the region, was evidently among these people. In the height of his influence, Dr. Dr. Severino used to hold extravagant parties. Anabel recalled them:

¹¹⁸ “A usura foi a destruição dele.”

¹¹⁹ The poem is “Ozymandias” by Percy Bysshe Shelley (1819).

They were marvelous parties...[we] went to the party, [we] danced a lot...And they always treated us very well...[They] only served whiskey, everybody knew about it, at Dr. Severino's parties there was only whiskey.¹²⁰

Unlike *cachaça*, for example, serving whiskey would have been a mark of prestige, while drinking it would have been an occasion for praise and admiration.

And the guests, at any party [he held], would leave...with little presents that were distributed at the party...If someone said, "Party at Dr. Severino's home," the city got into an uproar, right? Everyone [was] excited because everyone wanted to go.¹²¹

While uninvited guests—"penetrators," or *penetras*, as they are called—often times crashed these parties, guests were not treated with the same regard:

[He] held many parties for the people from the bank...Each time a new [bank] manager arrived [in town], Dr. Severino adopted [them]. Bank managers were Dr. Severino's thing.¹²²

Anabel explained that the interest in "adopting" the new bank managers was, of course, monetary:

[It was a] financial interest. The more parties and lunches and dinners he held for these people, the more they opened the bank coffers for him, you know?¹²³

¹²⁰ "Eram festas assim maravilhosas...íamos a festa, dançávamos muito...E eles sempre nos trataram muito bem...só era whisky, todo mundo sabia, nas festas de Dr. Severino só rolava whisky."

¹²¹ "E os convidados ainda saíam qualquer festa...com presentinhos que eram distribuídos na festa...Se alguém dissesse: 'Festa na casa de Dr. Severino,' a cidade ficava em polvorosa. Né? Todo mundo agitado, que todo mundo queria ir."

¹²² "Eles davam muitas festas para o pessoal do banco...Cada vez que chegava um gerente novo, Dr. Severino adotava. Gerente de banco era com Dr. Severino mesmo."

¹²³ "Interesse financeiro. Quanto mais ele dava festas e almoços e jantares pa esse povo, mais abriam o caixa do banco pra ele, sabe?"

To have an interest, in this context, or to be *interessado* in the adjectival form, means to be interested in the gain or advantage that you can win by means of a relationship with a person. A habitually interested person, or an *interesseiro* in the substantive form, would be anyone for whom a constitutive element of their character is the habitual use of others for the pursuit of particular interests.¹²⁴ In Kantian terms, this is to treat someone as a mere means for the satisfaction of a desire, and such relationships are self-destructive in the long run. That Dr. Severino was interested in others for the advantage he could gain through them—and presumably those same others were interested in Dr. Severino for the gain he could likewise afford them—helps to make sense of what happened after his decline:

When things began to get bad [for him]...[this was initially owed to] poor administration [of his plantation], lots of money wasted on cars of the year, with [extravagant] trips...[and the children] had an incredible extravagance...[Then] things started—financially [speaking]—started to fall.¹²⁵

And thus, Anabel explained, everything else began to fall apart:

The *DECLINE* was very rapid. Because all of a sudden, he didn't even have a car any longer...Every day he came into town walking—even to buy bread, he came walking.¹²⁶

Old age, blindness, and illness eventually overcame him. He began to age very rapidly, and his condition became increasingly fragile. His relationships began to fall apart:

Those friendships that he had, [they] disappeared...Friends disappear. You lost [your] money, you lost [your] friends. Only [your] true friends remain behind. I don't [even] know if he had any true friends. I [really] don't know if he won any [real] friends during

¹²⁴ This term becomes gendered in a pejorative expression often used to characterize women who may appear to show sexual interest in others from whom they wish to gain something, for example, money or prestige through a feigned romantic interest in a wealthy man or woman.

¹²⁵ “Quando a coisa começou a ficar muito ruim...má administração, muito dinheiro gasto com carro do ano, com viagens...tinham uma extravagância incrível...e a coisa começou, financeiramente, começou a cair.”

¹²⁶ “O DECLÍNIO foi muito. Que de repente ele nem carro tinha mais...ele vinha andando todos os dias pra rua, até pra comprar pão ele vinha andando.”

his life. He had lots of people [around him who had] much interest. His interests and the interests of others.¹²⁷

The only person he had to care for him was his wife, and when she died before he did, his situation worsened even further. Many people seemed to think that his social and financial decline was attributable to his physical and mental decline, but the woman I interviewed suggested that his physical and mental decline was more accurately attributed to his isolation:

I think that [when] people say that his mind [had gone] bad, it is [rather] that [your mind goes bad] if you have nobody to talk to.¹²⁸

Anabel goes on to describe the end:

Well, I think that his end [must have been] horrible. The children didn't give [him] any attention, he had raised his children spoiled. Much, much luxury, [too] much excess...And [it was] not—this was not love, because the children did not...return it, right?¹²⁹

The material wealth he had won over the course of his life began to break apart:

I don't know if [this] is true, but—what we all heard was that they put him into a room...When the mother died—when [his] wife died—[they] took him from his bedroom where he slept. That is [to say], if you're already not doing well, if your wife dies, if you are already losing your memory, [and] you leave the [familiar] surroundings that you recognized. [And then they] threw him in a room—what I heard [was] that [he] was [in a storage room] with the [miscellaneous] things from the house, [old] dismantled bed frames, old furniture, and I don't know what else—[they] put him in a room with a man

¹²⁷ “Aqueles amizades que ele tinha sumiram... Amigos somem, você perdeu dinheiro, você perdeu amigo. Só fica mesmo quem é amigo de verdade. Eu não sei se ele tinha algum amigo de verdade. Eu não sei se ele conquistou amigos durante a vida dele. Ele tinha pessoas de muito interesse. Interesse dele e interesse dos outros, né?”

¹²⁸ “Eu acho que o que as pessoas dizem que era cabeça ruim, é que se você não tem ninguém pra conversar.”

¹²⁹ “Então, eu acho que, o fim dele foi horrível. Os filhos não davam atenção, ele criou os filhos com muito mimo. Muito, muito luxo, muito excesso...E não—isso não era amor, porque os filhos não...retribuíram, não é?”

to watch over him...accompany [him], give [him] medicine, all of those things...The children divided the house down the middle...passed a wall in the middle of the house.¹³⁰

All of this amounted to a loss of orientation in his world:

Well, for a person who was accustomed having his own house, even when he loses his memory, he [still] knows [and recognizes] his surroundings, even without [being able] to see. The house is his, he built it...he lived there all his life. If all of a sudden you encounter a wall down the middle [of your house], you become even more lost. You no longer know where you are, [you] no longer have any reference. I know that he died in this situation...He was living in the house, but in a room.¹³¹

Another man who was present during the interview, and occasionally participated in the conversation added: “[It was] in a room at the back [of the house].”¹³² This would be a space that would normally be used by domestic servants, or *domésticas*, thus deepening the humiliation. Anabel continued:

[A room] in the back of his own house. The space...for him to move about became smaller, because they passed a wall through the middle of the house.¹³³

The theme of falling into “smallness,” or poverty—which appeared in the previous section as Jorge characterized the consequences of his uncle’s actions upon others—reemerges in Anabel’s narrative in a fascinating manner. In this case, the actual space where Dr. Severino resided,

¹³⁰ “Eu não sei se é verdade, mas a—o que a gente houve é que colocaram ele num quarto...Quando a mãe morreu, quando a esposa morreu, tiraram ele do quarto que ele dormia. Quer dizer, se você já não está bem, se sua esposa morre, se você já está perdendo a memória, você sai daquele ambiente que é conhecido. Jogaram ele num quarto, que eu soube que tava junto com coisas da casa, cama desarrumada, móvel velho não-sei -o-que, colocaram ele num quarto com um homem tomando conta dele...acompanhar, dar remédio, aquela coisa toda...os dois filhos dividiram a casa ao meio...passaram uma parede no meio da casa.”

¹³¹ “Então, pra uma pessoa que ta acostumada a ter a sua casa, mesmo quando ele perde a memória ele sabe do seu ambiente e mesmo sem enxergar. A casa é dele, ele construiu...ele viveu ali a vida toda. Se de repente voce encontra uma parede no meio, você fica mais perdido ainda, você não sabe onde é que você está mais, já não tem mais referencia. E eu soube que ele morreu nessa situação...Ele tava morando na casa, mas num quarto.”

¹³² “Num quarto no fundo.”

¹³³ “No fundo, na própria casa. O lugar...pra ele circular se tornou menor, porque passaram um muro no meio da casa. Então, ele não tinha acesso a casa toda.”

which was connected to his social personality and his achievement of “greatness,” was being reduced into an increasingly smaller physical space. It was literally being divided up by walls, and he became relegated to marginal spaces in what had been his own home. At this point, Anabel introduces the theme of social “existence” and its loss:

Well, beyond the financial part, abandonment, solitude, I think he died very badly. And given who he was—Dr. Severino has [been dead for] what—how many months that he’s been dead? Nobody remembers Dr. Severino anymore, you know?...He didn’t see anybody anymore...people didn’t go [to his house] to visit him. Well, you start to no longer exist, you are simply no longer spoken of...I know that he disappeared...he disappeared very quickly from the city. Nobody remembers—nobody talks [about him] anymore. For someone as important as he was—because he had an importance [whether it was] good or bad—he was important in the city. Everybody knew Dr. Severino. And the people respected him.¹³⁴

Finally, Anabel describes his burial:

[Dr. Severino] practically died in ostracism...He died really badly, I think...With all the things that he did, he died very badly. I think the people were cruel. I wasn’t here for—for his death. But I heard that...[there] were very few people—very few people [at his burial]. And one thing was certain: his house was a house full [of people].¹³⁵

The imagery of the poorly attended funeral is relevant here. When hearing people talk about wakes and funerals that occur in the region, it is not uncommon to hear passing comments about how well the funeral was attended: “There were so many people!”¹³⁶ Implicit in statements like

¹³⁴ “Então, além da parte financeira, desprezo, solidão, eu acho que ele morreu muito mal. E pra quem foi Dr. Severino, Dr. Severino tem o que, quantos meses Dr. Severino ta de morto? Ninguém lembra mais de Dr. Severino, sabe?...Ele não via mais ninguém...as pessoas não iam lá visitá-lo. Então, você começa a não existir, simplesmente você não ta mais falando...Eu sei que logo ele desapareceu...ele desapareceu muito rápido da cidade. Ninguém lembra, ninguém fala mais. Pra quem foi importante como ele foi, porque ele teve uma importância boa ou ruim, ele teve importância na cidade, todo mundo conhecia Dr. Severino. E as pessoas respeitavam.”

¹³⁵ “Ele morreu praticamente no ostracismo...ele morreu muito mal, eu acho...Com todas as coisas que ele fez, ele morreu muito mal. Acho que as pessoas foram cruéis. Eu não estava aqui na, na morte dele, mas eu soube que...que tinha pouquíssima gente—pouquíssima gente. E uma coisa é certa, a casa dele era uma casa cheia.”

¹³⁶ “Deu muita gente!”

these, and sometimes explicit in others, are ideas about the extent to which the deceased was loved and regarded by their others. The manner in which one's funeral is (or is not) attended serves as a public reminder of the kinds and qualities of relationships that the deceased enjoyed in life. That so many, or so few, people might attend another's funeral is a final revelation, in a sense, of who that person was and how—and whether or not—that person will live in the thoughts and memories of those who surround and survive them in death.

The search for wealth and greatness seems, in a sense, to be a search for a way out of human limitation and finitude, and a way of living on after death. In the region, the notion of those who are rich and powerful can be expressed as *os grandes*, the great, while the poor and weak can be expressed as *os pequenos*, the small, or *os fracos*, the weak. Those boundaries grow and contract according to the qualities of one's activity and social relationships.¹³⁷ Becoming great, and, in a sense, recognized, is to gradually move out of former boundaries and limitations. This becoming great can be expressed in the idiom of growth, which may be achieved through the expansion of material possessions, but also, and crucially, in terms of growing the personality. In the context of this ethnography, this would be to *crescer o nome*, or to grow one's name.¹³⁸ To fall into poverty was to *ficar nas pequenas*, or to become, or come into, smallness.

But there are different means of achieving greatness and growing one's name, and some of these means appear here to be self-defeating. We have already seen that one way of growing, of gaining property and God's blessing, is through hard work. Others have suggested that the most common way to *crescer*, or to achieve growth, is to *mentir*, or lie.¹³⁹ If some insight can be gleaned from the Kantian story—which broadly seems to inform the Hegelian and Habermasian story about the causality of fate—and treating others as a mere means is ultimately self-destructive as such conduct undermines the grounds for sociality, then it becomes comprehensible that those, who in life, treat others as mere means would eventually—in the long run—find themselves bereft of those others in death. Even though such people may achieve some form of greatness in life—as Dr. Severino did—and always appear to be surrounded by people—holding parties, drinking whisky, and handing out presents to guests—one might ask

¹³⁷ Compare this to Munn's (1986) account of "fame."

¹³⁸ See Chapter 8, Section 4.

¹³⁹ Fn341.

whether or not those people are actually *with* one another, or if they were merely *next to*, but ultimately separated, from one another.

Such people, whose lives are based on interest and who are called *interesseiros*, are similarly described in the region as being *falso*, or false, in the substantive rather than adjectival form. Someone might say of another person, “Be careful with that person, he’s false,”¹⁴⁰ rather than merely saying someone is “acting” falsely. These people are taken to be “false” in their being. False people are tricky people, prone to telling lies, not worthy of trust. Those who are “true,” or *verdadeiro*, are worthy of trust, honest, and faithful in their relationships to others. If this is taken together with the Kantian and Hegelian story about the nature of self-destructive relationships, an account that helps to illuminate Dr. Severino’s story, then one might say that the “false”—false people, false conduct—negate or undermine themselves and their relationships. If the “true” is something that endures—and is, in some sense, “immortal”—while the false withers away and is eventually forgotten, then it makes sense to observe that the burial of someone who was *falso* in life would not be well attended, while the burial of someone who was *verdadeiro* in life would involve a funeral that was well attended. In other words, it appears that the false and the interested encounter their truth in death, and they are forgotten.

7. Loss of Goods

One way of looking at this account of Dr. Severino’s demise and eventual death is by looking at the different moments and kinds of loss that he experienced. The experiences of loss in this narrative, and in the other narratives above, can help us to get a sense of just what was lost in these different cases, and this, conversely, can help one develop a sense of what it was that was taken to be good. In other words, the “what” of loss can help to give an idea of the kinds of goods there are to be gained.

There are different moments of loss in the narrative, and through a sort of cascading effect, these seem to initiate even further experiences of loss. In Dr. Severino’s case, the first set of things to go seemed to be his plantation, his finances, and his bank credit. Following these,

¹⁴⁰ “Cuidado com ele, pois ele é muito falso!”

the parties came to an end and the whisky stopped flowing. The fewer parties he held, the less he was able to curry the favor of bank managers, and the less credit he was given to administer his plantation, and so on. Consequently, his friends departed, and he was left in increasing solitude with no one to talk to. The lack of company, increased inactivity, and solitude all compounded themselves and lead to greater inactivity while, on the other hand, meeting increasingly basic needs required more and more effort and physical exertion. He could no longer drive from place to place, but instead he had to start walking everywhere to procure even the most basic necessities, such as his daily bread. Eventually, his dominion over his home contracted and declined, and the house began to be dismantled. As he became relegated to a small room in the back of what was his house, similarly, his dominion over his body and mind decayed further and further. His own movements and thoughts became increasingly alien to him. And at the end, he was alone with himself, but a self that he was forgetting and increasingly unfamiliar with. Shortly after his death, and even before his physical death, he was forgotten.

Through this tragic narrative, we can derive a sense of the kinds and spheres of goods, and also the ways that they interact in order to constitute a social world. We can do so by looking at Dr. Severino's narrative in reverse:

(1) Body: As he was leaving life, control over his body and health were among the last goods to leave him. When coming into life, the body might be thought of as a first or primary good that one comes into.

(2) House & Small goods: Next, was control over his home as a kind of good that was an extension of personality, and goods that give shelter to and nurture the body, such as the bed he slept in.

(3) Social Relations: Before he lost control of his house, he lost his spouse—one of his last relationships that seemed to have been based on something like love and genuine affection. Before he lost his spouse, he had already started to lose his friendships, and before that, the regard of his creditors at the bank.

(4) World: All of those relationships had allowed him to build the small empire he inhabited, and that little empire was the first and perhaps most fragile good to be lost.

This series of goods, as an analytical abstraction, helps us to see how different kinds of goods are ordered and interrelated. While the process of loss, at least in Dr. Severino's narrative, does seem to suggest that these goods can be ordered in a sort of temporal and ordinal sequence, further consideration suggests that this need not be case. For example, one does not have full use and control over the body at birth, and rather comes into the world helpless and fully dependent upon a set of social relationships. So coming into one's body, as a kind of "good" that enables various forms of agency and activity, is preceded by other kinds of social goods. As a moment in a broader historical experience, Dr. Severino's loss of life and the loss of his goods, which followed and was partly an outcome of the posseiros' loss of their world, contributed to local historical understandings of justice and injustice. The unjust, if not criminal, activities that occurred in this period deepened people's understandings of the "underlying relations of recognition" (Honneth 1995:26) in social life, in property relations, and manifold other dimensions of the good. In Part Two, therefore, I turn to an examination of the interrelationships and structure among different forms of goods and recognition.

**PART TWO:
SOCIAL GOODS**

**CHAPTER 6:
THE STRUCTURE OF GOODS & RECOGNITION**

1. Themes of Goodness

Damião woke up early every day, usually around four or five in the morning when everyone else in the house, me included, was still trying to hold onto sleep. At this hour the only sounds that could be heard proceeded from the outside. Most of the other homes in the community would still be quiet. Often enough, one could hear the sound of the early morning rain striking down upon the roof, or the sound of wind coursing through the canopy of the rubber groves nearby. Damião's waking was invariably accompanied by a series of characteristic sounds. Among the first was that of an aluminum pot being filled with water, which was subsequently placed over the flames on the stove-top. Eventually, the back door would open, and the sound of chickens rushing toward the door could be heard as Damião emerge with a small bag of corn to feed them. The sound of the rustling chickens would rise once, rise again, and then rise once more as he threw each handful of corn upon the ground. Eventually, one heard the sound of a metal spoon grating against the sides of the aluminum pot, as Damião mixed generous quantities of ground coffee and sugar into the boiling water.

At some point during this procession of sounds, Damião would turn on the radio. It was the radio from Gandu—"Gandu FM." Every morning, the DJ would make announcements about crop prices; the value of the Brazilian Real vis-à-vis the U.S. Dollar; announce local events; and mention highlights from both regional and national news. These varied announcements appeared

between stretches of music, a love-sick *seresta* ballad, a playful *forró* tune, or perhaps a song by Coldplay or Madonna.

On rare occasions, the DJ would play recordings of traditional *repentista* singers who, singing in pairs, took turns improvising verses about different themes. Their mourning voices, and the drone of their steel-string guitars, added something to the dreamlike state between waking and sleeping. Every now and then, and on several repeated occasions, the DJ would play one song in particular, and something about the lyrics took hold in those moments. The song was simply called “Mote em Decassílabo,” and was performed by two repentistas named Arnaldo Cipriano and Paulo Pereira. A *mote* is a thought that is expressed or developed in one or more verses, and a *decassílabo* is a verse form that is comprised of 10 lines, the last two of which are always repeated.

The theme in this particular song plays out over the course of eight verses, and is a meditation on the end of life and the activity of an old repentista singer who comes to terms with the arrival of old age, and the end of his career. Verses 1 and 7 develop this theme:¹

- (1) **Old Age** has arrived and will not permit // me to live from this profession any longer. // With all my heart, I thank // all of those who filled me with invitations [to perform]. // The **Guitar** has reached its **Limit**, // I’ve closed this chapter of the story. // I will build a museum to save **Her** // where the arms of man cannot reach. // *I will leave the **Guitar** as a reminder, // so that the **Family** will know that it lived from her.*²
- (7) **Old Age** arrived without warning me, // bringing me **Illness** as a prize. // It said: “Leave this Bohemian life; // the guitar, drink, table, and bar.” // For me, the only path was to leave [that life], // as those who attempt to go against the years are only tread upon. //

¹ The full set of verses, in order in which they occur, can be found in Appendix 2. Those entities that appear in the lyrics as especially salient figures—such as the “Guitar” or “Old Age” or “Struggle”—will be marked as proper names and highlighted in bold.

² [Verse 1] “A idade chegou e não permite // Que eu viva mais desta profissão // Agradeço de todo coração // Aos que me encheram de convite // A viola chegou a seu limite // Eu findei o capítulo da novela // Vou fazer um museu e guardar ela // Onde o braço do homem não alcança // Vou deixar a viola por lembrança // Pra família saber que viveu dela.”

Because once **Time** has put on its seal, // no matter how fearless, the wild are tamed. // *I will leave the **Guitar** as a reminder, // so that the **Family** can know that it lived from her.*³

The singer is forced to put away the guitar and retire, as he faces a new cast of others that have entered into his life: Old Age, Illness, and Time. These others irretrievably removed him from his life activity, as keeping up with the long voyages and many invitations to sing, as suggested below, will now have become too arduous.

But the singer had made a good life; together with the guitar, he had been able to provide for their family. Verses 3 and 4 develop this theme, acknowledging the series of relationships of giving and taking that had enabled him to provide for such a life:

(3) I raised nine children with the **Guitar**, // help from **God**, and from **Friends**. // I traveled to the most ancient places, // but I did not leave any [of my children] begging for alms. // I gave [them] shoes, I gave them clothing, I gave them schooling; // food was never missing from the pot. // We were two **warriors, Me and Her**; // those who **Struggled** as we did one day will **tire**. // *I will leave the **Guitar** as a reminder, // so that the **Family** can know that it lived from her.*⁴

(4) My whole family was raised // owed to my intelligence. // Under the affection of my own [family] and in my absence, // the guitar was always respected in my hands. // She gave me everything and asked for nothing in return, // she was the mother to the family that cares for me. // If my son understands that he owes [his life] to her, // [then the guitar implores,] “Don’t hide me from our neighbors.” // *I will leave the **Guitar** as a reminder, // so that the **Family** can know that it lived from her.*⁵

³ [Verse 7] “A velhice chegou sem me avisar//Me trazendo a doença como premio//Disse: “Deixe essa vida de Boêmio//A viola, bebida, mesa e bar.”//Eu o jeito que tive foi deixar//Que quem vai contra os anos se atropela//Que depois que o tempo bota sela//Por valente que seja o brabo amansa// *Vou deixar a viola por lembrança//Pra família saber que viveu dela.*”

⁴ [Verse 3] “Nove filhos criei com a viola//Ajuda de Deus e dos amigos//Percorri os lugares mais antigos//Mais não deixei nenhum pedi esmola//Dei calçado, dei roupa, dei escola//Não faltou alimento na panela//Fomos duas batalhas, eu e ela//Quem lutou como nós um dia cansa//*Vou deixar a viola por lembrança//Pra família saber que viveu dela.*”

⁵ [Verse 4] “Toda minha família foi criada//A custa da minha inteligência//Nos afagos dos meus e na ausência//A viola por mim foi respeitada//Me deu tudo e de mim não cobrou nada//Foi a mãe da família que me zela//Se meu filho entender que deve a ela//“Não me esconde da nossa vizinhança.”//*Vou deixar a viola por lembrança//Pra família saber que viveu dela.*”

These verses acknowledge a series of dependent relationships that, over the course of the Repentista's life, helped to enable the provision of care and goods to his family: shoes, clothing, schooling, food. The Repentista and Guitar are acknowledged primary and mutually dependent "warriors," engaged in the kind of life-battles that pertain to their particular form of life. While the repentista seems to initially attribute his success in providing for his family to his own activity and "intelligence," he is, in turn, compelled to acknowledge his inextricable dependence upon the Guitar and others—God, friends, and others—that accompanied and aided him.

The Guitar, in particular, is recognized as having provided incessant and selfless care, as the primary source of wellbeing for the singer and his family. The Guitar stands in as the "mother" of all, as the source of wellbeing for the repentista and his family. The aging repentista implores his children to acknowledge this relationship to the Guitar, and the Guitar asks to not be hidden from the family's neighbors and friends. The recurring line at the end of each verse represents an effort by the Repentista, for his part, to bring that recognition about.

Thus far, the verses acknowledge a series of dependent relationships, but they suggest a subtle distinction between *kinds* and *ways of depending*, which themselves appear as a form of goodness. Depending upon the Guitar, God and Friends allows the repentista, and more notably, his family, to remove themselves from what appear as marked or problematic forms of depending, such as begging for alms. Unlike the relationship between the Repentista and the Guitar, and the cultivation of an artistic practice, begging for alms places people in a position of dependency in which their connection to others is more tenuous. Begging depends upon the luck of encountering a kind soul, which may or may not appear, and may occur far less frequently than an ill will that might take what little you have. Cultivating a relationship with the Guitar, with God, with Friends is a means of removing some of the uncertainty of mere luck, by creating forms of dependency (or way of relying upon one another) that are based on care and the cultivation of a relationship. Ways of depending have a direct bearing upon the forms of goodness or evil that one encounters in the world.

The second verse presents an element of longing in the mutual relationship of the Guitar and the Repentista, who, in some respects, appear to be the only ones who fully grasp the extent of their joint struggle and the family's dependence upon their work, toil, and suffering. In

having labored together, and more readily “understanding”⁶ one another, both Repentista and Guitar long for one another:

- (2) This simple guitar companion, // she misses the fingers of its owner. // [She was] eyewitness of the **Fatigue** I endured, // as I entertained the Brazilian family. // The voyages from which I earned my living, // the tunes that I strummed upon her. // When I depart [this world], she remains but does not reveal // that in the **Struggle**, she was my security. // *I will leave the **Guitar** as a reminder, // so that the **Family** can know that it lived from her.*⁷

In certain respects, only the Repentista and Guitar fully grasp the “Struggle” through which they had jointly proceeded in the course of life. In many ways, only the Guitar fully comprehends the full extent of the Repentista’s toil, which may go unacknowledged by the Family. The Guitar was the true witness to the effort and Fatigue endured by the Repentista, through all of the voyages, songs, and performances. In other words, full recognition of one another may really only be possible between the Singer and Guitar through the work that they had undertaken jointly. The Repentista reveals that the Guitar, which had borne witness to his own struggles, had been his security throughout. Seeing that the Guitar was too humble to ask for much acknowledgement as a primary and basic source of life for both the Repentista and his family, the Repentista makes efforts to secure the memory and acknowledgement of her role in the family’s life.

In other words, outside of their relationship, the Guitar can only be revealed to others by the Repentista who hopes that, through his efforts, the Family will acknowledge the Guitar as a crucial source of their existence. The Repentista, in turn, faces the problem that his own life-producing activity may go unacknowledged by the Family. In the same way that the Guitar depends upon the Repentista to reveal, or fail to reveal, the latter’s dependence on the former, the Repentista likewise depends upon others to reveal the Repentista. Like the Guitar who was too

⁶ “Understanding” here could be thought of in the sense of the German term *Verstehen*, developed through Dilthey, Simmel, and Weber, as the process and ability to enter into standpoints outside of one’s own.

⁷ [Verse 2] “Essa simples viola companheira, // Sente falta dos dedos do seu dono, // Testemunha ocular que passei sono, // Divertindo a família brasileira // As viagens que fiz a minha feira // As toadas que eu dedilhava nela // Eu partindo ela fica e não revela // Que na luta foi minha segurança // Vou deixar a viola por lembrança // Pra família saber que viveu dela.”

humble to reveal her own role, the Repentista is not able to demand this acknowledgement of his role, but in turn depends upon others to reveal who he had been for others:

- (5) The longing that I'm sorry to leave behind // is so much that I am sorry to know. // Because wherever I passed, I only gave joy; // I never lacked respect in any home. // I will leave, but my **Name** will remain, // divulged by all my clientele. // If someone injures my name, another will reveal it: // "He was poor but he was trustworthy." // *I will leave the **Guitar** as a reminder, // so that the **Family** can know that it lived from her.*⁸

In other words, the **Name** of the Guitar and the Repentista alike are beholden to Others who reveal their name. The Repentista does what he can to have the Guitar acknowledged, because he acknowledges the Guitar himself; but he cannot guarantee that the Guitar will be acknowledged by the Family. This work of acknowledgment, however, is one that neither the Guitar nor the Repentista can do for themselves. Both depend upon others for that acknowledgement, which is not guaranteed anyway.

In addition to the themes of memory, and the acknowledging of the connections that have drawn their life together—which emerges most clearly in the last line of each verse—another theme emerges in Verse 6, which suggests a certain pain and suffering is involved in recalling the life story:

- (6) If, in every moment, I were to remember // this goddess, so pure and so legitimate. // If I remembered every moment when I was the victim// of longing, of weeping, and of emotion. // Recalling the past, I cannot bear it, // a nervous crisis overtakes me. // I've already stopped singing and put her away, // I see **Time** ending my hope. // *I will leave the **Guitar** as a reminder, // so that the **Family** can know that it lived from her.*⁹

⁸ [Verse 5] "A saudade que sinto de deixar//É do tanto que sinto de saber//Que por onde passei só dei prazer//Não faltei com respeito em nenhum lar//Vou sair mais meu nome vai ficar//Divulgado por toda clientela//Se um ferir o meu nome outro revela://“Era pobre mais tinha confiança.”//*Vou deixar a viola por lembrança//Pra família saber que viveu dela.*"

⁹ [Verse 6] "Se eu for recordar todo momento//Essa deusa tão pura e tão legítima//Se eu lembrar a todo instante serem vítima//De saudade, de choro e sentimento//Recordando o passado eu não aguento//Uma crise nervosa me atropela//Já parei de cantar e guardei ela//Vejo o tempo findar minha esperança//*Vou deixar a viola por lembrança//Pra família saber que viveu dela.*"

This passage seems to suggest that there are limitations on remembering; not merely the limitations imposed through the interventions of Illness and Time, but also limitations on what is good to remember. There are some aspects and moments of the Repentista's and Guitar's time together that is too painful to remember and—as only the Guitar and Repentista know and mutually reveal the depths of their struggle together—then at least in some ways, the intervention of Illness and Time was a welcome respite from the past.

This suggests that just as there are *ways of remembering* and remaining connected to the past, there are equally important *ways of forgetting* and separating from certain aspects of the past. Forgetting appears as a good, albeit in a different way than the way that memory is good. Verse 8 makes it clear that creating spaces for memory is simultaneously the establishment of boundaries—that simultaneously draw together and separate out certain relationships—which is necessary in the recollection of a story:

- (8) If my family will recognize // that the guitar deserves to be safely stored. // A companion that must remain separated // from the one who sang so much, to whom it gave so much joy. // Do not trade or sell [the guitar], // sell some other object but leave her. // Many people may not touch her // because outsiders should not disturb inheritance. // *I will leave the **Guitar** as a reminder, // so that the **Family** can know that it lived from her.*¹⁰

Here, separating out certain relationships is necessary to stabilizing the connection among others, as the imposition of “outsiders” or the mistreatment of the Guitar could only serve to extinguish the life and story of the Repentista and Guitarist altogether. The establishment of boundaries allows the story of the Guitar and Repentista to be remembered and acknowledged.

Throughout this song and story, a series of relationships emerge and are acknowledged (or recognized) between various entities, some of which, at various turns, challenge the life of others. This was the case of Fatigue, Illness, and Old Age that appeared as salient and problematic figures over the course of the Struggle that the Repentista had undertaken. Outside and apart from the Repentista's manifold relationships—to his Guitar, his Family, his Friends,

¹⁰ [Verse 8] “Se a minha família conhecer//Que a viola merece ser guardada//Companheira que fica separada//De quem tanto cantou e lhe deu prazer//Não procura trocar e nem vender//Vende outro objeto e deixa ela//Muita gente não pode pegar nela//Que os de fora não mexe com herança//Vou deixar a viola por lembrança//Pra família saber que viveu dela.”

God, and all of his Clientele who esteem and reveal his true Name—the Repentista’s life and thriving in the world would be diminished, and Fatigue, Illness, and Old Age would overcome the singer in an unmitigated and destructive way.

The song offers several of the major themes that I will explore in this part of the ethnography, in this and the next three chapters. This song does not hold a particularly special place in regional life. It is not a “touchstone” or a “guidebook” for people’s lives; I never heard anyone make any single, let alone any special, comment about this song in particular. It was commonplace, a song that I occasionally heard on the radio, and there are many other songs like it that are part of the *repentista* genre. Still, this particular song represented a number of themes and idioms that I had often encountered in the region—about having a “name,” about “struggle,” and depending upon others, like “friends” and “God”—and it drew these various idioms together in a way that helped me understand the interrelations between them more clearly. While commonplace, this song could also be thought of as a poetic reflection about variations and interrelations of “the good,” providing an image of human dignity that form “part of the background of a conception of distributive justice” (Taylor 1986:36).¹¹ The rest of this chapter (together with the few chapters that follow) develops some of the themes that have emerged thus far, with the aim of building a broad account of human dignity and relationships. I would like to suggest that different aspects of this “background” conception of the human good—what it means to be a “person,” what it means to be in a property relation, or what it means to deserve justice—may themselves be taken to be the objects of critical reflection, and therefore a vision of human dignity and justice that is undergoing a process of renovation.¹² In other words, the very terms, contours, and authority of a regional “moral economy” are at stake.¹³ Struggles over moral economy will be seen to inform struggles over land, which I will explore in Part Three of this ethnography.

In the next Section 2, I develop a theme of the irrevocable condition of “dependency” that grounds all life together. First, I explore the local idiom and theme of “God” as exemplary of the

¹¹ As was briefly discussed in the Introduction, Section 2b.

¹² Working through the historicity of “background” conceptions that inform human sociality is difficult without resorting to comparisons of different historical “epochs” or stabilized historical “formations.” Perhaps more than other chapters, Chapter 11 attempts to show how some of the terms informing social life are being subject to critical reflection and re-valuation.

¹³ See Thompson (1971) for an early and influential articulation of the notion of “moral economy.” For further elaborations of the idea, see Edelman (2005, 2012); Randall and Charlesworth (2000); Scott (1976). For an application of the idea of moral economy in a context similar to the present one, see Wolford (2005).

recognition that one cannot go through life alone. In order to successfully live life together, however, certain boundaries and limits cannot be transgressed, for otherwise, life together falls apart. In Section 3, therefore, I explore the necessity of having “limits” in order to successfully live life together. I do so by exploring one man’s extended reflections on the need for having what he calls “limits” (*limites*), which can be thought of as a kind of boundary between self and other that is necessary in order to successfully live a life *together*. The notion of “limits,” as will be seen, appears to portend an inchoate notion of respect that involves recognizing the boundaries and limits that constitute the difference between self and other. Having limits and boundaries, , as will be seen, does not merely appear as a separation of the self and other, but also a way of *bringing* self and other *together* in ways that are fruitful and generative of social action. In the final Section 4, I briefly explore the life of one local sharecropper named Amado, whose limits had been violated in manifold ways by those others upon whom he depended most. This example will serve as exemplary of what it means to *exacerbate* the limits and conditions of another’s life. This will serve as a starting point for a discussion of a “miserly” being, which will be developed further in Chapter 7. In later chapters, the themes of Struggle, Fatigue, and Miserliness; of Generosity, Namehood, and Friendship; and of Trees, Persons, and Property will be developed in further detail. This will help to flesh out different dimensions of the good, justice, and moral economy, which, in turn, indicate potential sites and directions for social contestation and transformation.

2. God as a Companion

Biblical stories about God serve, in the first place, as a model for work. Many people in the rural areas build their houses very gradually, accumulating enough money to purchase bricks, cement, and gravel for the foundation; then wood for the framing and the roof, and tiles or sheet metal to cover the house. Houses might unfold over the course of several years. One man who was building his house in this manner suggested that, “God made the world slowly. We have to do it in the same manner.”¹⁴ In these processes of building and creating, God plays a particular

¹⁴ “Deus fez o mundo de vagar... a gente tem que fazer do mesmo jeito.” Fn448.

agentive role, and serves throughout as a companion. A common expression in the region goes: “Whomever works, God helps.”¹⁵ God always accompanies one’s work, whether on the plantations or on one’s own farm, and the figure of God appears as a constant across these very different contexts. On the plantations, God appears as the sole companion of the isolated plantation worker. One person who had joined one of the land reform movements, suggested: “On the plantation, the worker only has God. In the Landless Movement, we have friendship.”¹⁶

In another conversation among friends, another plantation worker suggested:

The thing that I find the most beautiful is when a person is struggling in his own patrimony, not depending upon anyone. Just him and God.¹⁷

Likewise, for those who sometimes go to work on their roças by themselves, their work is also accompanied by God. Jorge, whose family had a small farm, explained: “I work—I work alone and with my powerful father, Lord God.”¹⁸ Sebastião, who had also achieved independence from the plantations after decades of such work, likewise suggested that after he acquired a piece of land, and became his own boss, the only entity that had any power over him was God: “I work—me and God,”¹⁹ and he continued: “God commands me, he’s really my manager.”²⁰

In this last statement, Sebastião is drawing from the idiom of plantation life to paint a contrast. The plantation managers, in their caprice and whims, no longer ruled over him, and now he only served under God as his primary authority figure. In both the plantation context, and working on one’s own roça—as one’s own boss—work similarly appears as being done alone, except for the constant companionship of God. The kind of aloneness that appeared in the plantation context, as will be seen in Chapter 10, however, was an artifact of the separation that was forced among the workers by the plantation management. In this case, a particular kind of worldly authority intervened in the workers’ relationships and kept them apart. In the context of the roça, however, aloneness was an artifact of the fact that, often times, some work simply happens to be done alone—depending on whether or not one’s family members, neighbors, or

¹⁵ “Quem trabalha, Deus ajuda.”

¹⁶ “Na fazenda, ele só tem Deus...no Sem Terra nós tem amizade.” Fn513.

¹⁷ “A coisa que eu acho mais linda é a pessoa lutando no patrimonio dele, não dependendo de ninguém. So ele e Deus.” Fn486.

¹⁸ “Eu trabalho, trabalho sozinho e meu pai poderoso Senhor Deus.”

¹⁹ “Eu trabalho, eu e Deus.” Fn322.

²⁰ “Deus ta me ordenando, é meu gerente mesmo.” Fn322.

friends, or an occasional hired hand comes to help with one's work on any given day. The way in which the aloneness is constituted, in that case, depends more upon the changing exigencies of work rather than the structure of the plantation. God's companionship is constant throughout, and in Sebastião's case, God was viewed as the model of companionship and what "management" should be. The figure of God, furthermore, also served as a model that surpasses other kinds of worldly authorities.

2a. God & Skepticism toward Worldly Authority

As our conversation evolved, Sebastião continued to explain that "God is the judge, prosecutor, deputy, manager...He resolves everything."²¹ In another context, Damião likewise suggested that: "The lawyer for the small people is God above." In these respects, then, God appears as a highly skilled professional: "God above is the medical doctor for poor people."²²

These are common expression and conceptions of God, and they appear, in the first place, as a reflection of widespread experiences of being cut off from various kinds of social services, whether legal justice, adequate health care, and, of course, their own experiences as plantation workers working under management. In these cases, God stands in as a replacement for these various worldly authorities. Wherever justice is done, whenever health is maintained, and work is fruitful and fulfilling, these facts are partly attributed to God's intervention, in place of the failed mediation of actual judges, medical doctors, lawyers, and so on. In these cases, God appears as the last and perhaps only recourse, and the ultimate agency. Another person, in discussing medical problems and poor health, suggested that even for the rich, God has the final say: "If God said there is no more solution, then money won't resolve anything."²³

While watching television with Damião one evening, a news report aired that was on the topic of cancer. Damião wondered why, or so it seemed to him, it was mostly rich people that got cancer. He wasn't quite sure why this was. Our conversation that followed led him to reflect further on the conditions of life under wealth and poverty. Damião discussed the different foods that rich and poor people eat. The rich, for example, get to eat the good cuts of meat—the "filet"

²¹ "Juiz, Promotor, Delegado, Gerente...ele resolve tudo." Fn322.

²² "O advogado do pequeno é só Deus lá em cima"; "O medico do pobre é só Deus lá em cima" Fn281.

²³ "Se Deus disse que não tem mais solução, dinheiro não resolve mais nada." Fn254.

(*filé*)—whereas the poor, he explained, get to eat the “bone meat” (*carne de oso*). Unlike filet meat, however, bone meat is conceived of as being “stronger” (*mais forte*) and healthier. This was fortunate, he explained, since the poor do not have access to good doctors, and having better food could at least compensate. He went on to explain that the medical doctor that serves the poor was God, and this was also fortunate, he explained, because “God is the best doctor.”²⁴ In some respects, Damião saw the poor as being the privileged class.

From an institutional standpoint, many people express an institutionally sparse and relatively unmediated relationship with God, and this appears to be owed to a very real sense of alienation from various forms of worldly authority. These criticisms of judges, medical doctors, and lawyers extend to church leaders and (as will be seen in Chapter 13) social movement leaders, all of whom are taken as being equally fallible and potentially corruptible. In many cases, then, the absence of worldly authorities is taken to be a good thing given that such relationships have all too often failed. At the settlement at Nossa Senhora, which will be described in more detail in Chapter 12, where there are no social movement leaders to whom land reform beneficiaries are beholden, a man named Edgar suggested that the only authority that was present on their settlement was God. There were no intermediaries—whether priest, pastors, social movement leaders: “Here, it’s just us and God. Us and God.”²⁵

These understandings of God, as reflections upon people’s alienation from various aspects of civil society, are also tied directly to deep skepticism about worldly religious institutions. Although Evangelical, and especially Pentecostal, churches are common throughout the region, public critiques of these churches abound. Their criticisms of church leaders are identical to those criticisms that many rural people level against plantation managers and social movement leaders, alike. After eating dinner one evening, Damião rubbed his stomach and said, “Hallelujah. My belly’s full,” and he commented that “We have to be religious before God.”²⁶ He made a distinction, however, that one should not be religious before the churches, which only seek to “enrich” (*enriquecse*) themselves. He suggested that the reason why the evangelical church pastors prohibit the congregation from watching television is because “television

²⁴ “[Deus] é o melhor médico.” Fn16.

²⁵ “Aquí é só Deus e nós, Deus e a gente.” Fn234.

²⁶ “Alleluia. A barriga cheia.” “A gente tem que ser religioso perante de Deus.” Fn377.

teaches,” and in watching television, he suggested, congregation members might see that the churches were fallible.²⁷

The evangelical churches are viewed by many as being business enterprises, and many people reject the evangelical churches outright. Damião, for example, suggested that the new churches are “businesses” through which pastors “sell the word of God.”²⁸ Elsewhere, he criticized the evangelicals, suggesting that they are not actually “believers” even though they claim to be: “Here in this region they say there are ‘believers’ (*crentes*), but the [true] believer is God...We were all [equally] created by God.”²⁹ The pastors, he suggested, “work earning their bread by saying they’re believers.”³⁰ Many debates occurred over these topics. On one afternoon, Damião suggested that “There are all kinds of work. But now, to go out selling the name of God to put money in your pocket!” This was seen as illegitimate. He joked with one of his interlocutors, “[You should] go around selling the name of God, you’ll get rich quick, Murilo!”³¹ One reason this may be viewed as illegitimate is because God is a basic condition for all creative work and the creation of well-being, and one cannot successfully create wealth and wellbeing by selling that upon which all wealth and well-being are founded upon.

A plantation worker who was present for another of these debates recounted a story about one afternoon when he was cutting wood with a chainsaw. His wife had come asking him to contribute money to the church that she had been frequenting, telling him that it was in his interest to contribute, for otherwise he would find himself suffering in hell (*inferno*). He became angry at that point, suggesting that he was paying his dues to the world right then and there as he worked and that he would not give any money to a pastor.³²

Damião, who was present for this debate, suggested that he did not believe in paying the 10% tithes (*dízimo*) demanded by the Catholic or Protestant churches. “God,” he suggested, “doesn’t beg for alms.”³³ He went on to explain that “my tithes” is helping others when they need help, and especially those who have various kinds of ailments or physical conditions that prevent them from helping themselves. He gave an example of a plantation worker whose wife had

²⁷ Fn377.

²⁸ “Vendendo a palavra de Deus.”

²⁹ “Aqui na região dizem que tem crente, mas o crente é Deus...Nos somos tudo feito por ele.” Fn322.

³⁰ “trabalha pra ganhar o pão, dizendo que é crente.” Fn322.

³¹ “Existe trabalho de todo tipo. Agora sair vendendo o nome de Deus pra botar dinheiro no bolso”; “Sair vendendo o nome de Deus, você enriquece rapido Murilo!” Fn392.

³² Fn245.

³³ “Deus não pede esmola.” Fn246.

fallen gravely ill. The worker did not have enough money to take her into town and stay with her in the hospital, so Damião went around from house to house in the community and asked people to contribute to a collection of money. In sum, he was able to collect R\$50 to help the couple.

Another person, another plantation worker, overheard this conversation and was inspired to share a story of helping a stranger whom he had encountered begging in the street. He had met an elderly woman in a nearby town, who had come to ask him for money, as she was no longer able to work and was living on very little. The man said to her, “Look, I don’t have any money I can give you, but...” Instead, he opened up one of his grocery bags and gave the woman a large package of crackers that he had just purchased.³⁴

Even some of the faithful “believers” (*crentes*) who attend the evangelical churches express similar skepticism about church authorities. One man named Gabriel, who was a regular member of a local Pentecostal church, likewise saw many of these churches as a “commercial good” (*bem commercial*), or enterprise. He counted one of the local Pentecostal churches in this category, which he took to be the reason that this church, in particular, was more permissive with respect to the congregation’s behavior. Members were allowed to play games like soccer, dominos, snooker, and to walk about “without a shirt,” “wear short shorts,”³⁵ among other behaviors. These facts, to him, were indicative that this particular Pentecostal church was being run as a commercial good.

He suggested that if and when he ever perceives his own church as being run as a commercial enterprise, he would simply “jump ship” (*pulo fora*). He contributes to the church, as he understands that the church has costs. When he gives, he suggested, he does so because his heart tells him to, and not because the pastor “requires” (*exige*) it. Like many people who are overtly hostile to the Pentecostal churches—for the same reason that they appear to be illegitimate commercial enterprises—in Gabriel’s case, he viewed his “commitment” (*compromisso*) as being between “me and God,” and not to any particular church or any particular pastor.

2b. God, Agency, and Uncertainty

³⁴ Fn246.

³⁵ “andar sem camisa,” “vestir short curto” Fn582.

Perhaps being alone with God in one's work was not a wholly bad thing. In some respects, being socially alienated and abandoned by worldly authorities might appear as a cue to carry on with the work of life in the absence of plantation managers and the various schemes of church pastors.³⁶ As has been seen so far, the notion of God in this context does not appear as some kind of entity that observes from afar, but rather something that is immanent in every turn and movement through the world. This recurrent theme—of always being in God's company—suggests that the idea of God is immanent in the self-relation. There is no self that is wholly isolated, no matter how alienated or disenfranchised; no matter how individuated, there is always God.³⁷ If there is the recognition that one cannot live absent from relationships to others, then even in the most alienated social situations, in which one is cut off from all manner of social relationships, there is still God. In contrast to those things that had cut people off from the means of life and from the good, God is something that brings the self into connection with others and other kinds of goods. There is never any unmitigated “aloneness,” because even in aloneness there is always something more, and that something is God. Antônia expressed this idea in the following manner:

So, I'm here today—I'm here thanks to God. When there are people [visiting]—I'm here, I'm here [with them]. When nobody else is here, I'm with God.³⁸

This idea of God helps to bring clarity to the idea that, despite what might appear to be total and complete isolation or alienation, there is always something more. The idea of hoping for something else, *in spite of* everything that seems to have closed you off from the world, is based on the recognition that those things that appear to have shut you off from the world are not the whole world. There is always something more, however inchoate and germinal.

Describing all of the different kinds of work she engaged in during her youth, Antônia explained that in every form of work, God was present:

³⁶ This presupposes, of course, that people have some independent means to generate a life and a livelihood.

³⁷ As was seen in the previous chapter, Dr. Severino had become increasingly alone and isolated given his instrumental stance toward others. His condition at the end of life raises the question of whether or not, according to local notions of God, a person like Dr. Severino would still be accompanied by God at the end of his life.

³⁸ “E aí to aqui hoje—to aqui graças a Deus. Quando tem gente eu fico aqui, fico aqui. Quando num tem, eu fico com Deus.”

Whether [grasping] the handle of a hoe, the handle of a machete, the handle of an axe—I did the work by myself, I could bring four—four, three—four loads of manioc to the casa de farinha. I got along all by myself, and with God—while my children were still little.³⁹

Antônia’s husband had died at a young age, and she had been left alone with the children. At that time, there were none of the government welfare programs that there are today, and a woman in her situation had to get by with very little help:

Women who gave birth in the early days, what was the help that they had? Help from God and from the—from the—from the child’s father. If she could—if she could get by well, she got by well—well, only so-so. If she couldn’t get by, then things were bad, and she just had to keep going.⁴⁰

Antônia described her work when her children were still young, after her husband’s death. While her family owned land, what they were able to produce for themselves was not always enough, and sometime she had to go out in search of paid labor. On those occasions, she would leave her children with her sister and leave for several days at a time, looking for work on the nearby farms and plantations:

I left the kids with their aunt and went to work far away. I only returned on Saturdays.

I asked her if she went to these plantations to work by herself or if she went with other people. She replied:

I went alone and with God.⁴¹

³⁹ “Tanto fazia no cabo da enxada, como no cabo do facão, no cabo do machado—eu fazia tarefa sozinha, botava qua—quato, três—quato cangaia de mandioca na casa de farinha. Eu me virava sozinha e Deus, os minino tudo pequeno.”

⁴⁰ “A muié de primero que ganhava nenê colé ajuda qui tinha? Ajuda de Deus e do, do, do pai da criança. Se pudesse, se pudesse passar bem, passava—bem não, meia, meia. Se num pudesse, passava mal mermo e aí tocava o pau pa frente.”

⁴¹ “Deixava os minino mais a tia e ia trabaiar longe. Só vinha no dia de Sabo.” “Eu ia sozinha e Deus.”

When she would prepare new manioc fields, Antônia described how she would prepare the fields by first clearing and felling a small stretch of forest. Clearing the forest was done most easily by starting at the bottom of the hill and gradually working your way upward. After clearing the undergrowth (described in Chapter 7, Section 2), Antônia would cut the trunks of the trees on the lower portion of the forest, but cut just deep enough so that they would not fall from their stumps. When she got to the top of the hill, Antônia would cut the tree at the top of the hill. This tree was a sort of keystone to felling the other trees. Unlike all of the other trees, which she would cut just deep enough so that they would remain standing, Antônia would fell the last tree at the top of the hill so that it would fall down toward the bottom of the hill. As this last tree fell down the hill, it would fall upon the other trees below it, and in this way, it would create a cascading effect through which all of the trees, at length, would be brought down. Antônia explained:

When I arrived there up top, then I—the [last] tree—because I cut the [last] tree [at the top of the hill] and then I’d knock the tree from—from—from the stump, from its place, right? When it fell, then that whole stretch of trees fell [beneath it]. The noise went:

“UUUUUAAAAAAAAAAAAA!”

To make [that last tree] fall, I would holler:

“IIIIHHHHHHUUUUUUUUUUUU!”

[There I was,] alone there in the middle of the forest, [me] and God. Alone in the middle of the forest—oh I was tough, I was tough!⁴²

In her early days, Antônia suggested that everyone as was equally poor, whereas today nobody is poor any longer. She considered herself and her family poor: “[we] were poor, but

⁴² “Quando chegava lá em cima aí eu—o pau—que eu cortava o pau aí eu decepava o pau do, do, do toco, né do lugar? Quando decepava, aí caía aquela camada de pau e a, a zoada fazia: ‘Uuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuu!’// Por pocar aí embaixo, aí eu fazia: ‘Iiiiiihhhhhuuuuuuuuuuuu!’//Sozinha no mei da mata e Deus. Sozinha no mei da mata, era braba, eu era braba.”

not lacking in the graces from God.”⁴³ The graces of God took the form of the return gift on their labor upon the world. She expressed an ethos of work, as a sort of interchange and exchange with God, where one’s work and striving, on the one hand, was returned by God in the form of being given something to eat:

People have to remain diligent, and work with trust in the Lord. [You have to] make something. If you don’t have anything today, [if you] don’t have something to eat today, tomorrow God will give it to you.⁴⁴

In an interview with another elderly woman named Francinha, she reflected on her rural upbringing and how her aunt had taught her how to work and to plant. Like Antônia, she similarly suggested that the relationship between God and her work was one of an exchange:

We only have that which God gives—because we work, asking God—and we work because God gives.⁴⁵

These particular expressions of God do not, therefore, express a total lack of capacity or agency on the part of Antônia or Francinha, but rather an endemic reliance upon others in giving fruit to one’s activity. In one sense, the fruits of one’s labor do not emerge solely from one’s own efforts, and, in this respect, there is a certain measure of uncertainty as to the outcomes of one’s efforts. This uncertainty points toward the non-reducible otherness that is the counterpart and condition to all creative action, and acknowledging this uncertainty also acknowledges that no person alone can completely determine the ends of their own action. The presence of God, immanent in all activity, is a reminder that there is always something other to one’s action, but it is that otherness that provides the occasion for creative labor. I elaborate these points at length in Chapter 9 in the discussion of trees.

⁴³ “Era pobre, não das graças de Deus.”

⁴⁴ “A pessoa tem de ter sua diligencia de trabalhar confiado no Senhor, faz uma coisa, se ele num tiver hoje, num tiver o qui cumer hoje, amanhã Deus dá.”

⁴⁵ “A gente só tem aquilo qui Deus dá—qui a gente trabalha, pede a Deus—e a gente trabalha qui Deus dá.”

2c. *God, Work, and Future Hope*

In other cases, God appears as being more clearly in control over Antônia's and Francinha's lives. Toward the end of their lives, both women reflected upon their age, their illness, and their increasing dependence upon God. Antônia reflected on moments in recent years when illness, which was "other" to her health and physical wellbeing, had overtaken her and reduced her to inactivity. She attributed her recovery and the removal of illness to God's intervention:

I couldn't sweep the house, worse yet clean the floors. Today, thanks to God, I can do everything.⁴⁶

Francinha, likewise, reflected upon God's role in keeping her in life:

And well, here we are, hanging on as long as God wills it. The one who knows all is God. Now, if it's in God's plan for me to leave here for another place, well, then I'll leave. And if it's not in God's plan—⁴⁷

In this context, Francinha is not talking about leaving the world for another place—the afterlife, or some beyond. Instead, she is talking about moving on to another house. Discussing her current living situation, she explained that she had moved into town where she could be closer to medical services upon which she depends. The house she lives in is located in a high traffic area near the entrance to town, and it can be dangerous to walk around. As she is losing her vision, she cannot go out of the house alone. In this context, she is hoping that perhaps one day she will have an opportunity to live elsewhere, but there is great uncertainty as to whether or not this will ever become a reality:

I just don't know. The one who knows is God, because God has seen to it that this is my house. There's no other resource [place to live]—this is the resource, this right here.

⁴⁶ "Num varria uma casa, piorou pa passar pano em casa. Hoje graças a Deus faço tudo."

⁴⁷ "E aí, tamos pur aqui rolano até quando Deus quiser. Quem sabe de tudo é Deus. Agora, se for marcação de Deus de eu sair daqui pra outro lugar, bom, eu poderei sair. E se não for marcação de Deus..."

And if He sees that I deserve to have a place that's a little better, He'll give it to me.
Because God's faith is great, God is powerful. God above everything, nothing above
God.⁴⁸

Not only does Francinha face the epistemic difficulty of facing an unknown future, she also recognizes that the course of the future, increasingly, depends less and less upon her own agency and creative capacities. Toward the end of life, God appears here as an important causal agent. Francinha's husband, Mateus, likewise pointed toward God as an important causal force:

A person who's my age—or her age—[that person] could say:

“My Lord, I will die without any future at all.”

But one shouldn't—as long as one is alive—one shouldn't lose hope. Well, those who are living still wait, [they wait for] some hope later on later on. Because you shouldn't lose hope (*esmorecer*), because if you lose hope, it's worse. When they're still alive, the person should stay close to God and trust in some hope. Because God marks [plans] everything, God marks everything.⁴⁹

The idea of waiting and hoping—derived from the same term, *esperar*—point to the dual character of hope, as something occurring in future time, and as something external to the subject's control. In certain respects, then, everyone is irreducibly dependent upon God, insofar as God is all of that which is uncertain about action and the future. The notion of “God,” in this context, is simultaneously an expression of uncertainty and the potential hardships one may face, but also the grounds for hope. One cannot know in advance what will come, whether good or bad, and at the very least, the course of the future is neither guaranteed to be good nor bad.

⁴⁸ “Mas não sei, quem sabe é Deus, qui Deus ver qui a minha casa é esta mermo. Num tem ricurso, o ricurso é esse, é aqui mermo. E se Ele ver qui eu mereço qui tem outro lugarzinho melhor, Ele vai me dar. Porque a fé de Deus é grande, Deus é puderoso. Deus sobre tudo, nada sobre Deus.”

⁴⁹ “A pessoa ta da idade qui eu vivo—da idade qui ela vive—diz assim: “Meu Deus, eu vou morrer sem futuro de nada”. Ele num dheve, enquanto ele tiver vivo num dheve perder a isperança. Bom, e aí, sempre quem é vivo espera, alguma isperança mais tarde. Bom, porque num dheve ismurecer, por se for ismurecer é pior né? Bom, e aí, a pessoa them qui se apegar cum Dheus enquanto tiver vivo e ther confiança em aguma isperança. Que tudo quem marca é Dheus, Dheus é quem marca tudo.”

Importantly, though, the future can be fostered to at least some degree, and the bad mitigated through the role that people have to play in those activities that are available to them. This is seen most clearly in notions of work:

Each person—when each person’s still a child—the father works hard to raise them, the mother works hard to raise them. And so, [at the beginning of life], the child has nothing and [eventually] has to work, always waiting for the future. Because nobody is born *having*. He only has something when he becomes—[when he] grows up, comes into his own (*fica sobre si*), and starts to work for the future. That’s when he hangs on to God and says:

“I am going to take advantage of the future that God gave me.”

And well, that’s how it is—whenever works, always works waiting for the future.⁵⁰

The structure of activity and temporality in these passages is striking. First, hope is not some “beyond” apart from the world that one lives in—there is no mention of a heaven, or waiting for one’s rewards in the afterlife—but hope is something that meets you halfway and in this world. It is something that one can, in a sense, invite into one’s life through one’s work. Through work, God gives hope in return.

God and the hope that God provides, however, is not something over which one has complete control. If laboring in the world is a transformation of the world, this is not a complete domination or subsumption of the world. This will especially be seen in the “property” relation with trees that is discussed in Chapter 9. Mateus suggested that while his and Francinha’s work was a crucial part of their wellbeing, a part of his effort to “win his battle”⁵¹ of life—he added an important caveat:

⁵⁰ “Que a pessoa—a pessoa é minino—pai qui trabalha pa criar, mãe qui trabalha pa criar. Tudo e finarmente, bom, nada ele them, them qui trabalhando e sempre esperano o futuro, né? Porque, pessoas nenhuma nasceu theno, ele só them alguma coisa quando ele fica—cresce, qui fica sobre si, qui pega a trabalhar pu futuro. Bom, aí agora, qui ele se apega cum Dheus e diz assim: ‘Vou puvethar o futuro qui Dheus me dheu.’ Bom, e aí é assim—sempre quem trabaia, trabaia esperano o futuro.”

⁵¹ “Pa vencer minha bataia.”

We prevail in accordance with what God permits. And in the end, we have to console ourselves with the will of God.⁵²

Consoling oneself with the will of God, however, means accepting that there are other agents in the world against which one's efforts can fail. Earlier in the interview, talking about illness that he and his wife suffered, he suggested that Illness has been, in some cases, an agency over which neither he nor Francinha have been able to prevail, and thus they find themselves solely at the mercy of God:

We really do live in the hands of—of God. And the little future that we have these days, it's nothing in the face of Illness.⁵³

In this section, I have explored the notion of God in order to explore the more general problem of agency, and the relationship of various others in the exercise of activity. God has appeared throughout this section as an ultimate expression of agency, and the recognition that in all work and other activity, there is a non-eliminable form of otherness that grounds the possibility of all agency and that allows for some form of temporal hope.

In other respects, as has been seen, God appears as a stand-in for the failure of other worldly authorities to acknowledge the activity and needs of those over whom they are supposed to administer or govern. The distant remove that plantation managers, lawyers, or medical doctors have from the lives of many rural people means that these latter are cut off from certain forms and possibilities of activity, social meaning, and recognition—cut off from meaningful work, cut off from justice, cut off from health. In these respects, people have to go through life alone, accompanied by God, and by those friends that they make along the way.

Recognizing that the self is not *all*, however, and that one is irrevocably dependent upon other agents, is a simultaneous acknowledgement that there are limits to what one can do, and also the acknowledgement that *doing* requires others, as was seen in the analysis of the Repentista and Guitar, above. There, furthermore, we saw that the *joint doing* that the Repentista and Guitar undertook was also a positive embrace of the limits between them and of their

⁵² “E tamos venceno conforme Dheus dá a licença. E finalmente nós dheve se consolar cum as vontade de Dheus.”

⁵³ “Nós véve nas mão mermo de, de Dheus e o futuro pouco hoje em dia pa duença num é nada.”

differences that, drawn together, also enabled them to engage in forms of activity that they could not undertake alone. In this sense, then, the notion of *limits* and *limitation* becomes a productive dimension of a relationship that enables (rather than curtails) the achievement of certain goods.

3. Limits of Goods, and Limits as Goodness

The idea of a “limit” is derived from an extended, several hour reflection about various experiences of transgression that I had recorded with an elderly man named Adonias, who lived on one of the MST settlements in the region. Adonias was 80 years old at the time of the interview in 2010, and had been denouncing the MST’s regional leaders for having violated the trust of many of the settlers living there. His reflections about these and other transgressions occasioned a reflexive discourse about the notion of limits, in a very broad sense. The notion that he referred to as a “limit” (*limite*) is not a common cultural idiom in the way that the notion of “eating” is explored as a generative evaluative idiom in Chapter 7. Through these reflections, however, Adonias appears to be capturing some novel normative insights that will be described in later chapters.

Adonias was semi-literate, and had been practicing his reading skills by reading “Bible Lessons” (*Lições Bíblicas*) that circulated widely and were readily available in the region. After a very long set of conversations about the notion of “limits,”⁵⁴ as he sought to elaborate the notion, he explained that he had gotten inspiration for his thoughts on “limits” from one of the lessons he had read about the Book of Jeremiah. This particular Bible lesson was published on June 27th, 2010, little more than a week before our first conversation about “limits” on July 7th. This means that Adonias had been thinking about this particular word for several days, and he was ready to talk it over with someone who was willing to listen.

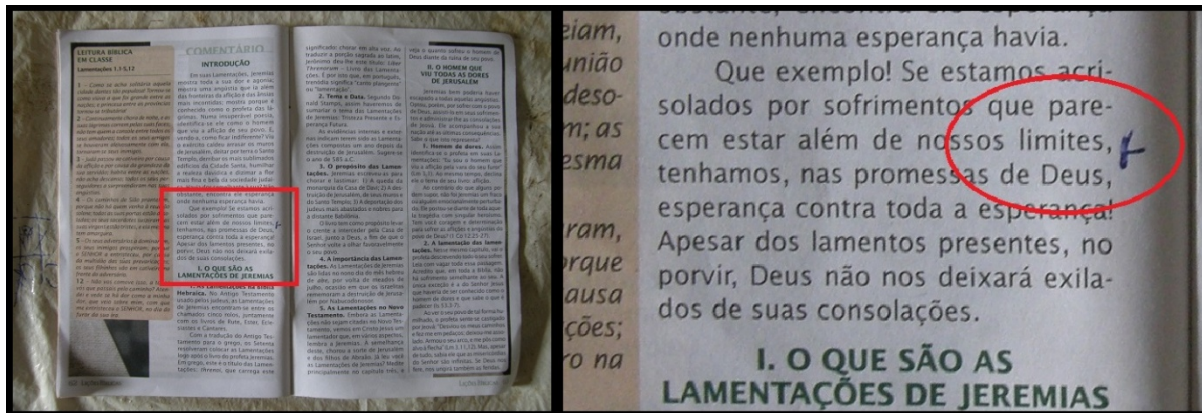
This section of the Bible lesson was an exegesis of the suffering that Jeremiah had undergone, and, at one point in the lesson, the text suggests the possibility of being “refined” or “purified” through the experience of suffering:

⁵⁴ The total time of these interviews, recorded on two occasions, was 223 minutes, or nearly 3.75 hours.

If we are refined (*acrisolados*) by suffering that appears to be beyond our **limits**, then we have, from God’s promises, hope against all hope! In spite of the present lamentations, from hereafter, God will not leave us exiled from their consolations.⁵⁵

From all of his reflections about limits, there is very little to suggest that his are explicitly Biblical in their content. Indeed, his reflections showed far more complexity and depth than anything that was to be found in that Bible lesson, and, as will be seen, drew deeply on his own experiences. The theme of “suffering” was salient in the lesson, and indeed, Adonias’s own suffering and feelings of betrayal were the ground for many of his reflections. But the word that caught his attention on the page was the term “limit”—of an experience that goes “beyond our limits”—and this was the word that he marked on the page and that was the object of his lengthy reflections. After the initial interview, he showed me the word he had marked on the page, which can be seen in Figure 15.

Figure 15: “Limits” (*Limites*)



3a. Limits Across Domains of Experience

⁵⁵ The original Portuguese reads: “Se estamos acrisolados por sofrimentos que parecem estar além de nossos limites, tenhamos, nas promessas de Deus, esperança contra toda a esperança. Apesar dos lamentos presentes, no porvir, Deus não nos deixará exilados de suas consolações.” The full text is available online at: http://www.estudantesdabiblia.com.br/licoes_cpap/2010/2010-02-13.htm Last accessed May 17, 2014.

In order to derive his notion of limits, Adonias worked through several different kinds of examples that instantiate what it means to have limits and, his notion of limits, it will be seen, is closely aligned to the notion of respect. He begins from more abstract considerations:

This is where [limits] come from. All respect, every point that belongs to the limit, is also in this [respect]. [A limit] is knowing how to live, it's respect. Because—if I don't have respect, then I don't have a limit—I don't have a limit. So, that's where—that's where the limiting point enters in, it's borne from respect.⁵⁶

Here he is suggesting that the first instance of the abstract notion of a “limit” can be discerned in a basic idea of respect.⁵⁷ He begins to explain his idea of respect by drawing on the course of his life experience. He had left his parents' home at the young age of 10 years, when he went out into the world to begin working. Over the course of his younger working life—living and being raised “in the world,”⁵⁸ away from home—he was often hosted by other families, and it was in those relationships where he recalls the notion of respect and limits:

Because I stayed in homes—in other families' homes. When I'd leave, they'd be crying [with sadness]. So, never in these—never in this upbringing that I had [walking and working] about the world—I never lacked respect in any home. I always only had [respect]—when I departed, I only left longing (*saudade*). So, that's where it fits in—where the limit fits. It's [founded] upon this [respect]. Because I never left a [bad] trace

⁵⁶ “É nisso aí aonde vem. O todo respeito, o todo ponto que pertence ao limite, é nisto aí. É o saber viver, é o respeito. Porque—se eu não tenho respeito, eu não tenho limite—eu não tenho limite. Então, é onde, é onde se cabe o ponto limite já nascendo do respeito.”

⁵⁷ Here the notion of limits, as respect, appears to be closely related to the notion of having “boundaries” between self and other. This is similar to an articulation of “respect” that we find in Kant (1991:243-244, my emphasis): “[W]e consider ourselves in a moral (intelligible) world where, by analogy with the physical world, attraction and repulsion bind together rational beings (on earth). The principle of mutual love admonishes them constantly to come closer to one another; *that of the respect they owe one another, to keep themselves at a distance from one another.*”

⁵⁸ See the section 4 below on “Exposure, Exacerbating Limits, and Living in the World.” Adonias stated elsewhere in the interview: “Because I left the company of my parents when I was 10 years old...I was raised by the world—today here, tomorrow there, today here.” (“Porque eu saí da companhia dos meus pais com 10 anos...Fui criado pelo mundo—hoje aqui amanhã ali, hoje aqui.”)

in the four states [where I walked], I never left a [bad] trace. And that's how I am to this day, and I give thanks to God for this.⁵⁹

To have traveled through four states, having been hosted by multiple families over the 70 years since he left his parents' home, and to have only left sadness and longing (*saudade*) upon his departure instead of bad traces—which is to say a bad fame, or a soiled name—is a mark of having lived with respect and within limits. He elaborates the notion of limits by beginning with examples from inside the home:

We already begin [with limits] inside the home. We already begin in the—inside my own house.⁶⁰

Adonias immediately proceeds to consider the notion of the limit as it is embedded in the notion of talk, or of a conversation:

The word “limit” is even in our conversations—in the conversation of one to another. That is, it already begins in the home. If I say—first, I make some plan with my wife, but I do so staying within limits, as it should be.⁶¹

In making plans with his wife, but doing so within limits, he seems to be suggesting that such plans are done by having a conversation within “limits,” as he will describe. Coming to an agreement about some plan establishes a form of conduct and a kind of contract necessary to carry out that plan. In other words, a plan embeds its own limitations on those actions that must be performed—to the exclusion of other actions—in order to bring that plan about:

⁵⁹ “Porque, morei em casa de—em casa de família. Quando eu saía, ficavam chorando. Então, nunca desse—dessa criação que eu criei pelo mundo—nunca faltei com respeito em casa nenhuma. Sempre só tinha—só deixava saudade quando eu saía. Então, é nisso aí aonde cabe—aonde cabe o limite. É em cima disso aí. Porque, nunca deixei rasto nesses quatro estados, nunca deixei rasto. E to até hoje, e dou graças a Deus por isso.”

⁶⁰ “Já vamos começar de dentro de casa. Já vamos começar dentro da, dentro aqui da minha casa.”

⁶¹ “A palavra ‘limite’ é até no conversar da gente, na conversação de um pra outro. Quer dizer, já vamos começar de dentro de casa. Se eu falo—primeiro eu faço um plano aqui mais a mulé, mais eu já fiz em cima daquilo do limite aí como deve seguir.”

Well, in that moment we agree about something, but shortly [thereafter], [if] either she or I does something different—[then we've] already parted from limits.⁶²

Here, he means to say that when either he or his wife departs from whatever plan of conduct that they had resolved upon previously, then at this moment, their broader interactions may begin to break down, become disrespectful toward one another, and become further removed from behavioral limits that were implicit in the plan. He imagines getting into an argument:

That is to say, [when] I—I see that things have gone beyond limits—I'll bring it to her attention:

“No, no it's this way, it's this way.”

She gets mad—she gets mad and comes with some indifferent words.⁶³

To utter “indifferent” words is to utter words that are inflammatory or hurtful the other, and damage the bond that the parties shared. At this point, the interaction devolves into mere reciprocal assertion of a subjective viewpoint, and the process of coming to mutual understanding collapses:

Well, I think about it all and then I am obligated to respond:

[Husband:] “Look, it's this way, and this, and this, and that.”

[Wife:] “OH, BUT THAT'S NOT HOW IT IS!”

[Husband:] “BUT THAT'S [NOT] HOW IT IS, MAN, IT'S LIKE THIS!”⁶⁴

⁶² “Bom, nestante nós acertamos uma coisa, mas logo ou eu ou ela já vem com outra coisa diferente—já saiu do limite.”

⁶³ “Quer dizer, eu—aquilo que eu to vendo que já saiu do limite—eu chamo ela atenção://‘Não, não é por aqui, é por aqui.’//Ela se azanga, ela se azanga e já vem com a palavra indiferente.”

⁶⁴ “Bom, eu, eu penso aquilo tudo e aí eu sou obrigado a responder: // ‘Oie é por esse modo e esse e esse e esse.’//‘Ah, mas não é assim.’//‘É assim rapaz, é assim.’”

He draws the lesson:

Well, that [conversation] has already departed from limits, it's already departed from limits...One [person] changed [course] against the other...and then goes on conversing. But conversing too much, that's already departed from limits—because the limit has to be with the right words.⁶⁵

By “conversing,” in these examples, he seems to be referring to a protracted dispute—arguing and yelling—that arises when there has been a failure in understanding—whether on his own or his wife’s part, or when one or the other attempts to appropriate the course of action for him or herself. When these things happen, interaction breaks down and there is disrespect. What has broken down, in all cases, is the limit, and it is precisely the limit that enables conversation and coordination of other activity and the maintenance of mutual respect.

He moves beyond the home, and gives a further example of talking with a lawyer, as yet another example of how to properly interact within limits:

Are we going to talk loud at him? We have to limit—we have to limit the conversation from one to the other. If he trespasses to talk back at me, he’s already departed from limits. If I talk back at him, I’ve already departed from limits, because one shouldn’t talk back. One must attend to the size (*tamanho*) that he is, and must attend to my position—his position and my position. That is, the limit already begins [by attending] from one to the other.⁶⁶

This is an interesting example, because it draws on habitual status distinctions couched in the idiom (seen earlier) of some people being “big” (e.g. the wealthy) while other people are “small” (i.e. the poor). But in this and the previous example, we can see that he is also trying to go

⁶⁵ “Bom, aí já saiu do limite, já saiu do limite...Um se alterou contra o outro...e aí vai conversando. O conversar muito já saiu do limite—que o limite tem que ser as palavras certas.”

⁶⁶ “A gente vai falar alto pra ele? Nós tem que limitar, nós tem que limitar a conversa de um para o outro. Se ele trespassou pra me responder, ele já saiu do limite. Se eu falar alto pra ele, eu já sair do limite que não deve falar alto. Deve reparar o tamanho que ele é, deve reparar a minha posição—a posição dele e a minha posição. Quer dizer, aí já começou o limite de um pra outro.”

beyond these received notions. In the earlier example, he admits that, like his wife, he is also capable of departing from limits; it is not a one sided potential. Here, likewise, there is a reciprocity and a mutual attending to one another. Neither party—big or small—should talk back, or talk loudly, or yell at the other.

He gives the example of trying to talk with someone from another country, and across different languages. If he finds that he does not understand their speech, he is required to attempt to somehow clarify the different language:

So, if I don't understand his talk, his words, what his word is, then I cannot trespass against the limit. That is, I should ask him what he means. So, we must have limits if we are to understand one another. And so, that's where the limit commences. If I talk louder, I've already departed the limit. Because [it's within the limit] where—where I recognize your word.⁶⁷

He uses our own conversations as a possible example:

Sometimes I don't understand—I don't your word. So, I must have the limit [patience] to think. Sometimes you ask me something:

“Oh, but I don't understand.”

Well then, I'll—I stop for a moment and I'll think about the manner in which I can respond, because I don't understand your word, your talk. That is...I should—I should return to the limit of the word.

“How's that? What is that word? How's that there?”

⁶⁷ “Então, se eu não entender a conversa—a palavra dele, o que é a palavra dele—deu não posso trespassar do limite. Quer dizer, pra perguntar a ele de que maneira é. Então, é preciso nós ter o limite pra entender de um para o outro. Então, aí vai começando o limite. Se eu falar mais alto, eu já saio do limite. Que é aonde—aonde eu to conhecendo sua palavra.”

So, that is your limit.⁶⁸

Resolving problems of mutual understanding involve returning to the limits of the words themselves, attempting to grasp the meaning and thus the limits of each word. The limits of our words, he seems to suggest, likewise constitute our own limits in establishing mutual understanding. Drawing one another into the boundaries or limits of each word requires a process of careful attention to the boundaries themselves, in order to clarify them.

He turns to another example:

Let's turn to a text—to some text. I'll read some text and I don't understand it. So, I should ask [what it means].⁶⁹

But instead of pursuing what he takes to be a proper response to this failure in understanding—which would be to ask for the tutelage of another—he imagines the kind of response that would not remain in limits. Instead, he yells and evokes a frustrated and angry voice:

“OH, BUT I DON'T UNDERSTAND THIS [TEXT] HERE!”

That there—that's already departed from the limit. That's already departed from the limit.⁷⁰

He yells again, providing another example in which someone appears to want things to go a certain way, but does not get their way:

“OH, BUT—IT'S NOT THAT WAY, NO, I WANT IT LIKE THIS!”

That's already left the limit. It's departed the limit.⁷¹

⁶⁸ “Às vezes eu não entendo, eu não entendo a palavra sua. Então, eu devo ter o limite de pensar. Às vezes me pergunta uma coisa: ‘Ah mas eu não entendi.’ Então, aí eu vou. Eu paro um pouco e vou pensar de que maneira é que eu vou lhe responder, porque eu não entendi a sua palavra, a sua conversa. Quer dizer...Eu devo, eu devo voltar no limite da palavra:// ‘Cuma é isso, cuma é essa palavra, cuma é isso aí?’//Então, é teu limite.”

⁶⁹ “Vamos pra uma leitura, pra uma leitura. Vou fazer uma leitura e eu não entendo. Então, eu devo perguntar.”

⁷⁰ “‘Ah, mas isso aqui eu não entendi!’//Aí já—já passou do limite. Já passou do limite.”

He gives these hypothetical examples to portray a kind of response that, instead of remaining within limits, transgresses boundaries and limits of conversation, the building understanding, and coming to a course of action. In a didactic turn, he then provides an example of how one might proceed instead:

So, I should think. Slow down a bit. Turn toward the limit in which I should respond, so that then we can have something through which we can understand one another. If I just yell—I don't recognize (*não conheço*) your word. If I just yell then you won't be able to respond. You can't respond to me.

So, I should—I should search for the limit, respond to you in the manner that you asked me. If [you ask] me calmly:⁷²

He speaks in a calm voice now, imitating the voice of someone expressing a lack of understanding—and asking for help:

“No, I didn't understand. I didn't understand your word, what does it mean?”

At that point I will have—I'll have a limit. I'll have good sense and use the word “limit” in order to limit how I respond [to you], [to explain] what it means.⁷³

In saying that he will use the word “limit,” he means to say that he will actually conduct himself in accordance with what he understands by the word “limit” itself, and by doing so, he will be better equipped to find a response. He draws some normative conclusions from his examples:

⁷¹ “Ah, mas é—não é por esse modo, não, mas eu quero é assim!//Saiu do limite, saiu do limite.”

⁷² “Então, eu deve pensar. Parar um pouco. Ir pra o limite que deve responder, pra poder então a gente ter o algo assim de se entender com o outro. Se eu falar mais alto—eu não conheço a sua palavra, se eu falar mais alto e aí voce não pode me responder, não pode me responder. Então, eu deve, eu deve procurar o limite de lhe responder do jeito que voce me perguntou. Se é baixo:”

⁷³ “Não, eu não entendi, eu não entendi a sua palavra, de que maneira é?//Aí eu vou ter o—vou ter limite. Ter o bom senso e usar a palavra ‘limite’ pra limitar o que eu vou responder de que maneira é.”

We can't trespass the limit of—let's say—of that plan that we made together, me and her. So, if we started in a calm manner and afterward end up enraged—no, we can't [go about it like that]. That's not in the limit. Either she gets mad, or I get mad, or whatever—no. That's [not the limit]. If we propose [to do] something now, from right then or tomorrow we have to hold the limit of that same proposal. So, that is the word “limit.” And so, that's where we have limits. We'll talk with Mr. President, we'll talk with Mr. Governor, we'll talk with Mr. Lawyer, we'll talk with Mr.—the justice—the justice—the Court Judge. We talk [with them]—but everything—everything within the limit.⁷⁴

He concludes:

And so the word “limit” is what governs everything. [It governs] institutions (*orgão*), judges, it [governs] everything in between.⁷⁵

The conversation continues in a rather abstract vein, but always grounded in concrete examples about the form of conversation, coming to agreement about plans, the experience of trying to read (but not understanding) a text. Through each of these examples, drawing on specific kinds of interactions, he explores different moments of failure and trespass—raising your voice at another, butting into another's conversation—that clarify the normative import of what it means to have “limits.”

In this view, Adonias appears to be recognizing a rather complex thought: in order for various social goods to be realized—coming to agreements, understanding a text, or merely talking—one must have a view toward the limitations that permit those interactions and activities to occur, activities necessary for bringing about other goods. Without limits, such interactions and activities would fail, and those goods become forfeit.

⁷⁴ “Não pode trespassar o limite daquele—vamos dizer—daquele plano que nós fez, eu mais ela. Bom, se nós começou de uma maneira manso e adepois vai terminar brabo—não, não pode. Aí não ta no limite. Aí ou ela se zanga ou eu me zango ou qualquer coisa, não. É isso. Se nós propôs um negócio agora, mais logo ou amanhã nós tem que ter o limite da mesma proposta. Então, é a palavra limite. E aí, é aonde nós tem o limite. Nós vai falar com seu presidente, nós vai falar com seu governador, nós vai falar com seu advogado, nós vai falar com seu—a justiça, a justiça, o juiz de direito. Nós fala, mas tudo, tudo em cima do limite.”

⁷⁵ “E aí a palavra limite é quem governa toda. É órgão, é juiz, é tudo quanto é no meio.”

3b. Limits, Property, and Material Goods

As we have seen so far, having limits helps to create the possibility of having joint activity. Yelling at others, attempting to dominate others, or claiming unilateral control over joint actions undermines the very possibility of joint action. “One word [spoken] louder than another goes beyond [limits].”⁷⁶ Recognizing limits is not merely something that occurs immediately in face-to-face interactions, but it mediates relationships that are non-present. This can be seen in the notions of property that Adonias begins to develop. He gives the example of taking a notebook that another person left sitting on a table. He explains that finding a notebook left sitting out on a table would, for him, somehow be accompanied by recognizable signs that the notebook belonged to someone else—it has its own limits:

If it’s sitting here, it has limits. Because if it didn’t have limits, you wouldn’t have left it sitting out there adrift.⁷⁷

The owner of the notebook is not there to prevent him from taking it, or to declare that it belongs to him or her. How does he recognize that the notebook has a “limit”? The notebook’s “limit” is a complex relation of recognition that draws together various dimensions of pragmatic presuppositions, implication, and entailments. That we might find a notebook sitting on the table, taken together with the other contextual evidence (e.g., we are in someone’s house; the notebook is not something we already identify as ours; notebooks are valuable and are not things that one would likely leave adrift; it is not positioned in a garbage can; etc.) brings about a probabilistic inference that someone must have placed it there and that it belongs to the person who placed it there—most likely the owner of the home we are in. That person’s non-presence, furthermore, does not revoke the claim they have on the notebook precisely for the reason that the recognition of a limit places restrictions on appropriation of the notebook. Presumably there are reasons then—signs and marks that can be given—that indicate the limits on the notebook and that it is not for the taking.

⁷⁶ “Uma palavra mais alta de que outra trespassou.”

⁷⁷ “Se ela ta sentada aqui ela tem limite, porque se não tiver limite voce não deixava ela aí à toa.”

Being able to attend to those signs of limitation, likewise, implies that those signs of limits may also be absent. Later, he gives the example of *terra devoluta*—or unoccupied, state-owned land—that does not have limits because it lacks the marks of another person being there:

You can come and sit down here anywhere. You can open up a road anywhere—you open a—anything you want to do. Why? Because it doesn't have a limit.

The limit is—if you arrive here at the corner of this table here, and you already find another [person sitting] here—well then, your limit is up to here [where there is another person]. But sometimes you want to go beyond, well that's when you don't—when you're not having limits, because you went beyond...And so, now you go spreading out wherever you want—then you don't have limits.⁷⁸

In short, the notion of limits in property presupposes the recognition of another person's mediate presence in an interaction; in this case, an interaction with some sort of object, whether a notebook or some small stretch of land, through being able to read certain signs. This notion of property will be developed further in Chapter 9, where it will become clear that people do not merely make, and recognize, one another's claims to things in the world; just as importantly, those things likewise make claims upon those people with whom they are in relation.

3c. Limits & Orders of Goods

As has been seen through Adonias's reflections, the constitution of certain kinds of goods are formed at the limits between people, actions, and things. A good relationship with others, a good conversation, a good property relation, require certain kinds of limitations and recognition of others, otherwise they become transgressive. The land grabs described in Chapter 5 can

⁷⁸ “Voce chega e senta em qualquer canto. Voce abre uma rua em qualquer canto, voce abre um—um tudo que voce queira fazer. Por que? Porque não tem limite.// O limite é—se voce chegar aqui nesse canto de mesa aqui, e já encontra um aqui—então, seu limite é até aqui. Mas às vezes voce quer trespassar, aí é onde voce não ta—aonde não ta tendo limite, que voce trespassou...E aí, agora voce se espacia pra onde quer—não tem limite.”

described in these terms, as an utter failure to acknowledge limits and an attempt by some to claim the whole world for themselves.

As will be seen in subsequent chapters, the need for new orders and kinds of goods also emerge at the limits of prior goods, when those latter have reached their own inborn limits. The limitation of the physical body—for example, to shelter itself or directly fashion the world—occasions recognition of the body’s defeasibility and its limited nature (see the next Chapter 7, Section 3) and the need for further goods. The machete, for example, is an extension of the physical body that directly transforms its capacity to change the physical world about it, whereas a shelter is a good that can offer protection to the body from various forms of exposure. In the absence of shelter, the body is exposed to forces that exacerbate the limits and frailties of the body.

When one becomes fatigued, ill, aged—or, most poignantly, when one is born—one needs care, love, and friendship from others. When people are born—and until the person comes into control and “possession”⁷⁹ of their physical body—they remains dependent on care from others and, in this way, care is a good that is a prior condition for the body as a further good. The body that remains without care in birth, or in illness, wastes away. The intersection of the incomplete physical body and dependency upon others is, perhaps, among the most basic forms of moral life.⁸⁰

When someone is unable to care for him or herself, when their body has reached its limits, they require attention from others. Seeking care and love from others is not a denial of one’s own limitations, but a recognition of one’s limitations, and an attempt to remedy them through entering into relationships. This gives rise to an ethic of generosity that is the acknowledgement that everyone, universally at some point, cannot live without others and,

⁷⁹ See Waldron’s (1988:361-363) account of Hegel’s notion of self-possession.

⁸⁰ Jürgen Habermas [(2003:33-34) cited in Bernstein (2006:312-313)] expresses this thought elegantly: “I conceive of moral behavior as a constructive response to the dependencies rooted in the incompleteness of our organic makeup and in the persistent frailty (most felt in phases of childhood, illness, and old age) of our bodily existence. Normative regulation of interpersonal relations may be seen as a porous shell protecting a vulnerable body, and the person incorporated in this body, from the contingencies they are exposed to. Moral rules are fragile constructions protecting both the physis from bodily injuries and the person from inner and symbolic injuries. Subjectivity, being what makes the human body a soul-possessing receptacle of spirit, is itself constituted through intersubjective relations to others. The individual self will only emerge through the course of social externalization, and can only be stabilized with the network of undamaged relations of mutual recognition.

This dependency on the other explains why one can be hurt by the other. The person is most exposed to, and least protected from, injuries in the very relations which she is most dependent on for the development of her identity and for the maintenance of her integrity.”

therefore, we should orient toward others as our selves. The figure of the miser, however, denies its dependency upon others and strives, for lack of a more precise term, to be all and to have all.

This is to say that, at manifold turns, dependency is a condition of all life, whether human or otherwise.⁸¹ The limits on the person, therefore, give rise to the need for positively constituted dependencies on various kinds of others. While the aging and ailing person is inextricably delivered to the care of these others, these relationships with friends and family members—at least ideally—are constituted by a history of shared affection and love. This makes this form of depending different than that of a landless family that is delivered, of material necessity, to the fate of day laboring, sharecropping, and plantation work. In both relations, both the aging person or landless family are delivered into the hand of others, but the analogy breaks down when it is acknowledged that the latter form of dependency is not constituted by something that could be called love, but rather by starvation. In other word, the body's limitations can occasion exploitative situations under which the limitations of the body—evidenced in hunger or starvation—can be directed against a person, in order to draw them into an exploitative work relationship over which they have little choice.

These forms of dependency are an exacerbation and exploitation of the body's physical limitations, and they hinge upon the threat of starvation. Whereas the former kind of dependency, based upon care, is simultaneously an acknowledgement of limitations and an attempt to take up that limit, so to speak, into the arms of another, this latter form of dependency can be thought of as exploiting and transgressing those same limits and forcing one into the grasp of another. Indeed, recognizing that the other has nowhere else to turn is what grounds interested relationships based on using the other. Recruiting the frailties of the body—the material and causal limitations of people's physicality—into the constitution and composition of relationships, therefore, simultaneously flags problematic and exploitative forms of dependency that point to the need for new kinds of limitations.

To summarize this section, these manifold kinds of goods—whether the body, care, health, and various kinds of material goods, such as a house or a machete—take shape at the limits and limitations of others goods. The machete becomes a good for the body, seeking to transform the world, when one's hands have reached their limits. These limitations—giving rise

⁸¹ The term “to depend,” at root, means to hang upon or hang from, and in the same way that people depend upon one another, a vine depends and literally hangs upon a tree as it climbs and makes its way toward the light.

to the need for, and interrelationship between, different goods—give rise to what might be called orders of goods, and these orders of goods are grounded in recognizing the constitutive limitations of, and between, different kinds of goods. These orders and orderings of goods are, therefore, also orders of recognition. These orders of goods, and the recognition of the interrelationships and limitations among goods, will be seen to emerge at various turns in the rest of this ethnography.

One woman named Valentina expressed some of these interrelations in the following manner. Valentina and I were discussing how, if she owned a plot of land in the forest, she might proceed to transform it into a roça. She explained this in the following manner:

First, I'd work in the future. If I went to make a shelter [where I could] rest my head, and then I'd be able to—⁸²

Her husband, Vitór, overhearing our conversation from the next room, and anticipating the direction of her thought, offered a completion:

[Vitór]: —work.

[Valentina]: Work. Because I'd go make that shelter where I could rest my head, and then return to make what God gave me to eat, and [then I'd] be able to give to my friends. Because—for us to eat alone, we can't eat. We can only eat with our friends.⁸³

Valentina's brief statement is interesting on several levels, notably because her account of a mundane daily activity integrates interactions among several orders of goods. Her work begins by building a shelter near the place where her work in the forest will occur. This, she suggested, is a form of working in the future; the future condition of her work being the fatigue that she knows her body will feel, and making a shelter is in anticipation of her future need to rest. The

⁸² “Ja trabalhar pemero no futuro. Se for fazer um rancho, apoiar a cabeça, e ia conseguir—”

⁸³ “Vitór: Trabalhar.//Valentina: Tabalhá. Porque ai eu ia fazer aquele rancho pa eu colocar minha cabeça e vortá a fazer o que Deus me deu pa eu cumê, e pudê dar aos meus amigos. Que—que nós cumê sozinho, nós num comi. Nós só come cum nossos amigos.”

material ground for fulfilling this future conditional—if she works, she will need to rest—is actualized in the act of building a shelter.

Having a rested body would enable her, likewise, to return to her work, “to make what God gave me to eat.” Valentina’s locution is peculiar as it seems to be a contradiction in terms, as she suggests that she had made something that was given to her. Considering what has been said previously about the notion of God, however, the apparent contradiction is resolved in recognizing that any effort of work is merely an engagement with—and the pairedness of—self and other.

Valentina then continues by pointing out that in making what God gave her, she would be able to share food with her friends, thus cultivating wider orders of goodness, which is found in the notions of friendship and generous sharing with others. These different aspects of the good will be elaborated upon in subsequent chapters.

4. Exposure, Exacerbating Limits, and Living in the World

In the next chapter, I will develop a commonly expressed notion that those who use, mistreat, and otherwise exploit others, tend to end up in misery themselves—at least in the long-term. In some respects, their condition becomes a reflection of those others’ whose lives they had helped to make miserable.⁸⁴ In this section, I would like to suggest that the experience of suffering and

⁸⁴ A long footnote from a long Immanuel Kant’s *Observations on the Feeling of the Beautiful and Sublime* nicely captures this thought, where Kant cites a story about the sublime loneliness of the miser. Kant’s footnote reads:

“I should like to give just one example of the noble awe that the description of complete loneliness can inspire, and I draw for that purpose upon some passages from ‘Carazan’s Dream’ in the Bremen Magazine, volume IV, page 539. In proportion as his riches increased, this wealthy miser had closed off his heart from compassion and love toward all others. Meantime, as the love of man grew cold in him, the diligence of his prayer and his religious observances increased. After this confession, he goes on to recount the following: ‘One evening, as by my lamp I drew up my accounts and calculated my profits, sleep overpowered me. In this state I saw the Angel of Death come over me like a whirlwind. He struck me before I could plead to be spared his terrible stroke. I was petrified, as I perceived that my destiny throughout eternity was cast, and that to all the good I had done nothing could be added, and from all the evil I had committed, not a thing could be taken away. I was led before the throne of him who dwells in the third heaven. The glory that flamed before me spoke to me thus: ‘Carazan, your service of God is rejected. You have closed your heart to the love of man, and have clutched your treasures with an iron grip. You have lived only for yourself, and therefore you shall also live the future in eternity alone and removed from all communion with the whole of Creation.’ At this instant I was swept away by an unseen power, and driven through the shining edifice of Creation. I soon left countless worlds behind me. As I neared the outermost end of nature, I saw the shadows of the boundless void sink down into the abyss before me. A

misery is constituted by a collapse in the interrelationships of the various goods—transgressing the limits—which results in what might be called “exposure.” In local terms, this condition of exposure can be described in the notion of “living in” or “living about the world.”⁸⁵ When plantation laborers’ bodies begin to tire—when their physical strength no longer serves or defends them by allowing them to walk away—they enter into a condition of chronic exposure. With no roof over their heads, and with few people to care for them, they live alone in the world. This breakdown appears to occur for misers in a way that is analogous to the way in which this collapse proceeds for people who are thrown into miserable living condition.⁸⁶ It is precisely in these collapses, I would suggest, that an explicit notion of “goods” can arise in the first place. This is why, as described earlier, Adonias’s discussion of “limits” was always grounded in reflections upon moments when limits were transgressed. In this final section I would like to briefly explore the condition of one man’s life, a sharecropper named Amado, in order to indicate various points at which “goods” emerge most acutely; that is, when their limits are violated, transgressed, and lost.

There is much about Amado’s story that will have to remain obscure. I only met him on several brief occasions, and I was never able to talk with him at great length. Amado had migrated to the region in 2000 in search of work on the region’s plantations. He was probably in his mid-50s, but his physical body was aged well beyond his years. He had been unable to find regular work on the plantations, and this was probably because of his age. Consequently, he had been working at one of the MST settlements in the region since 2004. Amado was not “settled” in the community, but rather he worked as a sharecropper and occasional day laborer for some other families who were settled there. Amado had no home, but resided in a dilapidated shelter—a run-down old shack—that had been left over from the plantation period. On occasion,

fearful kingdom of eternal silence, loneliness, and darkness! Unutterable horror overtook me at this sight. I gradually lost sight of the last star, and finally the last glimmering ray of light was extinguished in outer darkness! The mortal terrors of despair increased with every moment, just as every moment increased my distance from the last inhabited world. I reflected with unbearable anguish that if ten thousand times a thousand years more should have carried me along beyond the bounds of all the universe I would still always be looking ahead into the infinite abyss of darkness, without help or hope of any return—. In this bewilderment I thrust out my hands with such force toward the objects of reality that I awoke. And now I have been taught to esteem mankind; for in that terrifying solitude I would have preferred even the least of those whom in the pride of my fortune I had turned from my door to all the treasures of Golconda—” (Kant 1960[1764]:48-49).

⁸⁵ The notion of “living in the world” (*viver no mundo*), “living about the world” (*viver pelo mundo*), or “in the middle of the world” (*no meio do mundo*) provides an important idiom for Russel Parry Scott’s (1981) work on rural migration in Brazil.

⁸⁶ Compare the language of “misery” and “miserliness” in Chapter 7. A collapse of this sort was briefly explored at the end of Chapter 5, Section 6, and is a process that I explore through further cases in Chapter 7, Section 5.

he shared this shelter with some other landless men who did similar work in the region, and whose bodies were similarly ailing and aged. Amado had no children, he had no land, and it appears that he arrived in the region alone, without any family or relatives nearby.

I saw Amado late one afternoon on October 18, 2009, when I was sitting outside with Damião at Pequi Community, and we all began to talk.⁸⁷ At the time, Amado was sharecropping for a man named Mauro who was settled on the MST settlement where Amado had been working. Mauro had first arrived in the region with the MST around 1997, and was considered a low-level militant (*frente de massa*) in the organization.

Over the course of our conversation that afternoon, Amado explained that he had come from a small town in the southernmost reaches of the cacao lands, some 300 kilometers south near the municipality of Porto Seguro. Amado explained that he had never been able to return to his home region, although he hoped to one day.⁸⁸ Damião asked how long it had been since he had heard from his relatives in the southern cacao lands, and Amado explained that it had been years—very likely since 2000 when he had first left. I asked him if he had any phone numbers, addresses, or any other contact information. He had none. Tears welled up in his eyes, and he turned his head away so that we would not notice that he had begun to cry.

Amado had somehow wounded his foot, and evidently it had been infected for some time. His wound was not healing, but getting worse. As he was sharecropping Mauro's rubber, this meant walking through the rubber groves for several hours each day, tapping a few hundred trees, and collecting the hardened balls of latex. It was not clear how he had injured his foot—perhaps he had stepped on a sharp object. To be sure, the rubber boots (*sapatão*) he wore were old and falling to pieces, and they probably offered very little protection his feet.

By this time, he explained, his infected foot had become quite swollen, and he was no longer able to wear his boots. Putting them on was simply too painful, so he had begun to work barefoot. This only exposed his foot to further injury, and may have exacerbated the infection. Amado could not stop working, however, because he had to work if he was going to eat. In this sense, the hunger he felt in his stomach compelled him to continue working—eventually barefoot—and this militated against his foot healing. Conversely, the exacerbated condition of

⁸⁷ Fn297.

⁸⁸ In several respects, Amado's story is reminiscent of the narrative about a man named Ermilino, presented in Anthony Leeds (1986) award winning poem "We Shall Dry Our Eyes," published in *Anthropology and Humanism Quarterly*.

his foot militated against his ability to continue working and to feed himself. Because he had few people to whom he could turn for help, and no other means to garner a livelihood, he was condemned to the warring conditions of his body.

Before Amado left that afternoon, Damião gave him a large handful of anti-inflammatory ibuprofen pills that I had brought from the United States in a large 1,000 tablet bottle. Damião wrapped the pills in a piece of paper, and I explained how to take the pills—how many he could safely take, how often, not on an empty stomach, and so on. Not expecting this small offer, Amado was visibly relieved. A smile came over his face and he thanked us repeatedly.

I saw Amado again one month later, on November 21, 2009.⁸⁹ He immediately showed me his foot, which had healed tremendously, and he heaped praise on the ibuprofen that had worked wonders. But while his overall condition had improved, he was still unable to wear his rubber boots and working was still difficult. He was visiting Pequi Community that afternoon because he was short on food, and he had come to see if any of the families there would be able to share some manioc flour that he could take with him to eat. He explained that some of the people living at Settlement 3 mistreated him—they never gave him any medicine, they never gave him any food. He explained:

They don't give, no. They only take—take—take—take.⁹⁰

He explained that he was afraid to ask the people where he worked for food because, he explained, they would “hit me.”⁹¹ While Amado struggled to work, Mauro and those others who occasionally employed him doing odd jobs could be found sitting underneath the tree—

—resting in the shade.⁹²

Mauro owed him R\$50 for work that he had done previously, but he kept delaying payment. Amado had showed Mauro his infected foot, explaining that he needed the money for medicine, but Mauro refused to pay him. Instead of paying Amado what he was owed, Mauro had recently

⁸⁹ Fn350.

⁹⁰ “Eles não dá, não. Eles só tira—tira—tira—tira.”

⁹¹ “Bater em mim.”

⁹² “Descansando embaixo da sombra.”

made a trip to the beach. Mauro had simultaneously failed to acknowledge Amado's condition; failed to acknowledge his own dependence upon Amado's (unremunerated) labor; and failed to acknowledge that Amado's condition was partly a result of his stance toward Amado.

This theme—this fear of being hit—recurred several times in our conversation that day. Amado would say:

They're going to hit me.⁹³

It may be easy to underestimate what this might have meant to Amado. With his health already compromised—having been reduced to his ailing body—his ability to work was compromised; and having been cut off from many important relationships—people upon whom he could have relied to give him respite from his suffering—the magnitude of the *fear* of being *hit*—yet another blow to his body—appeared to Amado with an overwhelming greatness. At length, Amado concluded:

I am a slave.⁹⁴

Apart from his few companions, Amado had become quite alone in the world. Exacerbated by pathological relationships, his body had reached, and been pushed beyond, its limits. His need to rest his body—to heal—and his need to continue working—so that he could eat—warred with one another, further aggravating both his health and his ability to work. The people upon whom he depended most—Mauro and others for whom he worked—did not appear to acknowledge Amado—neither his person, nor his limits—and their apparent hard heartedness only deepened the manifold injuries from which Amado suffered. His limits had been transgressed, his condition had become one of chronic exposure, and he had little—apart from strangers and a few friends—that could help to relieve him of his suffering.

The next two chapters examine the interrelationship among goods and their limits in order to explore the meanings of transgression and the possibilities for flourishing. In Chapter 7, I explore agonistic relationships among self and other—whether the relationship of a person

⁹³ “Eles vão bater em mim.”

⁹⁴ “Sou um escravo.”

working to transform a stretch of forest, a person's relationship with their body, and various forms of "eating" and being eaten. Through these relationships, I explore different kinds of social suffering and injustice that arise when certain kinds of limits are transgressed. Social evil, in the following chapter, is personified in the figure of the "miser" that shows disregard for and consumes others. In Chapter 8, then, I explore the possibilities of social wellbeing and flourishing by exploring acts of generosity, the meaning of having a socially recognized "name," and the process of building positive relationships based upon genuine "friendships."

CHAPTER 7:
EATING, OTHERNESS, AND SELF-DESTRUCTION

1. Encounter in Taking and Giving

The purpose of this chapter is to explore reciprocal (but not always symmetrical) exchanges in relationships of giving and taking, eating and being “eaten,” by exploring a variety of relations between what might be described as *self* and *other*, writ large. In Section 2, I work through a description of the various encounters between persons working to clear a space to in the forest, and the many entities that comprise the forest. This section aims to describe the manifold relationships that both impinge upon and ground the exercise of purposive activity. In many instances, the forest resists the realization of certain purposes, and creating meaningful activity requires modifying, taking from, and destroying parts of the forest. Here the self eliminates some of its others in order to thrive in a new way. At other turns, the forest and its manifold may be drawn up into human purposes and activity, closing the distance between self and other.

An expression that is occasionally heard in this agrarian setting neatly captures the interchange between the working body and the world:

The land gives, and the land eats.¹

The notion expressed here is that the land—the earth, the soil—gives life to all that emerges from it, and provides so that others may eat—whether those others are insects, plant, animals, or people. In time, however, all of those others will, in death and decay, eventually be consumed by the land. There is always, in a sense, a return upon what is given: giving is followed by consuming what is given and, eventually, that which has consumed the given will itself be consumed, at least in the broad course of life. The manner in which this interchange proceeds,

¹ “A terra dá, e a terra come.”

however, is the point at which, at least in the human realm, distinctions about good and bad conduct and relationships emerge.

Section 3 of the chapter begins with the experience of fatigue, and the loss of the body. If, in the first section, the working and striving body always appears to be central to the exercise and establishment of human purposes—through labor—then, in the second section, the working body appears as something that can be “other” to the self, in the same way that any of the various entities comprising the forest may stand against the striving of the working body. This section begins with a brief examination of the experience of fatigue, and then examines more profound experiences of losing the body through aging and illness. The health of the body, then, emerges as a kind of “good” that can be cultivated and maintained in the same way that natural entities from the forest are drawn into human purposes, and become integral to the good, through other processes of cultivation and care.

The chapter continues in Section 4 by exploring the idiom of “eating,” from the Portuguese verb *comer*, which, as will be seen, has an extensive semantic domain. Through detailed attention to this idiom, I will begin to develop a framework for thinking through the interrelationships that constitute normative interactions in this context. Not all of the relationships discussed here are explicitly, or even implicitly, moral relationships, but by working through a wide range of examples about “eating,” one can gain insight into the structure of moral relationships as founded upon the interchange between *self* and *other*, writ large.

Section 5 of this chapter explore examples of destructive human relationships, and it will be suggested that when the relationship between self and other proceed in a particular manner, the grounds for the continued life of both self and other may be undermined. This same can be said of the relationship between people and the forest and its manifold: when people orient toward that natural world in particular ways, people may undermine both their future capacity to live and the life of the forest itself.

2. Clearings & the Hazard of Movement

As we walk through the forest, with the weight of sacks carrying our lunch and old soda bottles filled with water, we constantly encounter various entities crossing our path. As we walk into the forest, different grasses and leaves brush up against us, some of them eating away at our arms and legs. *Tiririca* grass readily cuts into your arms and legs, while the bamboo-like *tabocas* plant scrapes away at my skin like coarse sandpaper, readily leaving a burn mark. If we set out to make new pathways, vines continually overwhelm our path. Walking is a constant process of encounter and discovery.²

Today, we are clearing a small bit of forest to make a space where we can plant. We begin by thinning out (*raleamento*) the undergrowth, cutting away at all of the smaller plants, vines, ferns, and young trees before we begin to fell some of the larger trees that block the sunlight above. As we cut through these plants with our machetes and our *biscols*—machete blades that had been reattached to long, wooden, hand-carved handles³—these plants resist our efforts to varying degrees, owing to the different physiological structure of each kind of plant. The common *feto* fern easily succumbs to our carbon steel blades, while the young trees and plants with woodier stems offer greater resistance. As we cut our way through, our machetes emit bits and pieces of fibrous plant material, which shoot back toward our bodies. If one of us is unlucky, perhaps a piece will strike the face. As we cut through the understory, sometimes heavy branches or even whole trees—that for years had been suspended by a single vine through which one of us had just cut—fall all around us. When this happens, storms of branches, leaves, and other bits of dust and debris (*ciscos*) fall from the canopy, and sometimes into our eyes. As we continue working we encounter spines and thorns that pierce into various parts of our bodies.⁴ And then, in a quick instant, the blade I am wielding deflects off of an unseen rock, causing an abrupt change in trajectory and a deep gash in my shin bone. You help me tie off the fresh wound with an old piece of fabric cut from the tattered t-shirt covers most of your torso.

Pixixica and *mangue* ants, incited by the trembling vibrations that course through these plants as we work, rain down upon our necks and make their way under our clothing. Their bites burn our skin, and we drop everything in order to brush them off of our bodies.⁵ Perhaps in the process we encounter a nest of the so-called “man-castrating” (*capa-homem*) ants, whose bites

² Fn569, 331.

³ See Figure 22.

⁴ Fn569.

⁵ Fn138, 330.

leave both of us in agony. As we turn over one leaf, and brush up against others draped across our path, we find a nest of “girl’s breast wasps” (*marimbondo peito de moça*).⁶ These wasps descend upon us, sticking to our clothing, stinging relentlessly. Their stings are particularly painful, as this particular kind of wasp, they say, “sucks the venom of snakes.”⁷

I turn and brush up against a leaf where the humble “sloth” caterpillar (*largata de preguiça*), or perhaps the more ominous sounding “fire” caterpillar (*largata de fogo*), lightly caresses my arm. The bristly hairs along the length of the caterpillar’s body bring about a searing pain in my arm, eventually leading to a strong headache that later turns into a fever that remains with me for the rest of the night.⁸ The sloth caterpillar is especially common in the farm plots that we are tending to in the clearing, especially the cacao seed beds that we will eventually tend to with our bare hands.⁹

As we continue, tiny burrs (*carrapichos*) stick to our clothes, while various kinds of ticks (*carrapatos*) stick to our skin so as to extract blood from our bodies. On a less fortunate day, but happily not today, you might brush against a leaf from which dozens of grass lice drop, invading every corner of your body. These lice are smaller than the head of a pin, and you would only notice them late into the night, when awakened by a vicious itch that overtakes your entire body.¹⁰ We might also encounter black flies (*borrachudos*) during the day, or the mosquito (*muriçoca*) during the night, and a whole host of other insects that thrive on our blood, leaving our skin full of red welts.¹¹ If one of us is most unfortunate, a sand fly might take a sample of our blood, transmitting the protozoan that cause leishmaniasis. This disease that causes expansive skin lesions that first appear on the face, hands, and other extremities. If left untreated, these lesions leave deep, craterous scars upon your skin, and, over the course of months or even years, it may spread to your mucous membranes and internal organs. The antiquated treatment for this disease involves injecting toxic drugs—composed partly of heavy metals—into and around the lesions that may take months or years to heal.

⁶ This is the *marimbondo peito de moça*. Other wasps we may encounter include the *marimbondo tatú*, *marimbondo mangue*, *marimbondo-manginho*, *marimbondo-conhãode-bode*, *marimbondo-estrelha*, or the *marimbondo-vaqueiro*. Fn57.

⁷ “Chupa a seiva de cobra.” Fn57.

⁸ Fn30, 331, 356.

⁹ Fn331.

¹⁰ Fn30.

¹¹ Fn14.

If I am terribly unlucky as I walk, I may step onto an unseen pit viper that then recoils and bites into my ankle. If I am lucky, it only strikes the black rubber boots that I wear to protect my feet. Otherwise the flesh of my foot would eventually turn black and, if the flesh does not completely die, my leg might atrophy into complete uselessness. A child might die from such a bite. One “legend of nature” (*lenda de natureza*), recounted by a young man named Leandro, says that when you are bitten by a snake and you tell other people, you must not speak the snake’s name or say that you were bitten by a snake. If you do mention the snake by name, the poison will kill you. This young man recounted a story of a woman who had been bitten by a snake on a nearby plantation. She reportedly said: “I was offended by a creature of the ground,”¹² and although he did not “see the proof”¹³ himself, he knows that the woman did not die.

Once we have cleared the understory, over the course of several days, and felled some of the larger trees, we find that we have created an impenetrable mass of debris that is difficult to traverse. This debris compounds some of the earlier hazards, and presents new ones of its own. As we walk upon this debris, we find ample opportunity to twist an ankle in the latticework of intertwined branches, and if one of us slips and falls from a log, we risk impaling ourselves upon the multitude of branches pointing upward. This mass of debris may also hide snakes and other creatures that make our already difficult movement even more perilous.

This thick, tangled mass of debris covering the ground makes planting and cultivating practically impossible. How will it be possible to plant the ground amidst all this debris? How are we to clear away this debris? “How,” Sebastião asked me on one occasion, “is the hoe supposed to pass through that?”¹⁴ Opening up spaces in this debris (*abrindo faixas*)—just using our machetes and axes, cutting the debris into smaller and smaller pieces—would take several people at least five days of heavy labor. Fire is our solution today, taking only one afternoon of work for one or two people.¹⁵

¹² “Foi ofendida por um bicho do chão” Fn57.

¹³ “Não vi a prova.” Fn57.

¹⁴ “A enxada, como é que passa?” Fn320.

¹⁵ It becomes readily apparent that the given reason for why horticulturalists use fire has little or nothing to do with improving soil fertility. This is the reason given by the agronomist who, watching from a distance, has never participated in clearing a plot in the forest, who thinks in terms of machines; who never attempted to walk through the debris or plant crops in their midst; who never tried to remove that debris without the aid of a bulldozer, which is beyond the means of most smallholders. A temporary increase in fertility is indeed a consequence of burning, and one familiar to the agronomist who studies the abstract inputs and outputs of agriculture from afar, but the reason why smallholders use fire is to remove the and obstacles and hazards that emerge in the debris. Fn320.

Finally then, after we have removed enough of the debris, and braved a myriad of obstacles and entities that encroach upon our work and our bodies, we begin to plant—perhaps a mix of beans and vegetables, together with manioc or bananas. As we leave home every morning to our workplace at the roça, if it had rained the night before, we may encounter occasional pools of mud that grip at the rubber sandals on our feet (if we had not already changed into our rubber boots). The mud might either strip our sandals away from our feet entirely, or tear the rubber strap that runs between your two large toes and connects the top of the sandal to the rubber sole.

Upon arriving at the roça, we encounter yet other hazards. If we planted bananas the year before, the trees will now be ready to give their first fruits. When harvesting, we take care to watch for snakes that may have hidden in the large bunch (*cacho*) of banana fruits, waiting for birds that may have made their nests amidst the developing fruits.¹⁶ As you walk about doing your work, you might unknowingly step upon the rotting remains of an old banana tree that had been harvested several weeks ago. The plant material from rotting banana trees is extremely slippery; if you slip upon it, and don't catch yourself, you hit the ground. This is all the more risky when navigating steep hillsides (*ladeiras*)—riddled with old logs and the accumulated matter of banana plants—while carrying 30 or 50 pounds of harvested bananas upon your shoulders. Under these conditions, you encounter ample opportunities to lose your balance, trip, and fall. At the end of your day, as you cross a stream on your way home, you perchance step onto a wet stone with a slippery layer of algae that has grown upon it. You slip and fall again, bruising your tailbone upon the flat rock beneath you. Walking becomes even more difficult for the next several days.¹⁷

2a. *Human Purposes, Effort, and Resistance*

The above descriptions represent some of the manifold hazards that people face as they farm, transforming small clearings in the forest into cultivated patches of various herbs, vegetables, shrubs, trees, and other plants that comprise their farms. Fortunately, these various

¹⁶ Fn283, 331.

¹⁷ Fn191, 228, 331.

hazards are never faced all at once in a single day. In one sense, these various hazards enter into opposition to these human purposes, creating resistance to the working body as it attempts to fashion and transform the world. Beyond the various oppositions and resistances to the human body, manifold other entities oppose and resist the plants that the farmers attempt to bring up into the world. Damião explained that various diseases, like “cacao canker” (*cancro de cacao*), or pests like the woodpecker (*pica-pau*), affect the cacao trees and their fruits. He was having problems with woodpeckers that had been boring holes into the cacao pods and ruining the seeds inside. Damião commented that he would have to come to the farm early the next morning to shoot the bird that was causing this damage to his harvest.¹⁸

Another obstacle that farming people face is the relentless growth of weeds, referred to as *mato*. On one occasion, one farmer reflected that: “The farmer’s greatest enemies are the weeds.”¹⁹ One weed, called the “bird herb” (*erva-de-passarinho*),²⁰ is a very light vine that can easily overgrow and kill its host tree, as is true of the *gameleira* vines, which are a kind of fig plant.²¹ Another plant, considered as falling somewhere between a cultivated plant and a weed, is called “Little Marian” (*marianinha*). In the past, the region’s cacao farmers planted marianinha as a form of ground cover, especially because it helped retain soil moisture. However, because this plant covered the ground in such a thick blanket of plant material, anything that fell into this mass would be hidden from view. Cacao pods that had fallen to the ground after being cut from cacao trees with a long pruning pole (*podão*) sometimes became hidden from view in the thick bed of ground cover. For workers, in particular, this made collecting the harvested fruits difficult, and such ground cover might also hide creatures like snakes. Furthermore, because these plants created such an impenetrable mass of plant matter at the base of the trees, spreading fertilizer was quite difficult.²² For these reasons, marianinha and other similar ground cover passed from being cultivars to weeds, or *mato*. As such, instead of promoting herbaceous ground cover underneath their trees, many small farmers prefer a condition that they refer to as *bate folha*. Bate folha results when the increasingly closed canopy of the agroforest blocks out a sufficient amount of sunlight, and eliminates the growth potential

¹⁸ Fn275, 367.

¹⁹ “O maior inimigo do agricultor é o mato” Fn367.

²⁰ These plants are from the family *Loranthaceae*, some of which are considered hemiparasitic, meaning that they obtain some of their nutrients from a host plant.

²¹ Fn275.

²² Fn323, 340.

for weeds. At this point, the only ground cover is an increasingly thick blanket of dead and decaying leaves and twigs that are easy to walk over and also retain soil moisture.²³

In this sense, the idea of *mato* represents those sets of plant entities that are outside of, and in opposition to, the cultivated space of human purposiveness. *Mato*, as the farmer's "greatest enemy," is a negative element that is to be excluded. However, *mato* may come into purposiveness in at least two ways. First, *mato* is a space that can receive further objects that have fallen outside of human purposiveness. For example, if one wishes to throw away a bit of trash or other refuse, one might say: "You can throw it over there in the *mato*"²⁴ In this example, *mato* still remains outside of human purposes, and is potentially negating or destructive of these purposes, but here it is a space for receiving other entities that have fallen outside of such purposes. Thus, while *mato* remains decidedly outside of the sphere of human *purposes*, it is decidedly within the sphere of human *interests*, insofar as its potentially destructive capacity is something that must be actively attended to and regulated.

If *mato* can generally be taken as a negative space, specific components of *mato* may, furthermore, *come into* human purposes. This depends upon specific practical interests that can shift at different moments—for example, when one is in search of a medicinal plant.²⁵ The plant referred to as "*São Caetana*," for example, was used in the past to wash clothing. It was also referred to as "soldier's soap" (*sabão de soldado*), presumably because it was readily available to soldiers with dirty clothes and nobody to wash them.²⁶ Furthermore, specific kinds of *mato* can serve as indices of land fertility, while others, such as the *sapé* grass, may indicate soil infertility.²⁷ *São Caetana*, again, is taken as an indication of fertile land. Someone seeking to buy a plot of land might look for *São Caetana* growing there.²⁸ As such, even the "greatest enemy" can simultaneously be reframed as positive and creative, and thus enter into the spheres of human interests and purposes.

Mato is a great regulator. It is a powerful and relentless force that can break the strongest of wills. When the cacao plantation economy collapsed in the early 1990s, after the witch's broom fungus (*vassoura de bruxa*) was introduced into the region and destroyed the cacao

²³ Fn340.

²⁴ "Pode jogar aí no *mato*." Fn468.

²⁵ Fn468.

²⁶ Fn460.

²⁷ Fn468.

²⁸ Fn460.

plantation economy, the *mato* was relentless in its assault on the plantation lands. A person walking through a stretch of forest with an untrained eye might not be able to discern that, only some years before, the same bit of land was part of a productive plantation. The *mato* recurs relentlessly, and if left to its own ends, eventually transforms cultivated land into forest. Unlike people, *mato* does not experience fatigue.²⁹

3. Fatigue and the Body as Other

Damião had been planting his *roça* in this manner for more than 10 years, and still his work was not complete. Some of the older plots that he had first planted were growing and becoming increasingly productive, whereas those plots he had planted in later years were still maturing. Damião himself was aging, and on one occasion he commented that he would do more work than he already does, but that he is limited by his own body. After a certain point, every working person tires and eventually every person loses control over his or her body. The body tires and “fatigue” (*cansaço*) begins to set in, taking “command over the person”³⁰ and control over the body. Damião explained:

There are times when I want to do more and more and more, but the fatigue doesn't permit it.³¹

In this sense and in such moments, the human body can be encountered as external to the self, as other to the self, in the same way as thick vines, stinging wasps, and the relentless *mato*. In other words, the body may intercede as a sort of obstacle that is, under certain conditions, distinguishable from the self and its projects.³²

Working for other people—whether as a regular plantation worker, sharecropper, or occasional day laborer—exacerbates this relationship to the physical body, and for this reason,

²⁹ Fn116, 212.

³⁰ “Manda na pessoa.” Fn266.

³¹ “Tem vezes que eu quero fazer mais e mais e mais e mais, mas o cansaço não deixa.”

³² Fn228.

working for others is not highly regarded by rural people in this region. The reason for this is quite specific: people without resources, who wholly depend upon others not only for their livelihood, but also for the very opportunity of making a livelihood, cannot rest.

Unlike Damião, Caio had not yet succeeded in acquiring a piece of land that his family could call their own. Caio, likewise, referenced the fatigue involved in working for others:

Working for other people is bad, because you'll never rest.³³

Being in debt to others, likewise, exacerbates this relation between the body and the need for rest. The debt intervenes in the person's relation to their own body since the debtor stakes a claim to access and use of what Marx would call the body's labor power. Problematic forms of debt give meaning to very common declarations when people say: "I don't owe anything to anybody!" (*Não devo nada a ninguém!*), which may otherwise appear as an expression of asocial behavior.³⁴ It is for these reasons that aging women and men hope to have control over a small piece of productive land, a *roça*, before they retire—so that they can have a place to work for themselves.

For his part, Caio had been working on one of the region's plantations for 25 years. He worked with a signed work card (*carteira assinada*). His wife and two sons worked alongside him, helping with various work tasks, but they did so under the table (*clandestino*) and never received any worker's benefits.³⁵ Caio was looking forward to his retirement because he would finally leave the plantation. His family had been saving up for years to buy a small cacao *roça* where they hoped to move when he was old enough to retire. Caio never complained about plantation work, but he saw that there was no future in it.

The small *roça* he had set his eyes upon purchasing was already productive (*safreira*), and this was important to Caio because starting a *roça* from the ground up takes years. If someone is to spend their retirement living from a small *roça*, then the initial cultivation of the *roça* needed to occur well before the time when one planned to retire. Therefore, Caio noted, he aimed to buy a *roça* that had already been planted and already productive. Otherwise, he

³³ "Trabalhar pra outras é ruim, porque não vai descançar." Fn539.

³⁴ See Chapter 10, Section 3d on debt relations in plantation stores.

³⁵ See the brief description of *diária* work in Chapter 10, Section 3.

explained, “When will I be able to rest?”³⁶ Owning a small roça would be a sort of dream and provide a measure of happiness for Caio. He explained: “If a guy’s got a roça, it’s already a bit of happiness for him.”³⁷ Having a roça provided a measure of stability in the face of insecurity: “If you [are fired] from here, you already know where you’ll go.”³⁸ Later in the day, Caio explained: “A person’s future is in a house and a roça.”³⁹

In Caio’s reflections, the importance of the roça and a home emerge precisely in the context of fatigue, when plantation work is no longer viable, and each person needs somewhere to rest and to retire—a place they can depend upon. In other words, the tired body needs a place to go, somewhere to rest, something to live from, and something to support the body that is losing its capacity to work and to care for itself. As goods, the home and roça emerge in the context of the loss of energy and the ability to work, but their status as goods become all the more acute in the experience of fatigue and the loss of health. Indeed, despite his lament that he was not able to work more, Damião claimed that he was rich because his health was still relatively intact given his age:

There are people who—when they get to my age—they can’t sit down properly, they can’t sit for a long time—all of them complain of back pain, of this, of that. I don’t feel any of those things, no. That’s why I am a rich person. I really am, to tell you the truth.⁴⁰

In the next section, I would like to dwell on the loss of health and the body, in order to get more clarity about the way in which such loss, and the end of activity, gives rise to the need for various other goods that help to remedy that loss.

3a. Losing the Body

³⁶ “Quando é que vou descansar?” Fn539.

³⁷ “O cara tendo uma roça, já é uma alegria pra ele.” Fn440.

³⁸ “Se sair daqui, já sabe pra onde vai.” Fn440. By “here,” Caio was referring to the plantation. When Caio said, “If you leave here,” by “if you leave” he meant “if you are fired” and thus forced to leave the plantation.

³⁹ “O futuro do cara é casa e roça.” Fn440.

⁴⁰ “Que tem gente que quando chega a minha idade não guenta sentar, ficar sentado até esse horário, nem guenta ficar em pé direito, todo queixano que ta com dor de cadeira, com isso, com aquilo. Eu não sinto nada não. Por isso eu sou um cara rico, sou mesmo, falar a verdade.”

In the middle of a long conversation with Francinha, she begins to reflect on the end of her life and her increasing physical inactivity:

I die from the longing I feel for the land, for my work, because—I don't know—I think that it's very good to work. There's a saying like this:

“Whoever works, God helps.”

We worked, we can trust God. And God will help us, you can trust that. Because I worked all of my life, and I had great faith in God—great faith, really.⁴¹

Francinha has cataracts and, at the time of the interview, was nearly blind and beyond surgical intervention. A single bottle of the eye drops that could slow the advance of her cataracts cost about R\$80, or about 17% of the monthly retirement benefits that she received in 2009. This was the second time that my research assistant and I visited Francinha and her husband Mateus, and since the first visit we were able to get some free samples of the eye drops from a family friend who was also an ophthalmologist. It was hard to say how long the trial sample would last. Francinha's body was leaving her and she was no longer able to work. She lived in town now with her husband, who was also losing his health. She is away from her land, apart from her plants, separated from her work. She is losing her body, and losing her world.

Francinha proceeded to recount experiences with both privation and success that she had undergone over the course of her life, all of which she attributed to something that might be called God's plan:

And so, what is this? It is what God wants and what we do. Because I know—I mean, who knows, young man—I trust deeply in the Lord God, I have faith and it is alive in him. I know that everything in this world, without God, it is nothing, nothing.⁴²

⁴¹ “Morro de sodade da therra de trabalhar, porque, eu sei la, eu acho muito bom trabalhar, porque them um dizer assim: Quem trabalha Deus ajuda. A gente trabalhou, pode confiar em Deus. E Deus vai nos ajudar, pode confiar, porque, eu toda vida eu trabalhei, mas eu tinha muita fé em Deus, muita mesmo.”

⁴² “Então, tudo isso é o que? É o que Deus quer e o que a gente faz, porque eu sei, não sei não minino, eu confio muito no Senhor Deus, eu tem a confiança é viva nele. Eu sei qui tudo neste mundo sem Deus não é nada, nada.”

She continued:

Without God, one is nothing. God is first, because he is the Protector. He is the Savior. He is the one that resolves all of our problems. Well, he is the one that frees us from evil, and that's what he is. And that is why I live this way, Thanks Be to God. That's why I feel a great desire, I had the desire—⁴³

As the discussion of God made clear in the previous chapter, however, even the most alienated, ground down form of life is always accompanied by God. No matter how bare one's existence, one is always *something*, however inchoate; because if there was no God accompanying one's bare existence, one would be nothing.

Francinha seems to have a conflicted relationship with God, however. At various points, she indicates that without God, she would be nothing, and she expresses her thanks to God at almost every turn in the conversation. She attributes her present condition of physical incapacity to something like God's will, but at every turn in our conversation, she indicates that she still has a desire to work. While, in the above passage, she thanks God for the way she lives, she goes on to express her desire to be living differently:

And that is why I live this way, thanks be to God. That's why I feel a great desire, I had the desire—I like the roça and I would have liked to—if I hadn't lost my vision, I wouldn't be here, no. I would be on the roça, I would be on the roça.⁴⁴

I suggested that if her health was better, she would still be working on the farm to that day:

If I had—if I hadn't lost my vision—even with everything else that I feel in my body—because I feel diabetes, I feel cholesterol. I feel numbness on one side [of my body]—well, I think that's from the diabetes. But even with the way that I live now—I feel heart [pain]—but [despite all of that,] I could still get by living life, as long as God willed it.

⁴³ “Sem Deus, num é nada. Premeramente é Deus, qui Ele é o protetor. Ele é o Salvador, Ele é quem resolve todo nossos pobrema. Bom, Ele é quem nos livra do mal e Ele é assim. E por isso eu vivo assim, Graças a Deus. Por isso eu sinto muita vontade, eu tinha vontade—”

⁴⁴ “E por isso eu vivo assim, Graças a Deus. Por isso eu sinto muita vontade, eu tinha vontade—Eu gosto da roça qui eu tinha vontade de—se eu num tivesse perdido minha visão, não tava aqui não. Tava na roça, tava na roça.”

And I have—I have it in me. Because if I could still see, things would be better for me. Even with how I’d be able to take care of myself, I’d have more resilience (*resistência*). Because [if] I could see, that is, if someone taught me [how to make] a remedy: “See, that medicine is good for diabetes.” Then I would make it myself. “That medicine is good.” I would make it. And what I mean is, because of the way that I live [today]—I always have to ask [others] to make it. But the thing is, I find that when we have to ask too often, it leaves a bad taste (*enjoa*). All we do is, “Hey Peter, do this. Hey Paul, do that. Hey Mary, do that other thing.” I think that’s horrible!⁴⁵

What emerges in this passage is that Francinha is losing control over her body, and in losing control over her body she is losing control over some of her active capacities. This makes it clear that the self, whatever that is, and the physical body are not isomorphic. Like anything else, the body can become “other” to the self and its projects. If, in some sense, one can *come out of possession* of one’s physical body, one must have also at some point come into possession of one’s physical body.⁴⁶ Learning how to use one’s body, in different ways, is a part of the process of amending it toward the creation of different kinds of ends. Training and caring for the body is part of the process of cultivating various kinds of goods that emerge from the body’s activity. This bodily dependence becomes clearest when one loses control of the body, as is the case with Francinha, and when the body becomes “other” to the self. At this point, health emerges as a basic good and condition of the body; health is recognized as a form of wealth, a kind of “good.”

Francinha’s husband, Mateus, is sitting next to her on the couch at this point, and he weighs in on the fact of forced dependence upon others, to whom she must now turn for help:

⁴⁵ “Se eu tivesse—não tivesse perdido a minha visão—mermo dento de tudo qui eu sinto no meu corpo—qui eu sinto diabete, eu sinto colesterol. Bem, eu sinto um lado durmente—bom, mas eu julgo qui é procidido da diabete. Mas mermo qui assim como eu vivo—sinto de coração—mas dá pa eu ir levano a vida, conforme Deus marcou. E aí eu tenho, tenho em mim qui eu tivesse inxergano a coisa pra mim era melhor. Até mermo como eu cuidar de mim eu tinha outa resistência, porque eu inxergava, quer dizer, um, um me insinava um remédio: “Ói tal remédio é bom pa diabete.” Eu fazia. “Tal remédio é bom.” Eu fazia. E quer dizer, qui da forma qui eu vivo, eu peço pa fazer. Mas só qui eu acho assim, qui a gente pidir dimais enjoa. A gente ta só: “Ei fulano faz isso, fulano faz aquilo, cicrano faz aquilo outo.” E eu acho ruim!”

⁴⁶ Once again, see Waldron’s (1988:361-363) account of Hegel’s notion of self-possession, which was also briefly cited in Chapter 6, Section 3c.

Now, those who can't do it for themselves, they have to ask those that are healthy!⁴⁷

Francinha concurs:

Those who can't do it [for themselves], they just have to ask [another]. But I, I really feel [miss] the roça, I really feel [long for] it...I really feel [miss, long for] the roça. If God—look, I'll tell you, if God still gave me my vision, or [if God] gives it to me yet—I don't know, only He knows. I would still—I would still want to live on the roça. Because it's a place that's more—more open air. We feel better there. See, on the roça, we plant a—a mint plant. We plant a *favaca grossa* plant. We plant a *favaca fina* plant.⁴⁸

Interestingly, in this passage, Francinha's longing for the roça is not just a longing for a place, but a longing for what, for her, was the meaningful and creative activity that simultaneously occurred in, and also constituted, that place. This activity was planting, which, as we have seen in the previous chapter, has a particularly rich historical constitution as a form of social action. She continues to list off a series of other things she would plant:

[I would plant] a *quioiô* plant. Plant a *couve* plant. We have herbs for our beans, to make porridge of whatever we want. All of this is GOOD. Plant a *jiló* plant—what better vegetable is there than *jiló*? We make a porridge of beans, with *jiló*, with greens. That there is a very healthy, it's very good!⁴⁹

She laughs. And then, explains the reality of her situation clearly, concluding with a final appeal to God for a return to her work and life on the roça:

⁴⁷ “Agora, só qui, quem num pode fazer them qui pidir mermo a quem ta bom.”

⁴⁸ “Quem não pode fazer, só tem qui pidir. Mas eu, eu sinto muito a, a roça, sinto muito mesmo...Sinto muito a roça, se Deus—olha, eu digo a vocês, se Deus me desse ainda a minha visão, ou me der—eu não sei, tudo quem sabe é Ele. Eu ainda tinha, eu ainda tinha vontade de morar na roça, porque eu acho um lugar mais, mais arejado, a gente se sente melhor, olhe, na roça a gente pranta, um, um pé de hartelã, a gente pranta um pé de favaca grossa, um pé de favaca fina.”

⁴⁹ “Um pé de quiolhô, pranta um pé de couve, a gente tem folha pra um feijão, pra fazer um cuzido de quorquer coisa, tudo isso é bom, pranta um pé de jiló. Tem verdura mio do que jiló? A gente faz um cuzido de feijão cum jiló, cum folha. Aquilo é uma vitamina muito boa, muito boa.”

AND SO, I UNDERSTAND [HOW TO DO] ALL OF THIS, AND TODAY I CAN NO LONGER DO IT. I've already done [all of these things], but today I can no longer do them. And so, that's why I say—I really like life on the roça. I am here because God wants me here. And I am still thankful to God—I still give many thanks to God that I can still be here in my little home. Here—the only person that can take me from here is God. Because I don't owe a cent to anybody. This place belongs to God. Under God, it belongs to us. And I am thankful to our Lord. But if God gave me the power to still live on the roça, that would be wonderful to me—really wonderful—because I like to walk on the roça.⁵⁰

There is a great deal going on in these reflections. Francinha is giving an account of a range of transformations that have made her captive to an increasingly inoperable body. Although she commands the skills, knowledge, desire and the future orientation to carry out various creative tasks, she lacks a crucial condition for carrying this out, namely, her vision. The rest of her body is ailing: she has cholesterol, diabetes, numbness on one side, heart problems. Her body is dying.

Francinha's husband, Mateus, suggested something concrete that they had to be thankful for. Similarly, though, he also explained their captivity to "Illness." He had bought a small piece of land in the countryside, but owed to his wife's illness, they were unable to do much with that land:

The first piece of land that I possessed as my own was just a little bit [of land]—it was what I'd purchased at Pequi Community...[But] I didn't—I didn't do anything there. I didn't do anything with it, do you know why? Well, because my wife fell ill—living like she does now—and well, we continue struggling [with that] because the little future there is goes to the illness. We have nothing—we're thankful to God that we don't sleep out in the open. We have a little hut to—to sleep in—because the illness doesn't leave [anything else]. Life is wasted—it's really just wasted on illness. And now I'm sick, too. Well, in the end, life is just wasted on—on illness. We really do live in the hands of—of

⁵⁰ "ENTÃO, EU ENTENDO DISSO TUDO E HOJE EU NUM POSSO FAZER. Já fiz, agora hoje eu num posso mais fazer. Então, é onde eu digo, gosto muito da roça. To aqui, porque Deus quer, eu ainda dou graças a Deus, ainda dou muita graça a Deus eu estar aqui e to dento do meu barraco. Aqui, só quem me tira daqui é Deus, porque, não devo tustão a ninguém. Aqui é de Deus, abaixo de Deus é nosso e, aí eu dou graça ao Senhor. Mas se Deus me desse o poder de eu morar na roça eu acho bom demais—demais mermo—qui eu gosto de andar na roça."

God, and the little future [retirement money] that we get today is nothing compared to
Illness.⁵¹

The loss of physical life is not a wholly inexorable process. Like any other “other,” Illness is not exempt from the effects of activity. If activity and work overcome the forest—transform the forest and bring it into human purposes—Antônia likewise suggested that being active in her old age was her way of combating old age and fending off death:

Now, as long as [death] doesn’t come, as long as the day doesn’t arrive, I’m looking toward God. I’m—I’m—I’m trusting in the Lord, and I’m—I’m fighting. Now, I just can’t stay waiting, telling her to simply come. If it’s coming, I’m not going to just wait around, no. There’s no way I’ll wait, I’m not just going to wait. Because if you wait it gets worse, just sitting there thinking to yourself—dwelling in that thought is worse...One can’t just wait—the day that [death] arrives, okay, but you shouldn’t just sit there waiting. There are people who get sick, and they just sit there—sit there doing nothing, they don’t touch a leaf—illness takes control of the whole body.⁵²

For Antônia, merely ceasing to live would amount to delivering herself over to illness, something she adamantly refused at 79 years old:

No, I won’t. I won’t—I won’t—I won’t deliver my—my—my—my flesh to suffering.
No. No—that’s not how I am.⁵³

⁵¹ “O premero therreno qui eu pissuí pur meu foi um pedacinho, foi o que eu comprei lá no Pequi...Eu num, num fiz nada. Num fiz nada, sabe por quê? Porque a mulé caiu duente—véve aí desse jetho—a gente vem lutano. Qui o futuruzin qui faz é somente pa duença. Num themo nada, damo graças a Dheus qui num dorme à toa. Themo o barrocuzin de, de a pessoa durmir, porque a duença num deixa. A vida é gastar, é gastar aí cum duença mermo. E agora eu tomém duentado. Bom, tudo e finalmente qui a vida é gastar cum, cum duença. Nós véve nas mão mermo de, de Dheus e o futuro pouco hoje em dia pa duença num é nada.”

⁵² “Agora, enqonto num vem, enqonto num chega o dia, to olhano pa Deus, to, to, to confiado no Senhor e to, to pelejano. Agora, só num posso é ficar isperano, dizer ela já vem. Ele vem vou ficar isperano, não. De jetho ninhum q’eu num ispero, num ispero mermo. Porque se isperar é pior, só ficar maquinano naquilo—ficar naquele pensamento é pior...Qui num pode isperar—no dia qui chegar, tudo bem, agora num, num, só num pode isperar. Them gente qui ta duente ali, fica ali num dá, num arreda uma paia pa nada—a duença toma conta do corpo todo.”

⁵³ “Não, não vou, não vou, não vou, não vou intregar minha, minha, minha, minhas carne ao sofrimento. Não. Num, num to assim.”

She recounted a little bit of the routine through which she stays active, and reiterated her refusal to succumb:

Now, for me to stay there, just lying down the whole time—constantly, constantly, constantly—then suffering takes control of the—of our body. It takes control of the flesh, takes control of the nerves, takes control of the bones, takes control of everything. And well—when we want to take control of ourselves, there’s no way anymore—it’s already taken [by suffering]. So, you shouldn’t wait around [for death], you must battle, look toward God and battle. Until whenever He wants, right?⁵⁴

In other words, for Antônia, laboring to gain control over her own body mirrored the labor required to create a measure of control over a space in the forest.

4. Eating and Being Eaten

Early on in my experience in the region, and as I was learning Portuguese, I began to notice patterns in the ways in which marked uses of the verb *comer* (to eat) were employed, especially in a destructive or detractive sense. There are different verbs to express the notion of eating, beyond the common Portuguese verb, *comer*. Other variations on this verb include *papar*, *traçar*, and *rangar*,⁵⁵ whereas other terms express the act of eating onomatopoeically, such as the expressions *paco* and *creu*.

The notion of eating passes from unmarked forms of eating—eating a plate of beans and rice—to marked forms based upon the proportion that one eats. A person who eats excessively large quantities may be referred to as a *comelão*—an eater in the augmentative form, or a “big eater.”⁵⁶ This usage is closely related to a generalized notion of gluttony and greed, or *gula*. For

⁵⁴ “Agora p’eu ficar dhethada direto—direto, direto, direto—o sofrimento toma conta do—do corpo da gente. Toma conta de carne, toma conta de nelvo, toma conta de osso, toma conta de tudo. E aí—qondo a gente quer tomar em si, já num them mais jetho—já ta tomado. Então, no them qui isperar, them qui bataiar, olhar pa Deus e Batalhar. Athé qondo Ele quiser, né?”

⁵⁵ Fn603.

⁵⁶ Fn603.

example, one person living on one of the land reform settlements commented: “If people had their [land] documents, then people would have their independence and the Big Eaters [*comelão*] couldn’t eat anymore.”⁵⁷ This example indicates one of the various senses of the verb *comer*, and, in this context, the speaker is talking about local MST leaders who he felt were taking more than their fair share, as will be described in more detail in Chapter 13.

Termites may eat the wooden supports under your house causing the back of your home to collapse,⁵⁸ mosquitoes might suck your blood, while working too long with cement might eat away at the skin on your fingers. For example, during one evening meal in 2010, shared with two brothers—masons who had been contracted to help build a brick house in one of the rural communities—one of the brothers grabbed a pot from the stove. The pot was still hot, and he burned his fingertips. Normally, he commented, his fingers would not be so sensitive to the heat, but, he explained: “The cement eats at your hands.”⁵⁹ That is, the cement with which he had been working all day had worn down, or ate away, at the calluses on his hands, leaving the skin on his fingertips “thinned” (*afinado*, or refined). Consequently, the cement’s “eating” at his hands modified his capacity to perform a simple task—picking up a hot pot—and, more generally, the set of capacities available to using fingers and hands.⁶⁰ Even in this sense, the cement’s “eating” affected some other—this man’s hand—and their ability to act in the world.

Sometimes that which is eaten, may, likewise, destroy that which eats. Some people, for example, claim to “eat” *cachaça*—a Brazilian liquor made from sugarcane juice, playfully referred to as “water” (*água*). One may say: “Today, I’m going to eat water!”⁶¹ which is to say, “Today I’m going to get wasted!” Eating *cachaça* may, however, turn upon and consume the eater, and begin to take control, or *toma conta*, of the person who is drinking. In doing so, the *cachaça* eventually eats away at the person’s body, their health, and personal relationships—sometime leaving them destitute and alone: *acabado*, finished, ruined.

People may also eat different elements of one another. For example, someone might desire to eat another person: “I’m going to eat that man” or “I’m going to eat that woman,”⁶² which is to say that someone wishes to have sex with—better translated as “fuck”—another. Or

⁵⁷ Fn301.

⁵⁸ Fn536.

⁵⁹ “O cimento come a mão.”

⁶⁰ Fn436.

⁶¹ “Hoje to comeno água!”

⁶² “Vou comer aquele homem.” “Vou comer aquela mulher.”

someone might wish to perturb another person by playing mind, for example, through various deceptions or falsehoods, and claim: “I’m going to eat his mind.”⁶³

In these senses, the idea of eating picks out different relationship that may subsist between different kinds of entities, and in these marked senses, the quality of the relationship is detractive or destructive in some capacity or other. Something that “eats”—or “eats away at”—another could be thought of as modifying or, in some cases, undermining the latter’s capacity to achieve certain ends, whatever those happen to be, and however they came about.⁶⁴ In more abstract terms, eating might be said to be an act of “negating,” and in some cases, as in clearing the forest for planting, such acts of negating are unavoidable as part of a larger creative process. Some such processes, however, are less creative but more destructive in a straightforward sense. By drawing attention to these negating processes more generally, particularly in their marked forms, we can gain insight into “eating” and the incipient moral problems it poses at different orders of relationship.

By focusing on “eating,” I do not wish to suggest that the idea of eating is employed as a metaphor, or as a “key symbol” (Ortner 1973), at least not in a strong sense. It is not clear that “eating” is used in a metaphorical sense at all, or that other relational concepts could not do the same interpretive work that the idiom of “eating” is doing in this section. While the notion of “eating” may be common in local idioms, it does not seem to form the crux of anything that might be called a cultural “system.” This is not to suggest, however, that the relational concept of “eating” is not patterned or frequently drawn upon as people both describe and evaluate their experiences. For the idea of eating to be patterned—and fruitful across experiential contexts—it only needs to pick out a particular relational structure that the idiom of “eating” helps to render intelligible and evaluable. This relational structure, however, is a part of those relationships (and thus could be re-described in other terms), and does not derive only from what people say about them.⁶⁵

⁶³ “Vou comer o juízo dele.”

⁶⁴ Fn436.

⁶⁵ In other words, rather than claiming that I have identified a key symbol that draws together a “cultural system,” I have tried to identify a relational structure that is identified and highlighted through tokens where the verb *comer* is employed. The relational structure is not “proprietary” to this particular verbal form, however, and does not point to a “web of significance” that is causally detached from the non-human world. Geertz professed: “Believing, with Max Weber, that man is an animal suspended in *webs of significance he himself has spun*, I take culture to be those webs, and the analysis of it to be therefore *not an experimental science* in search of law but an interpretive one in search of meaning” (1973:5, my emphasis). I take it that humans are animals that, in their web-spinning, sometimes get caught up in webs and vines that are not of their own making, and are stung by the occasional wasp, too. This

4a. Tokens of Eating in Discourse

Different tokens of eating present a particular structure, which has at least two objects:

_____ eats _____

Through this relational predicate, the subject subsumes, consumes, destroys, detracts from, or otherwise diminishes its object in some way or in some capacity. When the properties of this relational structure subsist in an experience, people may find the idea of “eating” to be interpretively applicable in some helpful way. The ways in which this detractive relational structure can be drawn into and emerge in moral projects, however, can vary widely. The following tokens of “eating” help to illustrate the wide range of relational and practical domains into which the idiom of eating can extend conceptually. Below I present 16 tokens, while attempting to cluster them into relational categories through which the notion of eating emerges. I begin (“Eating as Existential Asymmetry”) with examples in which the asymmetries of eating and being eaten appear more as irrevocable conditions of existing, much in the same way that making a clearing in the forest has been described as a kind of struggle for existence among various kinds of beings. I then proceed (“Objects Eating Objects”) to examine tokens of some kind of object eating another kind of object, and in the following section (“Eating Others and Other’s Things”) the relationships of eating emerge very rapidly as moral relationships and not merely an irrevocable condition of being. The next set of tokens examines certain configurations of sexual activity as a specific subset of eating or consuming other people, in particular men consuming women. This leads to broader considerations of situations when exploitation are described in terms of eating others (“Eating Others as Exploiting Others”), and finally to a special case of eating and being eaten by money (“Being Eaten by Money”) as a special realm for this moral problematic. In the two sections that follow these tokens, I explore the plantations

outlook on “meaning” draws upon the tradition associated with Charles Sanders Peirce, which suggests that an adequate account of “meaning” and “significance” cannot be separated out from experience (i.e. “experiment”) or from “nature”—that is, from non-human others. See Peirce (1992, 1998) for a useful introductory collection of his writings; see Short (2007) for a comprehensive introduction to Peirce’s theory of signs.

as a site wherein people are eaten or consumed, and the case of eating money as an instantiation of greed.

A. Eating as Existential Asymmetry

(a) One man described a relationship between the earth and the human body:

When we die, isn't it the earth that eats us?...We don't eat the earth.⁶⁶

In this case, the asymmetry of "eating" relationships emerges once again, but in a very different mode than that presented in examples (i), (j), and (k) below. Eating points to a relationship that is constitutive and an intractable aspect of being an embodied entity.

(b) Another person described the asymmetrical relationships between the forest and the provision of food:

Because just the forest, alone, it doesn't give food to anybody.⁶⁷

B. Objects Eating Objects

(c) Eating relationships may occur in an unmarked fashion between various organisms. One man recalled that one of his children was born in the hospital in town. The hospital was overrun with mosquitoes at the time, and he decided to take his wife and newborn son away from the hospital:

⁶⁶ "A gente morre e quem come a gente não é a terra?...A gente num come terra."

⁶⁷ "Porque só as mata só, num da comida a ninguém."

When I arrived there [in the hospital], I say: “Man, here [the mosquitoes] are going to eat—they’ll eat my wife, eat my boy, eat everything...Look, I’m going to take my son home, if not, the mosquitoes are going to kill him.”⁶⁸

(d) Another man described a more direct notion of eating, which expresses the notion of eating as extinguishing. Here he is describing the difference between a *bem de raíz* crop—typically a perennial tree crop, such as a cacao, clove, or some kinds of rubber trees—and an annual crop like corn or beans, which he describes in the first place:

You planted it, harvested it, sold it or eat it, and it’s gone. But the *bem de raíz* stays there for life (*por vida*), it remains there...It’s—there for—it becomes native there.⁶⁹

(e) Another person, in an instance of elicited speech regarding the range of the idiom of eating, suggested ways in which non-human objects might be involved in “eating” relationships, as well:

The sharpening stone eats the machete.⁷⁰

In this case, the stone “eats” away at steel, and in some sense, it has a detractive or destructive force upon the machete blade insofar as it eats away at the steel in order to sharpen it. In time, the sharpening stone will reduce the machete blade to nothingness—no longer able to hold an edge—but it is important to note that this form of “eating” has a specific purpose relative to human conduct. Without eating away at the blade, the machete cannot be sharpened and hence cannot be employed in any further meaningful work.

C. *Eating Others and Other’s Things*

⁶⁸ “Quando eu chego lá, eu digo: ‘Rapaz, aqui vai cumer, vai cumer mulé, vai cumer minino, vai cumer tudo...Oie, vou levar meu filho pra casa, senão a muriçoca vai matar.’”

⁶⁹ “O senhor plantou, culeu, vendeu ou cumeu, cabou. E é bem de raiz fica ali por vida, fica ali...É, aí pa—fica nativa ali.”

⁷⁰ “A pedra de amolar come o facao.”

(f) In another context, a young man was describing a conflict that his mother had gotten into with another woman over some gossip, which eventually turned violent. He recalled that the other woman had snuck up on his mother, to strike her down with a machete:

When mom saw it, the machete was already eating on top of her.⁷¹

In other words, the machete was descending upon his mother, who had seen it coming too late and was badly injured. This example gives another case in which the eating relationship is one of the subject (a machete) destroying some object (the woman).

(g) One man had purchased a car that he hoped to use for contracting freight, and since he did not know how to drive, he had hired a driver to help him. The driver, however, failed to take care of the car. The owner of the vehicle described the driver's destroying the car as having "eaten" the car:

The driver ate the car and even filed a complaint against me to pay him four months [of severance pay].⁷²

In this case, one person "ate" or destroyed the car, which was first manifest in the decay of the car's physical properties, and furthermore as the destruction of the man's property.

(h) Jorge, recounting a story about how his grandfather had entrusted their family's land title to a local lawyer, who stole their land document, stated:⁷³

Grandpa delivered [the land title] to Dr. Bartolomeu at that time. And Dr. Bartolomeu—*CREU!*—[he ate it up].⁷⁴

⁷¹ "Quando mainha viu já foi o facão cumeno em cima dela."

⁷² "O motorista comeu o carro e ainda deu queixa de mim pra eu pagar quatro mês."

⁷³ See Chapter 5, Section 6.

⁷⁴ "Vovô entregou a Doutor Bartolomeu naquela epa. Doutor Bartolomeu creu."

The onomatopoeic term “creu” (described above) imitates the sound of eating, and in this case, it appears that the Doctor had attempted to appropriate both the land document and the land for himself.

D. Sex as Eating Others

(i) Another man described his first sexual experience when he went to a local brothel after he first began work and earn money. He was fourteen years old at the time, worked selling bread, and spent all of his money in the brothel:

I tired from eating three, four women in a night...The next day I'd work, work, work—I sold bread, and so on walking [about selling bread], quite a bit. When I got back [home], I say:

“Hey, this money here, I'm gonna eat another again, I'm going to eat the woman again.”⁷⁵

(j) Another man, explaining that a young woman who had sexual relations out of wedlock would, often, be forced into a life in the brothels.

Well then, she delivered herself there [to the brothel], and the tobacco (*fumo*) ate left and right.⁷⁶

In this case, “tobacco” is a euphemism for the vagina, which is taken to be “eating” or having sex with all of the people who frequent the brothel. Notice that, in this case, the woman's vagina is agentively dismembered from the woman and the rest of her body.

⁷⁵ “Eu cansei de cumer três, quato mulé na nôthe...No outo dia eu trabalhei, trabalhei, trabalhei—vendi o pão, lá vai e andei, mei mundo. Quando vortei, eu digo://‘É, esse dinheiro aqui, eu vou cumer outa de novo, vou cumer a mulé de novo.’”

⁷⁶ “Aí ela se entregava lá e o fumo cumia a torto e à direito.”

(k) In recounting local lore about the competition between the traditional political boss of the region (the local “coronel”) and the local catholic priest, who vied for power in local politics, he compared their similar sexual exploits. With respect to the *coronel*:

I know that [the coronel] was a first-rate player, see? He didn’t have one *comadre* that he didn’t eat (*papasse*), I don’t know for sure, but that’s what people say.⁷⁷

With respect to the local priest:

[The priest] ate all of the girls from the church...And the [coronel] didn’t like him disputing his power, no...He wanted to kick the priest out [of the town] but the priest also wanted to be in control.⁷⁸

In these cases, “eating” could be translated as “fucking,” and here eating assumes another form of competition, conquest, and domination. Eating appears in the context of vying for power and control, and establishes an asymmetry between those who vie for position to “eat,” and between those, an asymmetry with those who are eaten.

E. Eating Others as Exploiting Others

(l) Another man described contemporary laws in education that prevent teachers from being able to reprimand their students:

The teachers have the students, [but] they can’t even reprimand the students...No, here no, they can’t even reprimand [the students], they have to eat it quietly, [and] the students can do whatever they want to the teacher.⁷⁹

⁷⁷ “Eu sei que ele era um namorador de primeira categoria, viu? Ele não tinha uma comadre que ele não papasse, segundo dizem, que eu não sei não.”

⁷⁸ “Comia aquelas meninas da igreja todas...E o [Coronel] não gostava de disputa não...Não, queria botar o padre pra fora e o padre também queria mandar.”

⁷⁹ “As professora tem os alunos, num pode nem recrimar os aluno...Não, aqui não, nem recrimar num pode, tem de comer calada, os minino faz o que quer com a professora.”

By saying that they have to “eat it quietly” (*comer calada*) he means to say that the teachers have to take verbal abuse from students and are unable to say or do anything in return.

(m) In this case, one young man is describing relationships to “false” friends who do not really have one’s best interests in mind:

And the person is always playing with me, even when they’re talking with me [face-to-face] and then with falseness behind my back, you see? They just wanted to suck. Sucking is the following: it’s only wanting the *come-to-us* (*venha nós*)...you see? Everything that I had, they only wanted *come-to-us*. When I needed them, where was the friend?⁸⁰

In this case, there is a play of appearance. One friend, which turns out to be a false friend, has two faces. In relation to the person, they put on one face of appearing to be supportive, but behind the person’s back, the friend assumes a different posture. Over the course of experience, it becomes clear that the friend only wanted to “suck,” or eat from, the person. Interestingly, the interlocutor in that case uses interesting deictic terms to describe “sucking”: *come-to-me*. This seems to imply that there is an asymmetry in the relationship; when the friend is sucking off of the person, only drawing toward the self, when the other needs the friend, there is no reciprocity. This could be taken as a paradigm of an epistemically “false” form of friendship.

(n) One man who lives on a land reform settlement complained that some community members had attempted to take advantage of others, and those who take advantage of others, he describes as “eating” others:

I didn’t struggle to live in misery, nor did I struggle for me and my friends (*colegas*) to be eating one another.⁸¹

⁸⁰ “E a pessoa sempre me jogano e me, mermo assim, conversano comigo e com falsidade por detrás quando eu dava às costas, ta entendeno? Só queria sugar. Sugar é o seguinte, é só quereno venha nós...Tá entendeno? Tudo que eu tinha só queria venha nós; quando eu precisava, cadê o amigo?”

⁸¹ “Não lutei por mode viver na miséria, nem lutei pa poder eu e meus colegas um comendo o outro não.”

In this case, if one person “eats” another, it is in the sense of taking advantage, usually for financial gain and through trickery.

(o) In another case, a man describes asymmetrical eating relationships between plantation managers and plantation workers:

The workers going hungry, while the manager eats the plantation’s income without anybody knowing.⁸²

In this case, “eating” is akin to stealing and the object is the plantation money. The agent of the theft is the plantation manager, who is stealing both from the plantation workers (e.g., delaying their payments), but also stealing from an absentee plantation owner, taking advantage of the owner’s absence.

F. Being Eaten by Money

(p) Another man, describing his reluctance to receive agricultural loans, described the problematic aspects of debt relation. Here he is describing the relationship between the principal and the interest:

When it’s done and you go to pay, that interest—that principal—it already ate everything in the interest!⁸³

What he is expressing here is that the money that would be used to pay off the principal is eaten up by the interest—which becomes agentive—and that it is impossible to. The “he”—the eating subject—eats everything and takes it back into itself.

⁸² “Os trabalhador passano fome, e o gerente cumeno a renda da fazenda sem ninguém saber.”

⁸³ “Quando caba qui for pagar, aquele juro—aquele pincipá—ele já cumeu tudo no juro.”

4b. *Plantation Work & Being Eaten*

Some people describe the region's plantations as "eating" workers up, sapping their strength, and constantly replacing those used up workers with new ones, until the strength of the new workers was consumed, and they themselves were finally replaced.⁸⁴ Damião later explains:

These other plantations—the guy enters there as an employee, but it's the same thing as being a slave. These [plantations] there, it's really the same disgraceful slavery...Everybody knows it...it's another slavery. Either you work, or you have nothing. If they don't like the worker—he works and works—and when he's lost his strength, they push him out and put in a new worker. When [the plantation] eats up that guy's strength, then they push him out, too.⁸⁵

Other people likewise employed the idioms of eating (and having nothing to eat) to characterize plantation work. One man, who after years of plantation work had acquired land for his family, explained that in order for him and his friends to arrive at the place where they are today, they had suffered a great deal. Sebastião elsewhere suggested that what they had to "eat" when they worked on the plantations was *hunger* itself:

We earned nothing—we ate more hunger than with our bellies full. We'd go to [work on] the roça—[maybe] eat a banana—while we were planting for the fazenda. Today, thank God—thank God, today I go hungry only when I want to.⁸⁶

⁸⁴ The region's plantations are described in detail in Chapter 10.

⁸⁵ "Essas outas fazenda—o cara enta pa lá como ser um empregado é a merma coisa de ser um escravo. Essa [fazenda] aí é mermo uma escravidão desgraçada...Todo mundo conhece isso...[Essa outra fazenda], outa escravidão, ou o cara trabalha, ou não tem. Se não gostou mais do cara—o cara trabalha, trabalha, quando perdeu as força, ele empurra aquele e bota outro novo, quando comer as força daquele, empurra também."

⁸⁶ "Ganhano mixaria—cumeno mais fome qui a barriga cheia. Ia pa roça—cumia banana—pantano pa fazenda, agora, gaça a Dheus to hoje aí, gaça a Dheus, passo fome quando eu quero."

He described the plantation managers as “cunning” (*sabido*) and as “tricking” (*enrolando*) the workers out of their wages, and, furthermore, as eating the profits that would have gone to the absentee owner of the plantation. The plantation manger was eating everything:

He had to eat because the [owner] only came here every eight or nine years!⁸⁷

What he meant was that because the plantation owner visited so rarely, the temptation to steal from the plantation was so great that the manager was simply unable to resist “eating” from plantation’s harvest. Other people expressed a similar perspective that implicated the plantation managers—even more than the plantation owners—as being responsible for squandering the plantation’s profits. Damião suggested:

The plantation manager—while the workers were going hungry, the manager was eating the plantation’s profits without anybody knowing.⁸⁸

Plantation workers were caught between the demands of their physical bodies that needed to eat—subdued by their own hunger—and the greed of plantation managers who wanted to eat everything for themselves. The demands of their physical bodies held a claim over the workers to the advantage of the plantation managers. As seen in Chapter 6, Section 4, hunger had a compulsive power over Amado that kept him captive to plantation work. Antônia had similarly explained:

[Working] on others’ farms, whether or not you want to, you have to go. Whether sick or well—unless you’re bedridden—you have to go. Because if you don’t go, you don’t eat.⁸⁹

A man named Justo similarly employed the idiom of captivity to describe plantation work:

⁸⁷ “Ele tinha qui cumer porque o home só vinha aqui, cum otho, nove ano.”

⁸⁸ “O gerente da fazenda—e os trabalhador passano fome e o gerente cumeno a renda da fazenda sem ninguém saber.”

⁸⁹ “E a, e a roça dos outo que queira, que não queira, them que ir. Ou duente ou bom—a num ta na cama—them que ir. Que se não for, não come.”

In those days, we lived in captivity [to the plantation]...Ave Maria! We lived in captivity.⁹⁰

The idiom of “captivity” (*cativeiro*) is another way of expressing the notions of bondage or slavery, and in a sense, people were captives to their own bodies, physical needs, and hunger.

4c. *Eating People and Eating Money*

Whereas, in the previous section, Damião described plantation work as having one’s strength consumed and “eaten” up, he contrasts this with being able to work for oneself. The shift is from a condition pervasive lack to material abundance, and a form of self-determination that results when hunger is alleviated and no longer has coercive force over the self:

I can sleep and wake up, think about what I’ll do tomorrow and have my belly full. My children have all graduated—because [before] I couldn’t send them to study, [but today] they’re all graduated. I eat what I want, I go wherever I like—nobody orders me about. I’m the one that orders me about.⁹¹

This state of self-determination contrasts with the way in which plantation work “eats” the strength of young women and men, who are viewed as interchangeable parts that are eaten up only to be replaced by another younger person.

Just as people (and their strength) can be eaten up by the plantations, money can also be eaten. Indeed, the expression “to eat money” (*comer dinheiro*) is perhaps the most commonly used circumstance where the “eating” idiom is employed in an ethical and evaluative sense. The act of eating money represents notions of greed and theft. For example, public monies that are designated for infrastructure building projects are taken to be prime targets for misappropriation, and often channeled toward private enrichment and aggrandizement.

⁹⁰ “Naquele tempo nós vivia num cativeiro [da fazenda]...Ave Maria! Nós vivia no cativeiro.”

⁹¹ “Eu posso dormir e acordar, pensar no que eu vou fazer amanhã e ter a barriga cheia. Meus filho tudo é formado—que eu não podia botar meus filho pa estudar, tudo é formado. Como o que eu quero, vou p’onde eu quero—ninguém me manda. Quem me manda sou eu mermo.”

Some kinds of money are viewed as more legitimate targets than others. For example, in 2009, a local bank housed in the local post office was robbed by two individuals who casually walked behind the counter and held up the attendant working there. Reportedly, one of the robbers told an elderly woman who was there with her granddaughter, “Don’t worry grandmother, we only want the federal money.”⁹² After they took all of the money from the drawer, they fled before any police could arrive.⁹³ The content of the rumor is intriguing because it suggests, at the very least, a kind of ethic in which robbing impersonal institutions is more acceptable than robbing humble, helpless individuals—such as “grandmother.”

On the other hand, when public money is destined for a specific group of people, whether as an agricultural loan for a private individual or as a development project for a community, the notion of eating money becomes more apt. I often spent late afternoons with Damião, sitting outside of his family’s home in Pequi Community, talking with various passers-by, family members, neighbors, and friends. On one of those afternoons, a car from the Bahian Agricultural Development Company (EBDA) drove through the community after some of the organization’s employees had given a public presentation in a nearby community. EBDA was promoting various “socio-environmental” (*socioambiental*) and “sustainable” (*sustentável*) development projects. Development projects of this sort—“projects” (*projetos*), as they are referred to—are common throughout Brazil, and many are viewed as shams that merely squander public monies and never result in anything positive. As the car drove by that afternoon, Damião declared: “They only want to eat the government’s money!”⁹⁴ This is a typical comment that expresses a lack of faith in both governmental and non-governmental projects.

Damião and I were sitting outside when a flatbed truck drove by, loaded with turf grass that was destined for the plantation owned by the local mayor named Humberto. Damião had not supported Humberto in the last election cycle, and he suggested that the only reason the truck went out of its way to drive past the house was to spite him by displaying the municipal riches that Humberto was “eating.” One of the most common accusations leveled at politicians of all stripes is that they “eat” public money. In 2010, for example, accusations circulated that the municipal mayor named Humberto had been misappropriating public monies. People in the rural areas, some of whom worked on Humberto’s plantation, observed heavy construction equipment

⁹² “Não se preocupe avó, a gente só quer o dinheiro federal.”

⁹³ Fn194.

⁹⁴ “Eles só quer comer dinheiro do governo!” Fn441.

entering the plantation. One of the large tractors that had recently been used in the construction of a new bridge in town was also being used to excavate a large pond on Humberto's plantation. Humberto was also remodeling his home, installing a new garden, pool, and making various improvements to the roads on his plantation, and many people believed these improvements were being done with public money. According to local lore, Humberto had lost R\$3 million (\$1.7 million USD) over the previous three election cycles—the first two of which he lost—and so many believed that he was attempting to recuperate from those losses by “eating” as much public money as possible.

4d. Struggle, Hunger, and Eating

What constitutes “eating” and “hunger” as evils, however, is their proportional relationship to one another. Too much eating leads to too little hunger; too little eating leads to too much hunger. The proper amount of hunger leads to the proper amount of eating. Augusto, for example, explained:

For me to have things, I had to—I had to experience hunger. Because if we have no struggle (*luta*), then we have nothing. With struggle, we have everything. Without struggle, we have nothing...For me to have anything, I must struggle. Look at my hands, see how they're split open?⁹⁵

If, in laboring in the world, the body leaves marks of its efforts upon the world, then in transforming the world, the world likewise leaves its marks upon the body. The mutual marking of both the world and the body are signs of a relationship grounded in the exchange of mutual formation and care. Properly toiling upon the world, and bearing the marks of the world upon the body, allows an interchange of the fruits from that work. The marks on one's hands demonstrate the character of those relationships. The hands of the wealthy—with their delicate fingers, fine calluses, and unscarred knuckles—are likewise taken to be a sign of something

⁹⁵ “Eu pa ter as coisa, precisei—passei fome. A gente sem luta não tem nada. A gente tem tudo com luta. Sem luta ninguém tem nada...Pa eu ter qualquer coisa tem que lutar. Oia pa minhas mão como ta pocada.”

deficient about their relationship toward the world, and the means through which they acquire their livelihood. Working for others on the plantation is a perversion on both counts. The laborer bears the scars of work, but is severed from what it works; the landowner bears no scars, and eats everything that results from the laborer's effort.

Another way of thinking about this relationship is that for those whose needs are satisfied immediately, without effort—and usually through the effort of others—are those who do not have to labor toward the satisfaction of those needs and desires. Such would be the rich, who are characterized by excessive eating.

Damião described all of roças he had planted over the course of his life:

And so, the skin ate. I put in a new farm plot (*roça*) every year, and I'm happy about this. And now I see that my future is guaranteed, my retirement is guaranteed⁹⁶

Saying the “skin” (or, more accurately, the “leather”) “ate,” is a way of saying that he worked hard and put forth a great deal of effort in creating his farm. He might say that he scarified a lot of skin, and, if asked, he would show the marks of his effort on his skin. Effort, in this case, is invested in long-lived trees that, like children, eventually grow up, require less care—and may, in turn, take care of their parents. Investing labor in trees, then, is a way of securing future goods and future care. Damião explained:

When you plant and harvest, it's a very good thing. Hunger leaves. There's no hunger on the roça. After you start to harvest, you have everything. You have everything you need to eat, to sell, to give away if you like, and to loan if you want, and so on.⁹⁷

Being able to anticipate this return on a future harvest—even one far into the future—changes the present character of eating.

Lázaro reflected on the early years—after his family had gotten their land and began to gradually transform the forest—and recalled eating the humblest of foods, as they had no money for anything else. Having a different sense of their shifting future time horizon—of the future

⁹⁶ “E aí o couro comeu. Eu sei que todo ano eu botava um pedaço de roça e to feliz por isso. Eu to veno o futuro garantido, minha aposentadoria.”

⁹⁷ “Voce plantar e culê é muito bom. A fome vai embora. Não existe fome na roça. Depois que voce começa a culê, voce tem tudo. Voce tem tudo pa comer, vender, dar se quiser, emprestar se quiser, enfim.”

harvest, security, and wellbeing that the trees would bring to his family— Lázaro was able to taste his food in a different way:

I'd eat dried fish...and I'd say to myself:

“I am eating dried fish with my cold porridge (*jacuba*), but it's as if I was eating a steak.”⁹⁸

Jacuba is another name for a *pirão*, which is a kind of porridge made from manioc flour. Instead of being made with boiling water, however, *jacuba* is made with cold water. Like dried fish, *jacuba* porridge would be considered among the humblest and most basic forms of sustenance for a rural worker. Eating dried fish and cold porridge would be a mark of their suffering. Here, however, this man is indicating a crucial difference between the context in which he had begun to work for himself, on his own land, eating his dried fish and cold porridge, in contrast to when he used to work on the plantations. Working on the plantations and eating dried fish and cold porridge was a compelling material sign of his disconnection from a future. Here, the suffering involved with being malnourished was not connected to a prospective future return on that suffering. In the new context, however, the suffering of eating cold porridge and dried fish was transformed into a deep satisfaction in the knowledge that a more definitive future was coming into being. In other words, the connection of *suffering* and *having* something was unified. Dried fish and cold porridge were transubstantiated into steak and an emerging future.

He recalled the days of work, which for him were undifferentiated in the qualities of rain or shine:

Here I took in both sunshine and rain. I'd come and sit for my mid-day meal. I'd sit down anywhere here. I'd eat my mid-day. [If it was raining,] I'd eat with a banana leaf [over my head]—I'd be eating [and if it started raining], I'd get up and cut [a banana leaf

⁹⁸ “Eu cumi ispeto...E pa mim, eu dizia: ‘To cumeno ispeto cum minha jacuba, aqui é a merma coisa qu’eu ta cumeno minha carne de boi.’”

to cover myself]. Then come back, sit down again and finish eating. It was like that. I'd finish eating, and then bow down.⁹⁹

When Lázaro says that he would “bow down,” he seems to be suggesting that he would get right back to work after he finished his lunch. The posture that the body assumes, especially when still preparing the ground in the first years of planting a roça, is one in which the body is bent downward toward the ground.¹⁰⁰ But it is not clear, from what follows in his reflection, if he is saying that in working and attending toward the ground, he is also bent downward in prayer. He completes this previous thought by stating what he would see before him in that downward facing position:

Thanks to God, there is my roça. Thanks to my Lord of Good Ends.¹⁰¹

5. Miserliness & Isolation

The notion of being miserly has a correlate in the notion of misery. One might say that a person lives in a miserable condition (*miserável*) and that a person might be miserable (*miserável*). To be a miser is an instance of one who eats too much, and to be in misery is an instance of one who eats too little. In some cases, eating too little may be a condition brought about by a miser.

Miserliness is not a quality that inheres in particular groups, types, or classes of people. One man named Justo recounted that when his parents began to age and were in need of care, he and his wife took both of them under their own care, where each eventually passed away. His brother, however—who lived in another municipality not far away, and who had become well-off, at least in relative terms—had never offered any care for his parents, and as they aged, remained focused on his own pursuits. When their parents finally passed away, Justo's brother

⁹⁹ “Aqui eu tomava sol e chuva. Chegava, me sentava na hora de fazer a mei-dia. Me sentava, em qualquer um canto aqui. Cumia minha mei-dia. Eu tava cumeno, tinha uma palha de banana—eu tava cumeno aí eu levantava, tirava, vortava, me sentava e ia terminar de comer. Era assim. Era eu terminar de comer, baixava.”

¹⁰⁰ Later, after the tree has grown and its branches have risen toward the sky, one's efforts are more frequently directed toward the fruits in the canopy. The body's posture assumes a more upright position, as it looks upward.

¹⁰¹ “Graças a Deus tai minha roça. Graças ao meu Senhor do Bonfim.”

revealed his miserliness—that he was *miserável*—by not helping with any of the costs associated with his parents’ burials, although he had the means. Justo, on the other hand, had to work extra days on the plantations (Saturdays and maybe Sundays) so that his family would be able to afford the burial. Because his brother refused any expenditure or effort, the various costs involved in the care and eventual burial fell upon Justo. In this sense, his brother’s miserly conduct created a mirror in Justo’s misery.

The wealthy are not always miserly. On another occasion, Justo gave the owner of the largest grocery stores in town as an example. Whenever this man was driving through the countryside—perhaps delivering food orders to the plantations in the countryside—and happened upon anyone walking on foot, the man always “makes it a point” (*faz questão*) to stop and give the person a ride. This man’s children—who were raised under the condition of their family’s commercial success—were widely considered to be miserly (*miseráveis*). Unlike their father, who would stop to offer rural workers a ride, the children simply passed by in their car.

These various distinctions came out clearly in a conversation with the mason, Pedro, who was helping with the construction of a brick house that Damião’s family was in the process of building.¹⁰² In that conversation they were talking about different kinds and terms for houses, and the term *curtiço* was offered as referring to an “old and ugly house...small and cramped.”¹⁰³ Damião added that a *curtiço* is “poorly organized, like the shack there at the farm...That’s called a ‘*curtiço*’.”¹⁰⁴ Pedro added that a *curtiço* is a structure built “in precarious situations.”¹⁰⁵ People living there, he suggested, would be considered “miserable” (*miserável*). In some contexts, they explained, to be miserable means to be broke (*puro*) and in a state of “poverty, without money,” and generally, to be *miserável* refers to:

Whoever lives in a situation of misery.¹⁰⁶

However, if someone calls you “Mr. Miserable!” (*Seu Miserável!*), then the connotation is that one is stingy, wicked, and cold-hearted. This difference is captured in the grammatical aspect of the two copulas, between *ser* and *estar*, both of which can be translated as “to be.” The *ser*,

¹⁰² Fn163-164.

¹⁰³ “Casa velha e feia...pequeno e apertado.”

¹⁰⁴ “Mal-organizado, como um barraco lá da roça...chama um *curtiço*.”

¹⁰⁵ “Com situações precária.”

¹⁰⁶ “Quem vive de situação de miseria.”

however, refers to the stable nature of a being, what it “is” in its essence, such as a sick-minded person: “He is sick,” as in a “sick” or “perverse” person. The verb *estar*, on the other hand, captures what something or someone is doing, some moment of an activity, or a temporary condition: “He is sick,” or “feeling sick” or “ill.” Calling someone “miserable” is to embody a certain form of *ruindade*, or badness, wickedness, or evil. Pedro commented:

An evil rich person is [é] miserable.¹⁰⁷

He explained that to be miserable, in this sense, involves having a “miserable sentiment” (*sentimento miserável*), implying a miserly or stingy orientation toward others:

Whoever has a bad [or evil] sentiment.¹⁰⁸

Damião explained these differences in the term’s meaning by saying that there were two “pronunciations” of the word.¹⁰⁹

The terms for miserly persons are varied, and some of them employ creative figures and imagery. One informal collection includes the following terms and expressions:

<i>Ruim</i>	Stingy, miserly
<i>Avarento</i>	Avaricious
<i>Usurário</i>	Usurer
<i>Miserável</i>	Miserable
<i>Misera (Miséria)</i>	Misery
<i>Canguinha</i>	Small yoke
<i>Mao-de-feto</i>	“Feto”-handed (see the image below)
<i>Mao -de-vaca</i>	Cow-handed
<i>Mao-fechada</i>	Closed-hand or tight-fisted
<i>Cobra-na-bolsa</i>	Snake-in-the-pocket

¹⁰⁷ “Um rico ruim é miserável.” Fn163.

¹⁰⁸ “Quem tem um sentimento ruim.”

¹⁰⁹ His son, Silvano, corrected his father, explaining that these were two “meanings” or “significances” (*significativos*) of the word.

<i>Pão duro</i>	Stale bread
<i>“Fulano é misera de gente”</i>	“Fulano is the misery of the people.”
<i>Mão-de-figa</i>	Fig-hand
<i>Unha-de-fome</i>	Nails-of-hunger
<i>Fominha</i>	Small-hunger
<i>Mão-de-finado</i>	Hand-of-the-deceased
<i>Churino</i>	Whiner
<i>Sovino</i>	?

To have a “snake-in-the-pocket” means that a person is reluctant to reach into their pocket to search for any spare change. To have a “hand-of-*feto*” draws on the image of the *feto* fern, the young leaves of which appear in the form of a tightly closed fist clutching onto money, as seen in Figure 16 below.

Figure 16: The *Feto* Fern



There are various ways of being miserly. One afternoon, while having lunch with a small group of friends on a local farm, the topic came up about what to do when a visitor shows up at your home near lunch or dinner time. They commented that many people will put off having their lunch or dinner, feigning that they are not yet hungry, and wait until the guest leaves before they have their meal. Everyone present condemned such conduct, and one farmer named Teodoro explained:

“No” is the saddest word.¹¹⁰

Being unable to share, however, can also result from other limitations. Many farmers note that they simply do not have the means to share the overabundance of the food that they have now. When selling bananas, for example, their buyers will frequently reject a number of bruised or damaged bananas that would be unmarketable. Consequently, many perfectly edible bananas are frequently left over, and if there is anyone that will take them, these will be given away freely.

On one occasion, a medical doctor had come to visit Pequi Community to offer medical checkups to people living in the surrounding rural community, taking people’s blood pressure, testing vision, and the like. When he learned that the medical doctor was in the community—and had come alone in his a car with ample space—Damião went to gather up as many of his leftover bananas as he could carry, and brought them to the doctor so that he could deliver them to the hospital. The farmer commented that it is a good thing to help out people. After all, he explained:

Who knows, I may need him one day.¹¹¹

While “him” specifically referred to the medical doctor, Damião also meant to imply any of the indeterminate persons—patients at the hospital—whom he may be helping by giving away his excess bananas, and to an indeterminate future situation in which he might need another’s help. Insofar as this is a calculated form of giving, the referents or targets of the calculation are indeterminate and lack precision. The farmer did not know whom he might be helping, and they, in turn would not know who it was that had helped to feed them. What he was pointing toward, and contributing to, instead, was a generalizable public ethos in which people are prone to help others, without any view toward a *specific* return, but rather with a hope that others would likewise be willing to help one day if and when he or another was in need—but without

¹¹⁰ “A palavra mais triste é ‘não.’” Fn74.

¹¹¹ “Quem sabe, eu não preciso dele” Fn102.

any guarantee that such a return would actually occur, or that circumstances when a return became necessary would ever come about in the first place.¹¹²

This ethic of generosity will be explored at more length in Chapter 8, Section 2. In the present context, the ability or inability to share is constituted by specific kinds of limitations; in this case, the inability to distribute one's abundance, and these limitations can be overcome by entering into certain kinds of relationships. As was suggested earlier, various kinds of limitations are the ground (and normative motivation) for various kinds of relationships; forms of thriving require the acknowledgement and recognition of various limitations that then necessitate various relationships that enable limits to be overcome (without being transgressed). The miser is constituted, in part, by a refusal to engage and come into relation with others in a *reciprocal* fashion in which there is a potentially equal return. In some cases, the miser attempts to overcome his or her own limitations at the expense of others, destroying those others, and thus destroying the very ground upon which the miser's aggrandized life had been built. In so doing, the miser, in all cases, fails to recognize the limits and need of others, and has a faulty vision of his or her own limitlessness.

The image of the miser may be instantiated in various ways, and in various relationships. We have already seen earlier images of miserly beings at the end of Chapter 4, where we encountered two very different cases of men who had aggrandized themselves at the cost of others. In the first case, Jorge recounted how his uncle, who had attempted to squander his sister's and nephews' inheritance, in order to leave his other relatives in poverty. In this case, the uncle had attempted to take and to consume all for himself, failing to recognize the needs of his other family members. This, as will be seen, is cast in the idiom of greed and consumption, of *eating* all, aggrandizing the self and leaving one's others in "smallness." In that narrative, the narrator explained, whatever disparities there may be in people's fortunes, such disparities that are brought about by *taking* from others was a normatively proscribed form of conduct:

But you cannot take from us—just because we are lesser—and keep everything for yourself, so that we fall into smallness.¹¹³

¹¹² This is an articulation of what Marshall Sahlins (1972:193-194) described as "generalized reciprocity."

¹¹³ "Mas o senhor não pode tirar o da gente—que somos de menos—pa jogar tudo pa senhor, pa gente ficar nas pequena."

This normative prescription does not proscribe taking from others simply because it is unfair or a mean-spirited way of orienting toward other people. Rather, by *undermining the lives of others, one is simultaneously undermining one's own claim to continued life*. The second case demonstrates this most clearly. In Chapters 4 and 5, we encountered Dr. Severino who had coordinated with many others in order to take land from the posseiros who had been living in the hills. Dr. Severino had accumulated a significant amount of wealth in this process, and created an extravagant form of life—hosting parties, sharing whisky—but owed to the manner in which he created the *appearance* of a thriving and vibrant social life, at the cost of others, he ended up undermining the long-term conditions for his own life.

The normative claim embedded in these narratives, therefore, was not merely that one should not take from or use others—stated as a sort of abstract ethical maxim. After all, neither of these men was ever punished in any standard sense. In each case, though, both men ended up destitute at the end of life. An overhearer to Jorge's narrative about his uncle summed up both cases succinctly:

Usury was his destruction.¹¹⁴

The claim here is that independently of explicit judgment and punishment, taking from others, aggrandizing oneself at the cost of others, and living through greed and usury, would eventually undermine the conditions of one's own life. This way of living was destructive of others, and was, just as importantly, manifestly self-destructive.

In other cases, living with abandon and without regard for others or one's future was similarly self-destructive. One woman explained that one of her sons had carelessly squandered inheritance money that he had received from land she sold. She explained:

[My son] ate his money, [he ate] his share and fell into hardship.¹¹⁵

¹¹⁴ “A usura foi a destruição dele.”

¹¹⁵ “O pai desse cameu o dinheiro dele, a parte dele e ficou se bateno.”

Lázaro's father, likewise, had not thought of his children and the inheritance that their grandfather had left for their family. His father had sold the farm, and squandered all of the money:

He took the money—he ate, he ate, and he ate goods—bought a little house—bought a little house.¹¹⁶

As a result of his father's excessive eating, he and his sibling were exposed to life in the world, without any support, and had to turn to work on the plantations. These two figures, the miserly father, and the miserly plantation manager, appear interrelated in this case. Here, before exploring the form of retributive justice that misers face—and the self-destructive results of failing to regard or attend to one's others—we can explore these two figures in more detail, as these are the among some of the social figures whose power will be challenged, as will be seen in subsequent chapters.

5a. Fathers as Misers

As an important social figure, fathers are very frequently taken to be a potential source of miserliness in their relationships with other family members, while women, children, and young men are often the targets of miserable behavior.

One elderly man named Vicente recounted a story of a father and his two sons. The father had one palm oil, or dendê tree, that his two sons were supposed to inherit. The sons asked their father what they should do with the tree, since there was only one tree, and two of them. Their father suggested that the sons should split the tree in two—effectively destroying the tree—and depriving his sons of any inheritance whatsoever. While the tale bears an alternative reading, all overhearers agreed that the story was an illustration of the father's miserliness and his desire that none of his children deserved to have anything.¹¹⁷

Another man named José recalled his own grandfather, and his relation to dendê palm:

¹¹⁶ “Pegou o dinheiro—cumeu, cumeu, cumeu feira—comprou uma casa—comprou uma casa.”

¹¹⁷ The alternative reading of the story might suggest that the father did not want his sons to fight over the inheritance after his death, and thus resolved to eliminate a potential source of future conflict. Fn386.

The man was so stingy that when he'd harvest his dendê, the pile of dendê would be more or less this tall.

He indicated the size of the pile, more than a meter tall.

Well, when we'd go to take a piece of dendê to roast, he'd say—

(He imitates the deep sound of his grandfather's grumbling voice.)

“LOOK—LEAVE MY DENDÊ THERE—OTHERWISE, MY DENDÊ WON'T BE COMPLETE!”

We only wanted one piece of dendê! And the pile was this big, all spread about!

“LEAVE IT THERE, LEAVE IT! THAT'S TO SELL—OTHERWISE, MY DENDÊ WON'T BE COMPLETE!”¹¹⁸

Whereas some fathers and grandfathers only think of themselves, a principle of generosity lies on the other side of such miserliness, and some fathers exemplify this as well. One woman named Valentina explained that when others are good to you, you should be good to those who come after you. Her own father, she explained, had left a bit of land that she and her other siblings divided among themselves. For her, in turn, it was important to do just the same for her own children:

If I want to work, it's so that tomorrow or after, I can see my children raised up. I don't want to die and leave my children without—without anything. Because it's the same

¹¹⁸ “O home era tão churino que ele cortava dendê, a ruma de dendê ficava dessa altura assim mais ou menos. Aí, quando a gente ia pegar um dendê daquele pa assar pa comer, ele fazia://“Ó—dexe meu dhendê aí—senão vai disintherar meu dhendê.”//Um dendê que a gente pegava! Com uma ruma dessa altura por la tudo!//“Dexa isso aí, dexa aí! Isso é pa vender—senão, vai disintherar meu dhendê.””

thing—because my dad left something for me, so a mom can also leave something for her children. My dad died and he left something for me.¹¹⁹

Many men, likewise, who may have traditionally controlled their family's inheritance, today recognize that inheritance is something that needs to be shared among all members of the family. On one occasion, I was together with Damião's brother Colodino, Colodino's spouse Benita, and Damião's spouse Joana. (Damião was not present.) We were watching a DVD that I had filmed with Joana and Damião—of their family's roça. In one part of the film, Joana suggested that she "helps [Damião]"¹²⁰ on the farm. Colodino commented that Joana has spoken in error (*errado*), and that her family's farm belongs just as much to her as it belonged to Damião. Colodino noted that many children, likewise, say that they "help" (*ajudar*) their parents on their family's farms. This, he explained, was also incorrect because, he noted, the roça "is for us" (*para a gente*). Each family only "wins together" (*vencendo junto*) and every family member shares the same "rights" (*direitos*). He explained that this must be the case, unless a father is truly "miserly" (*miserável*). He explained:

A miserly father only thinks about himself.¹²¹

Instead, he explained, one must think about the whole family, so that the whole family can benefit from the family's roça together.¹²²

5b. Plantation Managers as Misers

Plantation managers may likewise take on the figure of the miser. While many are taken to be fair in their treatment of workers, others are taken to be paradigmatic of miserliness. One man named Tobias, who was retired and ran a humble country store from his house at Pequi

¹¹⁹ "Se eu quero tabalhá é pra amanhã ou dipois ver meus filhos lá em cima. Num quero morrer pa deixar meus fio sem um, sem um nada. Que é a mesma coisa—que o papai deixou pa mim, a mamãe tambem pode deixar pu filho. Meu pai morreu e deixou pra mim."

¹²⁰ "Ajudo ele."

¹²¹ "Um pai miserável que só pensa nele." Fn463.

¹²² Fn463.

Community, shared a story about a manager from a nearby plantation who was “full of miserliness.”¹²³ The manager often paid the workers late, and sometimes not at all. It was evident to the workers that the manager had been squandering the plantation’s harvest and income, keeping much of it for himself, and doing so not only against the workers, but against the absentee plantation owner. Eventually, however, the plantation owner caught wind of what the manager was doing and fired him. The former manager ended up working in a neighboring municipality, and was reduced to performing the most grueling manual work, cutting weeds with the *biscol*.

Tobias then recalled another local plantation manager who is known for being particularly miserly, or *ruim*, whose nickname was Sogrão, or “Big-Father-in-Law.”¹²⁴ Big-Father-in-Law was the general manager of a large local plantation that had recently purchased a neighboring plantation. Tobias explained that this was not good news for the workers, as the workers at this other plantation would now be under Big-Father-in-Law’s management.

Big-Father-in-Law, Tobias explained, “takes everything for himself.”¹²⁵ As he said this, Tobias imitates the gesture of eating by putting his hand to his mouth. Before the second plantation had been purchased by the first, the management there permitted workers to plant manioc and banana roças—to plant roças in the older sense of provision grounds¹²⁶—but now that the management had changed, Big-Father-in-Law prohibited the workers from planting subsistence and minor cash crops. He ordered all of the new workers to abandon their roças.¹²⁷ Moreover, Tobias explained, Big-Father-in-Law began to pressure the plantation workers to buy their groceries—beans, rice, coffee, cachaça, and so on—at the plantation’s store for inflated prices.¹²⁸ The plantation store was owned and operated by Big-Father-in-Law himself,

¹²³ “Cheio de ruindade.”

¹²⁴ As with all names, this nickname is a pseudonym. The choice of pseudonym, however, reproduces the affinal imagery of the man’s real nickname, insofar as it references a male family authority.

¹²⁵ “Puxa tudo pra ele.”

¹²⁶ See Chapter 2, Section 3.

¹²⁷ Fn450.

¹²⁸ Another man explained that the price for a bottle of Domus cognac in town cost R\$9, whereas on the plantation where Big-Father-In-Law worked, it cost R\$30—a 233% price markup. A half-liter bottle of Corote brand cachaça, likewise, cost R\$10 on the plantation when normally it would not cost more than R\$2—a markup of at least 400%. Fn509.

independently from the plantation's overall operation. If the workers did not purchase their groceries from Big-Father-in-Law, he would fire them.¹²⁹

Big-Father-in-Law was not well liked in the region, and this was because Big-Father-in-Law did not show love for anybody else. In another conversation, Sebastião explained:

[Big-Father-in-Law] doesn't like anybody.¹³⁰

In saying that Big-Father-in-Law did not “like” anyone else, Sebastião meant to say that he had no feeling for others and attempted to live his life apart from—and at the cost of—other people. Generally, one might say that Big-Father-in-Law viewed people instrumentally.

Not only was Big-Father-in-Law greedy, but his word also had no value. Damião explained that some years ago, Big-Father-in-Law had offered him the opportunity to plant manioc in the forest on the outskirts of the plantation where Big-Father-in-Law managed things. In exchange for access to land to plant, Damião agreed to plant pasture grass for the plantation after his manioc harvest was complete. The plantation was seeking to clear and cultivate new spaces, and by allowing Damião to plant manioc in the forest, the plantation was able to externalize all of the costs associated with expanding into the forest. This process would take about 18 months. Before Damião's manioc had matured enough to harvest, however, Big-Father-in-Law ordered Damião to uproot his crops and plant the pasture grass that they had agreed upon. Damião refused, however, as he had already invested a good deal of labor in the area, including the labor intensive process of clearing the forest.

In a surprising turn of events, Damião threatened suit against Big-Father-in-Law. Part of what enabled Damião to refuse so resolutely was that, unlike many workers, Damião no longer depend solely upon Big-Father-in-Law's good will and the manioc he had planted on the plantation. By that time, Damião had already begun taking part in the land occupation at Nossa Senhora, and in having access to the land and an independent livelihood there, his family had achieved a certain measure of independence. If Damião had not gained access to that land,

¹²⁹ Another man, on a separate occasion, likewise explained that they would find some reason to fire the worker, whether an invented reason, or create some sort of “test” (*teste*) that the manager will claim the worker failed to pass. Fn509.

¹³⁰ “Não gosta de ninguém.” Fn515.

however, he would have been in a position of subservience to Big-Father-in-Law, since, before then, he had nowhere else to work.

By the time that Damião finally harvested his manioc, he simply refused to plant the pasture grass. This was a form of retribution against Big-Father-in-Law's miserliness. Since the agreement between Big-Father-in-Law was informal, and Damião had not signed any legal contract, there was little Big-Father-in-Law could do. Since Big-Father-in-Law had already broken his word, Damião no longer felt obligated to him. After all, he explained, it was Big-Father-in-Law who had invited Damião to clear the forest and plant there. Damião explained:

I didn't ask for anything.¹³¹

In other words, Big-Father-in-Law had not done him any favor, and Damião had not placed himself in debt to Big-Father-in-Law. Since Damião was already planting land elsewhere, he explained that he no longer had to depend upon Big-Father-in-Law's good will—or the lack thereof.

At length, Damião explained that he was not the first or last person that Big-Father-in-Law would coerce into working for free. Damião recalled that Big-Father-in-Law had recently ordered another worker's banana grove destroyed, and, on another occasion, he had simply taken another worker's manioc harvest. For Damião, refusing to plant the pasture grass was a minor form of retribution:

I gave him what he was due.¹³²

In other words, because Big-Father-in-Law had presented miserly behavior toward Damião and many others, Big-Father-in-Law was no longer deserving of reciprocity. By cutting off his others from the respect that they were owed, Big-Father-in-Law cut himself off from the reciprocal respect of others. Damião explained the principle in another context:

If you're going to bank miserliness with me, then I won't open my hands for you.¹³³

¹³¹ "Não pedi nada." Fn509.

¹³² "Dei o troco a ele." Fn509.

By “bank miserliness,” Damião meant that Big-Father-in-Law was accumulating, or creating a track record, of miserly behavior that was publicly recognized. In being recognized as miserly, other people would turn away from him increasingly. In other words, through miserly conduct, people like Big-Father-in-Law cut themselves off from sociality by treating other people instrumentally. In so doing, others become closed off to Big-Father-in-Law. Big-Father-in-Law’s personal or proper name, as many people recognized, became exemplary as an instance of miserliness.

6. Self-Destruction as Retributive Justice

*But God said: “Nobody profits off of other people’s sweat.”*¹³⁴

At first glance, the above statement appears to be plainly wrong. Clearly, profits are made every day at the cost of others’ sweat. The quote is taken from an interview with a man named Ulisses, who had begun to reflect on the various forms of corruption to which he had borne witness, and from which he had also suffered, at various point in his life. The corruption Ulisses had in mind here resulted in the suffering that he and other people from his community had experienced in a local land reform project, at the hands of a former community leader named Gustavo, who had been enriching himself by diverting funds from a house-building project that was intended for the whole community. Gustavo had used these monies to renovate and expand his own house, while some of the houses for other community members were never even built, and others were left half-finished, as can be seen in Figure 17 below.

¹³³ “Se você vai bancar ruindade para mim...não vou abrir a mão para você.” Fn435.

¹³⁴ “E Deus disse: ‘O suor dos outros ninguém se lucre.’”

Figure 17: Incomplete and Abandoned Project Houses



Gustavo had accumulated a small bit of wealth, greater than that of his companions, and he had done so at their expense:

He wasted other people’s sweat on women, on trips—you know? But God said:

“No one profits off of others’ sweat.”¹³⁵

Corruption, Ulisses had been explaining, doesn’t amount to anything:

You see, sometimes it’s a cold and calculated corruption, which afterwards doesn’t amount to anything.¹³⁶

In saying that such corruption “doesn’t amount to anything,” Ulisses’s statement might be more literally translated as it “doesn’t *give to* anything” (*não dá em nada*). At this point, the meaning of the initial statement begins to emerge with more clarity. In not amounting to anything, he is suggesting that whatever profit one accrues at the expense of others will, in the end, crumble. The reason for this is that those profits do not provide a *return to* those others from which they

¹³⁵ “Porque o suor dos outros ele gastou com mulheres na rua, com viagens a—sabe? E Deus disse://‘O suor dos outros ninguém se lucra.’”

¹³⁶ “Às vezes é uma corrupção fria e calculista, entendeu, que depois não dá em nada.”

were taken, and upon which they were built; there is no *giving back* to others. This reading of the grammatical relation is both felicitous and perhaps fortuitous; but by examining the causal and structural relationships in what is occurring here, the fortuitousness of the grammatical reading dissipates and is replaced by considerations that are more motivated and compelling.

Those who profit off of others' sweat ultimately turn their backs to those around them, as they attempt to live self-contained lives. But because that apparently self-sufficient life had been built at the expense of others, the person profiting upon others is self-deceived about the grounds of its relationship with the world. Gustavo's own life was built from the lives of others, but by building his life at other's cost, he failed to properly recognize these others as the condition and ground for his life. And in so doing, by destroying these others, he is likewise destroying his capacity for future life. In other words, because its mode of existing in the world is destructive of the very relationships upon which it has become aggrandized, this form of activity is self-destructive. This logic was the same one we saw at the end of Chapter 5 in the case of Dr. Severino, who had suffered a destructive turn of fate by the end of his life, and Habermas's notion of the "causality of fate" was introduced.

Indeed, Gustavo's fate had changed over the years, and his living conditions had taken a turn for the worse:

Today, he lives begging in misery.¹³⁷

What he had accumulated, he had gained at the expense of others:

And he really didn't profit. He really didn't profit...The house [he] has today is such that, if [people] were to take vengeance, he would lose that house, you see?¹³⁸

In the end, the man did not lose his house, but instead, for a number of years, the man entered into financial hard times. More importantly, though, his standing in the community had become greatly diminished, and he lost a great deal of his trust in the eyes of his neighbors. The person I was interviewing concluded this section by explaining his normative vision of land reform:

¹³⁷ "Hoje vive mendigando miséria."

¹³⁸ "E ele não lucrou mesmo. Ele não se lucrou mesmo...A casa que [ele] tem hoje é uma casa que se a coisa fosse colher a vingança e tal e tal ele perdia aquela casa, voce entendeu?"

I struggled for this here, young man, for better lives. I didn't struggle to be living in misery, nor did I struggle so that me and my companions could be eating one another.¹³⁹

This case could, and perhaps should, be thought of as a kind of retributive justice. There are various kinds of retributive justice, but although they do not all work through similar means, they operate through a similar logic. The forms of retributive justice might include physical retaliation—attacks with machetes, shootings, and other forms of physical violence, as was seen in Chapter 4 in the story of Jeremias. In these cases, the injured party, or those close to that party, brings about retribution directly.

Another potential form of retribution may revolve around the use of witchcraft (*bruxaria*), which, at least in some cases, may not be entirely controllable by the perpetrator. Antônia, for example, explained that her husband had been killed by witchcraft:

I lost my husband after seventeen years of marriage—my husband died—they killed him, they killed him with witchcraft. My husband [was killed by his] own brother.¹⁴⁰

Her brother-in-law's motive was rather simple:

Wickedness (*ruindade*)...Because [his brother] was—God forgive me—he had made a pact with Satan. It must've been that, because [that's the only way] one brother could have the courage to do that to another brother.¹⁴¹

Antônia recalled her husband's gruesome death. His body had become inflamed and the skin had begun to rupture in places. After some time, her husband could no longer wear any of his clothes, as they no longer fit on his body, so she covered his body with large cotton bags that she

¹³⁹ “Eu lutei por isso aqui menino, por vida melhores. Não lutei por mode viver na miséria, nem lutei pa poder eu e meus colegas um comendo o outro não.”

¹⁴⁰ “Quando tinha dezessete ano de casado eu perdi o mar—o esposo—o esposo morreu—mataram, mataram a saber, de—de bruxaria. O mesmo irmão do, do esposo, aí.”

¹⁴¹ “A ruindade...Porque ele tava, Deus me perdoe, ele tava laçado com sataná . Só pode ser, porque o irmão que tiver coragem de fazer uma coisa daquela com outro irmão.”

had sewn together into a loose-fitting garb. I asked her what had become of her husband's brother:

Thank God, he paid [for his crime] immediately...He died. And before he died, he suffered a lot.¹⁴²

She did not elaborate on the circumstances or the causes of her brother-in-law's subsequent death. He was not killed straightaway, as through direct physical revenge, but his death was retributive in certain respects: he had *paid* with his life for having killed his brother, and the suffering he experienced before death was causally and not contingently connected to this fact. She thanks God for her brother-in-law's eventual demise, but it is not clear if the retribution was God's, or if the same evil that her brother-in-law had employed to kill her husband had somehow turned against her brother-in-law.

What is clear, though, was that through his own actions, Antônia's brother-in-law had undermined his own claim to life. Life was taken from him, and that was reason to give thanks. If the brother-in-law had directed ill-intentionality toward his own brother's death, his own intentions appear to have left his control and set some other agencies into motion that had exacted retribution upon him.

6a. Destroying One's Children

Another case articulated the causal logic of retribution and demise, but in a way that does not seem to presuppose any intentional acts upon any party, but rather through the undermining of the conditions for living life together. One evening I was interviewing two young men from Pequi Community, two cousins named Leandro and Silvano. We were talking about the trials they experienced growing up as boys, and now as young men, in the countryside. The conversation repeatedly turned toward their relationships with their fathers—Colodino and Damião, respectively—and the various expectations and pressures that their fathers placed upon them. Their families especially depended upon boys for labor, and there was a great deal of

¹⁴² “Graças a Deus que ele pagou logo...Ele morreu foi. E antes dele morrer ele padeceu um bucado.”

pressure placed upon boys—in a way that was different than the pressures placed on young women—to contribute to farm life. Leandro and Silvano often felt inadequate, put down, and often times angry with their fathers’ failure to recognize them and their own (and not their fathers’) aspirations. They loved their fathers, however, and for all their frustration, they recognized that some fathers were far worse. Indeed, they had seen other young boys in the community suffer at the hands of truly miserly fathers.

Silvano began to share a story about a young man from their community named Tristam. Tristam was the oldest son to a man named Manoel, and Manoel worked Tristam very hard:

Let me tell you a story...[Manoel] had a son [named Tristam]...He was the one that worked hardest on the roça.¹⁴³

Silvano was relatively young at the time, but he remembered that Tristam used to visit his family’s home, and he had developed a close friendship with Damião:

He always came to the house...to our house. He really liked dad, and dad was—he was friends with him—dad was friends with him. Except that Manoel was always very hard on [Tristam].¹⁴⁴

The friendship that developed between Tristam and Silvano’s family was one that turned on acts of sharing:

It was a friendship in this way—because we’d go make manioc flour there at the flour mill, and [Manoel’s] son would always visit with us there. Sometimes he’d bring some [manioc] flour for us [and say]:

“Hey Damião, don’t you have any flour [to eat]? Here, take a half liter of flour—take it so that you can all eat.”¹⁴⁵

¹⁴³ “Deixa eu contar a história...[Manoel] tinha um filho que...era o que mais trabalhava na roça.”

¹⁴⁴ “Ele ficava—vinha aí pra casa direto...pra casa aí. Ele gostava de painho pra caramba e painho era, era—tinha mais amizade com ele—tinha amizade com ele. Só que Manoel sempre foi rigoroso.”

The relationship of giving and sharing was reciprocal:

And [Tristam] would come eat at [our] house, too. Sometimes he'd just show up, and dad [would say]:

“Hey Tristam, let's have a bite to eat together”...“Hey Tristam, let's have a bite to eat together.”¹⁴⁶

Presenting good form in the face of such an invitation, Tristam would initially turn down the offer, thereby allowing Damião to insist:

“No, Mr. Damião.”

“Let's eat!”¹⁴⁷

Thus, they would all share a meal. Damião was still working on the plantations at this time, and had only recently acquired a tiny plot of land where he had built his first house.¹⁴⁸ Damião and his family were poor, and Manoel did not approve of Tristam's friendship with them. Silvano continued:

So they had that friendship—dad liked him so much. But [Manoel] didn't like it...Manoel didn't like that he'd come here, that he'd bring things [for us] and that dad [would invite him in]:

“Come in the house and eat!”¹⁴⁹

¹⁴⁵ “Amizade assim, porque fazia farinha lá e conversava muito lá na casa de farinha e o filho sempre vinha pr'aí, às vezes trazia farinha: ‘Ô seu Damião tem farinha? Toma aí meia lata de farinha, toma aí pra vocês comer.’”

¹⁴⁶ “Ele chegava e comia aí em casa também. Às vezes chegava assim e painho: ‘Ei Tristam, umbora pegar o rango aí...’ ‘Ei Tristam umbora pegar o rango aí.’”

¹⁴⁷ “‘Não seu Damião.’//‘Umbora!’”

¹⁴⁸ See Chapter 12, Section 7.

¹⁴⁹ “Aí tinha aquela amizade, painho gostava dele pra caramba. Aí não gostava...Manoel não gostava que ele vinha pr'aí, trazia as coisas e painho: ‘Vem comer em casa.’”

Silvano's family was involved in an ongoing relationship of reciprocal sharing with Tristam, and this amounted to a continual affirmation of their reciprocal worth to one another, and in a way that exceeded Manoel's acknowledgement of his own son:

I know that Tristam, he—the boy was just like a mule. He worked all the time, and [Manoel] didn't give anything to the boy—no [new] clothes, not anything.¹⁵⁰

Perhaps Tristam's willingness to share with others, and the friendships he had developed, was a mirror through which Manoel could see his own hard heartedness.

Eventually, the hard heartedness and miserliness with which Manoel treated his son led to Tristam's death:

I know that a dog bit the boy. A mad dog—when a dog become crazy—he bit the boy and the boy died destitute (*à míngua*). And [Manoel] didn't do anything.¹⁵¹

Not expecting that this would be the end to the story, I asked:

[Jonathan]: He died?

And they affirmed that this was his end:

[Leandro]: He died.

[Silvano]: He died. Damn (*porra*)...¹⁵²

¹⁵⁰ “Sei que ele e ele—menino era que nem um jegue, parecendo um burro. Trabalhava direto, não dava nada ao menino, nem roupa nem nada.”

¹⁵¹ “Sei que o cachorro mordeu o menino. Cachorro doido—quando fica doido—mordeu o menino e o menino morreu à míngua. Ele não fez nada.”

¹⁵² “‘Morreu?’//‘Morreu.’//‘Morreu pô.’”

Tristam's death was, for them, an occasion for reflection upon the condition of their own lives, and with each sorrowful "damn" (*porra*) that completed each one of Silvano's sentences, I could hear how deeply this story affected them.

I wanted to understand more clearly what it meant when Silvano explained that Tristam had died destitute, or "à míngua," and I asked them if they could explain what this amounted to:

[Silvano]: "À míngua" is like this: in any which way. Damn...

[Leandro]: "À míngua" means suffering, Jon. Without having—without having any care, without—without taking any interest in him, understand? He just let him suffer ...

[Silvano]: He was suffering. Damn...[Manoel] left him there, [he didn't even try to] get him an [antibiotic] injection, nothing like that—he didn't even do that, damn it. The boy laid there [in bed] with a swollen leg. [Time] went by, went by, and went by until he passed away.¹⁵³

Silvano's explanation that *à míngua* meant "in any which way" (*de qualquer jeito*) could be taken to mean that he died in the absence of any determinate set of relationships upon which he could positively depend. Tristam's life in the world was, more than anything else, subject more to his father's caprice, and lack of interest in his son. Moreover, Manoel actively sought to intervene in and sever the relationships that Tristam had developed with those that treated him with more love, as he had found in Silvano's family. Silvano's and Leandro's own fathers pressured them to work hard on their own families' farms, and Silvano and Leandro did not always feel appreciated. But their fathers were nothing like Manoel:

I know that [Tristam] died—damn. [Manoel] was evil [or miserly] as hell.¹⁵⁴

¹⁵³ "S: 'À míngua' assim, de qualquer jeito, pô.//L: 'À míngua' é sofrendo, Jon. Sem ter, sem ter cuidado. Sem—sem ter interesse nenhum por ele, entendeu? Deixa ele sofrer só.//S: Tava sofrendo, pô...Deixa lá, dá uma injeção, uma coisa assim e nem isso ele fez, pô. O menino ficou aí com a perna inchada. Foi, foi, foi até falecer."

¹⁵⁴ "Eu sei que o cara morreu pô. Ele era ruim pa porra."

Tristram died in his early 20s, and Silvano and Leandro were still boys when this happened. They did not have many memories of Tristram, but the story of his death was something that Silvano's mother would often recount to them.

For these young men, then, Manoel was a familiar example of a man who had really been a bad father, and this helped to explain his own condition at the end of his life:

You see, Jon, we've got a saying:

“God is the king of everything and of everyone. He is the owner (*dono*) of everything and of everyone.”

So God—God forgive me for what I'm about to say. But [in Manoel], you see what it is for someone to have no love in their heart. He saw—HIS SON—he watched his son die, as Silvano said, in destitution. And today, where is [Manoel]? Lying [sick] upon a bed, with no hope to be found from doctors...But this was his son. And before that, when he was younger...what was [Manoel capable of] doing to people who were [not family but] simply his friends?¹⁵⁵

In other words, at the end of Manoel's own life, he died suffering from an illness that had rendered him completely helpless and dependent upon others. There was something about Manoel's death that was, for Leandro and Silvano, a reflection upon how he had lived his life. If Manoel had been capable of treating a son with such evil and disregard, what limits would he not transgress and what disregard would he not show to those who were not of his own flesh and blood?

Indeed, Manoel was not merely negligent toward his own family, but toward others in his community. On another occasion, Damião illustrated this through a story about a man—a local plantation worker—who had turned to Manoel for help. Manoel, Damião explained, used to run

¹⁵⁵ “Ó Jon, tem gente que diz://“Deus é o rei de tudo e de todos. Ele é dono de tudo e de todos.”//Deus—que Deus me perdoe o que eu vou falar. Mas voce vê o que é uma pessoa que não tem amor no coração. Ele viu—O FILHO—ele viu o filho morrer, como Silvano falou, nas minguas. Hoje ele ta aonde? Em cima de uma cama desenganado do médico...Mas isso foi o filho. E no antepassado, na infância dele...o que foi que ele fez com pessoas que eram simplesmente amigo dele?”

a small country store through which he sold small dried goods such as beans and manioc flour.¹⁵⁶ One day, a worker from one of the nearby plantations had come to see Manoel in his store. The man had been suffering through financial hard times, and was having difficulties feeding his children who were “going hungry” (*passando fome*). The man had no money with which he could pay Manoel, but he asked if he could purchase a liter of manioc flour on personal credit (*fiado*), or on trust. Breaking into the story to interject some commentary of his own, Damião suggesting that one liter of manioc flour was such a small request that it should have been given freely, without so much as a thought.

Manoel denied the request, however, because he did not believe that the man would ever be able to pay him back. He sent the man away, but not before adding insult to injury by declaring:

My stomach’s full!¹⁵⁷

To Damião, Manoel was exemplary of what it meant to be *ruim* and *miserável*, or bad, evil, wicked, and miserly.

It was stories like this—and especially the story of Manoel’s son, Tristam—that informed what Leandro was about to say next:

I think about it like this, Jon. Because Jon—we pay for what we do, Jon. We pay for what we do. For example—God help and guard me [from this]—[but imagine if] I take a life. Will I find any more peace? No. I’ll be sleeping but I’ll be thinking about the life that I took. I’ll be thinking about the human being that I took from the world, understand? [Thinking about] where he went. So man, I see things like this, understand.

And there, I come to the conclusion that, in the future, I’ll come across people worse than me, you see, Jon? That’s why I say that what we do here on earth, we pay *here*, understand?

¹⁵⁶ Not unlike the country stores (*vendas*) described in Chapter 3, Section 2b.

¹⁵⁷ “A minha barriga tá cheia!” Fn293.

Who desires ill to their neighbor—¹⁵⁸

I take up and complete the thought myself:

—they pay here on earth.¹⁵⁹

Leandro continued:

Isn't that how it is? That's how it is more or less, understand? And whoever does evil to their neighbor—could it be that good fortune comes? Could it be that good things come? No, only evil comes. And today, Jon, many people have this—this wickedness, this falseness—something that I hate is falseness.¹⁶⁰

This and other similar cases, such as Dr. Severino's that was presented at the end of Chapter 5, suggests a notion of retributive justice for people who violate and transgress the limits of others. Manoel had adopted an instrumental relationship toward his son, and by failing to recognize or respect his son's limitations, he ended his son's life. In turn, however, Manoel had also undermined the possibility for his continued social life. He had lost sympathy from many people in his community, and at the end of his own life, Manoel's condition reflected the condition of increasing suffering and isolation into which he had thrown his own son. Unlike his father, however, Tristam's name was recounted and remembered by Silvano and Leandro as being a kind person, generous, and a true friend to others. Manoel's name, on the other hand, became exemplary of miserliness and hard-heartedness. In the next chapter, I explore the relationship between different forms of generosity, namehood, and the possibility of building genuine "friendships," as was seen in Tristam's orientation toward others like as Damião and his family.

¹⁵⁸ "Eu fico pensando assim Jon. Porque Jon—a gente paga pelo que a gente faz Jon. A gente paga pelo que a gente faz. Por exemplo—Deus livre e guarde—eu tiro uma vida, eu vou ter mais sossego? Não. Eu vou ta dormindo e vou ta pensando na vida que tirei. Vou ta pensando no ser humano que eu tirei do mundo, entendeu? Pra onde ele foi. Rapaz, eu acho assim, entendeu.//E lá, e chego a uma conclusão que lá na frente vou me deparar, vou encontrar pessoas pior do que eu, entendeu Jon? É por isso que eu falo que aqui na terra faz, aqui paga, entendeu? //Quem quer mal ao próximo—"

¹⁵⁹ "Paga aqui na terra mesmo."

¹⁶⁰ "Né isso? Mais ou menos isso, entendeu? E quem faz mal ao próximo—será que vem fortuna? Será que vêm coisas boas? Não, só vem o mal também, pô. E hoje Jon, muitas pessoas têm isso aí ó—maldade, falsidade—uma coisa que eu odeio é falsidade."

The interrelationships among generosity, names, and friends can be understood as constituting a broader moral economy that brings people into wider spheres of goods, both social and material, in ways that contrasts with the social suffering and isolation that people faced on the plantations. As will be seen, by orienting toward others with a generous spirit, one can build a good “name” and friendships through which the social world can appear in new ways.

CHAPTER 8:
ABUNDANCE, NAMEHOOD, FRIENDSHIP

1. Living For and Through Others

This chapter begins by exploring local idioms of generosity that appear as a contrast with miserly being. As was seen in the previous chapter, miserly beings are not only destructive in their orientation toward others and the world, but they are also self-destructive. As was suggested in Sections 5 and 6, miserly people lose their social standing, and the hold that they have on their own lives, because they forsake and destroy the lives of others. One way that this occurs is through the loss of the marker or index of their social reality, which is their “name” (*nome*). Thus, following the description of the forms and motives of generous being, the chapter moves to an exploration of “namehood” or what it means to “have a name” in this ethnographic context. The quality and character of one’s name—the ways in which it is socially recognized by others—is then shown to emerge from the forms of interaction and conduct that one takes in relation to others. When a person’s name is “good,” that person may engage in a wide range of relationships through which people may be good *for* one another. When one’s name is “bad,” one’s social relationships dissipate and the person becomes, from a social standpoint, a sort of non-entity. At the end of this chapter, I transition to a discussion of “friendship” (*amizade*) which is an idiom that describes a fruitful form of living together in the world.

Namehood, as will be seen, is not just for people, but also part of the landscape, notably farms, as non-human entities become the locus of names and naming. Bearing this in mind will help to make sense of the way in which named non-human entities—especially things to which people stand in a “property” relation, such as their trees and their roças—can be thought of as participants in the social world. In next chapter, I will explore some of the ways in which people’s property relations to trees are sometimes conceived of in terms of a kind of kinship that is based upon care and mutual regard.

If the miser's way of being in the world is self-undermining precisely because the miser undermines the lives others; and if, in being miserly, the miser destroys his or her claim to having a name; the miser also undermines others' hold on their names by treating them as non-entities. In other words, the miser fails to recognize the names of others. Another way of looking at this is to suggest that namehood—and the desire to have a recognizable name—is an especially acute problem for those people whose have been forced into the margins of society, whether by historical forms of slavery, the experiences of dispossession that were described in Chapters 4 and 5, or the hardship which many plantation workers suffered as will be described in Chapter 10. In many respects then, the land rights movements that emerged in the region in the 1990s, which will be described in Chapters 12 and 13, can be understood as a claim to a name, place, and standing in the social world.

2. Generosity and the Return

The positive transformations that people experience with access to land may be expressed in terms of “bounty” or “abundance” that cultivation has enabled them to create. The gain in abundance helps to deepen an ability to share, to help, to give—and even *to return* goods that family members might have stolen in moments of hunger. A conversation with Damião and Joana illustrates these points:

[Damião]: Here we've got a little bit of everything—manioc, cassava, rubber trees, cacao, bananas. There're yams, a bunch of—lot of things that let us feed ourselves. And we feed other people on top of that! You understand? There's lots of stuff!

[Jonathan]: There's so much food that it sometimes even goes to waste, no?

[Damião]: There's so much food that sometimes it goes to waste—*lots of food!* It's no small amount! Lots of food, today. And before I didn't even have a

SINGLE banana to eat! I didn't have a single one to eat! And today, there's so much that it goes to waste.

[Jonathan]: The animals eat, too, no?

[Damião]: The animals eat, too. The animals thank me for it!¹

Damião laughs with joy. Joana, Damião's wife, recalls periods of privation when she would go out looking for fruit to take from the plantations where they lived in their earlier years:

[Joana]: We—sometimes I would sneak out to take bananas from [the neighboring plantation] over there—

[Damião]: And that was done in secret! Hidden from sight, just to get a bunch of bananas to eat! Today you can see [all our bananas] here.

[Joana]: Thanks to God. We even have leftovers...

[Damião]: And if [the plantation] wants, I can give back the bananas I've eaten! We have a lot here!²

They all laugh together. The theme of having an abundance—more than they can eat—contrasts with the hunger that many people felt in their years as plantation workers. Not only can they eat, together with their friends and neighbors, but even the animals can eat, and being able to share with others can help one cultivate a good name.

¹ “D: Aqui tem de tudo—tem mandioca, tem aipim, tem seringueira, tem cacau, tem banana. Tem inhame, um boc[ado]—uma série de coisa que dá pra gente se alimentar. E eu ainda os outros ainda! Entendeu? Muita coisa!//J: E tem comida que perde aqui, né?//D: Aqui perde muita comida, muita! É pouca não! Muita hoje. E antes eu não tinha uma banana pra comer! Nenhuma pra comer, eu não tinha! E hoje tem pra perder, a vontade.//J: Os bichos come também, né?//D: Os bicho come também—os bicho me agradeçe.”

² “J: A gente—eu mesmo saía de lá do Pequi, vinha buscar banana aí [numa fazenda vizinha]—//D: Escondido ainda! Escondido pra arranjar um cacho de banana pra comer. Hoje voce vê aqui—//J: Graças a Deus, nós temos de sobra...//D: Se eles quiser, as que eu comi lá, eu devolvo a eles agora! Tem muita aqui!”

Having diversified agroforests helps to guarantee that abundance throughout the year. While some crops are productive, others are still maturing, such that when one harvest ends another can begin. Another woman, Valentina, imagined what that abundance looks like, and the possible routes for the employment of that abundance, whether consumption, or sale, or giving it away to friends so that no one would go hungry:

When the cacao runs out, the *cupuaçu* comes in. When...the cupuaçu runs out, the cacao comes in again. Nobody will have an aching stomach. And if one [tree] dies, the person will plant another so that they never go hungry. If they want to sell [the harvest], then sell it, unless you want to give it to your friends, you get it? Because friends also need [to eat]. Because being here [with this abundance], we're not going to say, "Our friends don't have needs." Yes, they do have needs.³

She imagined a dialogue with a friend who does not have a roça of their own, and who found themselves in a situation of need:

Maybe you don't have your own roça, and you'll say:

"Valentina, do you got such and such vegetable?"

"Sure thing. Let's go get you some seeds from one or another."

And you can eat it, too. You can't just give the seeds, no. You give the seeds and give the edible part, too, understand? Because to just give the seeds but not the edible part, that's of no use. You have to give both:

"Hey Fulano, look here—these seeds—and look here—this is for you to eat."⁴

³ "Quando o cacau pifasse o pocaçu chegava, quando...o pocaçu pifasse, o cacau chegava. Não ia ficar ninguém de boca quieta. E morreno um a pessoa já vai prantano outo que é pa num ficá cum fomi. Se quiser vender, vende, se não quiser dá aos amigos, entendeu? Que os amigos também picisa. Que nós tamo aqui e nós não vai dizer: 'Os amigos não precisa.' Precisa sim."

⁴ "À vez voce não tem sua roça e diz://'Valentina, tem tal verdura?''/Tem. Umbora conseguir a semente com um ou outro.'//E comer também. Não é só semente que pode dar não. Dar a semente e dar o cumistil entendeu? Porque pa

For Valentina, imagining having abundance was tied together with being able to share that abundance.

Another man named Justo recalled the many occasions that he had helped a neighboring family that had several young children. He recalled that the father, Leonardo, would go out in the middle of the night to fish at the river so that he could keep up with his work during the day:

Leonardo would wake up in the middle of the night with nothing to eat, and come down here to the river's edge to fish with a basket.⁵

Their families shared many places in common throughout their daily routines, and they frequently encountered one another at the river near Justo's house. If the other family was nearby, and if Justo's own family had food already prepared, they would offer what they could. He remembered various occasions when he would ask his wife, Telma, if they had anything to give:

"Hey Telma, could you give some farinha to the girl there?" She would give some farinha. When we had fish, it'd be fish. Meat, sugar, coffee, soap.⁶

He remembered the children playing by the river, while their mother worked washing their clothes. He recalled taking the youngest daughter in his arms, and inviting them all to the house to eat:

"Let's go to the house, let's eat." We'd show up at the house, put the food out and give it to them.⁷

dar a semente e não dar o cumistil, não adianta. Tem que dar os dois://'Ó fulano, oia aqui—a semente—e oia aqui—pa voce cumê."

⁵ "Leonardo acordava uma hora da madrugada, sem ter nada de comer, vinha pescar nesse rio aqui de cesto pelo canto da beirada."

⁶ "'Ei Telma, dá farinha a dona menina.' Dava farinha. Quando tinha peixe, era peixe, carne, açúcar, café, sabão."

⁷ "'Vamos pra casa, vamos comer.' [Chegava] em casa, botava comida e dava a elas."

Encountering any of their neighboring family by the river, whether washing clothes or fishing, he would often send food or invite them to the house to eat.

How many times did I go down [to the river] with his children, and come back to the house to give [them] food? “Eat.”⁸

He explained that the hunger of others occasioned a categorical obligation to feed them:

Because hunger doesn’t have a circumstance, isn’t that right? Isn’t that right? A hungry person would even eat gravel if it weren’t for the flavor.⁹

By saying that hunger has no “circumstance,” Justo meant that if you ever meet someone who is going hungry, you must feed them, no matter who the person might happen be. In many respects, this relationship of helping occasions instances of generosity that do not have a clear return. There is no evidence that Justo hoped to exploit this relationship—in the sense of a miser contracting a debt with someone—but he did hope that, if his own family was ever in the same position, Leonardo would show the same regard to his own family. Justo has no materially coercive power over the family—Leonardo did not work for him—Justo was not a politician seeking his vote, and he had no established means through which he could profit in his relationship to Leonardo. He did not control the small plot of land upon which Leonardo and his family lived; he did not buy or sell commodities to them; he did not control rents; and he was not involved in municipal political relations. While Justo clearly gained the friendship and affection of his neighboring family, there is no evidence that he had done so *with the aim* of acquiring esteem or of growing his name. While the logic of the return is by no means unacknowledged—recognizing that, one day, he might have to rely on his own friends for help, and perhaps even need to go to this specific neighboring family for help—it is by no means clear that if he (or a member of his family) was in need of help, that he would turn to that specific family for help. Indeed, in time, that family may have moved on to live on other horizons and they may, in the course of time, never be heard from again. These future relations are, fundamentally,

⁸ “Quantas vezes descí mais os meninos dele e vinha pra casa dá comida?//“Come.””

⁹ “Que a fome não tem circunstância, né não? Né não? A pessoa com fome só não come brita porque não tem um açúcar.”

indeterminate and a strict calculation of an interest in a return cannot adequately explain generous behavior.

In another story that Justo recounted on another occasion, his friendship, and the relationship of giving and taking, results in a reciprocal return. One afternoon we were talking near the river, sitting next to a small hand-dug cistern, when Justo offered the story of how the cistern had come into being:

I am going to tell you the story of this cistern. This cistern here is a story. If I tell you [the story], you won't believe me. This cistern here...¹⁰

He enters into the story of the cistern:

There was a young man. He lived there on top [of the hill]. He'd get his food together and prepare it [to cook], and then he'd come to eat at our house. When he didn't come to eat at the house, I told [my wife] to send food over.¹¹

Justo did not elaborate on who the young man was, but it is very likely he had come to the region in search of work, and had found something temporary nearby. There are no indications that he had any relationship to the family other than that of a developing friendship.

In general, many men in the rural and urban areas alike depend heavily upon women's domestic labor. A young, unmarried man washing his own clothes at the river might be subject to mocking and ridicule, but a young man without anyone to cook for him could be pitied. This particular young man appears to have been given a humble shelter with his temporary employer,¹² but he had developed a friendship with Justo and his family, who had taken him under their wing and helped cook his food. They eventually developed a friendship that

¹⁰ "Eu vou te contar a história dessa cisterna. Essa cisterna aqui é uma história. Se eu te contar tu nem acredita. Nessa cisterna aí—"

¹¹ "Tinha um rapaz, ele morava lá em cima. Ele fazia e aprontava a comida dele e vinha comer em casa. Quando ele não vinha comer em casa, eu mandava Telma mandar a comida."

¹² Unlike giving shelter to a non-kin-related male, cooking for a non-related man would not constitute much of an imposition. My general impression is that men who are not kin relations—whether through blood or adoption—will not be readily brought into another family's home to sleep. Day laborers who have stopped to work in one place for a period of time will most often sleep in an extra structure, but they will not often be invited to sleep in the house. If the family's home is not located on their farm, but they have a shed or other storage structure on their farm, the laborer will often times sleep there.

occasioned moments of helping and generosity. Cooking for and helping feed this young man occasioned the opportunity for a return gift:

Well then, one day, he showed up at the house and said:

“Hey there Telma, can you give me [a cup of] water.”

She replied, “Water—water you have to fetch it in the river.”

Then he said, “You (*vocês*) drink water from the—[you] drink water from the river, huh?”

“We drink from the river.”

He went there and fetched a bucket of water and drank.¹³

Seeing that his friends were regularly drinking water from the river—which was not a wholesome source of water—he discovered a way that he could repay the family for the unmitigated kindness that they had shown him:

“I am going to dig a cistern for you right this minute.”

He came up here and went to work. *Bam-bam-bam* [imitates the sound of work]. This was around noon. By the time it was four o’clock, he came [and said]:

“The cistern’s finished, and the water doesn’t come from [the river] below, no. The water comes from [the hill] above.”¹⁴

¹³ “Aí quando é um dia, ele chegou em casa e disse://‘Ei Telma, Me dá água aí.’//[Ela] disse: ‘Água—água voce tem que pegar no rio.’//Aí ele disse: ‘E vocês não bebem água do—bebem água do rio é?’//‘A gente bebe lá do rio.’//Ele foi lá e pegou um balde de água e bebeu.”

¹⁴ “‘Vou cavar uma cisterna pra voce agora.’//Aí subiu aqui, aí desceu. *Bam-bam-bam*. Isso mais ou menos mei dia. Quando deu quatro horas chegaram:// ‘A cisterna ta cavada e a água não vem daqui de baixo não, a água vem daqui de cima.’”

...He finished the cistern and Telma asked:

“How much for the cistern?”

He said, “I’d take a beating first. Consider it paid for.”¹⁵

The young man refused payment for his work on the cistern, as investing the few hours that was required to dig and fashion the cistern in the earth was an occasion for reciprocating his host family’s kindness in the form of another, durable good.

2a. Generosity without Esteem

The calculation of a returned form of generosity—in whatever form—cannot be adequately understood as a calculation in which the return is expected in a determinate way. Genuine acts of generosity can be thought of most adequately as counting on a potential return, but a return that may not accrue to the initial giver, or central agent. In other words, conducting oneself generously may not amount to a direct reciprocation, but through ongoing acts of generosity, one can contribute to a generalized ethos of generosity. This may be seen in cases where generous activity is oriented toward a merely potential other and without any guarantee that the generous action itself will ever be widely recognized or even recognized at all.

One afternoon I was working with Damião on his roça. We were clearing aside various debris and bush on the ground, between young cacao and rubber trees, where Damião planned to plant beans and corn before the trees grew tall enough to prevent the sunlight from reaching the ground. The plot had initially been planted in plantain bananas that provided shade to the young cacao and rubber and, while most of the banana trees had been naturally phased out of production, some of the banana trees were still producing fruit. As I was clearing away the debris, I came upon a large bunch of bananas that had fallen to the ground. In mature banana

¹⁵ “Ele acabou a cisterna e disse assim, aí [a minha esposa] perguntou://‘Quanto é a cisterna?’//Ele disse: ‘Mé dá um murro na cara que tá bom, me dá um murro na cara que ta pago.’”

groves, it is not uncommon for the growing trees to topple over from the weight of the maturing fruit, especially if the winds happen to be particularly strong. The bananas from such trees would no longer be marketable because they would have been bruised by the fall and also be overly ripe. Some of these unmarketable bananas make their way into the farmer's households for domestic consumption, while many others are consumed by various bugs, birds, and other animals.

As I picked up the bananas to set them aside with the rest of the debris, Damião said to me:

Jon, why don't you set it by the side of the road? Maybe someone passing by will see them laying there, and they can eat some if they're feeling hungry.¹⁶

This was a small act of kindness, and a special form of generosity. Damião knew that many people who walk by his farm are plantation workers on their way to and from their work. Damião had worked on the plantations himself for many years, and, understanding the nature of foot-travel—both getting to and from work, and also searching for work—he could identify with the moments of privation and hunger that travelers might feel. By proposing that I place the bananas along the side of the road, not 20 meters from where we were working, Damião was orienting toward the potential future needs of others. Although there was no guarantee that anyone would indeed pass by, hungry enough to eat the bananas, Damião was attempting—albeit in a small way—to create a worldly condition whereby some potential hungry people would be able to feed themselves. The conjunction of their position near the road, with the physical properties that marked them as clearly “lost” (*perdido*) and unmarketable, rendered them clearer candidates for being taken and eaten. A bunch of bananas still hanging from the tree, or a bunch of cacao fruits gathered together on the ground, would not be clear candidates for being taken, as that could constitute theft.

This act of generosity involved indeterminacy on all levels. First, there was no guarantee that anyone would actually walk by hungry enough to eat the bananas. From the perspective of the potential beneficiary, furthermore, it would not be clear that the placement of the bananas

¹⁶ This quote is derived from an English paraphrase that I recorded in my fieldnotes. I was not able to record the original Portuguese at the time. Fn378-379.

along the side of the road was an intentional act. As a consequence, there is no reason why Damião could expect to receive any thanks or esteem as a result of what, for him, was an intentional act oriented toward potential others. After all, the bananas could have merely fallen off the back of a truck. The intentionality of the act is potentially opaque.

Of course, many passers-by who live in the region might know that the farm belongs to Damião, and most people would assume that the bananas are from Damião's farm. Many others, however, would not have that collateral knowledge. In short, there is no guarantee about any recognition or acknowledgement of the act outside of Damião and myself.

In terms of the "growth" of his name,¹⁷ Damião has no guarantee (or even apparent interest) in growing his name. If he had been interested in growing his name, he would have *given* or *donated* the bananas more clearly. As it stands, then, the presence of the bananas on the side of the road has the *appearance* of an accidental fact of the universe, rather than an intentional act that could grow Damião's name. These circumstances were not unknown to Damião. This case allows for the possibility of a purely benevolent act, devoid of interest, devoid of determinate beneficiaries, and points in the direction of a disinterested altruism that is based on a *generalized* recognition of a generally shared suffering, both past—in Damião's earlier life as a plantation worker—and future, among all present and future plantation workers.¹⁸

2b. *Sharing Documents (as Sharing One's Name)*

There are various ways of helping others beyond giving material goods. The plantation where Caio and his family lived was owned by a family who lived in the capital city Salvador, absentee owners who visited the plantation only on rare occasions. The planted area of this plantation was small, and instead of having an expansive and hierarchical managerial structure, the owners had merely entrusted the operation of the plantation to the two families who divided and administered all of the work between themselves. This particular work arrangement was an

¹⁷ See Section 4 below.

¹⁸ According to philosophers like J.J. Rousseau, Immanuel Kant, and Adam Smith, one of the reasons for engaging in acts of generosity is that it improves one's standing or sociability in the community. It grows your name. This example, Rousseau might say, provides an example of, and shows the possibility of, uncorrupted forms of *amour-propre*.

expanded version of the “production” labor arrangement,¹⁹ which allowed the people with these work contracts to employ any, and as many, other people they wished, frequently family members.

In this case, only the two male household heads were legally registered as workers with signed work cards (*carteira assinada*), and their other family members—their spouses and children—worked under the table, or “clandestinely” (*clandestino*). In an interview with Caio, he explained that sometimes people would show up in the region looking for work, and occasionally they would come to the plantation where Caio worked to see if there were any odd jobs. Since Caio already worked together with his family in an informal capacity, and since there were no managers overseeing their work, Caio could just as easily have offered occasional work to other people who needed the work. He explained:

If some guy shows up here [in the region], and there’s no work for him elsewhere, we’ll give him work, we’ll put it on our own time sheet. If he did the work, we’ll pay him [out of our own pocket], and then the plantation will pay us. That way, the guy can still get by, see?²⁰

In other words, because of the work arrangements that gave him a greater measure of autonomy on the plantation, Caio was in a position to help other people by sharing his work card until they were able to find a more stable source of livelihood.

Sharing documents can occur in occasions beyond work. For example, one woman named Joana recalled a circumstance in which one of her sisters-in-law was pregnant and was getting ready to give birth. Her sister in law did not have any of her personal documents, however, and the hospital could not admit her. Joana loaned her own birth certificate (*certidão de nascimento*) to her sister-in-law, so that she could be admitted into the hospital.²¹

As we will see in Section 6e below, however, loaning one’s name out can come with distinct hazards.

¹⁹ As described in Chapter 10, section 3.

²⁰ “Se o cara chegar aqui, se não tem o sirviço pra ele, mas da o sirviço, bota na folha da gente. Voce fez o sirviço, e ós paga pra ele, e a fazenda paga pra gente. Aí, o cara vai se viver, né?”

²¹ Fn31.

2c. Instrumental Helping

Helping relationships take various forms, and sometimes helping is done in view of a future return. For example, when walking down the road in the countryside, it is entirely common for both acquaintances and strangers alike to stop and offer a ride to people on foot. Offering a ride, say, between communities or into town is referred to as offering a *carona*. This might take the form of hitchhiking, where the pedestrian might try to solicit a ride, or the driver might see someone walking down the road and simply stop to offer the person (or persons) a ride. This is often times done between acquaintances but also among complete strangers. For example, the driver of a large truck making fertilizer deliveries to the local plantations might offer rides to pedestrians. If the parties are friends or have some other mediating connection the driver might offer a seat inside the car or cab if there is room. These spaces would be offered more frequently to women and children, whereas the open bed of a truck might be more typically offered if the ties are more anonymous. If the distance traversed was somewhat significant, say, in the case of a ride into town, the beneficiary might ask the driver if they could pay them a couple *reais*, perhaps equivalent to the cost of a bus fare, to help with gas. The driver might accept payment if the truck is privately owned and operated, but just as often they would explicitly decline any payment that might be offered. If the truck is owned by a plantation or some other firm, and the driver is merely operating the truck, they will rarely ask for or accept payment.²²

Giving a *carona*, or offering a ride, is a case for generous behavior among people who are, often enough, strangers. If the drivers do not benefit personally by *offering* rides, then those drivers thus contribute to the reproduction of a generalized ethos of generosity, from which everyone can potentially benefit.

On some occasions, although less frequently, offering a ride can be taken to be an occasion for creating indebtedness to the driver. In one of my earlier stays in the region, sometime in 2003 or 2004, I had made the mistake of failing to understand this. I had never spent much time with any of the families that were part of the region's local elite, as my personal dispositions did not serve me well in interactions with such families. I was much more

²² Fn147.

comfortable on the roça. One afternoon, while I was waiting along a country road for the next bus or kombi transport into town, a man from one of these families drove by in a large truck—probably coming from his family’s plantation—and he stopped to offer me a ride. I went to jump on the back of the truck, as I was accustomed to doing, but instead he insisted that I join him and another passenger in the cab, as they were heading toward town. I had never met this man before, although I vaguely remembered having seen him about town.

Several months later, having largely forgotten what, for me, was a routine and unmemorable experience, I encountered the man one afternoon while walking in town. He said hello to me, and I recognized his face, but I could not quite remember the specific context where we had met. Moreover, I had never learned the man’s name and he did not know mine either; that day when he had given me a ride, he and the other passenger were engaged in conversation, and we had barely talked. On this new occasion, the man noticed that I had forgotten our earlier interaction and that he had given me a ride. He made a comment to this effect—how could I have forgotten?—and I felt a little embarrassed.

This man and his family were deeply involved in local politics, and this encounter was a micro-instance of personalistic politics. I was unaccustomed to doing “personalistic” politics in this way and I did not really understand whom and what he represented, and, therefore, I had failed to participate properly. For anybody else from town or the countryside, such a failure to recognize and remember *this* driver might have amounted to a small disaster and a moment of humiliation.

Part of my error, in this case, was that I had failed to remember and recognize this man’s image, what he had done for me, and I did not recognize his name or the name of his family. Instead of simply reminding me where we had met, he made a point of shaming me—something I had never encountered in any of my other interactions in the region. While, in other contexts, such a “failure” would have hardly been taken as problematic, especially as people often make impressions in passing, help total strangers, and, often enough, people never even learn one another’s name, my failure to remember *this* particular man, and his name, indicated a further dimension of “namehood” and the ways in which it can be drawn into the politics of giving and taking, sharing and helping.

3. The Objects of Names

*“Later you’ll leave from here, but your image remains.”*²³

Traveling with people who have worked about the region’s various plantations over the years brings with it recollection—of people and places that were encountered, and various events that had occurred all across the landscape. People recall the names of the plantations where they had worked, the names of people who might have hosted them in their homes, the names of the companions with whom they had travelled in search of work. They might invoke the names of the plantation managers, whether or not they were mean, kind, or fair. People know the names of the various families that owned small farms, the trials these families endured, those with whom they had married or quarreled, and what happened to the family’s inheritance. One local plantation, for example, was known as the “Trouble Plantation” (*Fazenda da Encrenca*) because of the sheer number of conflicts that had occurred there over inheritance rights.²⁴ Places and people were tied together by occurrences, events, and stories; some distant in time, others near; some recounted by others, and others in which the narrator might have directly participated. The names of people and places were inseparably tied to the characteristic activities represented in these stories.

Natural features of the landscape, for example, can take on names. One large stream, for example, was named for the large, broad-leafed “marimbu” grass common along its banks, and often used to cover houses in earlier times. The river’s name was given both for the occurrence of this particular grass along its banks, and, furthermore, the *occurrence* of a characteristic activity (e.g., collecting the grass) that drew it into subsequent projects (e.g., covering houses). In this case, the name of the river draws together recognition of various kinds of object and properties of the object into a characteristic form of activity (e.g., this grass, found in this particular location, with these particular properties, is good for covering houses).

Place names tend to be durable beyond transformations in their status. Old plantations, which have gone bankrupt and then reopened under new legal names, or even those that have

²³ “Depois você vai embora daqui, mas a sua imagem fica.”

²⁴ Fn473.

been transformed into land reform settlements, are most commonly used to referred to using their old names—whatever their present status or legal name.²⁵

Personal and place names intermingle. One river, for example, is said to have been named for a woman who used to live at its headwaters, although who she was exactly had long since been forgotten. Damião, likewise, explained the connection between having a roça and having a name.²⁶ Having a roça was an “honor” (*honra*) for him, as it is connected work that he found dignified and beautiful to his name, which will live beyond him: “I’ll die, but the name remains.”²⁷ He imagined after his death, people saying: ““This is Damião’s roça.””²⁸ The beauty of his farm, as a mark of his life’s work, was the ground for respect and recognition of others. Having cultivated a small roça, he commented: “I’m known.”²⁹ Furthermore, Damião’s roça itself likewise has a proper name of its own, and while connected to Damião’ personality, it is also something distinct from Damião, something that will outlive him. Through different kinds of activities occurring over time and in space—such as the unfolding of a roça in the forest, a relationship between people engaged with, and engaged by, various other entities—names become distributed across the landscapes.

In different contexts, both Antônia and Alvina had recalled how, in their younger years, they had become well known throughout the countryside for being tough workers. Alvina recalled the voices of others who had offered praise to her name. She recalled the voice of a man to whom she sold shellfish she collected in the nearby mangroves:

“Many women get by okay. They work and get along fine. But there isn’t any other that works...as hard as Dona Alvina. Dona Alvina doesn’t eat fine foods, but her children never go to sleep without dinner.”³⁰

Antônia, likewise, recalled how she was widely sought after for the good work that she did:

²⁵ Fn315.

²⁶ Fn41.

²⁷ “Eu vou morrer, mas o nome fica.”

²⁸ “Essa é a roça de Damião.”

²⁹ “Sou conhecido.”

³⁰ “Muitas muié passa bem. Trabalha e passa bem. Mas não tem nenhuma que faça...que nem dona Alvina. Dona Alvina não come o que é bom, mas os fii não dorme sem ciar.”

I worked for everyone. I'd be on a—I'd be on one plantation, and before I was done at that plantation, another [plantation owner] would show up [asking] me to go work. I'd finish one contract, and then go to work on another plantation.³¹

Her fame in the region guaranteed that she would never lack work. In both of these cases, their names were also connected with a certain notion of their humility.

Neighborhoods, likewise, can accrue fame. In recent years, one such neighborhood in town had acquired a bad name (*má fama*), or become infamous, as a neighborhood housing thieves and drug dealers. One man from the neighborhood lamented this:

[People] just say: “Oh, there are thieves there, there's this, there's that”...It's the neighborhood's own inhabitants who're making this wickedness. These young boys, these groups of young boys—they should look to work, look to do anything else, but not rob others. The neighborhood goes down the tubes, it gets a bad name (*má fama*).³²

In short, some names may be partly derived from characteristic activities. The names of rivers may be named for the activities that occur in relation the kinds of objects that occur on a river's banks or in its waters. The qualities of names, likewise, help people navigate the kinds of places and landscapes they are moving through, and the various people they encounter.

3a. Avoiding and Forgetting Names

While forgetting someone's name in personalistic politics can be disastrous, name avoidance is connected to good or bad fortune in other ways. Speaking the names of different kinds of animals and plants, for example, can affect practical outcomes. According to the young Leandro, the *sede sede* (“thirst thirst”) bird is taken to be “bad luck” (*azarado*), and its name

³¹ “Trabaiava pa todo mundo. Tava numa, numa, numa fazenda e antes d'eu sair daquela, daquela fazenda já, já chegava outa, outo fazendeiro pa eu ir trabalhar. Eu terminava aquela, aquela impretha que tinha fetho, e ia pa, pa outa, pa outa fazenda.”

³² “Aí, só vai: ‘Ah, lá tem ladrão, tem isso, tem aquele outo’...A ruindade quem faz é os popio moradores. Que esses rapaz, esse rapaziada nova aí, procura a, a trabalhar, procura fazer outa coisa. Não, procura pa róbar os outos. Aí o barre fica lá em baixo, ó, com má fama.”

should be avoided altogether: “It’s not good to speak its name.”³³ Leandro had likewise suggested³⁴ that, if you are bitten by a snake and you go to others for help, you should not refer to the snake by name, but instead say: “I was offended by a creature of the ground.”³⁵

If you wish to go about tapping the *cupaíba* (or *pau óleo*) tree for its curative oil, many people suggest that there are important preparations and procedures involved, including name avoidance. In order to tap the oil tree, you must mark the part of the tree that you plan to tap. When you return the next day or several days later, you cannot have had any sexual relations for upwards of three days prior, and when you are in the process of taping the tree you “can’t talk or holler, because the oil will go away,”³⁶ and “if you look up [at the tree], [the oil] won’t come out.”³⁷ If you speak the tree’s name, the oil will not come out.³⁸ While I was unable to garner metadiscourse about the internal logic of this practice, it appears that avoiding the tree’s name was a matter of respecting the tree and what the tree was willing to *give* to the extractor. Today, it appears that many people no longer follow these procedures, and it is increasingly common to simply cut down the tree with a chainsaw and *take* the oil.

Some names merit obfuscation, perhaps because their memory is too painful. In an interview with several men who had participated in the occupation of a local plantation, the men were trying to remember the names of two gunmen the plantation owner had hired to dispatch the invaders:

“What was his name?”

“I don’t know the name of that plague (*praga*), no.”³⁹

According to Anabel, the term “plague” (*praga*) can be used as a substitute for someone’s name that you have either forgotten or cannot remember, but, more importantly, it is a manner of refusing to speak their name. She gave a hypothetical example:

³³ Fn57.

³⁴ See Chapter 7, Section 2.

³⁵ “Foi ofendida por um bicho do chão.” Fn58.

³⁶ “Nem falar que vai tirar o óleo, nem gritar.” Fn16.

³⁷ “Se você olhar para cima, [o óleo] não sae.” Fn16.

³⁸ Today, it appears that many people no longer follow these procedures, as it is increasingly common that extractors will simply cut down the trees with a chainsaw in order to extract the oil.

³⁹ “Como era o nome dele?”/“Eu não sei o nome daquela praga não.”

“That plague went to jail.”

“Who did?”

“I refuse to speak the name of that bandit.”⁴⁰

3b. Giving & Forming Names

Recording interviews was an opportunity for people to express the fullness and varied dimensions of their name. This could bring together legal names; the names and nicknames through which they were commonly known to others; and place names of either provenance or residence. Such declarations of one’s full name often took a form that drew together legal name, nickname and place name. The declaration of one’s name might draw together all of these various indices:

“My name is [legal name], known by the name of [nickname], from [place or community name].”

This brings attention to the fact that peoples are embedded in different naming regimes that draw together different various kinds of relationships and goods and operate according to different semiotic and causal logics.

On the one hand, having a name is not entirely a “given”—in the sense that a name, such as a family name, precedes the person; in some respects, one is not born with a name—but one is also *given* a name. Once given, it possesses only the most inchoate social content, as the person’s story has barely gotten past the preface. On the other hand, however, people’s names and stories are not entirely their own, as both are embedded in wider stories and associated with other names all of which precede them. Being born to a particular family, or in a particular

⁴⁰ “Aquela praga foi preso.”//“Quem?”//“Me recuso dizer o nome do bandido.”

place, for example, primes the reception of particular names. To some extent, the fates of some names rise and fall together, as will be seen later.

Having a name is not something that is exclusively one's own. One's name is, in certain respects, the property of a particular community. There are several senses in which this is the case: (1) First, one does not make one's own name. It is literally given by another—and is, in this sense, the first gift that one receives. (2) Second, one's name is connected to the names of others, notably, those others who gave one a name. Maintaining the dignity of a family name—or, more precisely, the name of one's father, mother, or another elder—is of the utmost importance for many people. One man explained that his parents were honest and “hard-working” (*trabalhador*) people, and that he and his siblings had all been raised so that, once they went out into the world on their own, they would not “sully [their father's] name.” To do so would have been “the greatest shame for us.”⁴¹

Having a good name, then, was a concern for most parties. If children were concerned with keeping a good name, in order to maintain the esteem of their parents, and the esteem of their parents' names in the community, then parents had a reciprocal concern:

Thank God, praised be the name of Jesus, God bless everyone just as my children have been blessed...To this day, thank God, my children are the same as me and their father: we are clean (*limpo*), there's no place where we have a stained name (*nome manchado*).⁴²

(3) Finally, and most importantly, one does not form the value of one's own name, but its evaluation depends wholly upon others.

3c. Legal Names

Legally, names are nothing new, but, as suggested throughout Part One, their active role in people's lives has become an increasingly salient social fact over the past century as people

⁴¹ “Sujar o nome dele.”//“A maior vergonha pra gente.” Fn376.

⁴² “Graças a Deus—lÓvado seja o nome de Jesus—Deus qui abençoe todos assim como abençoeu meus filho...Até hoje, graças a Deus, meus filho é igualmente a mim e o pai, somo limpo, não temo nome manchado em canto nenhum.”

enter into deepening relationships with the state and venues (such as on the plantation) where having a name matters in terms of being able to get work. Efforts to deepen people's relationship to the state have by no means ended, as can be seen, for example, in a campaign that was launched by the federal government that was called the "National Mobilization for Birth Certificates and Basic Documentation."⁴³ One of the campaigns slogans, promoted by the international soccer star Ronaldo "Fenômeno,"⁴⁴ read:

"I have a Name and Last Name. I'm part of the Brazilian Family."⁴⁵

Another slogan read:

"Birth Certificate. A right that gives rights."⁴⁶

These slogans lay bare the legal logic and structure of the birth certificate and ongoing efforts to renovate the social facticity of namehood. Learning how to write and sign one's name has become less a mark of prestige or honor than of legal social recognition. As was seen in Chapters 4 and 5, illiteracy and the inability to produce, control, or recognize one's legal name posed acute problems for achieving social recognition through land claims, as the qualities and character of people's names were subject to contestation. The recognition of historical social facts, such as these, provided keen motivation for people to enter into the legal world.

Legal names may be recognized in very specific domains such as in courthouses, notary offices, and credit bureaus, but they may be rather opaque in other social situations. This fact can create problems for transferring different forms of social recognition from one domain (social) to another (legal). For example, during the course of an interview with a group of people, one man, who had for several decades been friends with another man that was present during the interview, admitted that he had never learned the latter's legal name until it came up in the interview situation itself: "I've known you since I was born, but I've yet to know your

⁴³ "Mobilização Nacional Pela Certidão de Nascimento e Documentação Básica." Fn525.

⁴⁴ Ronaldo Luís Nazário de Lima.

⁴⁵ "Tenho Nome e Sobrenome. Sou da Família Brasileira." Fn525.

⁴⁶ "Certidão de Nascimento. Um direito que dá direitos."

name properly.”⁴⁷ The latter then proceeded to share a story of a time when he had to call on a local plantation manager to testify on his behalf concerning a legal matter. At the hearing, the judge began to question the plantation manager:

[Judge]: “And how long have you known this man?”

[Witness]: “It’s been 40 years.”

[Judge]: “What is his full name?”

[Witness]: “Well look, your honor, I don’t know. I don’t know, doctor.”

[Judge]: “But sir, you’ve come here to testify for this person and you don’t know their name?”

[Witness]: “But do you see why? It’s because I’ve known him for 40 years, but I only know him by [his nickname].”⁴⁸

4. Instrumentality & Growing One’s Name

Politicians in particular are beholden to the instrumental dynamics of name, and vie to create their name and mark in the towns. Upon taking office, for example, it is not uncommon for a new mayor to undertake a cosmetic makeover of the town square, so that they could then replace the old inaugural plaque (bearing a former mayor’s name) with one that bears his or her own name. Municipal mayors will sometimes try to take credit for infrastructure projects, for example those that come from federal funding, by downplaying or obfuscating the latter’s

⁴⁷ “Eu desde que nasci eu lhe conheço, agora num sabia do teu nome direito ainda.”

⁴⁸ “E tempo o senhor conhece esse homem?”/“Há 40 ano.”/“Qual é o nome dele certo?”/“Ô minha senhora, num sei não. Num sei não doutora.”/“Mas o senhor vem pra cá ser testemunha da pessoa e não sabe do nome?”/“Mas sabe por que? Porque tenho 40 ano que conheço, mas só sei do [apelido].”

contribution and role in implementing the project.⁴⁹ A woman named Juliana who lived at Pequi Community commented on how the local mayor had attempted to claim credit for the successful electrification of one rural community. In fact, the project was administered through the national electrification project, “Light For All” (*Luz Para Todos*), and it was through the community’s own early efforts that the project was actually implemented.⁵⁰ Another man named Sandoval from Settlement 5 explained that local politicians will endorse public meetings—amounting to little more than a flashy PowerPoint presentation coupled with, for example, flighty rhetoric about sustainable development “just to grow the mayor’s name.”⁵¹

Growing one’s name was closely tied to efforts to grow one’s fortunes. One man explained that one of the ways to “grow” most quickly was through lying. In his view, politicians, pastors, and people who try to get ahead through dishonesty all fell into that category.⁵² Attempting to grow by oneself and at the cost of others, however, tended to be self-defeating. As one man suggested: “to grow by yourself—that won’t work.”⁵³

4a. Magnitude & Fame of Names

Some properties of names can be described in terms of magnitude, as being “big” (*grande*) or “small” (*pequeno*), and in terms of power, as being “strong” (*forte*) or “weak” (*fraco*), which express both one’s capacities *to do* and also one’s social standing. Members of the rural working population will often times refer to members of the regional political elite, wealthy, and managerial classes as being “the big” (*os grandes*) or “the strong” (*os fortes*), whereas they will often times self-consciously refer to themselves as being “small” (*pequeno*), “weak” (*fraco*), or “humble” (*humilde*). In general, these attributes of persons are in direct proportion to control over material goods and wealth. However, this is not a necessary relationship. One person who had participated in some of the earliest land occupations in the region was commonly known by the nickname *Grande* (“Grand,” “Great,” or “Big”). For many

⁴⁹ Fn536.

⁵⁰ Fn536.

⁵¹ “Só para crescer o nome do prefeito.” Fn204.

⁵² Fn341.

⁵³ “Crescer sozinho—não vai.” Fn429.

people, hearing this name commanded respect and perhaps even fear. One man named Santiago, who had participated in these early land occupations, provided one characterization of Grande:

Grande was respected in the whole region. If people knew Grande was here, nobody would mess with us, nobody would mess with anything. But if they heard that Grande wasn't here, then they knew that the rest were weak...[His name] was widely cited, just like all of us [are cited today].⁵⁴

The magnitude of a name can grow over the course of one's life, in accordance with one's actions. Those names with particularly large magnitudes often frequently entered the sphere of fame. Generally, if one declares one's name, or declares that one has a name, it is generally in a self-affirming sense. The idea of fame, however, may be more closely aligned with notions of infamy or gossip, and frequently connotes negative character and characteristics.⁵⁵

The most famous names often take on decidedly ambiguous moral connotations. People like Norberto Odebrecht accrue the most complex fame, not because they are unambiguously bad or good, but most of all because they are *problematic*. Odebrecht helped set processes into motion that transformed the region in profound ways, and from his time onward, those changes affected every person—of every category and class—that had participated in the life of the region. His fame is problematic insofar as his name can be fit into diverse and normatively conflicting narratives, the outcomes of which are far from being straightforward.

Furthermore, Odebrecht's fame achieves the complexity and ambiguity that it does insofar as his activities in the region were carried out by others who were entrusted to act on his behalf, some of whom ultimately appear to have acted out of their own self-interest and reshaped Odebrecht's own projects, whatever they may have been. In short, Odebrecht's fame is in part a function of his own inscrutability. He lives more as a name than as a person who is perceptibly active in people's lives. For these reasons, in a long discussion about Odebrecht's role in

⁵⁴ “Grande era respeitado em toda região. Se soubesse que Grande tava aqui ninguem mexia, ninguem vinha aqui mexer com nada. Mas se soubesse que Grande não tava, sabia que o resto era fraco...Grande era citado.”

⁵⁵ As will be seen in Chapter 10, the region had garnered “fame” or a reputation between the 1950s and 1970s for being a place where rural migrants could find paid wage labor. This sense of “fame” is more neutral.

transforming the region, Felícia suggested that she had little direct insight into Odebrecht except through his fame: “I only hear about Odebrecht’s fame.”⁵⁶

Local politicians, likewise, often accrue morally ambiguous fame. Anabel, in recalling some of the scandals surrounding the youngest in a line of the region’s traditional political family, spoke of his fame:

Sometimes he does things—there are times that he’s done terrible things. The people who hate him must have serious accusations to tell about him. I don’t recall anything specifically, but I remember the fame. His fame is terrible, isn’t it?⁵⁷

In this case, the name becomes associated a “fame” that more clearly corresponds to a notion of infamy and “gossip” (*fofoca*). This fame serves as a résumé or shorthand of the person’s lifecourse and activity, and a general sign of their character, such that it no longer becomes necessary to recount every specific event attendant to a person’s life. Specific cases could be enumerated, but the way in which name accrues fame removes the necessity.

As one’s name and fame is something that is shaped through one’s actions, it is also something that can be shaped through the actions of others. For members of the “small” and humble rural population, and especially for parents, cultivating children’s names can be a matter of life and death. Losing one’s claim to a name can amount to losing one’s claim to life. Alvina recalled how on one occasion, when her son was an adolescent, she had received word that he and his friends had been taking sugar cane and oranges from a nearby farm. She recalled the conversation with her son:

“Were you cutting cane?”

“Me, no!”

“You took oranges. Did you take oranges?”

⁵⁶ “De Odebrecht só vejo a fama.”

⁵⁷ “Ele faz coisas—tem horas que ele faz coisas terríveis. As pessoas que odeiam ele deve ter casos sérios pra contar a respeito dele. Eu não me lembro nada assim, eu me lembro da fama. A fama dele é péssima, não é?”

“Me, no!”

“But the word is that you took oranges.”

“Me, no, mom.”

And so, I took [my son]—since the news came that he’d been taking oranges...Oh, I took [my son], oh! And I beat him, and I beat him.⁵⁸

In the end, it turned out that her son had in fact been telling the truth, and that a group of other children had merely placed the blame on him. From that point forward, if the other children ever returned to collect more oranges, he would return home to tell his mother what happened, so that she would know he had no part in it. He could not hazard developing fame:

“When this is over, the fame will get back to my mother, saying that it was me. But I don’t steal from others.”

So he walked by and went on his way. Then he’d get home and tell me:

“Look, mom, I went by [the orange trees] and [the other children] were taking oranges, but I didn’t take any. No, I didn’t take any. When they came [to me], I told them:

“I don’t want any. Because tomorrow, you’re going to say that I was the one who took them. I don’t want any.”⁵⁹

In her accounting, because she had properly disciplined her son, he grew up to have a good character. He died at a relatively young age, presumably from illness, but he had grown up right:

⁵⁸ “‘Tu cortou cana?’//‘Eu não.’//‘Tu cortou laranja, tu tirou laranja?’//‘Eu não.’//‘Mas a nutiça ta que voce tirou laranja.’//‘Eu não, mamãe.’//E aí eu peguei esse [filho meu], pela nutiça que deu, que ele tirou laranja...Ah, eu peguei esse [filho meu], ah, mas bati, mas bati.”

⁵⁹ “‘Oie, quando cabar, a fama vai pa mamãe, dizem que fui eu. Eu não tiro as coisa dos outro.’//Aí passava e ía embora. Aí, chegava em casa e dizia...//‘Oie mamãe, eu passei eles ficou tirano laranja, mas eu não tirei, não tirei uma não, quando eles viero eu digo: ‘Eu não quero. Quando for no dia da manhã vocês vão dizer que fui eu que tirei, eu não quero.’”

He died a grown man (*homem feito*). He left behind a bunch of children, but he never returned to those orange trees in town to take oranges from others.⁶⁰

5. Name in Social Interaction

As we saw in Chapter 4, Jeremias appeared to be struggling to regain control over his name and his life-narrative. In his retirement, Jeremias still works on pet projects that are promoted at Suor Plantation, especially “green” projects that purport to protect the environment and promote sustainable development. On one afternoon, Jeremias arrived in Pequi Community with two other men who were dressed in official-looking clothing. One of them wore a shirt with “Rainforest Alliance” marked on his sleeve in English; the other man had the word “Environment” (*Meio Ambiente*) written across his shirt. They had come looking to recruit small farmers to participate in a cacao buying program through the Rainforest Alliance’s forest cocoa certification, which, presumably, helps small farmers get fairer prices for their cocoa beans. The community members present for the meeting listened to their proposals, and just before Jeremias left, they scheduled a more formal and larger meeting with other community members in order to determine whether or not the farmers there would participate. Immediately after Jeremias and the other men left, everyone expressed their emphatic lack of interest in the project. That they would not participate was a foregone conclusion. A man named Gabriel suggested: “It’s no good. Odebrecht just wants to rob us.”⁶¹

Damião surmised that Jeremias simply wanted them to sell their cacao harvest to the plantation so that Odebrecht could resell it at a higher price. Damião, who had worked on Odebrecht’s plantation for years, suggested that just as Odebrecht controlled his and his companion’s labor, he now wanted to control their production as small farmers. If they entered

⁶⁰ “[Ele] foi aquele, morreu home feito, deixou um bucado de fio, mas nunca passou nos pé de laranja ali na Vila pa tirar uma laranja dos outos.”

⁶¹ I recorded this statement as a paraphrase in English. Gabriel’s statement very likely took the form: “Não é bom. Odebrecht só quer roubar a gente.” Fn226.

into agreement with Odebrecht, then “Afterwards,” Damião speculated, “they might even try to control your home.”⁶²

A few days later, I was with Gabriel and Colodino working on Colodino’s roça. They were discussing this recent episode with Jeremias. Gabriel explained that he had always heard of Jeremias, his exploits, the scar on his face. He knew that he had helped push the posseiros off of the land. He had even heard that, in some cases, Jeremias had traded a small radio or a wristwatch⁶³ in exchange for their land. Gabriel had never seen Jeremias with his own eyes, however, so that afternoon when Jeremias arrived in Pequi Community, Gabriel remembered thinking to himself:

“Ah, so *this* is the thief.”⁶⁴

Colodino explained, “Whenever Odebrecht wants something for himself, he sends Jeremias.”⁶⁵

Some days later, another farmer named Edgar was talking with me about Jeremias’s proposal that they market their cacao through the Suor Plantation. Edgar exclaimed:

What do I owe to Suor? Suor belongs to Norberto [Odebrecht]. This [land] here belongs to Edgar Sousa dos Santos!⁶⁶

He cites his own name emphatically, drawing an explicit connection between his name and the ground he was standing upon, and implying his awareness of the posseiros’ earlier loss of land at Odebrecht’s hands. Edgar summarized the difference between that earlier period and the present one: “Everything was obscure (*escuro*), today everything’s clarified!”⁶⁷ Odebrecht would not fool anyone again. Needless to say, Jeremias’s proposal was never carried out.

Whatever Jeremias’s intentions or self-understanding, these made little difference with respect to how his actions were received by others. In Chapter 4 we had seen several things

⁶² “Depois [Odebrecht] pode até quer controlar a sua casa.” Fn225.

⁶³ Gabriel cited one case when Jeremias has supposedly given someone a “Seiko 5 6119” wristwatch in exchange for their land. This particular model, evidently, had come out sometime around the late 1960s, which is consistent with the timeline provided in Chapters 4 and 5. Fn230.

⁶⁴ “Ah, esse é o ladrão.” Fn230.

⁶⁵ “Quando Odebrecht quer alguma coisa para ele, ele manda Jeremias.” Fn230.

⁶⁶ “Eu devo o que a Suor? Suor é de Norberto [Odebrecht]. Aquí é de [Edgar Sousa dos Santos]!” Fn236.

⁶⁷ “Tudo era escuro, hoje ta esclarecido!” Fn236.

about Jeremias: (1) He was a small part of a much broader project of accumulating land initiated by Odebrecht and others such as Dr. Severino. In terms of the distribution of responsibility, he could claim that he doing his duty; (2) Furthermore, the project of accumulating land was, at least in some important respects, a legal process; (3) The legality of the project was not, however, unambiguously “moral,” as it violated the norms of property among the posseiros who had good historical reasons for their distance—and for wanting to remain distant—from the state; (4) Because many of the posseiros appeared to lack mastery of relevant legal and language practices, and their own language for reckoning property was simply not recognized, they were reduced to quiet exit or what might be justifiable violent retaliation; (5) The most important thing we saw about Jeremias, however, was that he was native to the region and as such, most parties found it implausible that Jeremias had failed to understand the transgressions he was helping to carry out.

For this reason, Jeremias’s self-understanding and intentions counted for little when the meaning of his actions was subject to social judgment. Jeremias’s name, insofar as it is socially recognized, is cast from this whole history from which it cannot be separated. More than anything else, the very fact that it was *Jeremias*—more than anyone else—who approached the farmers at Pequi Community and proposed their participation in a project with Odebrecht, prepared the ground for the proposal’s failure. Jeremias’s name and story far preceded his actual arrival, and exceeded any of the good intentions or good will he might have had. He had long-since sacrificed his ability to *participate* in social life, and he bore the mark of this social death on his face, and in a name that was indelibly tied to that history.

6. Name as Goodness

Being stripped of everything else—one’s health, monetary wealth, land—one may be left with a name. Having a name is only a potential good, however, and a potential good connected to other kinds of goods and goodness.⁶⁸ Provisionally, then, it might be said that having a name is a potential ground for the distribution of other kinds of goods. For example, if you have a good

⁶⁸ See Section 6b below on names and credit.

name, then you can have friendships, and in having friendships, you must, by that very fact, have a name. If you have friendships, then very likely you will always have a place where you can eat, someone to ask for help or a place to sleep. Humble people may not have riches, but they may be rich in friendship. While you cannot have friendships without having a recognizable name, one can have a name while having no friends in the world. In this latter case, it is very likely that various others goods will be cut off from you, and eventually, one's own name will be extinguished in the social world.

The causal connection between different kinds of names and social recognition is nowhere better illustrated than in the story about Dr. Severino,⁶⁹ who had died alone and in increasing misery. In his case, it was not that he had been suddenly forgotten in an absolute sense—indeed, people were still discussing him, his deeds, and his demise—but rather that his name was remembered and spoken less and less, as the move into oblivion was a gradual one. Talking about Dr. Severino in those contexts was a process of accounting for his increasing isolation. A name is not, then, a good unto itself, but could be thought of as a potential site for the creation of value.

The value of name is understood as truth values. Truth values do not merely apply to the recognition or misrecognition of objects, their properties, and relationships (“The silver coin is sitting upon the table.”), but they also apply to persons and conduct insofar as people can inhabit and perform certain kinds of relationships and roles (such as being a trustworthy client, a generous friend, etc.). Truth values are accorded to persons insofar as they truly or falsely inhabit these roles.

Roles, furthermore, are differentiated insofar as specific forms of conduct are self-negating, self-defeating, and destructive. One can be a good friend and a good thief, but to inhabit the latter role tends to be destabilizing, as we have already seen in the case of Dr. Severino in Chapter 5.⁷⁰ Even if one is a good thief and brings together many other good thieves—all of whom might be friends, trust one other, jointly participate in large-scale acts of thievery, and distribute the stolen goods among themselves in a fair and just manner—there is

⁶⁹ As described in the last sections of Chapter 5.

⁷⁰ The case of Dr. Severino illustrates this point in an even more complex fashion. Even if one is a good thief, and brings together many other good thieves, all of whom trust each other, jointly participate in large-scale acts of thievery, and distribute the stolen goods among themselves in a fair and just manner, there is still a sense in which the creation of that distribution of goods is always done *at the expense of* others who are always held *outside of* that distribution. In this sense, the creation of a distribution of goods among thieves will still be self-destabilizing in the long run.

still a sense in which the creation of that distribution of goods is always done *at the expense* of others, who are always held *outside* of that distribution. In this sense, the constitution of others outside of a distribution of goods created among thieves will still be destabilizing and self-destructive, at least in the long run. As will be seen in the next section, notions about the social destructiveness of money—as being “ambitious”—helps to explain the self-destructiveness of activity done at the expense of others, as has been seen in the previous chapter.

6a. The Relation of Names to Money

As one man explained, the value of namehood is open to anyone independent of social class or status. If you are a good person—“from rich to poor, from poor to rich”⁷¹—then people will remember you. In contrast, if you are a bad person, whether rich or poor, you become unknown: “A bad person, nobody knows them.”⁷²

In this sense, a name has social properties that differentiate it from other kinds of social goods that can similarly be the basis for popularity or fame. Money, for example, binds people together in ways that friendship does not. One man explained: “Money doesn’t have consideration for anybody else. It only attracts.”⁷³ In this sense, having “consideration” for another seems to imply an opposite movement from attraction, and instead an orientation toward the other—for example, through acts of giving rather than merely receiving. He further explained that money does not achieve genuine or true friendship. He explained that if you were to win the lottery, you will only attract “false friendship” (*amizade falsa*). Money clearly allows people to achieve various kinds of ends, but it does not lead to other kinds of virtues, such as friendship and health: “With money, you don’t eat well [i.e. are not healthy], and you only have bad friendships.”⁷⁴ The root of the problem, as he explained, is that “money is ambitious.”⁷⁵

Names operate in a different causal sphere than money. Santiago explained this difference in the following manner:

⁷¹ “De rico a pobre, de pobre a rico.”

⁷² “O cara ruim ninguém conhece.”

⁷³ “O dinheiro não considera ninguém...só atrai.”

⁷⁴ “Com dinheiro, você não come bem, [e] só tem amizade ruim.” Fn493.

⁷⁵ “Dinheiro é ambicioso.” Fn493.

You have more value than silver and gold. I cannot BUY your value. Because there's neither gold nor silver that can purchase the value of a man of progress. Because a thief can steal the gold, waste it, make it fade, and everything else. But a man of progress, he dies, but his value never ends. The name remains and another speaks it: "Fulano dos Santos." You see? It lasts forever.⁷⁶

Here this man is indicating a causal disconnect between the value of a name, which is not directly accessible to monetary acquisition or exchange between people. One literally cannot buy a name with money, and this is owed to two different properties of names. As has been seen, names are created through activities and deeds occurring in complex social situations. This may include giving shelter or sharing food that might have been purchased with money. This may even include *giving* someone money directly to buy food or giving money to help someone pay for bus fare. Giving money to someone who cannot pay for their bus fare, however, is radically different than a politician who gives out money before an election in order to buy votes. In this latter case, the action of giving is more clearly self-serving than an act of giving money in which no interest is at play other than the interest in helping another person. Someone with interests that are ultimately oriented toward the self run the risk of being recognized as an *interesseiro* (self-interested), whereas someone who gives money freely and with the interest of helping another experiences the positive transformation of their name. As we saw in Chapter 5, in the case of Dr. Severino, he was initially able to *grow* his name by holding extravagant parties and sharing whiskey, but the value of his name was not durable because it was grounded in *mutual instrumental interests*. His relationships were deficient with respect to the virtue of generosity and in his lack of genuine regard for others. Determining the kinds of interests that are immanent in any given activity belongs to a social process of inferring the larger intentional structure of a broader social situation.

Because names are constantly being evaluated in a social field, others cannot steal another's name. One can smear or tarnish another's name, but the truth of a name is eventually revealed in the long term (see Section 8 below). Because evaluating a name means recalling and speaking the name of the other, this circumstance grounds the possibility—at least the logical

⁷⁶ "Voce tem valor mais do que prata e ouro. Não COMPRO o seu valor. Porque não existe ouro nem prata pra comprar o valor de um homem de proguesso. Porque o ouro o ladrão róba, acaba, desbota e tudo. Mas o homem de proguesso ele morre, mas o valor dele não acaba. Fica o nome e outro fala, [Fulano de Tal], né? Leva para sempre."

possibility—that a name can be sustained forever through the multigenerational life of the community, or for at least as long as the name is remembered and spoken.

Having achieved a name, however, does afford the possibility of accessing a wider range of goods. In other words, while a name cannot be directly purchased but must be formed, a good name can, at least in some sense, be converted into other goods.

What Santiago, who was quoted above, refers to as a “man of progress” is someone, then, who has an orientation toward others that is not taken to be purely self-interested. He explained one particular mark of a “man of progress,” which is that they participate in what he calls “activity,” rather than someone who participates in what he calls *picuinha*, which might be translated as “pettiness” or “provocation”:

Men of progress work in activity. When it’s some guy there [selling] drugs—you already know that it’s a man of drugs and he works in provocation (*picuinha*).⁷⁷

Here he is contrasting the work involved in “provocation” and “pettiness” with forms of what he might call genuine activity, or genuine work, using drug dealing as an exemplar. Damião, elsewhere, connected the character and activity to other fates:

I looked for clean work, honest—I never liked trickery (*trambicagens*), defrauding, buying stolen goods, drugs, and that crap. I never liked that, man. I never liked it. There are people there who get rich quick. You see them rise quickly by means of drugs. I keep away from that. When you get involved with all of that, pretty soon you can even lose your life.⁷⁸

6b. Names & Credit

⁷⁷ “Os home de proguesso trabalha em atividade. Quando é um cara lá da droga—já sabe que é um homem da droga e trabalha na picuinha.”

⁷⁸ “Eu sempre corri atrás de um trabalho limpo, honesto—nunca gostei de trambicagens, trambicar, comprar coisa roubado, drogas, essas porra. Nunca gostei disso, rapaz. Nunca gostei. Tem gente aí que enrica ligeirinho aí—voce vê subir ligeiro através de droga. Eu to fora desse esquema. Quando voce se envolve com muita coisa, daqui a pouco voce pode perder até a vida.”

A man named Marco, a small store owner named in Pequi Community, explained: “Having a clean name is money in your pocket.”⁷⁹ What he is referring to here is that “credit” can accrue to one’s social name in a way that might be distinguished from one’s legal names. These regimes of names potentially interact, as will be seen below. Legal credit is grounded in a legally recognized name, bound to a social security number, and supported by legal credit monitoring institutions such as the “Credit Protection Service” (SPC).⁸⁰ If you fail to pay your electric bills, for example, then your name becomes flagged in the SPC’s system and may be blocked from purchasing from other vendors on credit.⁸¹

Personal names occur in informal social networks of recognition and credibility, wherein name recognition occurs in much the same way that the institution of trust and respect were described in Chapter 3, Section 6d and 7c. This kind of interpersonal credit is based on mutual trust, interpersonal histories, and norms of generosity that may override claims to debt repayment.

Not all stores in town operate exclusively through legal credit, and some still operate through networks of name associations. Anabel, who had worked for several years as an office worker in a local agricultural firm, noted that when people referred to her name, they frequently predicated the firm’s name to her own: “Anabel of X Company.” The name of the firm, she explained “had weight” (*tinha peso*), “had worth” (*tinha moral*), and “had trust” (*tinha confiança*). As a result of her being associated with the firm—even though she did not hold great prestige through her position—the weight of her own name borrowed from the firm’s name. She explained that if she had to, she could purchase from some local stores on personal “credit” (*fiado*).⁸² In this sense, she was able to purchase on the borrowed credit of another entity that had a legally recognized name.

6c. Store Credit & Virtue

⁷⁹ “Ter o nome limpo é dinheiro no bolso.” Fn549.

⁸⁰ Serviço de Proteção ao Crédito.

⁸¹ Fn207.

⁸² Fn288.

Seu Pedrinho ran a tiny store out of an extra room he had built off the side of his house. The small income from this store supplemented the meager retirement benefits he received from the state. He explained the way in which trust worked in these interpersonal commercial relationships. He gave a hypothetical example of a man who purchases peppers from a small vendor on personal credit, promising to pay later. The client faltered on his repayment—because he had fallen ill or his wife had fallen ill—but the vendor, recognizing the worth of his client’s word, agreed to continue doing business with him. Seu Pedrinho gave another example of a friend of his who had actually become indebted for R\$2,000 to another local vendor, but had been unable to make the payments on what he had purchased. His friend had gone to talk with the vendor about his inability to repay him, and the vendor sat down with him to talk:

He said: “Sit here. You won’t leave [abandon] me, will you?”

[The man] replied: “No.”

“Then You can repay these R\$2,000 however you can...If you pay me 10, 20, 40, 50, or 1000, I’ll be here.”⁸³

The man in debt said that he would not abandon the store owner, and the store owner agreed that they could simply continue doing business, and that the man could simply pay him back little by little, as his circumstances permitted.

Unlike the plantation stores—the *cai duros* that will be described in Chapter 10, Section 3d—where debt becomes a form of bondage, the situation in the case of small-scale vendors is somewhat more nuanced. Vendors are subject to interpersonal evaluations of personal virtue that, perhaps more than clients, place them in a position of coercive cooperation. On one occasion, a man named Tobias, a small store owner in Pequi Community, explained that he feels compelled to sell to people on personal credit (*fiado*), because if he does not permit such sales, people would complain that he is “miserable” (*miserável*), in other words, that he is greedy and miserly. While we were talking, he presented me with one of his notebooks in which he kept

⁸³ “Ele disse: ‘Sente aqui, você num vai sair de mim não?’/Ele disse: ‘Não.’//‘Esse dois mil reais você paga como puder...Se você me pagar de dez, de vinte, de quarenta, de cinquenta, de mil eu to pa receber.”

record of all of the sales and money that was owed to him. He explained, however, that he considered all of that money to be lost. He estimated that, over the years, he might have accumulated somewhere between R\$4,000 or R\$5,000 of unpaid debts in the book, but he did not expect that any of it would be paid back to him.⁸⁴

Of course, there are limits on this. Damião, who also had a small store he ran out of the side of his house, explained that if he had clients who repeatedly purchased on credit but never repaid their debts, eventually, he would have to stop selling to them. He explained that if he purchased on credit in town, but never repaid any of his debts, his name and credit would become tarnished, and vendors there would no longer sell to him: “My name would become dirty in the square.”⁸⁵ Refusing to sell to another would not be done without sensitivity to personal circumstances. The underemployed, aging, chronically ill, disabled, or families with young children would be circumstances under which exceptions would very likely be made. Awareness of circumstance, however, would not be possible without having collateral understanding of the person, their story, and their name. Refusing to recognize such circumstances, as Manoel had done in Chapter 7, Section 6a, would be an immoral failure to acknowledge other’s limit and the conditions necessary for living life together.

In both cases, both vendors’ and clients’ names are at stake, and subject to reciprocal and mutual evaluations by one another and their larger communities. Vendors risk being cast as “miserly” (*miserável, miséira, ruim*), clients risk being cast as “vagabonds” (*vagabundos*) or as “lazy” (*preguiçoso*). The action of reciprocal evaluation serves to create a “mean”—in Aristotle’s sense—that places limitations on such exchanges and prevents them from promoting pure license, and from being destructive to both self and other.

6d. Conversion of Name to Other Goods

One elderly man commented that the two most important things one can have are “health” (*saúde*) and “respect” (*respeito*). Respect, in this case, seems to be a two-sided notion that entails both offering respect to others as well as receiving respect and esteem in return. If

⁸⁴ Fn262.

⁸⁵ “O meu nome fica sujo na praça.” Fn360.

you have the respect for (or the esteem of) others, he further suggested, then you can “ask” (*pedir*) for others to give or share with you, or ask vendors to sell to you on credit. He gave an example, suggesting that he could send one of his children or grandchildren “to purchase goods in town.” Instead of paying up front, they could cite his name and vendors would sell to them, because his name had respect. Likewise, presumably, if one’s health is failing, one can ask for food, other goods, or help. In other words, even after health fades, one’s respect remains. Whether or not one has respect, however, depends upon the quality of one’s name, and so respect is dependent upon name as a more basic good that has a particular durability.

Toward the end of a long interview, Seu Pedrinho, looking back at everything he had recounted about his life, began to conclude:

I’ve never broken the law. I’ve never met with an authority that told [me to be silent]: “*Shhh!*” I was never met with any of that. I have great happiness about this. I have great happiness that my name is clean. Thanks to God, [it’s] clean.⁸⁶

A young woman sitting nearby, who had overheard parts of the interview, interjected:

And [he’s] known in society!⁸⁷

Seu Pedrinho concurred:

I’m known in society. Me—thank God—I’m known [to others]. I can say that I am poor, black, ugly, but I’m well represented.⁸⁸

Being “well represented” amounted to a multifaceted social fact. He explained, for example, that whenever midday comes, he never has to worry about what his family would have to eat. That he has never had to pose that question was, in part, a consequence of having a good name. This was not, however, because he was materially wealthy:

⁸⁶ “Nunca passei uma desfeita. Nunca encontrei uma autoridade que dissesse: ‘Psiu!’ Nunca encontrei. Tenho uma grande alegria disso. Tenho uma grande alegria de meu nome ser limpo, graças a Deus, limpo.”

⁸⁷ “E conhecido na sociedade!”

⁸⁸ “Sou conhecido da sociedade, eu graças a Deus sou conhecido, posso dizer que sou um pobre, preto, feio, mas bem representado.”

I have a place to sleep. I have a place to buy. If I've got money, I'll buy [what I need]. If I don't have money, I can still buy [what I need], understood? I have happiness—I have happiness. There are days that I cry, “Lord, thank You .”⁸⁹

What he means to say here is that under normal circumstances he is able to provide for himself and his family. If, however, something bad were to occur, he would still be able to provide for himself because others have a good regard for his name. If he needed to borrow money, purchase something on credit, or if he needed something to eat or a place to sleep, others would provide for him because he had a positive name. Having a name also meant that he had a reciprocal regard for other people, as well, and could provide for others in need as well:

My friends—wherever I live—when I see [them, I say]: “Come in, sleep here, eat, and go on your way.”⁹⁰

Friendship, in this case, was connected to a capacity for receiving friends in his home, and sharing food and shelter with them, as they moved along their path. He recited the names of various others—most notably “big men”—with whom he had developed friendships:

The mayor here is my friend. Thanks to God. The mayor of [the neighboring town] is my friend, you see? He'll come and sit here:

“Hey Seu Pedrinho, how are things? How are things? How are things?”⁹¹

The fact that they dialogue with him, ask him how he is doing, and otherwise show regard for him was not a mark of his own magnitude, but rather that he was taken to be worthy of address at all:

⁸⁹ “Eu tenho onde dormir. Eu tenho onde comprar. Se eu tiver o dinheiro, eu compro. Se eu não tiver, eu compro sempre, entendeu? Eu tenho alegria, tenho alegria mesmo. E tem dias que to chorando, ‘Senhor, muito obrigado.’”

⁹⁰ “Meus amigo—todo lugar que eu moro, quando vejo, ‘Chega, dorme aqui, come e vai embora.’”

⁹¹ “Prefeito aqui é meu amigo, graças a Deus. Prefeito de Igrapiúna é meu amigo, entendeu? Vem senta aqui://‘Ei Seu Pedrinho, tudo bom, tudo bom, tudo bom?’”

City officials, this person, that person, business people—the owner of the largest supermarket chain [is my friend]. Thank God. That’s how it is—[if I need something from the store in town], all I have to do is send a message:

“It’s for Seu Pedrinho? [Sure thing,] take it, be on your way.’

What I mean is, when I die, I won’t take anything else with me, right? When I die, even if I have everything, will I take any of that with me? No? Well that’s what I mean—man shouldn’t just think of material things, no, [but] spiritual as well.⁹²

Here, by invoking the “spiritual,” it appears that Seu Pedrinho may be turning his attention toward some kind of “afterlife” or some otherworldly “beyond.” Given what has been said in Chapter 6, Sections 2 about the local concepts of “God,” we can expect that talk about “God” will be instantiated in (and about) his relationships with “others” in the actual world. In this way, attending to the “spiritual” has just as much to do with his “name” than anything relating to an afterlife.⁹³ Seu Pedrinho continued:

If I can do good, then I won’t do evil. If I can offer you a plate of porridge—as an example (*símbolo*), right? In helping you—I help you, I don’t take from you—[I don’t take] from what you have...This is the current [that runs through] every place that I’ve ever lived.⁹⁴

He imagined others speaking about him:

⁹² “É sacretário, é isso, é aquilo, é niguciante, o maior niguciante de rede de supermercado. Graças a Deus. É assim comigo—abasta um recadinho://‘É pa Seu Pedrinho? Toma e vai embora.’//Quer dizer, quando eu morrer num vou levar nada, não é? Quando eu morrer, mermo que tenha tudo, mas vou levar alguma coisa? Não? Então é isso que quero dizer. É, o home não pense só material não, ispiritual também.”

⁹³ After all, one’s name remains in the world as a social fact in the *afterlife* of mere physical life. Here it also bears noting that the notion of “name,” at least in this ethnographic context, appears to be much closer to Hegel’s notion of “spirit” (*Geist*) as a historically and interactionally specific instance of intersubjective recognition. This increasingly influential re-reading of “spirit” is defended by Richard R. Williams (1997) against earlier “metaphysical” readings of Hegel.

⁹⁴ “Se eu puder fazer o bem, não faço o mal. Se eu puder lhe dar um prato de pirão, um símbolo assim, né? Em lhe ajudar—eu lhe ajudo, não lhe tiro—do que você tem, não...E isso é o corrente de todo lugar onde eu morei.”

“That [Seu Pedrinho] there—he’s weak, he’s poor, he’s black. He doesn’t know how to read, he doesn’t know how to write. But he’s a good person.”⁹⁵

At this point, Seu Pedrinho invokes God:

Because not everyone delights in God. There are many who don’t want God...Because if you do something that doesn’t please God, then you don’t like God, isn’t that the case?⁹⁶

This might seem to be a curious place to turn to theological considerations, but given what preceded it, and what followed it, the meaning is precisely a summary statement of God as a social fact. It is precisely in helping others, by treating others well, giving whenever possible, and not taking from others, that one can win the reciprocal esteem of one’s others:

Every place that I’ve lived, wherever I walk, where I do my business, people love me. Thanks to God.⁹⁷

6e. Sharing, Using, and Instrumental Stances toward Names

Names may be drawn into instrumental relationships, and for this reason become the ground for structured forms of inequality. In a conversation with a young man named Silvano, we were talking about differences in treatment and service that people receive in stores. I gave an example of a store in a nearby town where, whenever I entered, the lead salesman always swarmed me with attention. Silvano concurred, and drew out the asymmetry in terms of how our names might be remembered for instrumental reasons:

Wherever he sees you, he talks with you. He remembers your name. And me, people aren’t interested in remembering my name because he doesn’t think I’m important to

⁹⁵ “‘Ali, é fraco, é pobre, é preto. Num sabe ler, num sabe escrever. Mas é gente boa.’”

⁹⁶ “‘Porque nem o povo agradou de Deus. Porque tem muitos que não quer Deus...Porque se você faz coisa que Deus num agrada, num gosta de Deus, não é?’”

⁹⁷ “‘Todo lugar que eu moro, que eu ando, que eu niguiceio, o povo me ama. Graças a Deus.’”

him. Even though I buy things and I'm on time [with my payments] in the store. And you bought something that day, and being a *gringo*, people already think you're more important than me.

Names may also be shared, or loaned out more directly, and point to ways in which “personal” and “legal” names can interact more directly. For example, it is common for the legal names of others to be used to open up store credit or to take out credit in agricultural programs. This is particularly common among family members, especially women—spouses and daughters—whose legal names are sometimes appropriated by older men with bad (legal) credit.⁹⁸

One young woman named Anastácia, for example, explained that she had loaned her legal name to her sister-in-law, who had made purchases in a local store totaling nearly R\$700. Her sister-in-law never paid for the purchases, however, and so she was stuck with the legal debt that was connected to her legal name. After interest had accrued on the debt, she owed nearly R\$900. Fortunately, however, the store owner was a “good person” (*boa pessoa*), and although the vendor was unable to forgive the principal debt, he stopped charging her interest and removed the R\$200 that had already accrued to the debt. In this case, the sister-in-law had lost all personal credibility, while the young woman's legal name had lost credibility; the vendor revealed a measure of kindness and personal character, while the state crediting agency remained as indifferent as ever.⁹⁹

7. Name & Political Capital

In the course of his life, a man named Júlio had created a name of an appreciably large magnitude. Júlio was a low level administrator at the Colônia, and had created a name among the families living there and those who worked at the nearby Firestone plantation. His name was not only recognized among the rural poor and plantation workers, but also by members of the regional political elite who hoped to create a political alliance with him for political gains. In

⁹⁸ Fn573.

⁹⁹ Fn375.

order to understand how Júlio's name was formed, it is necessary to understand a few details about how plantation workers sought to navigate through some of the problems created by labor law.

According to his account of labor law in the second half of the 20th century, anyone who worked at any plantation or firm for 10 or more years would accrue the right to double retirement benefits. If, for example, someone had worked for 10 years on a plantation and was laid off, the plantation had to pay the equivalent of 20 years of service into the state's retirement system.¹⁰⁰ If someone worked at a plantation for 15 years and was laid off, the plantation would be responsible for paying 30 years of retirement benefits, and so on. In order to avoid this financial burden, most plantations would let go of their employees after 8 or 9 years of work, but before they completed 10 years. After the employee had worked for at least three months for another firm, and the new employer signed their work card (*carteira assinada*), the worker could return to their previous place of employment and resume their former position, while the plantation would be relieved of the responsibility for paying double retirement benefits. This method of avoiding paying extra benefits was a common practice on many of the region's plantations, and very likely other kinds of firms as well.

For the plantation workers, this created a burden insofar as they had to find employers that could legally sign their work cards. If no legal work was forthcoming, the other option would be unemployment, financial hardship, and perhaps hunger. In order to circumvent these circumstances, some workers sought out fraudulent signatures on their work cards, declaring that they had worked at another firm for the requisite three months. The plantations administrators did not want to lose workers, and in some cases, it appears that administrators collaborated with workers' efforts to acquire fraudulent signatures. If a worker could find another firm to sign their work cards, the plantation could continue to pay the worker through back channels so that they never had to stop working.

Because of his position as an administrator at the Colônia, Júlio explained that he was empowered to sign peoples work cards in this way, and over the years, he had signed a great deal of work cards. He recalled the first person who ever approached him for a signature—a plantation worker from the Firestone plantation who had been laid off:

¹⁰⁰ The National Institute of Social Security (*Instituto Nacional do Seguro Social*), or INSS.

“Mr. Júlio, I’m in a rough situation here. Firestone’s let me go.”¹⁰¹

Júlio recalled that the worker had some eight or nine children, and although his family owned a small *roça*, what it produced was not sufficient to support the entire family. The man really depended on his work at Firestone to make a living. Júlio recalled the man’s words:

“I’ve got a *roça*—the *roça*’s productive, but it’s not enough. It’s not enough to feed [my family]. I really make my living through my work at Firestone.”¹⁰²

Júlio needed little convincing to sign the man’s work card:

Well, I took his work card and I signed it.¹⁰³

Legally, Júlio should have paid the equivalent of three months work into the retirement system, but as there was no enforcement, signing the work card cost nothing for Júlio. With Júlio’s signature, declaring that the man had worked with him for three months, the man was able to continue working at Firestone. Not long after, the man returned asking for another favor:

“Hey Júlio, can I ask you for another favor?”

“What’s that?”

“Could you sign [the work cards] of a few of my friends who are in the same situation? Would you sign these cards?”¹⁰⁴

Júlio ended up signing those cards, and over the course of his employment at the Colônia, he eventually signed many more:

¹⁰¹ “Seu Júlio, eu to numa situação aqui difícil. A Firestone me botou pra fora.”

¹⁰² “Eu tenho uma *roça*, a *roça* me rende, mas não me rende—mas não me dá o sustento. Meu sustento é feito com meu trabalho lá da Firestone.”

¹⁰³ “Aí peguei a carteira dele e assinei.”

¹⁰⁴ ““Ó Júlio, eu vou lhe pedir mais um favor.”//“O que é?”//“Voce assina de uns amigos meus que ta lá na mesma situação, voce assina essas carteiras?””

I signed work cards left and right...I signed more than 500...100, 200, 300...I don't know the exact number, but I signed a lot of work cards.¹⁰⁵

As a result of offering his signature, Júlio had become quite popular and respected among the plantation workers. His name was cited, repeated, and it flourished in the mouths of others:

My name became very good [among] those people, among all those families.¹⁰⁶

People would cite his name and his deeds:

“The one who did this [for us] was Mr. Júlio—the one who did this was Mr. Júlio.”

I gained a lot of prestige with them—in that forest, in the Colônia, among those people at Firestone.¹⁰⁷

In retrospect, Júlio recognized the potential political clout that would have given him:

If I'd told people, “Look, vote for Fulano,” they'd vote—they'd vote. If I was out drinking, they'd want to pay for my drinks: “No, this guy doesn't have to pay, [we won't let Júlio pay!]”...For me everything had become: “Júlio!” “Júlio!” “Júlio!”¹⁰⁸

Júlio did not accrue any financial benefits by signing the work cards, as there was no money involved in the transaction, and there is every indication that he genuinely wanted to help people in a non-interested manner. Although his name had grown significantly, and he enjoyed great public esteem and the occasional free drink, Júlio never sought to cash in his symbolic capital.

¹⁰⁵ “Eu assinei carteira a torto e a direita...Assinei mais de 500... 100, 200, 300...Não sei o número exato, mas que eu assinei muita carteira foi.”

¹⁰⁶ “Fiquei com o nome muito bom, aquele pessoal, aquela família toda.”

¹⁰⁷ “‘Não, quem fez isso foi seu Júlio, quem fez foi seu Júlio.’//Fiquei com prestígio com aquele—dentro daquela mata, aquela Colônia, aquele pessoal pela Firestone.”

¹⁰⁸ “Se eu dissesse: ‘Olha, vote em fulano,’ eles votavam, votavam. Até bebida que eu estava bebendo eles queriam pagar: ‘Não, isso aqui não paga não.’...Eu fiquei com aquele negócio: ‘Júlio, Júlio, Júlio.’”

He never became involved in local politics, but his prestige had not escaped the attention of the local political elites.

Júlio's family arrived in the region in the late 1940. His parents were part of a burgeoning middle class that was involved with state bureaucracy, and they were more closely aligned with state than municipal politics. In this respect, his family was somewhat alienated from local elites,¹⁰⁹ with whom he shared few political views or sympathies. When his family moved to the region in the 1940s they were not well received. He recalled one occasion when he had been invited to a feast—a *caruru*¹¹⁰—at the home of a man who had political ties to the oldest family of political elites in the municipality. One of the men present at the feast, named Ignácio, began to joke with Júlio—somewhat antagonistically—as soon as he arrived. Júlio voiced Ignácio's booming voice:

“LOOK [JÚLIO], WE DON'T WANT TO HEAR ABOUT SOCCER, POLITICS, OR RELIGION. YOU HEAR ME JÚLIO? I DON'T WANT TO HEAR ANY TALK ABOUT RELIGION, ABOUT POLITICS, OR ABOUT SOCCER!”¹¹¹

Júlio's politics were left-leaning, and these members of the local elite did not want to hear anything about that. Júlio recalled feeling humiliated, and after that he kept to himself and his plate of *caruru*. Ignácio's words seem to be pointing toward Júlio's incommensurate political views. Not long after, however, one of the other men called him into the back of the house where the other men—along with Ignácio—were talking politics. It was an election year, and Ignácio was going to be a candidate for vice-mayor. Having witnessed their initial encounter during the festivities, another man informed Ignácio that Júlio could be an important political ally given the good name that he had with the people at the Colônia and Firestone. Júlio recalled their words:

“Look, Júlio is the person who's got prestige in the Colônia.”¹¹²

¹⁰⁹ The heirs of traditional forms of patron-client politics, or the old *coronels*.

¹¹⁰ *Caruru* is a Brazilian dish made from okra, palm oil, and various other ingredients, and is a dish that is often served in various festivities and celebrations.

¹¹¹ “Olha, aqui não se fala em futebol, política e religião. Ta ouvindo seu Júlio? Eu não quero saber aqui de conversa nem de religião, nem de política e nem de futebol.”

¹¹² “Olha, quem tem prestígio na Colônia é Júlio.”

Ignácio called Júlio over, so that he and the candidate for mayor could talk with him and try to recruit him into providing political support:

“Júlio, we’d like to talk with you.”¹¹³

Júlio responded in the following manner:

“Mr. Ignácio, we’re not here to talk—we shouldn’t be talking about politics, religion, or soccer. I came to eat *caruru*, not for politics.”¹¹⁴

Júlio was able to accrue a positive name for himself by helping people at the Colônia. He did so without specific self-interest, but, instead, out of a more genuine interest to help some others in need. In a sense, then, Júlio could be said to have a genuinely “good” name. The prestige he had gained at the Colônia meant that his name was frequently cited and sometimes people bought him beer, but he had never used his good name for political gain. If Júlio had agreed to “cash in” his prestige and enter into local politics, the value of his name would have been transformed and accrued a more instrumental value that would have been in conflict with having a genuinely good name and standing in his community. By parroting the words of Ignácio’s earlier reproach, Júlio was able to escape their claim on using his name for political and instrumental ends.

8 Name-Reckoning & Truth-Value

In the early 2000s, a man of relatively stable financial means appeared in town with his family, and he immediately became involved in local politics. He had successfully appropriated a populist rhetoric, and became known for his willingness to butt heads with traditional political

¹¹³ “Júlio, nós precisamos conversar com voce.”

¹¹⁴ “Seu Ignácio, aqui não se comenta—não se conversa política, religião e futebol. Eu vim pr’aqui comer caruru não foi pra política não.”

families. He was quickly elected as a city council member (*vereador*). However, one of the unsettling things about him, as one woman explained, was that she had little knowledge about who he was, where he had come from, or who his family was. Indeed, this lack of transparency may have been part of the reason why the newcomer to town was able to be elected. His name was not associated with any particular story and history, and, perhaps more importantly, he was not associated with any of the local elite families that traditionally dominated municipal politics.¹¹⁵

Indeed, names are taken to reveal a good deal about people, but in some ways, the evaluative efficacy of name-reckoning is being challenged. New forms of mobility and possibilities for anonymity in recent decades undermine the revelatory power of names and, for many people, the social world appears less and less intelligible through what could be called name-reckoning. Naming practices themselves have opened up in ways that, at least for some, undermine the reliability of name-reckoning merely on the basis of one's name or family name. Naming practices, especially those associated with humble families, have always displayed a great deal of creativity. In naming children, for example, it is not uncommon for the series of children's names to proceed according to an alliterative phonetic pattern. A first daughter might be named Ana, the next, Ana Cris, followed by Ana Claudia, Anastácia, Antônia, and so on.¹¹⁶ Other people might name their children for each letter in the sequence of the mother's or a father's first name.

Legally speaking, it was formerly prohibited to register names that employed the letters “k,” “w,” and “y” given earlier standards in Brazilian Portuguese orthography. When registering a child's legal name, the notary would accept the name “Carol” but not “Karol.” Today, this law has changed and many people spell names in novel fashions, or adopt or adapt names that are not traditionally biblical or Brazilian. The names of North American celebrities, such as Michael Jackson or Mike Tyson, might be creatively appropriated and refashioned.¹¹⁷

Some complain that people no longer use “names for people” (*nomes de gente*), that is, traditional biblical names. From such a perspective, the form of the name—whether or not they

¹¹⁵ Fn441.

¹¹⁶ After the 6th child, however, some people claim that it is bad luck for the 7th child's name to follow suit, so the phonetic pattern ends at that point.

¹¹⁷ An internet search for creative Brazilian names yields diverse results, and lists of such names are often forwarded through email networks as a form of entertainment. For example, one such name could be “Miketisson Shuasneguer,” or a derivation of Mike Tyson Schwarzenegger

are “proper” (i.e. traditional) names, or names associated with certain families—matters just as much as, if not more than, the specific life-historical narratives associated with specific persons and names. The form of name-reckoning that has been explored in these sections, however, shifts the focus away from these formal properties of names to the life-historical narrative content that is a crucial social dimension of names. This indicates a way in which the form of names becomes overridden by evaluative concerns. As one rural man explained:

“There are people who are people, and then there are who only have the name of a person (*nome de gente*), see?”¹¹⁸

Here he is making a distinction between people who are people, in the sense that they are responsible to and attentive toward others—and those who are people in name only. This view, which is consistent with the logic of name-reckoning, undermines the *inherited* value of names, biblical names, or lineages, and shifts the focus to forms of conduct.

Sa. Revealing Names as Justice

As we have seen throughout this exploration of names, people’s names are not entirely in one’s own control. Just as one’s name can be subject to fraud, it can also be subject to revelation by others. For example, over the course of one land occupation that occurred at Settlement 6 in the region, the plantation owner had gotten the support of the local sheriff who was known for conducting extra-legal forms of “justice,” which sometimes included simply executing criminals or people who were perceived as being “criminal,” by working with local gunmen and assassins. A man named Ulisses, who had participated in that land occupation, recalled the sheriff’s attitude toward the squatters who had entered the plantation:

He only worked with assassins, you see? To him, we were of no value whatsoever...How is it that the justice [system]—which is supposed to be there to protect us—is entering into a pact with violent [killers]?¹¹⁹

¹¹⁸ “Tem gente que é gente e tem gente que só tem o nome de gente, né?”

As the plantation owner had aligned himself with the local sheriff, the squatters at Settlement 6 had to seek outside support. The squatters organized a public action, inviting city council members and state representatives for a public event in the town square. If anyone in the land occupation was going to be killed, then people would know about it. On the day of the event, a great number of people showed up and the squatters sought to reveal the reality of the situation and of the threats they were facing:

We put his name out in the square—recounting what it was he had done to the people of the region, understand—because if you were black or poor, you’d die. You had no value [to him] whatsoever. It was people from police group that were doing the killings at the time, you see—because, you know, this was a dark place in those days. And so we held a public action, and we went with a microphone into the middle of the square to recount everything that was happening and not happening.¹²⁰

In short, they revealed everything that the sheriff was doing to a wider public. Consequently, officials at a higher level took disciplinary actions against the sheriff, as he was removed from his post in town, and he was eventually transferred elsewhere.

8b. Name Revelation in Death

The value of a name—and the value of a person—can be seen in interesting ways in talk about death and burials. One man recalled his father’s death. After his father lost his land to a bank foreclosure in the 1950s, he worked in the region as a muleteer, or *tropeiro*. They did not live in dire poverty, but they were not wealthy by any measure. He was, however, greatly respected by his peers. This became evident upon his father’s death during the burial:

¹¹⁹ “Ele só apoiava matador, entendeu. Nós não tinha valor nenhum... Como é que a própria justiça—que ta ali pra defender a gente—ta se pactuando com violento?”

¹²⁰ “Na praça nós só botamos o nome dele—contamos o que é que ele fazia com o povo da região, entendeu—porque morria se fosse preto ou pobre não tinha valor de nada, entendeu, gente do grupo da polícia mesmo era quem matava na época, entendeu, que voce sabe que esses lugares naquela época era escuro mesmo. E aí nós fizemos uma ação pública e fomos com o microfone pra dentro da praça dizer tudo o que acontecia, que não acontecia.”

Lots of people [came], [they] filled the town.¹²¹

When funeral processions occur in town, all of the shops in the street close their doors out of respect. This is an act of respect that simultaneously serves to draw attention to the procession in the street. Although there certainly cannot be a clean causal relationship, the number of people attending a funeral can be thought of, in some respects, as an indication of the quality of one's life. The moment of death is the moment of truth with respect to life.

As suggested before, social beings are accorded different epistemic statuses or truth values, as having either been “true” (*verdadeiro*) or “false” (*falso*) over the course of life. The most ready-to-hand *indication* of one's truth-value is in the degree to which a burial is attended by others. The extent to which one's burial is attended can be taken as an indication of an affirmative truth value, and in this sense, one's name and conduct—as an example for others—lives on through others in the community. The false are not remembered, but are forgotten, and do not thrive in the community. In short, the burials of the true are attended and the true dead are remembered, the burials of the false are unattended and the false dead are eventually forgotten. In short, those who lived truly were those who did not merely live for themselves, but lived with an orientation toward others, as well.

Dona Márcia—the notary who was discussed in Chapter 4—was one example of someone who had left behind a good name and had lived for others. Felícia recalled Dona Márcia's name over the course of our conversation about her:

She was very honest, a very good person, very honest. And she lived her life—she didn't get rich because she never exploited anyone. She didn't leave any money behind, but she did leave a clean name because everyone liked her.¹²²

Dona Márcia's humility in life was mirrored in her death:

¹²¹ “Deu gente...enchia a cidade.” Fn394.

¹²² “Ela era muito honesta, uma pessoa muito boa, muito honesta. Aí viveu a vida—não enriqueceu porque ela não explorava ninguém. Não deixou dinheiro, mas deixou um nome limpo que todo mundo gostava dela.”

She's there [buried] in a shallow place. She said she didn't want anything [special], she just wanted to be buried in the ground.¹²³

In this case, the shallow grave is not a reflection of her lack of respect, but an enduring mark of her humility and selflessness. Despite her humility, her condition in death was still the focus of social activities. The woman recounting Dona Márcia's death explained that some of the loved ones she had left behind—including a woman that Dona Márcia had adopted and raised as her own daughter—had planned to eventually purchase a tomb for her. Even in death, then, Dona Márcia had not only the power to be remembered, but the power to affect the arrangement of material goods.

9. From Name to Friendship

Whereas money cannot achieve some of the goods attendant to virtues such as friendship, friendship can achieve some of the same ends that money brings about: “If you don't have money, if you're broke, you can get [what you need] with friendship.”¹²⁴ At least to a certain degree, friendship can bring about some of the same goods that money can achieve.

One afternoon during the June harvest festivals,¹²⁵ I ran into a farmer named Timóteo. He was slightly intoxicated and on his way to meet other friends at a country bar. He invited me to come along. We talked along the way, and over the course of our conversation, he began to discuss the question of friendship as it related to his life situation. He explained that although he does not have a lot of money, and is not rich with money, he had “friendship” (*amizade*). For this reason, he considered himself “rich” (*rico*): “I don't have money, but I have friendship.”¹²⁶

He explained that rich people like the plantation owner Norberto Odebrecht —whom he gave as a paradigm example—never came *walking* through the countryside, as we were doing on our way to the bar. “Odebrecht,” he explained, “doesn't come here.”¹²⁷ Instead, whenever he

¹²³ “Que ela ta lá num lugar raso. Ela disse que não queria nada, queria ser enterrada no chão mesmo.”

¹²⁴ “Se não tem dinheiro, ta puro, com amizade consegue.”

¹²⁵ Specifically, in the period between São João and São Pedro.

¹²⁶ “Nao tenho dinheiro mas tenho amizade.” Fn486.

¹²⁷ “Odebrecht não chega aqui.” Fn486.

visited his plantation nearby, he would arrive flying overhead in a helicopter. Somewhat counterintuitively, then, being rich amounted to being gated-off and isolated from social relationships.

While Timóteo is not a monetarily rich person, he had saved as much as possible for the June festivals. He showed me a few folded up R\$50 notes, which he pulled from his pocket. He explained to me that over the previous three days, he had consumed nearly 128 cans (*latinhas*) of beer. He had not done so himself, however, but he had paid for many other people to drink. Timóteo is a generous man, and in the time of the festivities, he is generous with beer. He explained that people in the countryside respect him and that he has no enemies. His name, he explained, is a “tiny name” (*nomezinho*). But while his name may be a humble name, it is one that people remembered and esteemed.¹²⁸ Moreover, it is a name that enables him to *walk about* and be *among* others—unlike Odebrecht, who appeared to live in relative isolation.

Having a widely recognized name, while a “good” of sorts, can also be a burden. One day, when travelling with Damião through a neighboring town, he explained: “I have an incredible [amount of] acquaintances here!” And he continued: “That’s why I don’t like to come here! I have too many friends here. That’s why I don’t like to come here.”¹²⁹ He explained that “with friendship there, you can never leave,”¹³⁰ as his friends would want to drink until “the next sunrise” (*amanhecer o dia*). So while friendship is an “elective” relationship in some senses, it is one that comes with certain commitments that can also become burdensome, even if they are not wholly undesirable.

As was noted previously, the historical and social content of names is subject to transformation over time and circumstance. Damião had achieved appreciable upward mobility through acquiring a small piece of land and becoming a small farmer. One evening when he and I showed up at a bar in a nearby town, where we ran into some of his old friends whom he had not seen in many years, they commented that Damião had achieved some success in his life. Damião insisted that he was still a “peon” (*peão*), another way of referring to a plantation worker: “I’m a peon.” One man retorted, “You’re no longer a peon! You’re rich today—you’re

¹²⁸ Fn486.

¹²⁹ “Tenho conhecimento incrível aqui!...É por isso que não gosto de vir aqui! Tenho amizade demais aqui. Por isso não gosto de vir [aqui].”

¹³⁰ “Com amizade dali, sai nunca!”

a *fazendeiro!*” Of course, everyone understood the humor and that these statements were exaggerations, but Damião continued to insist: “I’m none of that, I’m a peon.”¹³¹

The man who had been joking with Damião—as Damião later explained to me—was in fact descended from one of the wealthy families in the town where we had stopped. The family had lost most of its old wealth, though, and was no longer what it used to be. A person’s name, however, never loses value except through the person’s conduct, and it retains its value in the loss of all other monetary value. Damião explained: “When you have nothing else, you have your name.”¹³²

9a. *The Givenness of Friendship*

Friendship is considered to be an important and foundational good, in the same way that, say, a rested and healthy body is a basic good. In another conversation, a landless worker named Paulo—and one of Amado’s few friends¹³³—explained that both health and friendship were of crucial importance:

Health is the greatest wealth. Money isn’t everything—it’s more health and friendship.¹³⁴

This is especially poignant since, after his health had begun to fail him, what little Amado had left were his few friends since he did not have any family in the region, nor the means to return to them. In another context and in a slightly different manner, Timotéo suggested that plantation workers who had been stripped of everything were only left with God,¹³⁵ whereas, after joining the MST, people have friendship and companionship:

On the plantation, you only have God. In the Landless Movement, we have friendship.¹³⁶

¹³¹ “Sou peão.”//“Você peão mais não! Você é rico hoje, você é um fazendeiro!”//“Sou nada, sou um peão.” Fn473.

¹³² “Quando não tem nada, tem nome.”

¹³³ Amado was described in Chapter 6, Section 4.

¹³⁴ “Saúde é a maior riqueza. Dinheiro não é tudo—é mais a saúde e a amizade.”

¹³⁵ In Chapter 6, Section 2, “God” was seen as being the most basic source of agency, and an ineliminable source of otherness and companionship.

¹³⁶ “Na fazenda, ele só tem Deus. No Sem Terra nós tem amizade.”

Friendship, then, appears as an important good, from which other goods might be achieved. Friends banding together, for example, might be able to occupy and cultivate abandoned plantation lands and create better lives and relationships.

The local idiom of friendship, as is also the case with namehood, is taken to be impervious to the effects of money. As Santiago explained:

There's no money that buys [friendship], it's something given.¹³⁷

Silvano, who was present for that conversation, agreed and said that friendship is “conquered” (*conquistada*), in the sense of being won over and earned. Rather, the notion of friendship is of a relationship that cannot be genuinely grounded in self-interest or calculating orientation toward the other, and for this reasons, friendship operates outside of the sphere of monetary transactions.

This is not to say that friendships are infallible. Instead, the epistemic statuses of different friendships are constantly under review and revision. While some relationships may be grounded upon misrepresentations and mutually agreed upon falsehoods—as when Dr. Severino had colluded with others to dispossess the posseiros—genuine friendship cannot be based upon false representation. If a friendship turns out to be based upon calculation or self-interest, then the friendship can be said to be an “*amizade ruim*” or “*falso*,” or a “false” or “bad friendship.”

In some views, true and false friendships distribute across social space in a differentiated manner. For example, one young man named Vinícius, who had come to spend time with relatives in the countryside from the Brazil's capital city of Brasília, suggested that the difference was striking between the rural community and the urban area where he had grown up:

It's like a paradise in comparison to the big city...There's caring here, people will talk with you, you know? I don't know, but it's really nice to feel that sensation...There's none of that falseness. If someone wants to say something [to you], they'll say it. They don't go hiding [behind your back] and talking [bad about you] to other people.¹³⁸

¹³⁷ “Não tem dinheiro que compra, é uma coisa dada.”

¹³⁸ “Aqui é um paraíso comparado com a cidade grande...Aqui é um carinho, as pessoa fala com você assim, sabe? Sei la, é muito bom mermo sentir essa sensação...Num tem falsidade não. Se a pessoa quer te dizer uma coisa, diz, num fica escondendo falano pa outa pessoa.”

These were, of course, his initial impressions of being away from the big city. Vinícius admitted that he had spent very little time in the rural area and that he could be wrong, but he felt an undeniable difference in his interactions with people—especially when faced with children. He recounted that when he had woken up that morning, he was literally “hugged” (*abraçado*) by the children from the neighboring homes who had come to ask if he would play with them. That kind of care and friendship in the city, he explained, was far more difficult to encounter. Vinícius recalled a series of bad friendships from his youth, young children becoming involved in the drug trade, and brutal violence. Instead of dreams to be the next soccer star, children’s play in the city involved imaginations of being the next “Zé Pequeno” or the next king of the hill (*morro*).

The world that children in the countryside grew up in was radically different from that of children in the city. The difference was palpable to him, and at several moments when he became reflectively aware of this in our conversation, he would let sigh: “Thanks to God.”¹³⁹ Interactions with the children there were easy:

Here [in the countryside], you show up and you’re well received by the children. The children [call to you]:

“Come on over—come over here, man! What’s your name? What do you do?”¹⁴⁰

He would ask them if they were going to school, doing their homework, and so on. It was quite a thing to witness his interactions with the children, whom I had come to know very well myself, as the happiness he felt was entirely palpable.¹⁴¹

Vinícius compared his inchoate image of children from the countryside with his much more deeply ingrained image of children he had encountered in the city:

There [in the city], no. There they stand there looking at you, staring you down. They want to know who you are, where you came from, if you have money, if you’re new to

¹³⁹ “Graças a Deus.”

¹⁴⁰ “Aqui, você chega aqui você é bem recebido pelas criança. As criança://‘Vem rapaz—vem aí! Como é seu nome e tal? Que é que você faz, tal?’”

¹⁴¹ Fn201.

the area, if you're from the good [i.e. with the police]. They just look for conflict with you, see?¹⁴²

He explained that in the city, children want to sell you drugs, whereas in the rural community, there appeared to be genuine friendship:

“Here there's just friendship.”¹⁴³

Vinícius elaborated:

The children here don't have malice with anyone. They'll really talk with you, see, look you eye to eye. There's not that disconnect—talking with you here and now, but thinking about [how they'll betray you] down the road, understand—with that falsity...There nobody respects anybody. Really, the falsity is really big there...The falsity there is really big.¹⁴⁴

He explained that in one moment you will be having a conversation with someone, and later they will go talking bad about you behind your back. He shared a story about a former friend with whom he had gotten into a dispute, as the latter had been trying to court his girlfriend. Their fight escalated, and his friend had stabbed him in the back, not metaphorically, but with a knife.

9b. Epistemic Quality of Friendships

Falseness appears here as the disconnect between various self-representations and actual conduct. Political relationships, such as patron-client relationships, are often cast in the idiom of “friendship,” which may be deeply rooted in calculation and the exchange of money and

¹⁴² “Lá não. Lá ele já fica te olhando assim, te encarando. Quer saber de onde você é, de onde você veio, se você tem dinheiro, se você é novato, se você é do bem. Quer caçar confusão com você, entendeu?”

¹⁴³ “Aqui é só amizade.”

¹⁴⁴ “As crianças aqui não têm maldade com ninguém. Conversa, entendeu, com você mesmo, olhando olho no olho. Não têm aquela diferença—conversam com você aqui, pensam outra coisa lá na frente, entendeu—aquela falsidade...Lá ninguém respeita ninguém não. Sinceramente, lá a falsidade é grande...Falsidade lá é grande.”

favors.¹⁴⁵ Such relationships can sustain and even thrive off of what, in the sphere of friendship, would be considered falseness, calculation, misrepresentation, and interestedness.

For this reason, friendships, and any other relationship, are always subject to retrospective re-evaluation. False people—who might also be classed together with “bad” (*ruim*) or “miserly” (*miserável*) people—are those one might wish to avoid, and sometimes those people will do the work of avoiding you. As Edgar explained:

If a bad person (*pessoa ruim*) gets angry with you, you only stand to benefit if they keep away from you.¹⁴⁶

For example, one young woman named Adélia suggested:

I don't have friends (*amigas*), only colleagues (*colegas*).¹⁴⁷

I asked her why that was, and she explained with a rhetorical question: “Isn't a friend faithful?” Here she implied that in these relationships—in this context, referring to other women (*amigas*)—she had found little fidelity. Because none of those relationships fulfilled the condition of being faithful, she had no friends, and therefore these relationships were cast not as “friends” but as “colleagues” (*colegas*) or acquaintances.¹⁴⁸

In the same way that failures to properly respect the “limits” of others can cause a person to be severed off from various kinds of “goods” that relationships with others provide, friendships also have their own constitutional limits. Colodino explained that in order to have friendships, for example, one must be “humble” (*humilde*) and treat everyone with respect. He suggested that I was able to be successful in my own work because I had no qualms about visiting people in their homes, accepting whatever food was offered me, and because I came with the purpose of listening to people.¹⁴⁹

¹⁴⁵ This is a common idiom in personalistic, patron-client, and political relationships in the region, Brazil, and in Latin America more broadly. See Leal (1977[1949]); Wolf (2001[1966]). See Lebner (2012) for a recent account of the interrelationship between municipal politics, Christianity, and idioms of “friendship” in Brazil's Amazonian region.

¹⁴⁶ “Se tem uma pessoa ruim que zanga com você, você ganha se ele afasta de você.”

¹⁴⁷ “Eu não tenho amigas, só colegas.”

¹⁴⁸ Fn364.

¹⁴⁹ Fn453.

9c. *Friendship, Goods, and Goodness*

The following (nearly identical) statements about the relationship between friendship and money would appear to contradict everything that has already been said with respect to the immunity of friendship from money. The first statement is from a rural man named Vitór, and the second from Anabel:

“If you have friendship, you’ve got money in your pocket.”¹⁵⁰

“It’s better to have a friend in the square, than money in the drawer.”¹⁵¹

Friendship operates through the same kind of asymmetry that exists between namehood and money. If one has a name, one can get access to money and other goods; having money is not a guarantee of having a name, however. Having too much money and acting with greed can destroy one’s name. If one’s name has a particular epistemic status—as being either “true” or a “false”—one may be drawn into or cut off from other kinds of goods. The same is true of friendship. Having a friend in the town square and marketplaces is not good for merely getting store credit or buying *fiado*.

When people from the countryside come into town, it is usually to carry out various tasks and errands. Over the course of a morning in town, one might acquire various goods, and it may become hard to carry them all. This is where friendships in the square will come into play. It is common, for example, for a person to leave their purchases with a trusted store-owner in the town square until they got the next transport back into the countryside. Since most families do not have postal addresses—neither in the countryside, nor in town—it is also a common practice for someone wishing to send some good, destined for a recipient living in the countryside, in the hands of a local vendor where the recipient can go fetch it next time they are in town.

¹⁵⁰ “Se tem amizade, tem dinheiro no bolso.” Fn567.

¹⁵¹ “É melhor voce ter um ‘amigo na praça, do que um dinheiro na caixa.”

One young woman named Juliana, for example, had requested that a third party deliver some goods to the owner of a local lunch counter, where he held the goods until she could go pick up her delivery. Such favors were always done free of any charge. I later asked the lunch counter owner if there was a particular name for this practice, and he just described it as “storing goods” (*guarda de volumes*). He explained that it is “a way to be thankful” (*um jeito de ser grato*), or an “exchange of favors” (*troca de favores*). For this vendor, serving as a mediator to such exchanges was a means of maintaining good relationships with clients and potential clients, especially for clients who do not have places in town—or places close enough to the center of town—where they can store their goods, as they move between errands and wait for the next available transport back into the countryside. While people may have relatives or friends living elsewhere about town, the distance from the center may be too far to make the trek loaded up with goods. This is why having friends in the square can be important. Another man, for example, regularly stored goods he had purchased with a woman who, on market day, would sell coffee and various snack foods in the town square. They were not tied by any kinship bonds, but they had known each other for decades, and trusted one another.¹⁵²

Friendships allow you to leave your property in the hands of your neighbors. Tomás, who had a tiny house plot in a neighboring town and had stored some of his tools there, explained that he does not worry about his things being stolen there, even though he is away most of the time. He explained, “I make friends [with my neighbors].”¹⁵³ Through his friendships, instead of having to leave his tools in their unoccupied house structure, he leaves them with his friends who are neighbors.¹⁵⁴ Elsewhere Tomás explained, “You have to make friends, not just make money.”¹⁵⁵

9d. Forgiveness & Becoming Friends

After Seu Pedrinho had been displaced by the land grabs, he had succeeded in acquiring another piece of land elsewhere. His new neighbors were some of the new large plantations that

¹⁵² Fn181-183.

¹⁵³ “Faço amizade.”

¹⁵⁴ Fn561.

¹⁵⁵ “Tem que fazer amizade, não só fazer dinheiro.” Fn573.

had expanded into the region. As described in Chapter 5, the plantation owners and managers were suspicious of the smallholders and landless families near the plantations, and were afraid of theft and possibly reprisals.¹⁵⁶ After years of troubled relations with the plantation managers, Seu Pedrinho described the process through which he eventually came into better relations with these neighbors:

After all of the problems [with the plantation], I became someone who was friends with almost everybody in there...That is, they saw the truth [about me], they recognized the truth, that I was in the right, see?...And after a time, eventually they all came back to be my friend...Even the manager who was there...Oh my Lord! [He has been] very decent to me. Whatever thing came up:

“Oh, it’s about Seu Pedrinho? You can let it be!”

He’d even let me pasture my cattle there...Even the supermarket—when their market ended, they let me [set up my own store]—I worked there for two years!¹⁵⁷

Because friendships are “given” or, better, “offered” relationships, they must lack an element of material coercion and exploitation. To a certain extent, this seems to entail an egalitarian distribution of resources. More importantly, however, is that the distribution of resources enables all parties to a friendship to maintain a relative measure of material independence. What permitted Seu Pedrinho’s family to develop friendships with the neighboring plantation was, arguably, the fact that neither the family nor the plantation was in a position in which either was absolutely dependent upon the other for their material or social well-being.

Even though a small farm and a plantation are far from being equals, there is a real sense in which the smallholding family could remove itself from regular interaction with the plantation

¹⁵⁶ The only case of physical retribution that I have recorded was the attack upon Jeremias that was described in Chapter 4.

¹⁵⁷ “Depois de todas as questão, eu fiquei uma pessoa la dento com uma amizade quase com todo mundo...Quer dizer, eles conheceram a verdade, conheceu a verdade que eu estaria certo, né?...E uma hora voltou e quase tudo meu amigo...Mermo o gerente que tava la...Oh meu Deus! Coisa muito decente pa mim. Qualquer coisa://‘Ah, é com Seu Pedrinho? Deixa pa la.’//Até pasto me dá pa botar meu gado...Até o supermercado, que terminou a mercadoria dele, me deram—eu trabalhei quase 2 anos la dento.”

managers without fundamentally undermining their own well-being. If a friendship falls apart, therefore, neither party loses the ground of its material well-being, and the relationship can resolve, dissolve, or redevelop in various ways.

9e. Family as Friendship

For a number of years, Damião and Joana family had a dog named Xique-Xique, and he and I had become good friends.¹⁵⁸ Whenever I would go walking about the countryside to visit different farms or interview various people, he followed me wherever I went, accompanying me from the morning through the late afternoon when we finally returned home. Eventually, Damião gave Xique-Xique away to another family who lived several kilometers up the road. Every time I walked near the house where Xique-Xique now lived, he recognized me and would come to me. Sometimes he would start to accompany me for a while before, eventually, realizing that he had to turn back.

One afternoon before this occurred, however, I passed through the farm that belonged to Damião's brother, Colodino. In a passing comment, Colodino suggested:

This is something you should be proud of—to have a dog accompanying you.

He continued:

[Although] I'm Damião's brother, the dog [probably] wouldn't accompany me [as he does you].¹⁵⁹

Here, Colodino seemed to be suggesting that sometimes the ties of friendship and cultivated relationships can override inherited and given relationships. Friendships come in and out of being in ways that are different than kinship relations; one can have a bad relationship with one's

¹⁵⁸ Our friendship may have arisen owed to the fact that I was one of the few people who often pet the family's dogs. For many families, dogs were not so much pets as much as they were domestic and farm workers, drawn, as they were, into a wide range of human purposes from hunting to home security.

¹⁵⁹ Fn73.

father, and although one may no longer have an active relationship with one's father, the kin relationship remains a social fact, even if it is a deadened one. Friendships, on the other hand, can wholly cease to exist and fail to endure over time in ways that are different than kin relationships. In other words, friendships are achieved relationships that emerge through interaction, time, and care.

In a way that is somewhat distinctive from kinship relations—at least in this context—friendships are also subject to different kinds of epistemic distinctions that kin relations are not. While there may be a certain measure of indeterminacy in paternity, for example, and hence there may be procedures for “finding out” or discovering the “truth” about paternity, resolving the indeterminacy between “false” and “true” friends proceeds differently than kin relations. If the “truth” about paternity is discovered, then that truth does not change; it can change in the face of new evidence, but it is presupposed that the question is decidable. This is the sense in which many people suggest that “friendship” is a higher good than “family.” Friendships can be instantiated in different kinds of social contexts, whether between workers who meet on a plantation and become friends, or between family members. Some people suggest that when friendship is instantiated in family relations, then family seems to achieve a normatively higher form.¹⁶⁰

On the other hand, when good friendships and care come about, the idioms of kinship and family might be employed.¹⁶¹ On one afternoon, for example, I was accompanying a group of young men from Pequi Community to a soccer tournament in a neighboring community. These young men (myself included) were all visitors in the community, and since they were far from their homes and families, they had to rely upon friends in the host community for hospitality. These relationships of friendship and hospitality were sometimes cast in the idiom of kinship. For example, on our way to the tournament that morning, we stopped at an elderly woman's home, where she offered a light breakfast. The woman—87 years old at the time—had known one of these young men's fathers when the latter was very young, and so she had seen both father and son grow up. They had no blood ties to the woman, but rather an intergenerational connection that was established by shared life stories. The young men addressed the woman as

¹⁶⁰ See Chapter 9, Section 2.

¹⁶¹ Conversely, when affirming family and kin relations come about, these might be cast in the idiom of “friendship.” This can be seen most clearly, perhaps, in cases when children adopt new families. For further exploration of this question, see Chapter 9, Section 2.

“aunt”—“Hello, aunt!” They explained to me: “We call older people ‘aunt,’ ‘grandmother.’ It’s friendship (*amizade*).”¹⁶² The young men relied on these friends for hospitality and care while away from home, but recognizing that their hosts were also humble families and had limits of their own. Later in the day, when lunch came around, we all went our separate ways—each one of us was hosted in a different home—so that, as one of the young men explained to me, we did not place an unduly great burden—to be “heavy” (*pesado*)—on any single household. This was an instance of recognizing and respecting the limitations of one’s friends, so that the burden of hosting was more widely distributed, and the friendships could continue to thrive.¹⁶³

In the next chapter, I finally explore the property relations that people cultivate in trees and other plants, as further instances of the kind of moral economy that has been described in this chapter. Cultivating trees becomes a way of affirming ones standing in the world, which fosters further relationships to other people. The trees themselves, however, do not appear as mere “things” to be used instrumentally, but rather as social beings in a sort of exchange relationship with those people that cultivate them. As with the elderly woman above who welcomed the group of young men into her home, the idiom of a cultivated “kinship” reappears in the next chapter as people describe their relationships with trees. The idiom of kinship is further explored as a potential form of “friendship,” as was also suggested in the last case described above. Understanding people’s relationships to trees and other property, furthermore, helps to clarify what it means to violate these property relationships. When the relationships between people and trees are transgressed, what occurs is not the violation of an individual’s desire to “keep” or “hoard” something for themselves, but rather their ability to continue in a relationship with another social being.

¹⁶² Fn105.

¹⁶³ Fn105.

CHAPTER 9:
TREES, PERSONS, AND THE CLAIMS TO ONE ANOTHER

1. A Complete Good

This chapter explores the property relation as a relationship between people, their trees, and people's relationships with one another through the abundance that trees and other crops provide.¹ People establish their relationships with trees by cultivating and caring for them. The trees begin as saplings, and, as some people say, as "children" in need of care. In the long term, when the trees become mature, the trees reappear as "mothers" and as caretakers for the people who had cultivated them early on and who may have become increasingly aged and dependent. This cultivated form of kinship is brought about through a relationship of care, and the exchange of spilled sweat and blood (as signs of activity, labor, and caring), through which people and the trees come to have a mutual claim to one another. People who are stuck in plantation work do not view their trees as "mothers," however, because the cycle of care and exchange is broken. The relationship with the trees is, in a sense, incomplete because the property relationship is incomplete. For people who have acquired land, and places to plant, the ability to cultivate trees allows them to renew and complete that relationship.

During a conversation with Lázaro one afternoon, he quietly reflected on the sense of completion that he felt after finding his roça:

Mr. Jon, a roça...A roça, there's nothing better in a person's life than their health, and the person having a roça. Working for oneself, there is nothing better...Working for oneself, for one's person. There's nothing better. The person with their freedom, has everything.²

¹ See Chapter 8, Section 2.

² "Seu Jhon, uma roça. Uma roça, num tem coisa melhor na vida da pessoa é a saúde e a pessoa ter a roça. Trabalhar por dito, num tem coisa melhor...Trabalhar pro dito, pra pessoa. Num tem coisa melhor. A pessoa tem sua liberdade, tem tudo."

Lázaro's short reflection might appear as a somewhat confused reflection about what is good—and best—in life. He begins by suggesting that the best two things a person can have in life is *health* and a *roça*, or a bit of land. What makes these two goods “good” is brought together in the notion of work, which makes it clear that health and a *roça* are *goods for* something that is work. As was suggested earlier in Chapter 7, Section 3, physical health is a condition of the body that permits laboring to occur; when one is sick, tired, injured, or hungry, “having” a body counts for little with respect to work. The body must recover, rest, mend, or eat in order to be able-bodied. Having a capable body, then, is a condition for work to occur. But clearly, having a *roça* is not a condition for work to occur. One can work for others, and indeed, Lázaro spent most of his life working for others on the plantations. The ability of the body to be *good for* something further, then, is dependent upon it being brought into relationship with another kind of good, the *roça*. When these two goods are brought together, this gives rise to a further good, which is *working for oneself*. At this point, it becomes evident that *working for oneself*—one might say, being “independent”—is a good that hinges, or depends, upon a relationship with at least two prior goods, health and the *roça*. Whatever it means to be “independent,” then, must account for these dependencies. Another way of looking at this is to say that when health and a *roça* are brought together in a certain way, they form a composite good that is mutually constitutive. Health without land is plantation work; possessing land without the health and the strength to work the land is just frustration. Being landless and working for others at the cost of one's health, as Amado's case suggested,³ becomes something like slavery.

Just when Lázaro seemed to have suggested that *working for oneself* was the highest good, he subsumes his reflections on the good under a notion of “freedom” (*liberdade*), suggesting that a person with their freedom has “everything” (*tem tudo*). If we are to take Lázaro at his word, freedom is a kind of good with nothing outside of it, and one might say—to borrow Aristotle's language—that freedom is a “complete good,”⁴ or is the good itself. But given his

³ See Chapter 6, Section 4.

⁴ See Aristotle (2000:11): “The same conclusion seems to follow from considering self-sufficiency, since the complete good is thought to be self-sufficient. We are applying the term ‘self-sufficient’ not to a person on his own, living a solitary life, but to a person living alongside his parents, children, wife, and friends and fellow-citizens generally, since a human being is by nature a social being. We must, however, set some limit on these, since if we stretch things so far as to include ancestors and descendants and friends of friends we shall end up with an infinite series. But we must think about this later. For now, we take what is self-sufficient to be that which on its own makes life worthy of choice and lacking in nothing.”

prior reflections, “freedom” must be some sort of complex good in the same way that working for oneself was a complex good. Freedom is not an unconditioned good, but, when achieved, is dependent upon a number of prior goods. This is nothing short of saying that freedom is a form of dependency, a notion that is at odds with vulgar notions of absolute and unconditioned freedom. Indeed, the notion of freedom that Lázaro seems to have in mind is an unmistakably clear expression of what political philosophers have called “positive freedom.”

In saying that in having one’s freedom, one has *everything*, Lázaro is suggesting that one needs nothing more. Having everything is not a claim that one literally has everything—the whole world—but rather that having freedom, as a complex good, is sufficient and satisfying. Indeed, as we have seen in previous chapters, attempting to claim *everything*, literally speaking, amounted to a form of social dissatisfaction and ultimately social self-destruction. We saw this in the case of Dr. Severino at the end of Chapter 5, and in the discussion of miserliness and greed in Chapter 7. Dr. Severino’s attempt to take *everything* resulted in his social self-destruction. He ended up with nothing at the end of his life precisely because, in trying to have everything for himself, he had created social relationships that were instrumental, unstable, and ultimately self-destructive. In a sense, he had taken himself to be the whole world and had failed to recognize many others. Through his case, the notion appeared that some social relationships are normatively unstable and self-destructive because they misrecognize that they are conditioned by others. Lázaro’s claim that in having one’s freedom, one has everything, by contrast, seems to imply that others must have a shared access to the good. He had made this explicit in the introduction,⁵ where he had suggested that in having access to a farm, he was able to be “good for” his friends, his family, among others.

Lázaro’s reflections help to clarify the way in which “the good” is a hierarchically nested ordering of particular goods. The purpose of this chapter is to draw out more explicitly the structure of the good with respect to “property” in trees, and to indicate some ways in which achieving the good is tied to various other kinds of goods—such as social recognition—and that securing these goods give rise to notions of justice. Having a *roça*, for example, hinges upon acknowledgment from others—one’s neighbors, the state—that one has a legitimate claim to a particular bit of land. Furthermore, in having a *roça*, one can be good for, and therefore recognize, other people such as one’s friends and family for whom one can offer care. At a

⁵ See Introduction, Section 1.

deeper level of analysis, then, having a roça, having health, or control over one's physical body, hinges upon prior goods and acts of social recognition, just as it points toward further goods and further acts of recognition.

2. Kinship, Care, & Adoption

This section of the chapter begins by examining a case of cultivated kinship, as an interrelationship between people as family, and the relationships between people and trees, as another instance of family. I begin by exploring the case of a young man named Isaac, who rejected his uncaring and abusive biological father, and began to cultivate relationships with another, more caring family that he appears to have adopted himself. As will be suggested, the kinship relationships between people, and the relationships with trees that are also cast in kin terms, are both mediated by the activity of “cultivation” or what might be broadly understood as “care.” The account compares in fascinating ways with Susana de Matos Viegas's (2003) account of the interrelationship of feeding, kinship, and becoming family.⁶ Isaac removes himself from his relationship with his paternal father, for lack of care, and establishes relationships with a new family, partly by having worked and struggled together with them on the roça. In the end, Isaac's new family appears to acknowledge his material stake in the family's roça by his having worked and cultivated it with them.

2a. Family, Care, and Trees

The following is the story of a young man named Isaac, as recounted by him. Isaac's father was an alcoholic, and whenever he was drunk, he became abusive. When Isaac was a young boy, his father would hurl abuse toward Isaac, calling him degrading names, and

⁶ Viegas is working in the context of an indigenous Tupí population in the southern cacao lands. While none of the families that I work with identify as “indigenous,” some people like Damião recognize some indigenous ancestry among the many other sources of ancestry (as was seen briefly in Chapter 1, Section 2a). Therefore, it seems very plausible that the some of the modes and orientations toward reckoning kinship, as described by Viegas, may inform contemporary social life in the region, even if it is not explicitly acknowledged as such.

sometimes beating him. If not with his bare hands, Isaac's father might beat him with objects like a sheathed machete blade, or, on one occasion, the wooden handle of an axe (without the blade). On evenings when his father began drinking, Isaac would sometimes run away from the house to hide in the nearby cacao groves. He would pass the night there sleeping among the trees.

Isaac was friends with another boy from the community who was a few years older than him. Isaac's friend Carlos suffered from the same kind of abuse with his own father. Sometimes, when Isaac's father was having an outburst, and he fled the house, he might call upon Carlos to go pass the night with him in some nearby cacao groves. At other times, when Isaac's friend needed to escape from his own father, he would call upon Isaac to go pass the night with him in the cacao groves. The trees helped to hide them away from their fathers, and they gave them shelter. Through their shared suffering in these younger years, the boys had become close friends, and today they consider each other brothers.

When Isaac was around 15 years old, he had gone out to help with some work on Colodino's roça at Nossa Senhora. Isaac was friends with one of Colodino's sons, Leandro. Colodino and his family were planting a new banana roça, and they needed an extra hand to get the work done in a timely manner. Colodino asked Isaac if he would to help them out with the work in exchange for day wages, and Isaac agreed. Instead of returning home every night, Isaac stayed with them for a few days while the work was ongoing. This way, the work could proceed faster, as Isaac would not have to make the daily trek to and from Colodino's roça. When the work was completed after a few days, Isaac returned home where he met with his father. When he arrived, his father immediately began to chastise Isaac for his absence:⁷

“So now you only eat in other people's homes?”⁸

His father was angry; perhaps he realized that his son, who was coming of age, would ultimately reject him. Later on that evening, Isaac's father became angry about something; perhaps he had been drinking, and he tried to beat Isaac. Older and stronger now, Isaac was able to resist his father and again he ran away. This time, instead of fleeing to the cacao groves, he returned to

⁷ His criticism of Isaac was very much like the way that Manoel had criticized his son, Tristam, as was seen in Chapter 7, Section 6a.

⁸ “Voce só come na casa dos outros?”

Colodino's home where he arrived in tears. Leandro asked Colodino for permission so that Isaac could stay with them (*passar um tempo*) for a few days. Colodino agreed, only stipulating that if Isaac was going to stay with them, he would have to help out on the roça just like the rest of the family. Isaac stayed with them, and he never returned home to his other father. This was sometime around 2005.

Four years later, in 2009, I was with Colodino and his family, helping to film their story and their roça. Leandro and Isaac were busy working, clearing some weeds in one of the young cacao groves, and Colodino thought it would be interesting to go film an interview with them. Leandro was 24 years, some five years older than Isaac who was 19 by then. Leandro had been working with his father on the roça since he was about 12 years old, and he knew the struggle (*luta*) well:

[Leandro]: We have to—we really have to struggle—also for our, for our daily bread. And the truth is that this [roça] here isn't just a place to work. It's also our life. It's where we give our sweat, it's where we get our daily bread...And from the first when my dad got this land, we've struggled together, to this day I've been with him in this struggle.⁹

Leandro suggests here that if their family was not united, working together, they would not have been able to build the roça that they have today. The roça was the medium and the object of their work together, and by sharing in a joint struggle Leandro affirmed his connection with both his father, and something beyond themselves. Colodino took to Leandro's suggestion that the family needed to work together:

[Colodino]: Jon, the word that he mentioned there is the following...If the family isn't united, it's no use having any land...At my age, if I get a bit of land today, I won't be able to do anything. What good would that be? But with my family united together...The roça here is no longer mine, it's theirs.

⁹ “L: A gente tem de—tem de lutar mesmo—pra também pra nossa, pra nossa sobrevivência cada dia a dia. E na verdade isso aqui não é só o meio de trabalho. Também é nossa vida. Onde nós damos o nosso suor, onde a gente tem o nosso pão de cada dia...E desde quando meu pai conseguiu a terra a gente lutou junto, to aqui com ele até hoje nessa luta.”

Secondly, it's not even theirs—if they keep from selling it tomorrow or after, it'll belong to their own children.¹⁰

The land and the roça, in other words, potentially drew together several potential generations of children and children's children. And it provided fruit:

[Colodino]: In the early years we went through some really hard times...But today, no, thanks to God, today our table is no longer missing anything. If I don't want to go to town today [to buy food], we can just have our lunch from the farm, because we have a roça with chickens, we have fish, we have our chickens.

[Leandro]: We have cassava, too.

[Colodino]: We have cassava.

[Leandro]: Plantain bananas.

[Colodino]: Plantain bananas. We've got palm there to harvest the hearts. Well, we've got all these things. We have our dinner plate on the table. And we've got our garden with all sorts of greens.¹¹

Leandro and Colodino both talk about the difficulties of being together at times, as father and son. Isaac begins to talk at this point, for he had become a part of this family enterprise:

¹⁰ “C: A palavra que ele falou aqui Jhon é o seguinte...Se a família não é unida não adianta pegar uma área de terra...Na minha idade, se eu pegar uma área de terra hoje eu não vou fazer nada. Pra que? Mas minha família unida o que é que vai fazer? Ele já vai ter uma boa—a boa vantagem da roça aqui não é mais minha, é deles. Segundo, nem é deles—se eles botar na cabeça de não vender amanhã ou depois, vai ser dos filhos deles.”

¹¹ “C: Os primeiros anos nós passou dificuldade muito grande...Mas hoje não, graças a Deus na nossa mesa hoje não falta. Se eu não quiser mandar na rua hoje, nós almoça só com coisa do sítio aqui, que nós temos roçado de galinha ali, nós temos o peixe, nós temos galinha caipira.//L: Nós temos aipim também...//C: Nós temos aipim.//L: A banana da terra.//C: A banana da terra, tem pupunha ali pra tirar palmito, então, tudo isso nós temos. Nós temos o prato na mesa. E temos nossa horta com todos os tipos de folhas.”

[Isaac]: I've been well received here, I've liked it a lot. Here for me there's my time to work. I work. I've got time to have fun. I've got everything. For me, it's a good family for me. It's the same as being my father and my mother. I've got my father and my mother together with me.

[Colodino]: And I consider him to be a good kid, very well educated, very good. He listens to me, he's a hard worker, everybody admires him. And so for me, it's a great joy that he came to be with me here. He came into his own (*se tornou*) here with me, and I never want him to leave my side. The same rights that the other [children] have, he'll also have them here with me.¹²

This is a fascinating moment and an affirmation of an ever growing circle of kin. When Isaac acknowledges Colodino as a father, Colodino is similarly led to publically acknowledge Isaac's inheritance rights in the roça.¹³ Colodino then proceeded to explain that he had not only raised five children of his own after he married; he had also helped raise his youngest siblings when his parents had become aged and ill; and now he was helping to raise one of his grandsons together with Isaac. He took pride in recounting the number of other people he had helped to raise, whether his biological children, his siblings, his grandchild, or Isaac.

Leandro, in turn, reflected on his feeling of kinship with Isaac, as Isaac acknowledged Leandro's biological family as his own. These moments of acknowledging achieved forms of kinship lead Leandro, in turn, to articulate an explicit notion of kinship based upon friendship, love, and care. Leandro refers to Isaac as a "brother" (*irmãozão*) and reflects:

¹² "I: Fui bem recebido, gostei muito, aqui pra mim—toda hora tem o tempo de trabalho, eu trabalho. Tem o meu tempo de me divertir, tenho tudo. Pra mim é uma família boa pra mim. É a mesma coisa que ser meu pai e minha mãe. Ter meu pai e minha mãe também junto comigo.//C: E eu considero ele que é um menino muito educado, muito bom, me atende muito bem, trabalhador, todo mundo admira ele, então isso pra mim é uma grande alegria que eu. Ele se tornou junto comigo e não quero que ele saia de jeito nenhum comigo. O mesmo direito que os outros vai ter, ele vai ter comigo aqui."

¹³ Colodino's acknowledgment is public on multiple scales. He first makes this statement in front of Isaac, his biological son Leandro, and in front of me. More interestingly, perhaps, he makes this statement to the audience for whom he hoped to film and recount his family's roça and story. Indeed, in the months that followed, Colodino played, and even loaned out copies of the film, to many other people from the region—his family, friends, neighbors, and even visiting politicians—and he even sent copies to relatives in other cities such as Salvador.

It makes me happy to hear him say that my father and my mother are the same as his own father and mother, and it's true...The truth is, family is made from love, care, and friendship. And I think that in my family I've got all of that.¹⁴

At this point, the conversation turns toward me, holding the camera, and Leandro draws me into the conversation:

[Leandro]: And I also want to thank you, to thank you too for all the things you do here with us, for the friendship, for the care that you've got for us. It's really beautiful...

[Isaac]: You're a sort of—a family member, too.

[Colodino]: And Jon even planted some cacao here three years ago, right?...If he even wants to be part of the family, he already is!¹⁵

In these various moments, kinship is acknowledged as being constituted by care, working together, and through specific acts of cultivation on the landscape. The trees that people cultivate are acknowledged as one ground for creating kin relationships—giving people who cultivate them certain kinds of rights—and the trees themselves are often acknowledged as a kind of kin (first as “children” and then as “mothers”) that are also involved in relations of care and caring.

2b. *The Roça as a Giving Mother*

¹⁴ “Eu fico feliz só de ouvir dizer que meu pai e minha mãe é a mesma coisa que ser um pai dele e mãe, e é verdade...E a família na verdade é formada de amor, carinho e amizade. E eu acho que na minha família tem tudo isso.”

¹⁵ “L: E também agradecer a você, e também agradecer a você por muitas coisas que você vem fazendo com a gente aí, pela amizade, pelo carinho que você tem com a gente, isso é bonito.../I: Você é um tipo—uma pessoa da família também.../C: Inclusive Jon tem cacao plantado aqui há três anos atrás né?...Se ele quiser até ser da família, já é!”

One afternoon while riding up into the hills in a kombi, I overheard a fragments of a conversation in which an older man eventually concluded: “The truth is, it’s the land that raises us.”¹⁶ In a different context, on the same day when I had gone to deliver copies of the film that I had helped Lázaro and Guiomar make of their roça, Lázaro had noted: “A roça is a mother.”¹⁷ On yet another afternoon, I was talking with a man I’d just met on a bus that was going toward Suor Plantation where he worked. He had been telling me about a small plot of forested land that he had purchased apart from the plantation lands. He would spend his days off there where he was slowly clearing bits of forest, and gradually cultivating a young cacao roça. He had been explaining that there was no future for him as long as he worked at Suor or any other plantation, and so investing in a small roça was a way of ensuring his family’s long-term security. Reflecting on the long-term process of cultivating a young roça, he concluded: “You’re there cultivating it, caring for the roça, so that later on she’ll take care of me.”¹⁸

Two other men, both former plantation workers who had acquired land through the land occupations of the 1990s, described the change that land brought about in their lives:

[Edgar]: It’s where we restarted our lives anew, our livelihoods (*sobrevivência*), together with our families—

[Colodino]: —this land came as a second mother and second father to us, because at my age and at [his age], it’s rather difficult for [us] to go find work—

[Edgar]: —it’s very difficult. [What’s happened] here, you could give it a nickname like this: we’re reliving life. We’re born again—in the future.¹⁹

By suggesting that they are reliving life, and that they will both be born again in the future, Edgar is suggesting that after several more years—when their *roças* become fully productive—they will finally be able to realize their hopes to create good and livable lives.

¹⁶ “Na verdade, é a terra que nos cria.” Fn472.

¹⁷ “Uma roça é uma mãe.” Fn594.

¹⁸ “Voce ta zelando, cuidando da roça, pra ela cuidar de mim depois.” Fn454.

¹⁹ “E: É aonde recomençamos a nossa vida, a nossa sobrevivência, junto com nossa família.//C: —essa terra veio como seja uma segunda mãe e um segundo pai pra gente, porque na minha idade e de Edgar, pra procurar emprego fica meio difícil.//E: —fica muito difícil. Aqui dá pra botar um apelido assim: nós revivemos a vida. Nascemos de novo, futuramente.”

Describing their farms as second mothers and fathers is not an uncommon idiom in the region. For newly initiated smallholders, who now face cacao trees and their own futures with a very different footing, who search their past experiences for analogies that help them make sense of these new stances, perhaps it makes sense to compare the roça and the trees to parental figures. There are good reasons to suspect that some of the properties of roças and trees make them ideal candidates for these kinds of comparisons. The aggregation of land and various organisms that comprise a roça, and some kinds of the trees in particular, present a temporal durability that is not shared by provisional or annual crops like a manioc, beans, or vegetables, as these do not endure through a human timescale in the same way that a cacao tree does. Indeed, a cacao tree can live just as long as (or longer than) a human being.²⁰

Some people take these comparisons further, comparing caring for a farm with caring for a family. One young man from Pequi Community named Emílio, who worked as a day laborer, suggested that a cacao tree “is the same thing” as a child. If it gets sick, he explained, you give it medicine, you have to “care for” (*zelar*) it, always “remove the weeds” (*tirar o mato*), analogues for bad influences.²¹

Colodino, in another context, suggested that, “Making a roça and a child is the same thing...They need the same care.”²² He noted that a child needs medicine (*remédio*), and that the roça needs fertilizer (*adubo*), by which he meant that a child needs nutrition. He explained, furthermore, that the growth of a tree was like that of a child, insofar as their growth needed to be regulated and managed, so that both could grow up to be healthy. He explained that if a cacao tree becomes overloaded with fruit during the harvest season, then the foliage on the tree might yellow as the developing fruit draws too many nutrients away from other parts of the tree. He compared this to a suckling child: “It’s the same as a child suckling too much.”²³ In this sense, the production of cacao can overwhelm and damage the longevity of the tree and so, at least

²⁰ Although it is certainly not inconceivable, I have yet to record equivalent reflections that draw anthropomorphic comparisons or equivalencies between a “mother” and a manioc plant. If such a comparison was suggested, respondents might indeed affirm the validity of such a comparison, but this is an open question.

²¹ Fn422.

²² “Fazer roça e filho é a mesma coisa...precisa o mesmo carinho.”

²³ “Igual a uma criança mamentando demais.” Fn459. At the end of my fieldwork, when talking with Colodino about return visits in the coming years, we talked about that possibility that one day I might return to visit with a family. He likewise took the opportunity to draw a further comparison: “A fruit tree produces, doesn’t it? So does man.” [“O pé de fruta não produz? O homem também.”]

here, the growth of too much cacao can be seen as a destabilizing factor. The cacao—in this moment, as a child—sucks up too much life.

Pruning was another way of expressing the relationship to the cultivation and care of trees. Sebastião explained how pruning was to be carried out. Small buds and shoots, referred to as *brotos*, that constantly grow from the branches and trunk of the tree had to be constantly removed in order to guide the trees' growth. This was especially true near the harvest season, when pruning helped to ensure the development of cacao fruit. He described the broto as a child: "The shoot is a child."²⁴ If left to its own, however, "the child will suckle its mother" excessively, and, in turn, "suck the cacao"²⁵ and the tree's productivity. Like any parenting relationship, the relationship between the parents and children must be moderated, otherwise the child will grow outside of bounds or outside of "limits," to adopt Adonias's terminology that was introduced in Chapter 6. Some kinds of shoots, in particular, must especially be pruned. The *broto chupão*, or "big-sucker-shoot," is a growth that propagates directly toward the canopy, which diverts a great deal of the plants growth energy. The broto chupão must be eliminated as it can suck the tree's life force away from the production of cacao fruit. In this sense, the growth of offshoots on the body of the tree can reduce the production of the cacao fruits.

3. Planting, Alienation, & Affirmation

It is not uncommon for families that reside and work on plantation to plant herbs and vegetables around the dwellings they are provided. In some cases, workers might even plant various kinds of fruit trees on the old plantations. While planting valuable tree crops like cacao or rubber is largely proscribed, planting fruit trees and non-durable crops can be a very important part of a household's subsistence strategy. In the case of those families who had planted fruit trees on different plantations, they might be able to trace the various places across the plantation landscape where they had done so.

²⁴ "O broto é o filho"

²⁵ "O filho chupa a mãe."; "chupando o cacao."

On one of the MST settlements in the region, for example, Sebastião and Justo invited me to go on a walking “tour” (*passeio*)²⁶ of the old plantation where they used to work in the 1980s and 1990s. They showed me the location of the old houses where they had lived that had mostly been dismantled, except for the remnants of small cement foundations. One of the men pointed out the first house where he had lived on the plantation and a number of fruit trees that he had planted there. These included 28 cashew trees, two avocado trees, one coconut tree, and—somewhat surprisingly—10 cacao trees.²⁷ He explained that he had gotten permission from the plantation manager to plant the cacao trees. Presumably, during the time he lived there, he was able to collect, consume, or even sell the fruits for himself. Cashew nuts, for example, could be processed in the home and sold locally for a small amount of money.

For rural plantation workers, even though they had no land, planting whatever they could was a characteristic and common activity. Another man named Tomás, who lived on one of the settlements in the region, explained his passion for planting:

I like to plant so much that, wherever I show up, I plant. Let’s say, for example, that I plant [in one place] and then leave [the trees] there for whoever wants to eat [the fruit]—I do that.²⁸

Tomás recalled the different places he had planted various kinds of fruit trees, which he had left for others to enjoy (as with the bananas that Damião had left in Chapter 8, Section 2a):

I have other places where I’ve planted *cupuaçu*,²⁹ I’ve planted bread fruit, I’ve planted jack fruit, see? It’s all still there, and other people are enjoying the fruits (*usufruindo*). And I don’t mind, I don’t mind that at all.³⁰

²⁶ Justo, the younger of the pair, in his 50s, referred to our walk as a *passeio*, which is reminiscent of touristic sight-seeing tour. He had been going to school at night for several years, in order to learn how to read and write, and he insisted on keeping a written itinerary or log of the precise locations that we visited and the precise time of day. The *passeio* was a walk into their past.

²⁷ Fn319.

²⁸ “Eu gosto de plantar tanto que aonde eu chego, eu pranto. Se for por acaso eu dizer assim, que eu pranto e deixo lá pra quem quiser comer, eu faço isso.”

²⁹ Cupuaçu, or *Theobroma grandiflorum*, is a fruit tree that is closely related to the cacao tree (*Theobroma cacao*). It is cultivated increasingly in the region, especially the fruit pulp which is used for making juice.

³⁰ “Eu tenho outro lugar que eu prantei cupuaçu, prantei fruta pão, prantei jaca, né? Ta lá, quem ta usufruino é outas pessoa. Eu não faço importância, não ligo importância.”

Trees like bread and jack fruit are not important commodities in the region, and hence, for plantation owners, do not pose a serious threat for conflicting property claims. Even cashew trees—the nuts from which are in fact minor commodities in the region—are permitted in the region. At least in principle, Tomás could make a legal claim to these trees, since they would be considered a form of immovable property (*bens de raíces*), but given their relatively insignificant value and their relatively small number, many people do not make claims to such fruit trees. Instead, they become durable parts of the built environment, marks of their own work and personal history, and in considering their ongoing presence and fruiting activity, they occasion reflection on the possibility that they are helping feed someone else. In other words, they occasion moments of unacknowledged generosity that do not involve a return of recognition or esteem by those who have been the unwitting objects of such generosity. While people who plant trees might recall, and even be able to point out, the various locations, trees, and groves that they implanted on the landscape, those who currently reside and work in those locations do not know who those people were, and hence they are unable to acknowledge or esteem them. For those who planted fruit trees, however, they can acknowledge their own activity and take some measure of joy in knowing that someone is eating as a result of their former activity.

Planting, then, is a means of modifying the world, and in changing the physical landscape of trees, Tomás was able to discern links between his own activity and the form of the landscape, and, therein, he was able to find some form of self-affirmation despite his being fundamentally alienated from the ground of that world. He was estranged from the land, but not the trees that he had planted there. He now had distant relationships with those trees, but they were nonetheless relationships in which he could still remember himself. Thinking back to all of the fruit trees he had planted, and the people they were now feeding, was a humble route toward self-affirmation—recognizing that he had done something good in the world, even if few people would ever be in a position to recognize that.

The notion of affirmation and planting is not incidental. At this point in the interview with Tomás, he went on to explain that after having planted so many fruit trees in so many places, he had finally found some ground upon which he could both plant trees and also create a more durable and stable dwelling place. There, the nexus between himself, his trees, and the land upon which he planted them was whole. He reflected:

Now, it's that from there to here, I went affirming myself in a place where I knew I would remain fixed, like that place [up the hill] where I showed you the cupuaçu trees that I have.³¹

When he says that he went “affirming myself” (*me afirmano*), he is referring to the activity of planting the trees in those places. He goes on to list off some of the other trees that he had planted in the small roça that he had showed me earlier in the day: 200 cashew trees, 5 black pepper bushes, and so on. Planting was a means of multiple affirmations. It was a means of affirming his own creative capacities through his work, both by caring for the trees, himself, and his family through the interchange of labor and production. And through that activity, it was a means of affirming a more durable claim to the ground that he worked, where both he and his trees stood together. Through his work, he was able to create a stable relationship between himself, his trees, and the ground that was the medium for their ongoing relationships.

This nexus is the basis for what is properly understood as a “property” relationship. In the next two sections, I would like to explore various means of transgressing this relationship in order to gain further clarity on the constituent elements of that relationship. This, retrospectively, should help to give further insight into the experiential dimensions of the land grabs that occurred in the region previously, and also help to clarify some of the normative contours of such relationship.

3a. Violating Plant, Violating Self

Alvina had eventually moved into town. One of her daughters was settled on one of the region's many land reform settlements, but Alvina had no land of her own. At 96 years old, her health had been declining and medical care was more readily available in town, so she needed a place to stay during those days and nights when she would rest there. At her small house in town, as in the countryside, she planted in whatever open spaces were available to her. Alvina

³¹ “Agora, só que dali pra cá eu fui me afirmano num lugar que eu sabia que eu ia ficar fixo, como aquele lugar que eu te mostrei lá no cupuaçu.”

had filled her backyard (*quintal*) with a large number of plants—herbs, vegetables, and a number of durable trees. Planting was a part of who she was, a characteristic activity, and a characteristic joy:

I like to prepare my little backyard—fill it up with all kind of herbs and everything else.
I like to have my little plants.³²

Planting was a way to avoid inactivity and the further deterioration of her body—the hardening of her joints, as she would put it later in the interview. Planting also meant not being alone in her old age; the plants kept her company as she cared for them with love. It also enabled her to enjoy the company of her grandchildren, who accompanied her when she went to stay in town, as she could not travel by herself:

Whenever I come from [into town from] the *roça* because I'm sick, my granddaughter is at my side, because I can't be left alone.³³

Having plants was a way of keeping her grandchildren close—and out of trouble—when they were in the town. She explained:

With me at this age, planting my plants—to plant my bunch of sugarcane so that when my grandchildren arrive, my grandchildren cu[t]—[so that they] don't go [meddling] in other people's backyards. They can come and go into my backyard and cut some sugarcane to eat.³⁴

The neighborhood she lived in was cramped for space, however, and houses built right next to, and nearly on top of, one another. Boundaries among house plots and backyards were the frequent target of contestation and conflict.

³² “Eu gosto de fazer meu quintalzinho, encher de tudo, foia de tempero e tudo. Eu gosto de ter minhas pratinha.”

³³ “Quando eu vim da roça, que eu tiver doente, minha neta na ta minha beira, que eu não posso ta sozinha.”

³⁴ “Eu dessa idade, plantar meus pés de planta—plantar meus pé de cana pa quando meus neto chegar, meus neto cort—não ir pa dento do quintal dos outos. Chegar e entrar dento do meu quintal cortar cana e chupar.”

We were sitting outside behind her house, where we had begun recording a long interview, and she began to point out different things that were—and had been—part of her backyard and those parts that belonged to her neighbors:

And so, that there was a line for drying my clothes. That coconut tree there is mine, as I planted it. The orange trees. Everything.

[My neighbor,] he came up and planted a tree over there, see? Over there, that already belongs to them.

At this point in the narrative, Alvina has reached the point where she aimed to arrive. Her neighbor, who claimed that he had purchased a house plot that incorporated part of Alvina's own backyard, had begun to fence off part of her yard:

AND THEN, he built this fence—yanked up the clothesline.

AND THEN, he put in this fence—[he took over] everything. Took the ground.

Each moment in the narrative, as it tracked the unfolding transgressions, was marked with a quiet but emphatically voiced: “AND THEN—”

AND THEN, he planted this other coconut tree.

AND THEN, he uprooted the orange trees—and [sugar]cane. This [part] here was full of sugarcane, all the way to there.

THEN, he cut everything down, pulled it all up.

And then:

THEN, I began to cry.

As she was standing there crying, she recalled her neighbors and other people laughing at her. This was the point at which she felt most humiliated. She evoked the sound of their laughter:

And [there] they [were, standing there laughing at me:]

“KAAAA, KA-KA-KA!”³⁵

Alvina discussed the episode for nearly 10 minutes, repeating the salient aspects of the experience, reiterating the moment when her neighbor had come and pulled up her plants—the orange and lemon trees, herbs, everything. She recalled the humiliation she felt:

He pulled up everything and there I was crying—him there cutting everything down and me crying.

And she recalled once again their laughter:

“KA-HA-HA-HA, KA-KA-KA!”

And me there crying.

Because—me at my age, planting my plants—so that in the end, he’d go cut them down and pull them up? That hurt me in the heart.³⁶

This episode brings into relief the living dimensions of the property in this historical and social context. The transgression of property that occurred in this case brings out certain relational dimensions most clearly.

³⁵ “E aí, isso aí, isso aqui era um arame de estender minha roupa. Esse pé de coco aí é meu que eu plantei. Os pé de laranja. Tudo. Ele chegou e plantou outro aí, ó. Aí, aí já é deles. E aí, fez essa ceca—rançou o arame. E aí, bateu essa ceca—tudo. Tomou esse chão. E aí, plantou esse outro pé de coco. E aí, rancou os pé de laranja—e cana. Isso aí era fechado de cana, isso inté lá. Aí, cortou tudo, arrancou tudo. Aí, eu peguei a chorar. Eles: ‘KAAAA, ka-ka-ka!’”

³⁶ “Rancou tudo e eu chorano. Ele bateno a enxada e eu chorano. “Ka-ha-ha-ha, ka-ka-ka!” E eu chorano. Porque, eu da minha idade, prantar minhas prantas, pa quando cabar ele bater a enxada e rancar? Aí me doeu no coração.

As has been suggested previously, property is a social relation that rests on the recognition of others, and in this case, Alvina's neighbor appears to have staked a claim to her backyard based on dubious means. Without speculating too deeply about the conflict in the absence of further information, it appears that her transgressor was counting on Alvina's old age, and relative dependency, so that the court case would merely be ignored in the end.³⁷ In this context, conflicting claims to land demonstrate what it means to have limits or boundaries. The establishment of boundaries is not about being cut off from a social relationship. Quite the contrary, putting down a boundary is precisely the ground for the coordination of mutual recognition among neighbors. Failing to recognize the boundary between himself and Alvina, her neighbor attempted to subsume and denigrate her person. At least in this context, boundaries are not the cutting off of social ties, but part of the process of drawing people together in a manner that accounts for the limits on both Alvina and her neighbor.³⁸ The boundary provided Alvina with something she could point to that helped her to make tangible sense of the way in which her neighbor had transgressed various aspects of her person.

As has been suggested, property is based on planting, and here the fact of planting—which is a form of dwelling, occupying, and cultivating—trumps claims based upon contract, convention, and sale. Boundaries are established first and foremost by the spaces in which one has planted. In her narrative, it seems significant that Alvina points to various places where she and her neighbor has planted different kinds of trees, respectively; indicating precise linear boundaries appeared to be somewhat secondary.

Indeed, in order to make clear the spatial dimensions of the transgression, rather than pointing out to me the precise location of the property line, she instead pointed out those precise places where she had planted and thus, precisely, where the transgression had occurred—the clothesline, the coconut trees, and the small patch of sugarcane. This is not to say that property lines do not exist; indeed, this formed the basis of the conflict. But phenomenologically speaking, the appearance of property lines seems to have counted somewhat less than the evidence of Alvina's having dwelled on and cared for that bit of ground through the activity of planting on it.

³⁷ Instead, Alvina explained that she was still pursuing the court case.

³⁸ In his various discussions of the mathematical problems of continuity, Charles Sanders Peirce provides some fascinating logical considerations against the notion that boundaries can be understood in an atomizing mode, and that it is precisely boundaries that draw and pair entities together.

While it is not insignificant that her neighbor initially fenced off part of the ground in her backyard—indeed, this was a key moment of transgression—the moments when he cut down and pulled up her plants is repeated at several times throughout the narrative. This *cutting down* of her plants, likewise, coincides with the other most significant part of the narrative: witnessing her plants being destroyed, Alvina starts to cry and her neighbor(s) begins to mock and ridicule her. She did not cry when her neighbor began to build the fence; there was yet hope of resolving the conflict and recovering the ground. She cried when what she had created and cared for within that space was destroyed, and thus irrevocably lost.

The reason why property as planting might trump contract based property is because, for Alvina, property is a sensory and physical relation that overrides purely formal relations of contracts and sale.³⁹ Formally declaring a bit of land one's own does not put one into a creative relationship to that land.⁴⁰ Alvina had labored on this small plot of land and, as a result of her ongoing physical relation to it, she had developed a sense for the plants that had been under her care, which, in turn, allowed her to better care for others such as her grandchildren. To appropriate a turn of phrase from Rousseau's discussion of property, we might say that Alvina was "sensitive in every part of [her] Goods, [thus] it was much easier to hurt [her]."⁴¹ Her sensation for feeling for her goods—for her plants—owed from her creative and active relationship to it, a relationship that could occasion both great joy but also, as a result, deep pain.

In this context, the idea that property in labor (or in planting) may override claims to property in contract, or the relationship to property as a merely formal and legal relationship, can be seen in property that has been abandoned. If people occupy and dwell in a space that has been abandoned but is otherwise legally owned by another, then if the latter attempts to sell or otherwise involve that space in some sort of transaction, the claims of the dwellers override those who stake formal legal claims.

³⁹ This is similar to Rousseau's idea that a person "must take possession of [land], not by ceremonial statements, but by labor and cultivation, the only mark of ownership which, in the absence of legal title, ought to be respected by others" (2002[1762]:168).

⁴⁰ Indeed, one can purchase property in a remote corner of the world without ever having set foot or laid eyes upon it.

⁴¹ Rousseau, in his "Discourse on the Origin and the Foundations of Inequality Among Men," states: "That the Poor having nothing to lose but their freedom, it would have been a great folly for them to deprive themselves voluntarily of the only good they had left without gaining anything in exchange; that the rich, on the contrary, *being so to speak sensitive in every part of their Goods, it was much easier to hurt them*, and that they consequently had to take more precautions to protect themselves against getting hurt..." (1987[1755]:175, my emphasis).

This is not to say that claims to property cannot be successfully made via contract and transaction. But acquiring land via transaction supposes, however, that that property will be actively invested by the personality of the new owners, through some sort of activity, attention, and care of that property.⁴² In other words, property in land cannot be held idly, but it must be invested somehow with the marks of human activity. The owner that has abandoned their property, as we will see—who has never left marks of their activity, or who has ceased to care for those stretches of physical space—have, by that very fact, relinquished a stable claim to property.⁴³

3b. Intersubjectivity, Intentionality & Transgression

Larger, older trees sometimes fall upon smaller, younger trees, damaging them. The leguminous, nitrogen-fixing erythrina⁴⁴ tree, for example, has commonly been used as a shade tree on cacao plantations since sometime the mid-20th century. Its bright orange flowers make it highly recognizable in the cacao lands, as can be seen in Figure 18 below.

⁴² This need not be merely cultivation, however, as Locke might have it.

⁴³ This seems to go beyond Locke's discussion of property—which, as Holston (2008:113-117) notes, has deeply influenced Brazilian property law—and could even be seen as a positive emendation or revision of it. It appears to obviate the notion of “absolute” property since it provides conditions under which property relations can be dissolved independently of the wishes or intentions of a property owner. Political philosophers like Robert Nozick (1974), for example, famously defend a view of absolute private property, which suggests that once a property relation is established, the owner has complete license to use (or abuse) their property in whatever way they desire, so long as such use does not infringe upon others' liberty or property claims. Such use could also include mere non-use. On such an absolute account of property right, there is no apparent way in which one can relinquish or come out of one's property relations except through an explicit act (e.g., sale or declaration) on the part of the owner. It would be the absence of any phenomenologically available marks of ownership that can revoke the claim to formal ownership.

This can be seen in Brazilian *sesmaria* law, which stipulated that land grantees were required to cultivate and otherwise improve the land. Since these legal stipulations would have been especially applied to elite classes, this raises the question of how and whether or not such legal statutes influenced practical notions of property among the rural poor. It may be possible to build up a phenomenological account of dwelling and property that does not entirely depend upon formal legal structures, and it may even be possible to account for some changes of property law that were brought about through political pressure to recognize the claims of dwellers and squatters as opposed to land grantees.

⁴⁴ *Erythrina fusca*, locally referred to as “alitrína” tree.

Figure 18: Erythrina Tree in Bloom



In recent years, however, many plantations have begun removing these trees from their cacao groves. The reason for this is that the erythrina tree's woody structure is relatively fragile—absent the support of a dense canopy to help support its weight—and wind-felled erythrina trees have caused a significant amount of damage to the cacao and other tree crops that dwell in the understory. Falling trees often cross property lines, bringing with them damage or destruction to others' trees and property. Some attention to the destruction of others' property can help to clarify the intentional structure of transgressive acts, specifically, and clarify the phenomenological contours and social meanings of property in trees in this region.

Here I would like to explore two cases. The first case began when a child, whose family lived at a neighboring plantation, damaged a couple young rubber trees that belonged to a farmer named Edgar, who lived at Nossa Senhora. After this minor transgression occurred, Edgar's neighbor, Colodino, offered reflections about this case that reveal several things about the intentional and recognitive structure of such transgressions. The second case explores the reflections of a farmer from Settlement 6, named Honório, who was meditating on his

relationship to the trees that had been previously planted by the plantation, where he and other families had eventually settled. Honório's reflection on his relationship to the trees clarifies further dimensions of transgression, and brings out some of the intersubjective cognitive relationships that may obtain between people and trees.

3c. Sensitivity in Goods & Cutting the Body of the Good

The first case involved a small farmer named Edgar, whose smallholding was situated across the road from a neighboring plantation. A young boy, whose parents worked at a neighboring plantation, had been playing in the groves of the neighboring farms. In the course of his activity, he had damaged two young rubber trees that were located just inside Edgar's property line. The child had cut away at the bark of two young rubber trees, which can be seen in Figure 19 below.

Figure 19: Injured Rubber Trees



The damage would stunt the trees' growth and expose them to potential disease and loss. The plantation manager, taking partial responsibility for the damage, offered to treat the damaged trees with an application of a chemical that would help the tree regenerate its bark and protect it from disease.⁴⁵

This small incident had become the focus of conversation among Edgar's neighbors—other smallholders—in part because Edgar had reacted to the transgression in a vehement, verbally violent, and disproportionate manner. His neighbors and friends could readily understand and empathize with Edgar's anger about the incident. One of his neighbors, Colodino, offered an explanation of the import of what it was for someone to destroy a tree that you had planted and cultivated:

For a person to come and cut [a tree]—to leave a wound on a tree—to cut a cacao tree in that way, it's the same as cutting us. Because this [tree] here—because we planted it, we took care of it as though it was a child. As though it's a child that we're raising, like our family: with all love, with [every] hardship...working a lot [to raise that tree].

You see, it's a little bit of our sweat—which is really our blood, because we suffering to make this plant. So, when some guy comes along here to destroy, to cu[t the tree]—it's the same thing as cutting you. Is it not?⁴⁶

The assertion that cutting a tree is the same thing as cutting the body of the person who cared, cultivated, and suffered to grow that tree, points to an intimate relationship. Over the course of Colodino's reflections on the property relation, the "as if" (*como se fosse*) of the person's relationship to the tree—as if it were a child, as if it were family—eventually gives way to more direct assertions that a real, not metaphorical, relation in fact obtains. His assertions

⁴⁵ This can be seen in the bluish color that surrounded the damaged bark.

⁴⁶ "O cara chegar cor[tar]—dar um talho num pé de—cortar um pé de cacau desse, é mermo qui cortar a gente. Porque isso aqui—como nós prantou, nós cuida como fosse um filho, como fosse um filho qui nós ta criano, como nossa família, com todo amor, cum dificuldade...trabalhano muito.// Então, é um pouco do suor da gente—que seja mermo o sangue da gente, porque, nós ta sofreno pra fazer essa pranta. Então, desde qui o cara vem destruir aqui, ta cor[tando]—é a merma coisa de ta cortano voce. Né isso?"

become more forceful and literal: the tree *is* the sweat that they have spilled—even if only a little bit—in creating the trees, and blood itself is just sweat.

The account of the *activity* involved in creating the relationship to the tree is significant, as it indicates a relationship that is achieved and *brought about* rather than one that is merely given or inherited. Here, we can see a clear resonance with Locke’s account of property. Even more importantly, when Locke gives a substantivist account of property (mixing the “substance” of labor), the substance that briefly comes into focus here, sweat, is only of secondary importance insofar as it is the product of *activity*. In this way, the connection to the trees moves beyond an account of shared (and potentially inherited) “substance,” and moves toward a relationship based on the recognition of an active relationship of care and reciprocal exchange, which is cast in the idiom of suffering and hardship.⁴⁷ Sweat and blood are spilled in the long course of caring for a tree, and the state of the grown tree is a causal index of effort and care having been expended in that very place. This is why, Colodino concludes, that to cut the tree is the same as cutting the person that planted and cared for the tree.⁴⁸ The human interconnection with a bit of nature—a cacao or any other tree, whether agricultural or otherwise—is brought about through creative work and the “suffering” that the exchange with nature requires, in order for the latter to give any return.⁴⁹

The destruction of trees is not an unmediated relationship that directly causes pain in the cultivator, however, for in order to achieve a return from a cacao and rubber *roça*, trees must constantly be cut, pruned, and even altogether eliminated. Farmers must make decisions about which trees to plant and where to position them in order to regulate the amount of ventilation and sunlight entering into to the understory. As some trees grow taller and taller, the amount of

⁴⁷ “Suffering” (*sofrendo*) seems to be closely semantically aligned with notions of “struggling” (*lutando*) that many people use to describe the wider temporal dimensions of the work-process, as has been mentioned in Chapter 3, Section 8b.

⁴⁸ Waldron’s account of Hegel’s notion of embodiment, and the taking possession of objects, is useful in this context. Waldron (1988:364) writes: “there is something about the object itself, quite apart from its contiguity with me, which may be explained only in terms of the working of my will. If the object is inanimate (say, a piece of marble formed into a statue) then the aspect of the object which may be understood only by reference to my will is one of its physical properties—its shape, for example. If the object is organic, then maybe it is not merely some property which is understood in this way but also some ongoing process in the object: ‘What I do to the organic does not remain external to it but is assimilated by it’ (56R). When I plough and plant a field, I adapt or set in motion natural processes and activities whose occurrence here may then be understood only in terms which make reference to my will.”

⁴⁹ The evidence presented here suggests that taking possession of bits of nature is, reciprocally, a process through which nature takes possession of the cultivator. To be sure, in engaging parts of nature, nature itself leaves its *own* marks upon the body.

shade is constantly shifting. If the canopy gets too crowded and too little sunlight gets through, then some of the trees must be thinned or altogether removed. For young roças that are still in the process of being formed, this is typically done when the shade trees are still in the process of maturation and before they get too large. The fact that some trees must be culled makes it clear that the trees do not by any means share the same status as a human person. If and when it becomes necessary to remove some trees, then each farmer does so through making a utilitarian calculus about the future goods that they hope to harvest from the roça as a whole. They do so, Colodino explained, with a measure of pain:

You cut with—sometimes [you cut down those trees] with pity.⁵⁰

If some trees are cut down, then this is done with a view toward the goods that will be harvested from anywhere between one to 10 years into the future. Less radically, cacao trees also require pruning, typically at least one time per year. I asked Colodino whether or not, in pruning the trees, he felt the same pain as when another person cuts and damages the tree. He denied that it was the same, and compared pruning to needing a haircut:

No, we feel like we need a haircut, [we're] cutting hair, see? Because we're taking away what needs to be removed, understand?⁵¹

These brief considerations suggest that the way in which emotional pain is potentially distributed across the creative and destructive relationships between people and trees is mediated by the larger purposive structure of cultivating a roça and bringing it into fruition. Cutting a tree, as in the case of the child above, does not cause a simple immediate reaction of pain. Pain is mediated by various purposive or teleological structures that regulate processes of growth.⁵²

3d. Transgression, Intention, & the Proportion of Retribution

⁵⁰ “Voce corta cum—as vez cum a dó.”

⁵¹ “Não. Nós ta sintino como nós ta cabiludo, cortano cabelo, entendeu? Qui nós ta tirano o qui é necessário pa tirar, entendeu?”

⁵² Of which, the kinds of agent-centered “intentionality” is only one small part.

Given some of these various considerations, it is understandable that people like Alvina and Edgar should have had such a strong reaction to having their trees or plants damaged or destroyed. Through the extension of part of their personality in another being, they felt the damage to that other as damage to themselves. In Edgar's case, despite acknowledging this relationship as a source of Edgar's anger and pain, his reaction to the child's transgression was taken by all of his peers as having been excessive and unwarranted. Instead of moving toward reconciliation and forgiving the minor transgression, he built a physical fence between his farm and his neighbors.

Colodino explained that it was important to infer the relevant intentional stance with respect to what had occurred, and, at least in his view, this should have normative implications for evaluating and punishing the child's actions. He explained this in terms of the child being "innocent," in the sense that the child could not be expected to muster the sufficient degree of understanding that, if he was an adult, would have cast his action as a particular transgressive type:

See, it's because a child is innocent. We know that a child's not going to do what he did there—he isn't going to do that and know how to say:

"I'm damaging that guy."

He's not [going to understand]—he's innocent, and so, that's when someone [like Edgar] needs to deal lightly, because it was a child that did the act, it wasn't an adult. Now, if it was an adult, then that changes things, because that would really merit despair. Because then they would be doing it with anger [and ill-intent] toward you, to destroy what you are.⁵³

⁵³ "É, porque uma criança é inucente. Sabe qui uma criança num vai fazer isso como ele fez aquilo ali—ele num vai fazer aquela coisa pra saber dizer://“To prodijicano o cara.”//Num ta—ta inucente, então, é onde o cara tem qui ir leve, porque foi uma criança qui fez o ato, num foi o—num foi o adulto. Agora, quando é o adulto aí já muda, qui aí merece disispero mermo. Qui ta fazeno cum raiva de voce, pa destruir o qui voce é.”

In other words, for the child, the action does take his or her own action to be classifiable under a particular description (e.g., “—damaging another person”). From a normative standpoint, it would be inappropriate to attribute responsibility to the child in the same way that an adult would be held accountable for what is recognized as a destructive and, moreover, transgressive action. In short, there are legitimate limitations upon the outrage that can be expressed with the destruction, loss, or theft of property—this case presenting only one such example.

This was not the first time that Edgar had come into conflict with his neighbors and with the plantation. One local man who had served as a work supervisor, or *fiscal*, at the local plantation, recounted one occasion when the workers there were felling and removing a number of erythrina trees from the cacao groves. One erythrina tree had grown up very tall along the road, and as they were removing that tree a branch fell across Edgar’s property line. While it had not damaged any of his trees, Edgar went to the plantation manager and complained viciously, criticizing the work coordinator and insulting the workers. He created a fairly large scandal about the event.⁵⁴

Colodino, who was also present for this conversation, commented that although the branch had fallen on Edgar’s property line, it was important to acknowledge that the branch’s falling was not owed to any form of “vengeance” (*vingança*) or ill-will. The same conditions for restraint also applied, he explained, in the case of one person’s trees accidentally falling upon another’s trees:

We have the same consequence as the child, because it was an accident [caused by] the tree that fell by itself. There wasn’t anyone with an interest in damaging [the other], understand?⁵⁵

Colodino explained that an identical event had occurred on his own farm, with the only difference being that a significant number of his young cacao trees were in fact crushed. In his case, the plantation manager offered compensation for the damage, providing assistance in helping the trees recuperate. Colodino explained that because he was able to account for what he took to be relevant intentions structuring the event, he was able to react to the situation with

⁵⁴ Fn452.

⁵⁵ “Sim, nós vamo ter a merma consequência do—da criança porque foi um acidente da propia avre qui caiu. Num foi ninguém cum aquela interesse de prodijicar, entendeu?”

adequate understanding and forgiveness for the minor transgression. This allowed Colodino to maintain, and even build, trust with the neighbors.

Edgar, on the other hand, had reacted in a manner that was disproportionate to the injury, having verbally assaulted and insulted those who had been involved. As a result, Colodino explained, his neighbors would begin to feel “suspicious” (*cabreiro*) and “untrusting” (*desconfiado*) in their relationships with Edgar. Edgar had not shown what many took to be the appropriate degree of understanding and forgiveness that should have been apportioned to the situation. As a result of such a response, Colodino suggested, “[Edgar] can only lose”⁵⁶ by alienating himself from those around him.

4. Mutual Recognition & the Curse of Others’ Property

Coming into property relations by taking property from another is viewed, by some people at least, to constitute a *maldição*, or a “curse.” One man named Honório, who lived on one of the land reform communities that will be described in Part Three, explained that he and his companions stand in a different relationship to the trees that they inherited from the old plantation owner—which had been planted and cultivated by the plantation itself—than to those that the land reform settlers had planted themselves in new plots that they opened up. The problematic relations of theft, stealing, or unilaterally “taking” something from another were equally problematic when the person who was being taken from was a humble posseiro or a miserly plantation owner. Taking or stealing from another, in Honório’s view, brought about a “curse” (*maldição*):

Something that is taken from another, I see it as a sort of curse.

He explained his understanding of such a “curse”:

⁵⁶ “Só tem a perder.”

When you have a vision of not wanting to take from others, you even become saddened when you look at a cacao tree that is not yours, which wasn't something that you planted. So, this is where I see the curse: because the plant feels joy (*se alegre*) with the eyes of the owner, understand, the roça [feels joy].⁵⁷

In his account, the curse is, on the one hand, a betrayal of his own vision of wanting to live by what is properly and legitimately the result of his own efforts, and not at the expense of other people. Moreover, what moves this fascinating account of the property relation well beyond the traditional labor theories of property is that the connection between cultivator and trees not only involves the joy of the cultivator, but the joy of the plants. For Honório, at least, the plants themselves are taken to react to the cultivator in ways that are recognizable as “joyful,” and whatever plant joy looks like, it is not taken to be a mere anthropomorphic projection.⁵⁸ The other dimension of the curse of others' property, then, would be being rejected by the trees and other plants comprising a roça.

Honório further explains that this relationship is grounded in mutual care, but in the course of his explanation, he shifts between the perspectives and activities of the cultivator and of the trees:

And so, when you plant a cacao tree that you're taking care of every day, cultivating him, talking with him. Even a [palm] tree—whatever tree that you plant, that you have a habit [of being] with her, a habit of being there next to her and so on, taking care of her—she develops in seeing you approach. She grows, she puts out more fruit—understand—for the care you give, because you are her owner (*dono*). But if someone robs you, robs her from you, well, she won't feel well (*sentir bem*) in their presence. That's what I see...She doesn't feel well, because you're not her owner...Her blood—that thing in her, it doesn't fit well with you. I see that with the nature [of the tree]...I'm able to see this.⁵⁹

⁵⁷ “Eu vejo assim uma coisa tomado dos outros tipo uma maldição...Quando voce tem uma visão de não querer nada dos outros, voce se entristece até de voce olhar um pé de cacau que não é seu, que não foi voce que plantou. Aí o que é que eu vejo a maldição disso: porque a planta ela se alegre com os olhos do dono, entendeu, a roça.”

⁵⁸ This calls for further investigation into what, in this context, would count as signs of plant joy.

⁵⁹ “Aí no caso quando voce planta o pé de cacau que voce ta todo dia ali cuidando dele, zelando dele, conversando com ele né. Até mesmo um pé de pupunha—qualquer árvore que voce planta, que voce tem um hábito com ela, um hábito de ta ali junto dela e tal, cuidando dela—ela se desenvolve ao ver voce chegar. Ela cresce, ela bota mais fruto—entendeu—pelo seu cuidar, que voce é dono dela. Mas se alguem te róbar, róbar ela de voce, aí ela não vai

Just as he finished the reflection above, Honório described why having these old plantation trees represented a curse, and his relationship with those trees was in conflict with his vision of the kind of ownership and life that he sought to create:

That’s why I always say to people that this thing won’t work for anybody, this thing [of keeping the old plantation trees]. Really, my goal was never to take anything from anybody, it wasn’t [my goal] to take the plantation from the [former owner]. I went to take care [of my family’s own life]—I went to get a piece of land to work, to live by the word that the Lord declared:

“Live by the sweat from your brow”

So, when you plant, we’re living by the sweat of our own brow, when you harvest from that which you planted.⁶⁰

These reflexive moments on the property relation are fascinating on many levels. First, it should be noted that the gender of the tree shifts depending on the gender of the tree linguistically. The gender of the cacao tree (*o cacaueteiro*) is masculine, the gender of the general noun “tree” (*a árvore*) is feminine. One might read into the above passage—“because you are her owner”—that being in a property relationship means a masculine subject subsuming a feminine object. The property relationship, as has been seen, is rather one of reciprocal care that occurs independently of the gender of the tree or the cultivator.⁶¹ The grammatical gender of the tree is

se sentir bem com a sua presença. Eu vejo isso...Ela não se sente bem, porque não é o dono dela...O sangue dela—aquela coisa dela não se bate bem com voce. Eu vejo isso com a natureza...Eu consigo ver isso.”

⁶⁰ “É por isso que eu sempre comento com alguém e isso aí não serve pra ninguém, essa coisa. O meu objetivo mesmo não foi tomar conta de ninguém, não era tomar a fazenda do cara. Eu fui cuidar—eu fui arrumar uma terra pra trabalhar, pra viver daquela palavra que o Senhor disse://“Vivei do suor do vosso rosto”//...Aí a gente vive do suor do nosso rosto quando voce pranta, quando voce colhe o que voce prantou.”

⁶¹ This is a further point at which the labor theory of property that finds expression throughout these sections goes beyond the traditional accounts of Rousseau, Locke, and Hegel. For whatever Hegel’s advance beyond Locke, a property relation was still a relationship of demonstrated dominance and domination over nature. Waldron explains Hegel’s position in the following manner: “In choosing the realm of external objects as the arena for its first objectification, the will manifests the dominance of entities which are ends-in-themselves over entities which are not...One ‘proves’ this by endowing the object with a purpose which is not its own; when this is done, we recognize that the object is such that the *only* purpose it could have is a purpose given to it by a human being. In appropriating

incidental to the type of tree, and the social gender of the cultivator does not limit the possibility of entering in an ownership relation. In other words, the grammatical relations in this passage should not be taken as constitutive of a worldview. As has been seen elsewhere, men and women alike can come into property relations as conceived in this way. It is precisely this social fact, as was the case for Alvina described earlier in Chapter 3, Section 7b, that created anxiety about whether or not she should plant on the land that belonged to her in-laws.

The most fascinating thing about these reflections is that they capture the property relationship by simultaneously tracking the activities and perspectives of both cultivator and plant. Through daily cultivation, care, conversation, and an approach to one another in space, the cultivator and tree develop a habitual, one might say, routinized relationship and a regard toward one another. Upon sensing the approach of the cultivator, the tree develops, grows. The cultivator's provisioning of care to the tree is returned in the tree's return of fruit. This developing relationship is expressed variously in terms of a kind of blood, or a kind of (shared) nature that develops and grows between the cultivator and the tree. In this sense, the property or ownership relationship is not merely a one-side domination of the owner over the tree, but rather a reciprocal exchange. That property relation creates a habitual connection between the cultivator and the tree, and a mutual sensitivity toward one another. The tree "feels well" in the presence of the person who cultivated it, and, in return for that care, it gives fruit. This is one ground of a property relationship. It looks very much like the labor theory of property, but, in this light, the relationship can equally be understood as an exchange theory of property.

This makes clear, then, that the property relationship is not only grounded in the intersubjective relation of one's neighbors who acknowledge the property relation between the cultivator and tree—in addition to the bit of ground upon which that relationship is necessarily extended in space. The property relation is also grounded in something like an intersubjective relation between the cultivator and the trees that mutually acknowledge one another. Just as the cultivator can sense the tree, the tree, likewise, can either affirm or deny that it has a relationship to the cultivator as shown through indices of not feeling well in the presence of another who is "other" to it. This leads to the suggestion that property, in this context, is not merely a cultivator's unilateral *claim* on some trees, land, or whatever else; it is also a claim that is exerted

the objects of the natural world, then, man displays his intrinsic superiority over nature...Part of human development as he describes it is the process whereby nature ceases to be 'something alien and yonder' and becomes an environment in which human beings can feel 'at home'" (1988:356-357).

upon the cultivator by the trees, the land, and whatever others entities are in a relation to care. In other words, being in a property relation is both the self making a claim to some other, and that other reciprocally making a claim to the self.

This even seems to suggest a certain ethics of exchange. For, as any cultivator knows, if one is to receive the fruits, one must respect the various temporally shifting needs and material conditions that ensure the tree's viability. In short, unless one exercises a certain approach and respect for the tree, the tree will not provide fruit. Being an "owner," then, is not an asymmetrical relationship but one that is grounded in ongoing cultivation and the exchange of reciprocal care. This habit of being together, and of reciprocal sensing of the other, is brought into relief in the context of theft. The man does not comment upon the owner's feelings upon having one's trees taken away, but rather upon the trees feeling ill-at-ease in the presence of another that is "other" to the tree. That the owner relationship is not one of asymmetrical domination or dominion over some aspect of nature can be seen, furthermore, in the frequent acknowledgement that trees and the *roça*, in general, often stand in relation to the cultivators as "mothers" (*mães*), as was seen above.

For these reasons, one is able to make sense of Honório's claim that the trees inherited from—and indeed, taken from—the former plantation owner were a sort of curse. As will be described in Chapter 12, in Santiago's quest for land, it was never his or his companions' intention to take the plantation lands that were still under cultivation when they began to occupy the forest surrounding the plantation. Rather, they had intended merely to cultivate new *roças* in the largest stretches of forest surrounding the plantation, but owed to a turn of events that were partly out of their control, they ended up with the entire plantation. So for Honório, when he explained that he felt that his relationship to the old plantation trees was strained and "cursed," this is partly because he and his companions never meant to take all of the plantations' cacao trees. Instead, they only sought access to the unused lands to which the plantation did not have a legitimate claim. In Part Three, with some better understanding of these various dimension of property and the social good, I now turn to the appearance of the diverse land rights movements that appeared in the region over the course of the 1980s and 1990s.

PART THREE:
LAND RIGHTS MOVEMENTS

CHAPTER 10:
NEW FORMS OF PLANTATION LIFE

1. The Emerging World of Plantations

“I worked—I lost my strength on others’ [lands]...I worked, I lost my health working for others.”¹

This chapter describes different aspects of the expanding plantation system that emerged following the land grabs described in Chapters 4 and 5, and the experience of working for others. The epigraph for this chapter is taken from a conversation with Lázaro, and describes the ultimate outcome of his years working on the plantations. Plantation work merely sapped one’s strength and health, and did not result in a secure future for plantation workers. This chapter describes the various means through which various natural and social resources were exploited on the plantations, and describes the creation of new forms of dependency in this context, especially in terms of debt.

The period beginning in the 1950s, and continuing through the late 1970s, saw a very large-scale transformation of the forests into agroforests. This process included two broad steps that were variously undertaken by contractors, plantation workers, and federal agencies:

¹ “Trabaei, cabeí minhas força no dos outos...Trabalhei, acabei minha saúde trabalhando para os outros.”

(1) Preparing the ground for planting, first by clearing the forest. This was usually undertaken by contractors (*empreiteiros*).

(2) Procuring large quantities of rubber and (later) cacao saplings, planting them, and then maintaining them until they came into production.

These processes presupposed:

(A) Consolidating and securing access to land, which was largely described in the previous chapter; and

(B) Procuring an able-bodied labor force for carrying out steps (1) and (2).

These processes had profound implications for social and material relationships in the region. The transformation from a relatively annual cropping system—primarily manioc—to a relatively perennial tree-crop system similarly brought about new consequences and opportunities, both for the new land owners but also for the plantation workers. These will all be discussed in the following sections.

Just as in the previous chapter, where there was a lot of ambiguity about the status of the land grabs, there is ambiguity and debate about the results of the new plantation system. Throughout this chapter, I will present different kinds of evidence that helps to illustrate what plantation life was like for the workers. The goal is not to present a black and white picture, since, following the evidence that is available, as will be seen, there was quite a bit of ambivalence about the plantations; some accounts praise them, for example, in ways that are clearly at odds with how many others condemn the limited forms of life that the plantations offered workers.

The early interview that I had conducted with Seu Pedrinho, with the occasional participation of his spouse Heloísa and Damião, developed into a debate that nicely captured some of this ambivalence, although, in the end, it became rather clear that the critical perspective of the plantations prevails. Both Seu Pedrinho and Heloísa reflected on the ways that life had improved for people in the region after Norberto Odebrecht and the plantations arrived in the

region. Seu Pedrinho's reflections on this count are all the more interesting because his family had been dispossessed by Odebrecht. This points toward the deep ambivalence about Odebrecht's role in the region.

Damião was with us, as he had not yet departed to run his errands in town, and we were sitting with Seu Pedrinho and Heloísa on the small sofas that filled the front room of their small home in town. The young woman Sílvia was also sitting with us, overhearing and fascinated by the conversation. Heloísa periodically get up and went to the back of the house where she was simultaneously managing other household activities. In this moment of the interview, Seu Pedrinho and Heloísa develop their commentary about Odebrecht simultaneously:

[Seu Pedrinho]: He's a man of much progress, that Dr. Norberto!

[Heloísa]: Now, things really improved [in the region after he got here]—

[Seu Pedrinho]: Much progress, [Norberto was a man of] of much progress. Here, there is nobody [equal to him]—

[Heloísa]: Things improved, I think that he improved this region a whole lot—

[Seu Pedrinho]: —improved—

[Heloísa]: Because when I was little, I remember—²

At this point, Damião interjects into the conversation. Damião was born in 1951 and is 21 years younger than Seu Pedrinho. Unlike Seu Pedrinho,³ Damião grew up working on the plantations for much of his life:

² “SP: Um home de muito progresso, Dr. Norberto.// H: Agora, melhorou bastante—// SP: Muito progresso, de muito progresso, aqui não tem ninguém—//H: Melhorou, acho que ele melhorou muito bastante essa região.//SP: Melhorou.//H: Porque quando eu era pequena mais me lembro—”

³ It should be recalled that Seu Pedrinho, because he was able to resist Odebrecht's incursions in a way that the other posseiros were not, had received better compensation than the other posseiros and was able to buy a small plot of land after his family was kicked out of their original homestead. See the narrative in Chapter 5.

[Damião]: He didn't improve the region, he disgraced it! It's the contrary.⁴

Everyone laughs, and he continued:

[Damião]: The riches are all in his hands.⁵

Heloísa replied:

[Heloísa]: Right, except that [before the plantations,] the poor didn't do anything.⁶

Here Heloísa is suggesting that the posseiros did not do anything with the land. All they did was hunt and plant manioc. This supposed fact was a justification for expelling posseiros from the land. Because they did nothing, they had no legitimate claim to the land: this is the same kind of reasoning used by other usurpers, in other at places and times, who have appealed to a version of Locke's labor theory of property as a justification for expelling people from the land.

Damião continues to suggest that poverty increased in the region:

[Damião]: And [today, there are so] many people [living] in misery there, how many people are there [living in] misery?⁷

Everyone in the room agrees: "There are, there are [many]."⁸

[Damião]: Who don't have anything.⁹

Seu Pedrinho assents, "They don't have anything,"¹⁰ and Damião continues:

⁴ "Ele não melhorou, ele desgraçou, é o contrário."

⁵ "A riqueza ta toda na mão dele."

⁶ "É, mas só que pobre não faz nada."

⁷ "E muita gente miserave aí, quantas pessoa miserave tem aí?"

⁸ "Tem, tem."

⁹ "Que não tem nada."

[Damião]: How is it that he improved the region? He improved it for himself.¹¹

Heloísa and Damião again speak simultaneously, in disagreement:

[Heloísa]: But he created more jobs—

[Damião]: —he filled his pockets—

[Heloísa]: —but he created more jobs.¹²

Seu Pedrinho takes up Heloísa's line of argument for himself:

[Seu Pedrinho]: But I meant to say, I mean to say that [he] created jobs for many people.¹³

Heloísa clarifies her position just before Damião begins to develop his own argument:

[Heloísa]: I mean to say, that things improved because people were very backward, you know?... They were a backward people.¹⁴

Damião addresses Seu Pedrinho directly at this point, reminding him that Odebrecht had pushed him and his family off of their land:

[Damião]: For you to see, to this day you still could have had that—that land, if you didn't leave under pressure.¹⁵

¹⁰ “Não tem nada.”

¹¹ “Como é que melhorou a região? Melhorou pra ele.”

¹² “Mas gerou mais emprego.”//“Encheu o bolso.”//“Mas gerou mais emprego.”

¹³ “Mas eu quero dizer, eu quero dizer que gerou emprego pra muita gente.”

¹⁴ “Eu quero dizer assim, que melhorou assim, que era um povo assim atrasado sabe?...Era um povo atrasado.”

¹⁵ “Pra você ver...podia ter aquele, aquele terreno até hoje se não fosse sobre pressão.”

Seu Pedrinho revels in the thought of what might have been if his family had not lost their land, and declares: “Ave Maria!” Damião then addresses the argument that the plantations had created jobs:

[Damião]: What jobs are there today?¹⁶

He referred to one particular plantation in the region that, at the time of the interview, was in a state of decadence and employing very few people:

[Damião]: Very few, very few. Very little. It’s all lost there, everything—almost all of it abandoned there. What job is there? The jobs that to be found here are only at the Firestone and Suor plantations. These other plantations, the worker enters there as an employee, but it’s the same thing as being a slave. These [other plantations] are really just the same disgraceful slavery...Everyone knows this.¹⁷

Here he suggests that it is not the quantity of jobs, but the quality that seems to count. “Slavery” is not a job. Heloísa cedes that she doesn’t know enough about the circumstances of work on the plantations:

[Heloísa]: Right—that there—I don’t know about that.¹⁸

At this point, Damião brings his denunciation of plantation work to a conclusion:

¹⁶ “Que emprego aquilo ali ta dano hoje?”

¹⁷ “Pouquinha, pouquinha. Coisa pouca. Ta tudo perdido lá, tudo—quase tudo abandonado lá. Que emprego? O emprego que tem aqui é na [Fariston] e Suor, só. Essas outas fazenda, o cara entapa lá como ser um empregado é a merma coisa de ser um escravo. Essas [outras fazendas] aí é merma uma escravidão desgraçada...Todo mundo conhece isso.”

¹⁸ “É—isso aí—eu não sei.”

[Damião]: Suor Plantation is just another slavery. Either you work, or you have nothing. If they don't like the worker—he works and works—and when he's lost his strength, they push him out and put in a new worker. When [the plantation] eats that guy's strength, then they push him out, too...

I worked a lot at Suor Plantation—you know this because you knew me when I was working there, working there at that Suor Plantation. I—when I worked there—I didn't have nothing. NOTHING, NOTHING, NOTHING, NOTHING. Afterward, when I threw everything to the air and I came to work for myself, that was when I started to have something.¹⁹

At this point, he turns to the moment when he, his brothers, and their friends decided to occupy an old abandoned plantation nearby, and plant the land for themselves:

[Damião]: I can sleep and wake up when I want, think about what I will do tomorrow, and have my belly full. My children have all graduated [from high school]—because before I couldn't send my children to study—today they are all graduated. I eat what I want, I go wherever I want. Nobody orders me about—[the person] who orders me around is me, myself...But as long as we work for others, we are dogs.²⁰

The rest of this chapter attempts to reconstruct what it meant and means to be a “dog” or a “slave” in this new plantation context. This helps to give concrete meaning to what it means

¹⁹ “A Suor, outa escravidão. Ou o cara trabalha, ou não tem. Se não gostou mais do cara—o cara trabalha, trabalha—quando perdeu as força, ele empurra aquele e bota outro novo. Quando comer as força daquele, empurra também...Eu trabalhei muito na Suor, cê sabe que voce me conheceu trabalhando la, ali naquela Suor. Eu, quando eu trabalhava ali dentro, eu não tinha era nada. Nada, nada, nada, nada. Depois que eu joguei tudo pro alto e vim trabalhar pra mim, eu tenho alguma coisa.”

²⁰ “Eu, eu posso dormir e acordar, pensar no que eu vou fazer amanhã e ter a barriga cheia; meus filho tudo é formado, que eu não podia botar meus filho pa estudar, tudo é formado...Como o que eu quero, vou p'onde eu quero. Ninguém me manda—quem me manda sou eu mermo...Enquanto agente trabalha pros'outos, agente é cachorro.”

when one ceases to be a dog—to be one’s own boss. As has been suggested in earlier chapters,²¹ self-sufficiency does not mean being absolutely independent from others, but the recognition of multiple forms of dependency: upon the health of the physical body, upon trees, upon friends, the generosity of others (even strangers), and dependency upon God. In the discussion of proper names—the dimension of personality that one might single out as the single most expressive dimension of “individuality”—names themselves are recognized as being complex outcome of social interactions.

On the plantations, as will be seen, people are individuated (and “eaten” up) in a more radical sense, and this is owed to the radical forms of dependency through which people are reduced to nothingness, and their ability to do *good for* others is undermined, in the sense that Lázaro described it in Chapter 9, Section 1. Even in Damião’s brief account above, being his own boss is not about being solely or strictly *for himself*, but also being for his family, and also for friends and even strangers in need, as we saw in Chapter 8, Section 2.

2. Industrial Agroforests

The young rubber trees that would populate almost all of the new plantations came from a nursery plantation called Fomento, which comes from the verb *fomentar*, to foment or to promote the growth of something. Fomento was located in the Colônia, the government land colonization project that was discussed in Chapter 4. The Colônia was under the direction of a man named Antônio Lemos Maia who, according to Felícia, was originally from the state of Paraíba to the north. Fomento was established to help supply the new colonists with crop seedlings. Maia’s activity in the region is very briefly mentioned in Warren Dean’s discussion of the history of rubber in Brazil: “Smallholding colonists were taking up Hevea, with the encouragement of two other state officials, Oswaldo Bastos de Menezes and Antonio Lemos Maia, who had set up a nursery at Ituberá” (1987:118).

Fomento also sold rubber tree saplings, as well other agricultural crops that it was trying to promote, to the newly emerging plantations in the region. I interviewed one man, named

²¹ For example, see Chapter 3, Section 8d, and Chapter 9, Section 1.

Emanuel, who was born in Ituberá in 1937, and worked at Fomento for three years sometime in the 1950s. His father had migrated to Ituberá from a sertão town called Milagres de Brotas to work on the new road that was eventually inaugurated by the Instituto de Cacau in 1935. Emanuel's parents remained in Ituberá for several years after the road was completed, but then moved on to other nearby municipalities in search of work. Eventually, Emanuel returned to Ituberá in the 1950s with his aging father where he then found work, first at Fomento and later at Firestone. Emanuel remembered "gringos" like Antônio Lemos Maia, whom he referred to as a *doutor* (doctor) and an *engenheiro* (engineer). He recalled that Fomento had at least three different plant nurseries. One of the rubber tree nurseries, for example, occupied an area of six hectares. The young rubber trees in the nursery were grafted with rubber tree cuttings taken from special varieties of rubber trees that were bred to be more disease resistant and yield higher quantities of raw latex. The cuttings that were grafted into the young tree were, in turn, taken from groves of previously grafted rubber trees in another nursery that were cultivated solely for the purpose of providing new cloning material for un-grafted rubber trees in the first nursery.

The new rubber plantations in the region would put in orders for specific quantities of rubber trees, and the workers at Fomento would dig up the young trees for transplantation. This work was always done in the cooler temperatures of the Brazilian winter, during the months of June through August. Emanuel suggested that almost all of the original rubber trees that were planted on the new rubber plantations had come from Fomento. He recalled having helped provide trees for Firestone and Suor Plantation, as well as many other plantations in the region.

While the nurseries at Fomento were the major source of young rubber trees, Fomento also provided plantings of other crops such as clove trees (*cravo*) and black pepper (*pimenta do reino*), which were intercropped together, as well as guaraná bushes that were native to the Amazon. Another person I interviewed, named Reinan, was a *gaúcho* who had come all the way from southern Brazil to work in the region in 1976. Reinan had an agricultural background and had come on the invitation of his uncle. His uncle had bought a sizable plot of land during the earlier period of expansion, and was actively investing in more than 20 hectares of black pepper plantings between 1974 and 1975. He needed his nephew's help coordinating the first harvest in 1976.

According to Reinan, black pepper plantings underwent an initial swell in the region between 1974, and continued on into 1982 when nearly all of the black pepper bushes died as a

result of different fungal diseases. Reinan described his arrival to the region and the particularly rapid phase of growth in the regional plantation complex that he had witnessed in 1976. As described in the previous chapter, rubber was one of the first and most important agroforest crops introduced into the region as a monocrop, which was already exceptional to the predominantly cacao monocrop in the wider cacao lands. CEPLAC had initially banned the intercropping of rubber and cacao, owed to concerns that the association of both crops could foster the exchange of fungal diseases that could affect the tapping panel on the rubber trees.²²

New cacao plantings exploded in nearby regions in the mid to late 1970s. While small cacao holdings could be found in Ituberá, the only places with cacao planted in a “visible manner” (*maneira expressiva*) were found just west of Ituberá beginning at Piraí do Norte. According to Reinan, CEPLAC eventually removed the intercropping ban sometime between 1979 and 1980, and planters in Ituberá began to cultivate cacao in the interrows of their rubber groves. Up to this time, rubber was almost exclusively planted on large plantations and was not present among smallholders.

Today, it is rare to find rubber groves that are not intercropped with cacao. Rubber occupies the canopy, and as a cacao is largely shade-dependent, it occupies the low-light area beneath the rubber trees. Most capital-intensive plantations plant rubber and cacao and nothing more. Sometimes banana plants, specifically what are called *banana da prata* or other shade tolerant bananas, may be found interspersed throughout the groves. Unlike some other varieties of banana, these banana trees are capable of perpetually regenerating themselves without human intervention, and wherever they are found on the region’s plantations, they were likely planted to shade young cacao or rubber trees when they were first being cultivated.

2a. Transport Infrastructure

²² These especially included fungal diseases from the genus *Phytophthora ssp.*, notably *Phytophthora capsici*, *Phytophthora palmivora*, *Phytophthora citrophthora* and *Phytophthora hevea*. CEPLAC had similarly banned the planting of the *cupuaçu* tree, which was native to the Amazon region. Cupuaçu is in the same *Theobroma* genus as the cacao tree, and was considered a potential vector for the fungal disease, *vassoura-de-bruxa* or “witch’s broom” (*Crinipellus perniciosus*), that could attack cacao trees. Cupuaçu began to be planted on larger and larger scales in the early 1990s.

Other changes in the region included further transformations in transport infrastructure. Reinan recalled that sometime in the first few years of the 1980s, the road that was built in the 1930s was widened and asphalted, and culvert drains were installed under the road. The asphalt did not last long, however, and today only the occasional remnant of that road surface can be found. This temporary improvement and widening of the road, however, opened the way for changes in transportation.

Early on, there was only one bus that passed through the new plantation lands. It left from Valença early every morning, passed through Ituberá and the road to Gandu, and then went south to Ilhéus. It then made a return trip back to Valença later in the afternoon:

Here on this road the only bus passed here in the morning, which went from Valença to Ilhéus. If you missed [the bus] there were no other busses...The bus left directly from Valença, and that [bus] that left Valença passed [by here] at 7 in the morning, [and] it went to Ilhéus...And when that [bus] left Ilhéus, [it] passed here at 4 in the afternoon to go [back] to Valença.²³

Hitchhiking on the back of someone's truck was an occasional, but unpredictable, source of informal transport. This was largely based on the goodwill of the truck owner, but that goodwill was often times met with mechanical limitations:

There were some people who had some pickups, but when they went up [into the hills], everyone went up [all at once, and because of the weight], the car broke down. When [the truck] came down [again], everyone came down [all at once], and the car broke down [again].²⁴

At that time, there were no other predictable forms of transport. Eventually, the *kombi*, or the Volkswagen Type 2 Transporter, would become a common, more frequent, and more flexible alternative to the limited bus service. Today, there are upwards of several kombis that operate in

²³ “Aqui nessa estrada aqui só passava ônibus de manhã um, que passar aí de Valença a Ilhéus. Se você perdesse num tinha mais carro...O carro saía direto de Valença, e esse que saía de Valença que passava pela manhã 7 hora ele ia até Ilhéus...E quando o que saía de Ilhéus, passava aqui 4 hora da tarde pra ir pa Valença também.”

²⁴ “Aí tinha uns pessoal que tinha umas pick up aí, mas quando subia, subia todo mundo, acabou carro. Quando descia, descia todo mundo, acabou também.”

the region, and two different bus services that make several round trips to and from the hills daily.

2b. Contractors & Conversion of Forest

As the projected plantations were relatively large in scale, the initial investment of capital was similarly large. Opening the plantations in the forests, and converting them into agroforests, represented the first significant outlay of capital. This process of clearing the forest and converting it into rubber and cacao groves was, for the most part, initially carried out by *empreiteiros*, or private contractors, who were hired by the plantations. These contractors, in turn, would contract large numbers of workers to help them complete different jobs. One person that I interviewed recalled an *empreiteiro*, who frequently worked for Firestone helping to plant rubber groves, as having employed upwards of 800 people.

In 2009, I interviewed a man named Tiago who worked as one of these contractors. Tiago was born in 1932, and came to Ituberá in 1949 when he was about 17 years old. His first job in Ituberá was working as a municipal guard, and later in 1958 he continued working for the municipality as a tax collector. In 1964, when he was about 32 years old, he had acquired his first contract as an *empreiteiro* to help to open the new plantations. He ended up working for many plantations in the region, and he recalled earning something like Cr\$200 for every hectare of forest that he cleared with his work crews.²⁵

At these different sites, and depending on the specific contract, Tiago would clear the forest and, once it was cleared, arrange to have it planted with young rubber trees. As the contractor, it was his responsibility—and not that of the plantation—to procure people to work with him. He either sent recruiters to find workers, or might go out looking himself:

I searched for workers everywhere. I got them from the sertão, from Teofilândia, [from] there in Feira de Santana, in every corner [where workers could be found]...I brought

²⁵ It was not clear whether that amount was for clearing, planting, or both, and whether or not that amount was separate or included other costs he incurred in procuring and paying laborers.

people to work...I went [or] sent [others to find workers]...chartered trucks, sent [them on] searches and so on, repeatedly.²⁶

Sometimes he also recruited former posseiros to work with him. I asked him if he had ever encountered posseiros still living on the properties in the areas where he was working. He suggested that by the time he was sent out to clear the forests, the land had already been cleared of what he had earlier in the interview referred to as “invaders” (*invasores*). Like many other people before him, he had suggested that the posseiros land claims were illegitimate:

Individual [posseiros] came to live on the property without the necessary documentation. Often times [just] a weak receipt...a common receipt. “Received from Mr. John Doe. R\$100.”...[The posseiro was transacting] something that wasn’t even his, [it belonged] to the state. That happened all too often.²⁷

Beyond disqualifying their claims to land, which was by then a common theme, he characterized the posseiros in triply diminutive terms, as “little tiny small posseiros” (*posseirozinhos miudinhos*), and described their use of the land as unproductive and negligible. Hence, whatever the new landowners gave the posseiros to vacate the land was similarly insignificant:

And well, [these hills] were full of those teeny-tiny little posseiros [who lived there] without producing anything. Then [the new landowners] came and indemnified those [posseiros, and got the land from them] in exchange for potatoes. [They gave the posseiros] however [much] they wanted [to give them].²⁸

He suggested that many of the former posseiros, after leaving the land, went to live in town:

²⁶ “Eu puxava em tudo quanto era canto. Puxava gente aí do sertão, de Teofilândia, aí em Feira de Santana, em tudo quanto era canto aí...Trazia gente pra trabalhar...Eu ia, mandava...Fretava caminhão mandava buscas e assim sucessivamente.”

²⁷ “Veio os indivíduos que mora na propriedade sem a devida documentação. Muitas vezes um frágil recibo...um recibo comum. ‘Recebido de Senhor Fulano de Tal. R\$100.’...Uma coisa que não era nem dele, era do estado. Isso funcionou demais.”

²⁸ “E ai tava cheio daqueles posseirozinhos miudinho no meio sem produzir. Ai eles voltava e indenizava aquilo a troca de batata. Como eles queriam.”

Many of them...sold to—to the newly arrived people who had money to buy. And came to [live in] the city.²⁹

And many of them, as was suggested in the previous chapter, eventually returned to the countryside to find work on the plantations:

There were many people who were posseiros and sold their holding...and then returned to work [on the plantations].³⁰

Many of these opportunities, he suggested, were created by Norberto Odebrecht. Far from remembering him as having taken anything from the posseiros, he suggested, rather, that he had given them employment and access to the cash economy:

[Odebrecht] gave work to the people. The people left their roças to come work for Doctor Norberto. Because that way they had money to buy [goods] at the Friday or Saturday market.³¹

I asked Tiago if he himself had ever worked with any former posseiros: “And [did you] work with any of them?” He replied in the affirmative, but then he emphatically clarified the relationship:

I worked with them, yes...I didn't work with them—no—I GAVE them work.³²

He similarly described the other new arrivals who had invested in the region as having created jobs for the former posseiros, using an idiom of adoption that suggests that the new landowners—like good landlords—had taken the posseiros under their tutelage and care:

²⁹ “Muitos deles...vendia ao—à pessoa chegada que tinha dinheiro pra comprar. E vinha pra cidade.”

³⁰ “Tinha muita gente que era posseiro e vendeu a posse...e depois voltou a trabalhar.”

³¹ “Deu serviço ao povo. Aí o povo largava a roça pra vir trabalhar pra doutor Norberto. Porque tinha o dinheiro pra comprar no dia de sexta feira ou dia de sabado.”

³² “E voce trabalha com alguns deles?”/“Trabalhei sim...Trabalhei não—dei trabalho a eles.”

People came here from outside [the region], they bought [up the land], and then adopted the people to work for them.³³

The idiom of “adoption” here is especially salient, as it suggests that Odebrecht, and those who were associated with him, worked with a sort of “good will” and view toward the region’s betterment. This is a highly contested claim, as was seen both at the outset of this chapter and in earlier chapters. The idiom of adoption—like friendship, which is also frequently instantiated in the context of patron-client relations, as was seen in Chapter 8, Section 9—is a fundamentally contested idiom that is used to do very different kinds of critical and evaluative work. In the earlier discussion of adoption, as seen in Chapter 9, Section 2, children like Isaac escaped an abusive (biological) father in search of more nurturing relationships—by adopting another family—and relationships with trees were similarly seen as a form of adoption based upon mutual care. In short, rather than having stable meanings, claims about friendship and adoption are subjected to critical epistemic evaluations.³⁴ Many people from the region, including former plantation workers like Damião, might contest Tiago’s claims straightaway.³⁵

2c. Working Conditions & Clearing the Forest

Alonso, Gilberto, and Josué, who were descended from the posseiros and had managed to hold onto a bit of their land,³⁶ also eventually sought employment on some of the nearby plantations as part time workers:

We worked a lot on this Suor Plantation. Well, in the first block that they entered to plant rubber, we were there working...From the first block that [they] entered to put in these blocks there, they were felling, opening strips [of forest]. [To open the] strips, you go

³³ “Aqui veio os pessoal de fora, compraram, e adotaram o povo pra trabalhar.”

³⁴ Adoptions could be considered both real and “true,” or fake and “false” and pretense. Tiago’s claim would probably be chalked up as mere pretense. Adoptions that are judged to be real or “true” can be further evaluated as normatively “good” or “bad,” and therefore potentially undesirable, as might be the case with an abusive adoptive family. The case of Isaac that was seen in Chapter 9, Section 2a suggests that positive acts of adoption are a possibility.

³⁵ Whether or not this might happen publically is another question.

³⁶ As described in the Chapter 5, Section 2.

there using the axe—because it was [done with an] axe, it wasn't done with a chainsaw [like today], no—you put in the axe, fell all that forest, then when you finish, you come back [to start a new strip], see?³⁷

They explained that the work was divided between the workers, who did the heavy lifting, and a so-called engineer who demarcated the locations of each row:

There was an engineer—a topographer they called “engineer”—who located those rows, where those...rows would pass by. Then they marked [those places] with those poles, and then, we went in with axe and machete cutting those branches, cutting and taking [out the brush] to only leave the pure earth, because it later we'd dig the holes to plant rubber trees.³⁸

Damião and two of his brothers had also gone to work with an *empreiteiro* who was working at Firestone, helping with the initial phases of clearing and felling new rubber groves. Damião was between 14 and 16 years old at the time; his brothers were close to the same age. They went to earn money, but ended up staying for little more than a week before deciding to leave. I asked him what the work was like:

Man, it was bad, see? There were lots of contracted [workers]. There was the contractor. They felled [the forest], Jon—felled a forest, one hundred hectares of forest—they put in three hundred men at the time to fell [the forest] with axes, clearing [the understory and felling]...We went there [to find work]. When I arrived at the barracks [where the workers stayed], there were more than three hundred men in the barracks, covered with *piçava* palm fibers...I remember that I slept—the barracks was like a pigsty...I slept sitting on top of a piece of wood...with a little blanket here [over my shoulders] and the rain drops hitting my head. I said [to myself]:

³⁷ “A gente trabalhou muito aí nessa Suor. Aí, no primeiro bloco que entrou pa prantar essas seringas, a gente tava dento aí trabalhano...Desde o primeiro bloco que entrou pa botar esses blocos aí, tava dirrubano, abrimo faixa. As faixas é voce chegar, meter o machado—que era machado, não era motor-serra não—metia o machado, dirrubava aquela mataria toda, agora quando acabar, vortava, viu?”

³⁸ “Tinha um engenheiro, um topogo que chamava engenheiro, deslocava aquelas filas, por onde ia passar aquelas...filas. Aí marcava com aquelas varas e agora, nós ia com machado e facão cortano aqueles garranchos, cortano e tirano pa só deixar na terra pura, que é pa depois cavar os buraco pa prantar seringa.”

“Here—I won’t stay here, I’m out of here.”³⁹

The theme of “exposure” recurs again at this point.⁴⁰ Damião went to the leader of his workgroup leader (*cabo de turma*) and told him that he was leaving:

“Man, I’m leaving—I’m not going to stay in that barracks there getting wet. I didn’t sleep all night, I won’t stay there, no.”

Work during the day and not sleeping at night! I say [to him]:

“Tell me here, can I make a hut [to stay] there...in the work area?”

“You can, you can make one.”⁴¹

Damião called to his brothers and they set out to build a more adequate shelter for themselves:

Well, I went there with [my brothers], we made a shelter there, we bought some groceries, and went to stay there at the edge of the forest and work. Well, I worked one week...I stayed a little more than a week. When a Friday came and they went to count our production...I say:

“Man, when is the money going to come here?”

[The workgroup leader replied]: “Man, there’s no anticipated [date].”

³⁹ “Rapaz, mal viu? Muito empreiteiro. Tinha o empreiteiro. Derrubava Jon, derrubava uma mata, cem hectaria de mata, botava trezentos home na época pa derrubar no machado, roçar...Nós fomos pra lá. Quando cheguei no barracão tinha mais ou menos trezentos home dentro do barracão coberto de palha de piaçava...Eu sei que eu dormi—parecia um chiqueiro de porco o barracão...Eu dormi sentado em cima de um pedaço de pau...com a cubertinha aqui e a goteira bateno na cabeça, eu digo://‘Aqui não fico não, vou sair fora.’”

⁴⁰ This theme first emerged in Chapter 2, Section 5; Chapters 3, Section 3; and in Chapter 6, Section 4. The theme is developed in a more descriptive in Chapter 7, Section 2.

⁴¹ “Rapaz, eu vou mimbora—que eu não vou ficar nesse barracão aí moiano, eu não durmi de nothe, não vou ficar aí não’...//Trabalhar durante o dia e de nothe não dormi! Eu digo://‘Vem cá, eu posso fazer um rancho lá na—de palha lá dentro do serviço?’//‘Pode, pode fazer.’”

It had already been three months since [the last] payments came out [for the other workers].⁴²

A new kind of problem presented itself, and as they were still healthy young men with nothing to lose but a small shack they had built, they resolved to employ their feet:

Well, I say: “Well, I won’t stay here. No.”

I called the boys, I say:

“Our production—tell the guy to count [our production] and whatever money we [are owed]—count it up [and] whatever there is, we can take it in dry goods and get out of here.”⁴³

And they left and walked away:

Well we bought our groceries and went on foot—came on foot to Ituberá. From Ituberá—my father already lived on a plantation in Piraí do Norte—[and] we came [walking in that direction].⁴⁴

They walked—with bags of groceries strapped over their shoulders—for more nearly 40 kilometers, or nearly 25 miles.

2d. Plantation Work, Migration, Gender

⁴² “Aí, fui lá mais [os meus irmãos], fizemos o rancho, fizemos a feira, e fomos pra lá pa beira da mata morar e trabalhar. Aí trabalhei uma semana...fiquei mais uma semana. Quando chegou um dia de sexta feira que foi contar a produção...eu digo://‘Rapaz, quando é que vai sair dinheiro aqui?’//‘Rapaz, não tem previsão não.’//E já tinha três mês que tinha saído pagamento.”

⁴³ “Aí eu digo://‘Ah, não vou ficar aqui não.’//Chamei os meninos, eu digo://‘A nossa produção—manda o cara contar e o dinheiro que nós tiver, fazer conta, o que tiver nós compra de feira e vai embora.’”

⁴⁴ “Aí nós comprou de feira e veio de pé, veio de pé pa Ituberá, de Ituberá o meu pai já morava cá em Piraí do Norte numa fazenda, a gente veio pa cá.”

Many people had come from other parts of the region, and, in some cases, from other states to find work on the new plantations. Those municipalities where cacao production was already well-established, and people could find regular work, were probably less represented. Many of the migrants came from the coastal areas, referred to as the *beirada*, of the municipalities of Ituberá, Camamu, Igrapiúna, and other areas where regular wage-labor work was hard to come by. Many others came from drier municipalities toward the sertão, where regular work was also harder to come by and living conditions were simply more difficult.

One man named Sandoval recalled how his mother had gone to Ituberá to find work on the newly expanding plantations. She was from the municipality of Santaluz to the west in the arid sertão. She probably had come sometime in the early 1970s. Sometime later, she returned for her three children in Santa Luz, including Sandoval, so that she could bring them to Ituberá. This was in 1976:

The region here had that reputation that you earned [a lot of money] and such. She came here worked for a time, and then returned to the sertão and then called me to come accompany her.⁴⁵

Sandoval was 12 years old at the time, and he and his younger brother and sister came with her to the region. At that age, he was able to take on physically undemanding tasks at Suor Plantation, such as helping to fertilize young trees. The work to be found on the plantations at that time both involved heavy labor, felling and opening up new plots, and also preparing the young rubber and cacao trees for planting in the new clearings. In general, the heavier tasks were performed by men, while women and young children could undertake lighter tasks like caring for the trees, once planted in the field, and tending the nurseries.

Francinha, whose family members were posseiros in the region when she was growing up, recalled working in her family's manioc fields. There she helped with all sorts of tasks, including heavier tasks such as helping to clear (*roçar*) the understory as new plots were opened in the forest. When she eventually went to find wage-labor on the plantations, she explained, she

⁴⁵ “Aqui tinha aquela fama que ganhava bem e tal, ela tava aqui trabalhou uns tempos, voltou novamente no sertão e aí me chamou pra vim eu acompanhei ela.”

no longer worked clearing and felling, but rather worked planting, weeding, using a hoe, and harvesting and splitting cacao.

Another woman named Telma, who had also worked on the plantations for many years, suggested that expectations about domestic work and certain kinds of plantation work, such as rubber tapping, were difficult to balance. As is still the case today, women are mostly expected to do almost all household tasks—caring for children, preparing meals, cleaning the house, washing clothing, and so on—and balancing that with the rigid schedule of rubber tapping, she explained, was often times unfeasible. Tapping rubber trees required very strict and early hours, as well as constant and quick movement throughout the rubber grove, as the tapper moved from tree to tree. Bringing children along in tow was too difficult, and morning domestic tasks took priority over wage labor. Other plantation work tasks, however, such as harvesting and splitting cacao, would be more amenable to bringing children along, and, unlike rubber tapping which was invariably done early in the morning, splitting cacao was a task that could be performed and completed throughout various hours of the day. Children could help gather fallen cacao fruits as they were cut down from the trees using long pruning poles. Like preparing manioc for processing, the *quebra*, or “breaking,” of cacao fruit and the removal of the seeds was done in a central location. If children were not actively helping, they could be easily watched over. The following photograph in Figure 20, dated 1966 from the cacao producing areas of the Amazon basin, depicts such a situation with two women work on either side of a large pile of cacao fruit, accompanied by two children, the older of which appears to be helping with the work.⁴⁶

⁴⁶ The photo is titled “Quebra do cacau na margem do Rio Amazonas (AM)” [“Breaking cacao on the margins of the Amazon River (AM)”] by Hernondino Chagas and Catarina Vergolino Dias, 1966. Series: “Acervo dos Trabalhos Geográficos de Campo,” negative 14916. This photograph can be located at: <http://biblioteca.ibge.gov.br/detalhes.php?id=47337> Last accessed May 17, 2014.

Figure 20: Women and Children “Breaking” Cacao



The next photograph in Figure 21, dated 1953, is a posed photograph showing a pair of men working together at the Experimental Station for cacao research near Uruçuca, Bahia.⁴⁷

⁴⁷ The photo is titled “Quebra de cacau na Estação Experimental de Uruçuca (BA)” [“Breaking cacao at the Experimental Station of Uruçuca (BA)”] by Carlos de Castro Botelho and Tomas Somlo, 1953. Series: “Acervo dos Trabalhos Geográficos de Campo,” negative 465. This photograph can be located at: <http://biblioteca.ibge.gov.br/detalhes.php?id=411942> Last accessed May 17, 2014.

Figure 21: Men “Breaking” Cacao



As with the work groups that will be described below, breaking cacao on the plantations would have been done in gender-similar work groups, unless workers were related by an appropriate kinship tie.

Although this question needs to be more systematically examined, it appears that men were more often hired as regular wage laborers with signed work cards (*carteiras assinadas*), earning a regular monthly “minimum salary” (*salário mínimo*). This was especially the case with young men whose labor power and strength was more highly valued. Women and children, together with older and aging men—as well as young men unable to find regular work—were more often hired on a daily basis, earning a day wages (*diária*), or doing contract work (*empreita*) and “production” (*produção*) or piece work that would allow women to simultaneously attend to their children, while employing them in various work tasks. Splitting cacao, as just described, would be paid in accordance with the number of crates of cacao seeds that a woman, together with her children, might have been able to fill. Sharecropping (*meia*), likewise, would have been more amenable to work involving all family members. These different forms of plantation work are described below in Section 3.

One woman named Ofélia who, together with her second husband Tomás, had eventually gotten land at Settlement 1, described her earlier plantation work on the cacao plantations in the neighboring municipality of Piraí do Norte. Much about her story was typical—the lack of regular salaried work, the burden of raising her children alone, having left her first husband who was abusive, and the added burden of being solely responsible for domestic work. There were other elements that were also atypical—but also not entirely uncommon, as seen in earlier chapters through the cases of Antônia and Alvina (both of whom, for different reasons, also had to raise their children alone)—insofar as Ofélia also engaged in work that, in other contexts, might have been reserved for men. Ofélia explained:

My kids were practically raised on the plantations...I never worked through a work card, you see? I worked odd jobs...They gave me production work. They'd give me fifteen crates per day to split open. So, I had to leave at five in the morning—I'd leave at five so that by this time of the day I could be back home early. When I'd get home, I couldn't take care of the house...I'd go to my little garden that I had to plant , [pinto] beans, mangalô beans...pigeon peas, some manioc, cassava, tomatoes—I'd go plant these things so that we'd have our daily bread, that daily bread, to have enough to live...When I'd finally get home, the lightening bugs were already flickering...I'd go to the casa de farinha, I'd work to the morning light in the casa de farinha, roasting manioc flour—I'd do ten or twelve loads of manioc!⁴⁸

Her second husband, Tomás, whom Ofélia had married later in life, after her children were grown, chimed in at this point:

[Tomás]: She suffered a lot...she suffered a lot, suffered a lot

⁴⁸ “Meus fio foi criado quase na fazenda...Eu nunca trabalhei de carteira assinada né? Trabalhava avulso assim...Eles dava assim produção. Aí eles dava quinze caixas por dia pa partir. Aí eu tinha que sair 5h—saía cinco horas pa no caso uma hora dessa já chegar em casa mais cedo. Quando chegava em casa eu não ia nem cuidar de casa...Eu ia pra meu brejo que eu tinha pra prantar folha, feijão, mangalô...andu, essa mandhoca, aimpim, tumate—ia prantar essas coisas que era pa acabar de render o pão de cada dia, aquela diarinha, pa interá que era pra sobreviver...Quando eu chegava em casa os gavalume já tava acendeno...Pa casa de farinha, amanhecia o dia na casa de farinha, torrano farinha—botava dez, doze cargas de mandhoca!”

[Ofélia]: I suffered too much, I suffered too much.⁴⁹

Tomás interjected once again, suggesting that Ofélia often worked doing the most highly stigmatized form of work:

[Tomás]: She's already worked swinging the *biscol*.

[Ofélia]: That's right—the *biscol*.⁵⁰

A *biscol*, as seen in Figure 22,⁵¹ is a long cutting tool made from a machete blade that has been removed from its original (usually plastic) handle, and firmly attached to a much longer wooden handle—sometimes the same length as the machete blade itself—that results in much greater reach and cutting power.

⁴⁹ “T: ‘Ela sofreu muito...sofreu muito, sofreu muito.’//O: ‘Sofri demais, sofri demais.’”

⁵⁰ “T: ‘Já bateu biscol aí.’//O: ‘É, biscol.’”

⁵¹ The *biscol* tool is also briefly described in Chapter 7, Section 2.

Figure 22: The Bicol



The bicol might be used to clear tall weeds or the viny understory of the forest before felling the larger trees. Bicol work was always heavy work, and, as such, is stigmatized in the region. Ofélia had done work with a bicol, among many other kinds of work throughout her life working on the plantations. I asked her if she had also worked felling forest to clear areas to plant—a kind of work that is less frequently undertaken by women:

[Ofélia]: Oh my Lord in Heaven! What was there that I could not do?⁵²

I asked her if she ever took up an axe to fell trees:

[Jonathan]: And do you take up the axe, as well?

[Ofélia]: Well, today I can't stand it anymore—I can't do it anymore.

[Jonathan]: But you used to—you used to?

[Ofélia]: I used to...I worked too much. I had eight children on my back—it's no joke, eh? But thanks to God...⁵³

As single women like Ofélia sought whatever kinds of plantation work were available to them, single men also constituted a large number of the migrants to the region. Many of them appeared to travel in groups of friends. One man named Cezar remembered always travelling with friends:

We only walked with [our friends] through the world...Wherever we went out to work—wherever our companions went out, we went with them to work, because we couldn't leave one another.⁵⁴

Cezar first arrived in Gandu in 1947 from the municipality of São Miguel das Matas, some 83 km inland in the sertão, and recalled when Firestone first arrived in the Ituberá region around 1954. There were trucks, he said:

Carrying people from everywhere—Paraíba, Pernambuco, Ceará—all coming here to work because there were few people here. These people you see around here today, half of them are all new arrivals [from elsewhere].⁵⁵

⁵² "Ó meu Deus do céu! O que é que eu não fazia?"

⁵³ "J: E pega no machado tambem voce?//O: É, hoje é que eu não pego mais, num guento mais.//J: Mas pegava—pegava?/O: Pegava...É, trabalhei demais. Ficava com oito fio nas costas, é brincadeira? Mas graças a Deus."

⁵⁴ "A gente só andava com ele pa, pelo mundo...adonde a gente saía pa trabahar, donde o, o companheiro da gente saía, a gente com ele pa trabalhar, que a gente não podia deixar um ao outro."

Cezar ended up working at Firestone for many years. I asked him about working conditions there, and he explained:

We [lived] good there. We worked—we had our day to buy our groceries in the market. We bought our things—we survived—we hunted a lot in the woods. We had a good, big life.⁵⁶

He reported that they earned about 80 *mil réis* (or about 80 *cruzeiros*) per month, which was probably a low wage for the time, but that payment at Firestone always came predictably:

The firm always paid. When Firestone started up, they never missed anybody's payment, they never ran out of money. Never, to this day...They never ran out of money.⁵⁷

This comment becomes especially salient as many plantation workers in the region were accustomed to being paid late, perhaps not at all, or not in full as their pay might sometimes be subject to arbitrary deductions. For this reason, Cezar compared work at Firestone with work for other firms that also took hold in the region:

Many were similar, but none were ever really the same as [Firestone] because [the other firms,] they ran out of money, but [Firestone] never lacked [money to pay us].⁵⁸

He recalled the names of one of the bosses there, a man named “Mister Duprê”—“He’s the best boss”⁵⁹—and the names of two others, “Vaipond” and “Mister Rase”—“Good, good person.”⁶⁰ I asked him if he remembered the administrators, what they were like:⁶¹

⁵⁵ “Carregando gente de, de tudo, de Paraíba, de Pernambuco, Ceará tudo pr’ aqui, pa trabalhar...que aqui tinha pouca gente... Esses pessoá que você vê por aí, a metade tudo são chegante.”

⁵⁶ “A gente lá era bom. A gente trabalhava—tinha o dia de fazer a feira. A gente fazia a feira—subivivia—muita caça no mato. A gente passava uma vidão boa.”

⁵⁷ “A firma pagava, a Firestone começou nunca fartou pagamento pa ninguém, nunca fartou dinheiro. Nunca, até hoje...Nunca fartou dinheiro.”

⁵⁸ “Muitas era igual, mas nunca foi igual a de cá, porque cá fartava dinheiro e cá nunca fartou.”

⁵⁹ “É o melhor chefe.”

⁶⁰ “Boa pessoa, boa.”

They looked just like you...but they were—were different in the way they treated us...because they didn't understand Portuguese. You understand what we're saying, but they didn't understand... some of them got angry because when they talked with us, we didn't know what it was [they were saying].⁶²

Different kinds of work tasks, and different kinds of crops, demanded a different kind of labor force. The black pepper harvesting season, for example, lasted from four to five months, and the grape-like bunches of black peppercorns were harvested by hand. The peppercorns did not ripen all at once, and consequently, those who planted black pepper on a large scale needed a regular workforce for several months out of the years. One person reported working with nearly 100 people that he would bring to and from the town on the back of his pickup truck and on the back of a larger truck that he would rent for that period:

I paid a truck to bring people from Ituberá and went there [to the plantation], because there were no [workers to be found nearby]. I wasn't able to find enough people in the forest...There [in the forest], I could find about twenty people, and I brought sixty, seventy from here in town.⁶³

This kind of harvesting could be done by men, women and children alike, although really small children might not be able to reach the higher bunches of peppercorns at the top of the bushes.

2e. Plantations & Personal Documents

⁶¹ These Firestone employees would have probably been, H.J. Dupré, Bert O. Vipond, and E.H. Houser, as these names are cited in passing in Dean (1987). The individual's biographies are not available, but given what Cezar says about them, it seems likely that they were white men from the United States or possibly Europe.

⁶² "O jeito é igual a você assim...mas era, era diferente assim no, no modo de tratar a gente...porque num intindia o português, você ta intendendo o que a gente ta falano, eles num intindia...tinha daqueles que ficava zangado, porque falava com a gente, a gente num sabia o que era."

⁶³ "Eu pagava um caminhão pra trazer gente de Ituberá e ia pra lá, que lá não tinha. Não conseguia lá na mata achar todo esse pessoal...Lá achava uns vinte, e eu levava sessenta, setenta aqui da rua."

As was seen in Chapters 4 and 5, land documents and legal titles made a forceful appearance in the region in the mid-century and facilitated the dispossession that many of the posseiros faced, whereas in the earlier period, as was described in Chapter 3, Sections 6 and 7, legal land titles and legal personal documents did not play a central role in the posseiros' lives.⁶⁴ Over the course of the decades, and especially as a result of the dispossession, legal documents such as land titles had become social facts with increasing salience and force. In an analogous way, work in the plantation context also made having personal legal documents increasingly necessary as well, especially for those who entered into the formal wage labor market. This was a theme that was common to many narratives about the move to the region and the transition to plantation work. Cezar described it in the following way:

Those who went out into the world looking for work to survive, they got their [documents] there.⁶⁵

Francinha suggested that she never had personal documents until she was older and had gone together with her husband to find work on the plantations:

We got our documents when we went to live on the plantation...because we needed to get [our documents] to register on the plantation, because you couldn't work without documents...without registering...Without a document, you didn't enter.⁶⁶

Her husband Mateus similarly reported elsewhere that he never had any personal documents himself until he went to "register at the firm."⁶⁷ Together, they had worked for nine years at three different plantations in the region, one of which was Suor Plantation, and spent three years at each.

⁶⁴ Although, as was suggested in Chapter 3, Section 6b, this may have been partly deliberate in order to avoid conscription.

⁶⁵ "Aqueles que saía pelo mundo que procurava trabalhar pra sobreviver, la mesmo tirava."

⁶⁶ "Tirou o documento quando fomo morar na [fazenda]...porque precisou tirar pa fichar nas fazenda, qui não trabalhava sem o doc[umento]...sem fichar...Sem o documento não intrava."

⁶⁷ "Fichar na firma." Fn29.

Emanuel, likewise, recalled that after his mother had died when he was about 13 years old, and after his sisters had all married, he accompanied his increasingly solitary father to Ituberá where he would eventually enter the labor market himself:

[My father] came here, and so that I didn't leave him all by himself, I accompanied [him] from there [and] came here. [That] was the time that I really [became] interested in getting [my documents]—of finally getting my [personal] documents [in order] to register [myself for work] at the firms.⁶⁸

Caio similarly recounted his journey to Ituberá. I asked him if his parents had gotten his documents when he was young:

No, no, no—the documents we ended up getting them here after we were grown...Birth certificate, we got everything here, we got everything here in Ituberá...Everything, everything, all the documents that we have, [we got them] all here in Ituberá...I am like a child of Ituberá.⁶⁹

Having access to personal documents was key, therefore, to accessing the formal wage labor market. For those who had some reading and especially some writing skills, they could be quickly promoted into positions where other people worked under them. Caio explained:

If you arrived [and] gave a signature in the office, on a payment sheet, you wouldn't go to the roça anymore—you [would] already work—you would already be an administrator.⁷⁰

Being an “administrator” most likely mean becoming a “work group leader” (*cabo de turma*). One man named Gabriel had explained how his father had always worked “with the *biscot*”⁷¹—

⁶⁸ “Ele veio pra aqui, aí pra eu não deixar ele sozinho, eu cumpanhei de la pra vim pra aqui. Foi na época que eu já vim mermo interessado de tirar, de acabar de tirar meus documento pra eu me fixar na firma.”

⁶⁹ “Não, não, não, os documentos já veio tirar aqui depois de grande...certidão, tirou tudo aqui, tirou tudo aqui em Ituberá...tudo, tudo, todos os documentos que tem, tudo aqui em Ituberá...sou como filho de Ituberá.”

⁷⁰ “Você chegasse desse uma assinatura num escritório numa folha de pagamento, voce num ia mais pra roça, você já trabalhar, você já ia ser um dministrador.”

doing the most menial form of labor—all his life, and consequently he had prioritized providing his children with some level of education so that they would not have to do the same work. Gabriel had studied on an “ABC primer” from 10 years of age, and was able to do basic math as well. Consequently, when he started work at the plantations, he was able to start in jobs such as “work group leader” (*cabo de turma*) and “supervisor” (*fiscal*) in which he was “ordering” (*mandando*) other people that worked under him.⁷²

Working as a driver on the plantations—transporting workers, picking up the harvests, or distributing fertilizer—required a worker to acquire yet other legal documents such as a driver’s license, issued through Bahia’s State Department of Transit.⁷³ Getting a drivers license, furthermore, required a minimal degree of literacy in order to get through the required paperwork.

One man named Teodoro, who had migrated to the region from Sergipe, recalled the lack of education opportunities available in his youth, and the difficulty he and others consequently faced in learning how to read:

I never went to a school...never. Because there weren’t any there...at that time there were none...When I came here [that] was—I went to get my driver’s license and DETRAN [the driver’s license bureau] said:

“You can only get your license if you know how to do a little inscription—the name of your father, of your mother, and your own name in your own handwriting.”

Then I said, “I don’t have [that ability].”

It said, “[Then] you can’t [get your license].”

Well then...I went about aimlessly. I went learning with one [person and then] with another, with one and another. Then I learned.

⁷¹ “...no biscoi.”

⁷² Fn582.

⁷³ *Departamento Estadual de Trânsito*.

Then I went back [to the license bureau], I say, “I already know [how to sign].”

They said, “Well, let’s go.”

Well, I did—I did the inscription...got my license and [it was] ready. [And] today, I [can] read a letter, I know—I know how to go into any place, and I know how to get out, thanks to God. In time, it was the world that taught [me to read and write]...because the world teaches well.⁷⁴

3. Plantation Work, Disciplining, & Exposure

Plantation work meant disciplining workers and learning new forms of work. Learning how to work is a common theme that one hears in the region, as can be seen in these fragments in which Damião and Jorge, on separate occasions, reflected on the changes in work:

[Damião]: The people became harder workers, too. Brazil is a new territory, but the people had already opened more.⁷⁵

Although Damião’s reasoning was not entirely clear in the larger context, he is suggesting that people like the posseiros, who cultivated the land in a very different manner from the plantations, had to learn very different rhythms of work. When he suggested that people opened up more, this transformation also seems to parallel the literal and much broader forest clearings that came about with the plantations. Jorge, who was descended from the posseiros, expressed similar notions:

⁷⁴ “Eu nunca fui numa escola...Nunca. Porque lá não tinha...naquela época não tinha...Quando eu vim pr’aqui foi que—fui tirar a carteira e o DETRAN disse: ‘Você só tira a carteira se você souber fazer aqui uma inscriçãozinha—o nome de seu pai, de sua mãe, o seu nome com o seu punho’...Aí eu digo: ‘Eu não tenho.’ Ele disse: ‘Não tira.’ Aí pronto...fui assim à toa. Fui aprendendo com um e com outro, com um e com outro. Aí aprendi. Aí cheguei lá eu digo: ‘Eu já sei.’ Ele disse: ‘Então, vamos.’ Aí fiz, fiz a inscrição...tirei minha carteira e pronto. Mas hoje eu leio uma carta, sei, sei entrar em qualquer lugar e sei sair, graças a Deus. De acordo com o tempo né, o mundo foi quem ensinou...porque o mundo ensina bem.”

⁷⁵ “O povo ficou mais trabalhador também, que o Brasil é um território novo, mas o pessoal já abriu mais.”

[Jorge]: The people in the beginning...from my time onward, they turned into workers, learned to work, you see. They learned—everybody learned to work, and in the beginning, there were those...who had the means, they had everything [lots of open land], but they didn't have nothing—nothing.⁷⁶

Jorge's statement suggests a common theme, namely, that the posseiros had many resources at their disposal—lots of land—but did not use it to make anything. Consequently, if there was anything to learn, then disciplining workers means integrating them into the plantation hierarchy. The hierarchy could be roughly organized in the following manner:

Owner – *Dono*
Manager, Big Boss – *Gerente, Chefão*
Supervisor, Overseer, Foreman – *Fiscal, Capataz*
Work group leader – *Cabo de Turma*
Worker, Operator, Peon – *Trabalhador, Operário, Peão*

The plantation owners in the region are very frequently absentee owners, and, consequently, not deeply involved in the everyday operation of the plantation. There is no fixed model for the plantation order of authority, or the terminology used to describe different positions. On one plantation, the term for “supervisor” (*fiscal*) describes a position that is structurally similar to what on another plantation might be called a “foreman” (*capataz*). The specific structure on any plantation may depend on the size of the plantation, and the kinds of different agricultural activities undertaken therein. If a plantation has very large holdings of both rubber and cacao, there may be one manager (*gerentes*) each for both cacao and rubber production, followed by a hierarchy of other workers under them. The work group leader (*cabo de turma*) is both a worker and the lowest level of management. The work group leader's work tasks will be the same as for any other worker, except that they will be responsible for actively motivating workers in their

⁷⁶ “O povo de premero...de meus tempo pa cá, virou trabalhador, aprendeu a trabalhar, ta veno. Aprendeu—todos os mundo aprendeu a trabalhar, e de premero tinha aqueles...que tinha condição, o mundo e os fundos, e não tinha nada—nada.”

group. A work group leader might have some 10 to 12 workers under them.⁷⁷ Positions such as “work group leader” (*cabo de turma*) may require a greater degree of literacy—in order to keep written record of who showed up for work—and will often be promoted from among the workers. Other levels of plantations management may also be hired internally, potentially promoting solidarity among workers and management who may have developed friendships; or, the plantation might bring in management from the outside, thereby potentially fostering the separation of workers and managers.

Today, worker salaries are usually calculated in terms of the monthly minimum salary, or *salário mínimo*, which is determined at a national level. The lowest workers in the hierarchy will earn one minimum monthly salary, and often times the plantation management will try to find loopholes around paying worker benefits. The work group leader may earn 1.5 salaries, while those above the work group leader will earn several salaries per month.

There are four general forms of work on the plantations, which include what are called (1) *diária*, or daily wage, which is also calculated on the basis of the *salário mínimo*, or minimum monthly salary; (2) *empreita*, or contract work, already discussed briefly above; (3) *produção*, or production-based work; and (4) *meia*, literally, half or sharecropping.

(1) *Diária*, or daily wage, is a fixed wage that a worker earns based upon a specific and set number of work hours per day, usually from seven in the morning until four in the afternoon. On any given day, a day-wage worker may have their activity directed toward any given end, which might range from tending to the cacao-drying ovens, weeding rubber groves, spraying fungicides, or repairing fences. On most plantations, a day wage would normally be calculated as a fraction of a monthly minimum salary, and would be a guaranteed monthly wage. In other words, under the *diária* system, workers are not actually paid a daily wage but rather a monthly salary in addition to various guaranteed benefits. On the other hand, medium and small sized holdings may actually pay an actual daily wage for the occasional *clandestino*, or clandestine, day worker. These daily wages are calculated as a fraction of the monthly minimum salary, and as the day wage would not include any benefits as it would be paid under the table, they wage day would be slightly higher than that paid to a salaried worker.

Under the *diária* system, there is less incentive for the worker to increase productivity, and, consequently, there are more incentives for plantation managers to exert pressure over

⁷⁷ Fn44.

workers. Lázaro described work on the plantations that illustrated these conditions: “And [working] for others—those who are fazendeiros—the group leader doesn’t even want there to be a break. [Work is always] from seven to noon, and then from [one] to four.”⁷⁸ Around noon, there would be an hour break for lunch.

(2) *Empreita*, or contract work, is a contract between the landowner and a worker (or group of workers) that is aimed at completing a specific and finite set of work activities for a pre-specified amount of money. A work contract arrangement might involve clearing a specified plot of forest for planting; planting a specified number of cacao or rubber seedlings in a grove that has been prepared for planting; grafting a specified number of young cacao trees with more productive varieties; weeding a particular field; and so on. A work contract might also include a combination of any of the former activities. For example, it might specify that the worker is to clear a bit of forest and plant it in order to fulfill the contract. The duration of a work contract might be executed over a period of days, weeks, or perhaps even months. Work contracts are employed both by large-scale plantations, as well as by medium scale plantations and smallholders. In these latter cases, contracts might be made *por boca*, or by word of mouth, instead of drawing up an official contract.

Under an *empreita* system, since both the amount of work and the amount of compensation are fixed in advance, there is a greater incentive for the worker to increase productivity and plantation managers have less incentive to exert day-to-day control over workers’ activities. Workers can increase their productivity by, for example, bringing along spouses, children, or friends to help with the work. Family members, in most cases, would not be directly compensated for their contribution. In the case of non-family members that might be brought in to help with the work—whether friends, neighbors, or anyone else—the contract holder might compensate those workers by offering day wages to those workers or perhaps by exchanging work days.

(3) *Produção*, or production, is a variable pay system based on output, similar to a piece rate system. Like a work contract, this form of work is also aimed at specifiable and measurable work activities, but the magnitude of work and compensation is not set. A production work arrangement might include a fixed amount of compensation for every tree that is fertilized; a

⁷⁸ “E pa os outo, os cara que é os fazendeiro, o cabo de turma quer qui, qui num tenha nem um descanso. Das sete às doze. Das doze às quatro.”

fixed rate for every tree that is grafted; a fixed rate for each *arroba*⁷⁹ of dried cacao or each kilogram of dried rubber that is produced. For example, on one regional plantation in 2010, for example, the workers received R\$15 for each arroba of dried cacao, and 18 cents per kilo of rubber that they produced.⁸⁰ Local market prices for one arroba of cacao during this period varied anywhere between R\$60 to R\$80 per arroba, and thus the workers received only 18.75 to 25% of the value, which is far less than what a sharecropper would make. Other tasks, especially those requiring more specialized skill such as tree grafting, can allow a worker to earn the equivalent of two or three *diárias* in a single day.

Like the *empreita* system, the *produção* system affords the worker a greater degree of autonomy within the plantation work regime while increasing the possibility for monetary return, while minimizing the need for management. In other words, the worker sets their own limit to the exploitation of their own labor, while the owners and managers further reduce their own effort. Furthermore, as with the *empreita* system, and depending on the nature of the work task, the worker can bring along their family or contract another worker in exchange for a day wage.

(4) *Meia*, or “half,” is a form of sharecropping. Terms of sharecropping arrangements vary, and may range from an equal 50-50% division to a 40-60% division of the proceeds. In the former case, the sharecropper might be responsible for the costs of fertilization and other inputs, while in the later arrangement the landowner might keep the greater share of the harvest but is responsible for covering production costs outside of labor. Sharecropping arrangements may be a long term agreement to cultivate a set of cacao or rubber groves, or both; or it may be a short term agreement aimed at harvesting a particular crop. Clove, for example, is often times harvested in *meia* arrangements.

Justo described the time when he worked on a local plantation as a “sharecropper” (*meieiro*), or a “partner” (*parceiro*):

I worked as a partner in that area [called] block eight there...I worked there, [my share] was 40%. If I collected 100 arrobas of cacao, I kept forty...Everything there was 40%. And there was one miserly circumstance...If [the manager] passed [by block eight] and saw the *roça* in need of thinning, the weeds high, and the cacao unharvested, he sent

⁷⁹ An arroba is a unit of weigh equivalent to 15 kilograms.

⁸⁰ Fn415.

others to harvest [the cacao], and discounted [those costs from your share]. He discounted it...At the end of the month, you danced about with nothing.⁸¹

Circumstances such as these are sometimes compounded by other conditions that are built into the partnership agreements. While under basic *meia* arrangements the sharecropper simply receives a fixed percentage of the harvest in exchange for covering 100% of the labor costs, the *parceiro* system attempts to shift other production costs onto the workers through what are frequently called “deductions” (*deduções*) or “discounts” (*descontos* or *descontes*) on the workers’ share of the harvest. These deductions might include technical assistance (*assistência técnica*); road upkeep costs; fertilization costs, which, instead of being covered solely by the plantation, might be split 50%; tractor (*bisouro*) and other maintenance (*manutenção*) costs; and office (*ecritório*) costs. Two people suggested that if the *parceiro* is lucky, they will end up with a share of between 30-35% of the total harvest. Presumably, unlucky *parceiros* may end up with an even smaller share of the harvest. Luck, in some of these cases, may depend on the quality of the groves over which one is given control. All of these circumstances, and the *parceiro*’s earning power, may be further complicated by drops in cacao off-season, or the *paradeiro*, when production is very low. During these times, many plantation workers are forced to buy very basic goods on credit, which would be repaid during the harvest season.⁸²

Still, like the contract and production based systems, sharecropping arrangements afford workers greater autonomy and also allow workers to bring in family members and sub-contract to other workers. Depending on the nature of the agreement, sharecropping arrangement may offer workers more long-term security than work contracts or production-based work arrangements. Stable plantation through a work card (*carteira assinada*), earning a fixed day wage based upon the minimum monthly salary, could similarly provide a measure of security, but at the cost of more frequent interaction and subordination to plantation management. The worker’s pay, based on the national salary standards, was not negotiable in these circumstances. Whether or not one worked as a sharecropper, contractor, or regular wage laborer with a work

⁸¹ “Aqui eu trabalhava de parceria, naquela área do broco oito ali...Eu trabalhava ali, era 40%. Se eu colhesse cem arrobas de cacau eu tinha quarenta...Aí tudo era quarenta por cento. E também tem uma circunstância miserável...Se ele passasse e visse uma roça sem disbotar, sem o mato alto, e o cacau sem culê, ele mandava culê, ele descontava. Descontava...No final do mês você que dançava sem nada.”

⁸² Fn295, Fn297-298.

card depended less upon people's choices and preferences, but more based upon what kind of work was available.

3a. *Plantation Work & Sources of Autonomy*

In general, many workers appeared to prefer work contracts and production based labor over salaried (*carteira assinada*) work. One man named Diogo, whom I had interview the first time I visited the region in 2002, expressed very strong preferences toward that end:

[Diogo]: Living salaried on the plantations—to me, it's a kind of slavery...You can't wait for the rain to pass under cover of some tree...If the supervisors see you—they immediately get worked up. You have wait there, under the falling rain...[The supervisor says]:

“You have to be there in [the rain]!”⁸³

A few themes begin to emerge in this description of salaried work (which he also refers to as *diária*). The first, and most important, is the ongoing relevance of a language of slavery. This theme is intertwined with two other themes interrelated with the overarching theme of slavery, namely, the theme of exposure of the body to the elements, and the control of activity by the management. Later in this same conversation, these themes become further developed. First, the person deepens the brief comparison to slavery by moving from analogy—from being similar to, or a kind of slave—to identity, to actually being slaves. In other words, it is no longer a comparison:

[Diogo]: I speak for the people here: we are slaves. The person who works doing day labor is a slave—they're slaves. Working in *diária*, right? “Diária”—we call it “diária.” From seven to four. From seven to four.⁸⁴

⁸³ “Agora viver assim, salariado, em fazenda—pra mim é um typo escravo...Não pode passar uma chuva de baixo de uma palha. Seus homens ver—fica grelhando logo. Cê tem que ta aí caindo chuva aí: ... ‘Tem que ta de baixo!’”

The imagery of the clock, and the activity of the body regulated by an external time-keeping system, appears in this context. Diogo explained that you might be able to take a quick break while on the job, perhaps while the manager was away. He explained, however, that you will be reprimanded if the supervisor catches you resting. He voiced a manager scolding someone:

“No—boy—what is this? Why don’t you work today? It can’t be like this. How are you going to get your salary?”⁸⁵

So instead of being able to determine the moments of rest and of activity, the worker must continue to work in the face of fatigue, management, and the natural elements, which are figures that emerge again and again:

You have to be [there with] a leaf over [your] head and [continue] working...Even if the rain is too heavy...well, [you] have to stay with that little leaf over your head...or [hit] the road.⁸⁶

The voice of the management appears again in the next line:

The man comes there, says, “Let’s get to work.” If not, he comes at you with that [scolding], says, “You are suspended. You were...standing still. You’re not working, you were standing still.”⁸⁷

In comparison to the day-wage and salary system, Diogo expressed a greater preference for both production-based and contract work. These forms of work have an interesting similarity to the slave provision grounds—the original idea of a *roça*—that, during the slave period, provided

⁸⁴ “Eu falo pro povo aí: que nós somos escravo. A pessoa que trabalha de diaria é escravo. É escravo. Trabalha de diaria, né? ‘Diaria’—nos chama ‘diaria.’ Das sete às quatro. Das sete às quatro.”

⁸⁵ “‘Não—rapaz—o que é isso? Porque você não trabalha hoje? Não pode ser assim, como é que você vai o seu salário?’”

⁸⁶ “Tem que ta uma palha na cabeça e trabalhando...Se mesmo a chuva tiver grossa demais...aí, tem que ficar com aquela palhinha na cabeça...ou na estrada.”

⁸⁷ “O homem venha lá, diz “Vamos trabalhar.” Se não, ele chega aquele, diz “tá supenso. Ce tava...parado. Não tá trabalhando, ce tava parado.”

slaves with some measure of autonomy from the slaveholders outside of plantation work, as was suggested in Chapter 2, Section 3. Another plantation worker overhearing the interview agreed that contract and production-based work were much preferred, and Diogo explained:

We have more of a chance to succeed. We have more. We work harder, but at the same time, if we have to take a break, we have one, we have a break. Under *diária*, there's no way to take a break.⁸⁸

As was suggested above, the opportunity to get contract or production-based depends more upon the kinds of work that each plantation makes available. When this kind of work can be procured, however, they provide the workers relatively more autonomy in their actual work, and they allow for greater returns on labor. He explained that under these systems, there are fewer people watching over your work:

There aren't so many to watch [your work]. It's more tranquil...In produção, we work at that hour that we want. If we're too tired, we take a rest—rest the body a little. And then continue again. [The end result] amounts to the same...or much more.⁸⁹

Several new themes emerge here. There are no overseers to manage your work, and the rhythm between strength and fatigue guide work activity. The link between the clock and work activity become less imposing under the *empreita* and *produção* systems:

You earn much more...you don't look at the time, that marked hour. You're not looking at that [clock]. You only see that you have more to earn. [You can] take advantage of the time.⁹⁰

He describes the worker's relationship to the work:

⁸⁸ “Tem mais vez. Tem mais. Se esforça mais, mais no mesmo tempo, se tiver de ter um descanso, temos, a gente tem um descanso. A diária não tem como ter um descanso.”

⁸⁹ “Não tem quantos a ver. É mais tranquilo...Na produção é trabalha naquela hora que a gente ver. Tá cansado demais, dá um descans—o corpo um pouquinho. E depois continua de novo. Dá mesmo...ou muito mais.”

⁹⁰ Você ganha muito mais...não tá vendo esse tempo, esse horário marcado. Não tá olhando para isso. Só tá olhando que você tem a ganhar mais. Aproveita o tempo.

He works much happier. There's a way to make—to produce more. Working happily. The people working in diária, they work, but they are suffering people, you see? They produce, but produce in anguish. Because the supervisor is standing on their feet...Here there's no chance, the person is...is a slave...I think they're slaves.⁹¹

Diogo goes on to express a common ethic about work, suggesting that the harder you work, the more you should be allowed to earn. The contract and production based systems, in particular, provided institutional means for the relationship between work and compensation to be manifest more directly. Another person overhearing the conversation interjected with a common adage, “Whoever works, God helps,”⁹² which was seen in Chapter 6 to have a relatively complex meaning. Diogo draws this idea into his own ongoing thought:

“Whoever works, God helps.”

And the man who works, who exerts himself, has to earn more too...Not just standing there—“I'm hungry.” Looking back [and worrying]:

“My children are hungry.”⁹³

Here Diogo seems to express what he takes to be the proper attitude toward one's suffering and hardship. Rather than merely remarking on the fact that one is hungry, that one's children are hungry, one needs to adopt an active stance. But adopting an active stance can be alternatively undermined or promoted by different kinds of working conditions:

Everyone needs their liberty. Because in most places, the worker, he works excessively...they give the production, [they] have the return [for the plantation]...but [the

⁹¹ “Ele trabalha mais alegre. Tem como dá— produzir mais. É, trabalhar alegre. As pessoas trabalha de diaria, trabalham, pessoas sofrida, é—né? Produiz, mais produz angustiado. Né? Porque o homem ta no pé e tal...Aqui não tem vez, é uma pessoa...é escravo...Eu acho que é escravo.”

⁹² “Quem trabalha, Deus ajuda.”

⁹³ “‘Quem trabalha Deus ajuda.’//E o homem que se trabalha, se esforça, tem que ganhar também...Não é ficar lá— ‘Eu to com fome.’ Olha para traz assim://‘Os meus filhos ta com fome.’”

plantation]...doesn't give [the workers their] freedom. [The workers] are prisoners, a kind of captive. And [they] are only limited to that little earning.⁹⁴

In Brazil, to say that someone is in captivity, or *cativeiro*, is another way of saying that the person is living under slavery. Here, the condition of slavery is constituted by a cycle of alienation from the products of one's labor, or a lack of adequate return on labor. But even there, while working on the plantation among friends, they might imagine better lives and a better world where their relationship to their work might be different:

Only imagining [a better life], talking with their friends on the [plantation]:

“Things are bad, it's difficult here.”

Then they become despondent.⁹⁵

But when the workers are faced with the results of their work as their own, and not just for the plantation, this seems to have an enlivening effect:

And the more the worker earns, the more [the worker feels] strength and willingness [to work]. Because man is a worker, and the more he earns, the more strength and will he has to work. Isn't that how it is? I think it is.⁹⁶

Other aspects of plantation labor seemed to eviscerate the potentially social dimensions of laboring, including the regular presence of the group leader, and the occasional arrival of the plantation manager in the fields. One man remembered what it was like when the workers heard the sound of the motorbike that the manager used to travel around the plantation:

⁹⁴ “Todo mundo necessita a liberdade, dele. Porque na maioria dos local, é o operario, ele trabalha excessivo...eles dá produção, tem o rendimento...Mais eles...não dão a liberdade. São prisioneiros, tipo cativeiro. E é limitado só naquele ganinho.”

⁹⁵ “Só imaginando, conversando com os amigos na roça. “Tá ruim, tá difícil.” Aí fique desanimado.”

⁹⁶ “E quanto mais é o operário ganha, mais a força e a vontade. Porque o homem é um trabalhador, quanto mais ele ganha, mais tem a força e a vontade de trabalhar. Não é não? Eu acho que sim.”

“Look out, it’s the manager!”

When we heard the motorbike, [someone would cry out]:

“Look out!”

The manager was passing by. Whoever was [working] next to you had to run into the roça...run straight away into the roça [to get away from your side]...

Back then, who was [daring enough] to chat [with other workers], even for one second? If you talked for one second, you were afraid of [the manager]...If another friend was also talking with us, asking us something...[even if] we are working...When we heard the motorcycle, we ran away from our friend, and our friend also went away from us.⁹⁷

The fear here was that the manager might think the workers were just talking and not working, and that they would receive a suspension or warning, what are called *suspensão* or *advertência*, accompanied by a pay dock for one or more days. He recalled the words and sound of the manager’s gruff voice:

“I passed by there on the motorbike and I saw you talking there, boy. I saw you talking there. Watch yourself! If not, you’re going to have your two weeks [wage] discounted!”⁹⁸

Fear of the management, fear of having one’s wages reduced because of the threat of suspension or and docks in one’s pay, all of these mediated plantations workers’ relationships to their work, to the plantation hierarchy, to other workers, and, above all, to the clock:

⁹⁷ “‘Ó, o gerente’//Via moto://‘Ó!’//O gerente passar. As vez quem tava assim na beira, tinha que correr pa dento da roça, né? Correr logo pa dento da roça...//Antigamente quem era que batia, batia um papo um segundo? Batia um papo um segundo já com medo dele...Outo camarada também tivesse conversando com agente, perguntando alguma coisa, agente ta tabaiando...quando nós via a moto, agente já saía da beira do camarada, o camarada também saía.”

⁹⁸ “‘Eu passei por lá com a moto e vi voce bateno um papo lá, rapaz. Eu vi voce bateno um papo lá; ó voce! Senão, voce vai na sua quinzena descontado.’”

With that [fear] we would never talk, not even go out of the roça, [but instead] just stayed there working, from 7 to 12; from 1 to 4.⁹⁹

3b. Plantation Work & the Potential for Respect and Recognition

It does not follow, empirically speaking, that people did not actually talk, or that the fear of the management in these different cases was so overriding that workers were completely docile and subdued. The above example shows that people in fact did engage in conversation and develop relationships, and when they heard the manager coming, they simply hid their interactions. But they did not always merely hide, either, especially under circumstances when the workers thought they had a concern that overrode the plantation rules. In a conversation with a plantation worker named Sérgio, he shared a story about conflict with a plantation manager:

There was a manager there by the name of Alan who was really mean-spirited, nobody liked him because he truly was a mean-spirited person. And well, [one day] we got into an argument—it came to an argument because...it was raining and we stopped [working for] a bit to let the rain pass. Well, [that] was the moment when he showed up and found us [sitting there, waiting for] the rain to pass. He thought nobody should stop [working] for the rain to pass. Then I said to him that nobody could withstand the falling rain all day long.¹⁰⁰

If the plantation workers were not merely docile and subdued, the plantation managers, likewise, were not simply unhuman and mean. Some of them treated the workers with respect. In my conversation with Mateus and Francinha, Mateus suggested that during his years as a plantation worker, he generally had good relations with the plantation managers, who usually treated workers well enough:

⁹⁹ “Agente já com aquilo num ia bater papo, nem saía da roça, só tinha que ficar lá dando sistência, de 7 as 12; de 1 as 4.”

¹⁰⁰ “Tinha um gerente lá por nome Alan que era muito ruim, ninguém gostava dele, porque ele era aquela pessoa ruim de verdade mesmo. E aí a gente um dia chegou à discussão, chegou à discussão porque...tava chovendo e aí a gente parou um pouco pra passar a chuva. Aí, foi o momento que ele chegou e encontrou a gente passando a chuva. Ele achou que não deveria a pessoa parar para passar a chuva. Aí eu falei pra ele que ninguém aguentava tomando chuva o dia todo.”

They treated [the workers] well because, well, we worked as long as we saw that—that things would work out. There was no—[the manager] didn't oblige the person to be there—[the people] worked as long as they wanted, until [the plantation] no longer wanted them or [the worker] wanted to leave, and they went without any [problem].”¹⁰¹

If in the early period, plantation laborers were hard to come by, then it would make sense that plantation managers who regularly mistreated the workers, causing them to leave the plantation, would not meet with much success as a plantation manager. If a worker's relationship to the management was conflicted, then the worker could simply leave to find work elsewhere. At a minimum, then, plantation managers would have to respect the workers' sense of self-respect. Indeed, some workers like Mateus recalled fairly good working conditions on the plantations:

For my part, I'll tell you that I've never worked on any plantation where I didn't feel good—where I didn't feel good. I worked on every [plantation] with pleasure, because everyone treated me properly. I was a person that—I worked, everyone liked my work. Well, and in the end, I have nothing [bad] to say about any place where I worked. The people who look over my work, they also never said nothing [bad] to me, and I also have nothing [bad] to say about nobody. Thank God, they're all my friends.¹⁰²

In this case, it appeared that this worker and the plantation managers had at least a minimal measure of mutual regard for one another.

On other occasions, relationships between plantation workers and the management seemed to offer somewhat deeper moments of acknowledgment and self-affirmation. Emanuel recalled becoming well-known for the quality of his work and had received acknowledgment from numerous plantation managers. Not only did they acknowledge him, but they could

¹⁰¹ “Tratava bem porque, bom, a gente trabaiaiva até quando visse qui, qui dava. Num tinha—ele num obrigava a pessoa ta—trabaiava inthé quando eles quissem, quando eles num quissem mais ou quiria ir imhora, ia sem maior—”

¹⁰² “Eu pra mim lhe digo assim eu nunca trabaiei em fazenda em lugar nenhum fora do meu, fora de meu prazer. Tudo eu trabalhava cum prazer, porque todo mundo me tratava diretho. Eu era uma pessoa qui—eu trabalhava, todo mundo gosta de meu trabalho. Bom e tudo e finarmente, num thenho o qui dizer de lugar nenhum qui eu trabaiei, o pessuá qui toma conta de seu trabalho, tomem nunca me dizia nada, tomém num thenho o qui dizer de pessoas nenhuma e pronto, graças a Dheus todos são meus amigo.”

recognize his work because of its quality. Emanuel remembered occasions when one plantation owner would receive guests from other plantations, and show off the workers' efforts:

Sometimes he met with people from outside [the plantation], or he would get them and bring them [to visit.]. When they showed up there [the plantation owner would announce]:

“The person who did this work was Such-and-Such.”

The quality of work, in this context, might be measured by how much one harvested, but also, for example, by the result of one's clearing weeds (e.g., if they had been cut to the root), or whether a worker cut too deeply when tapping a rubber tree. Emanuel recalled several occasions when his own work had gained a measure of recognition:

[Some plantation owners] already recognized my work from other plantations [where I worked]—the plantation owners already knew—they knew me—

“This work here—the person who did this was Emanuel, wasn't it? Is he here at your plantation?”

[The owner] said: “He is.”

“I recognize it immediately. This work here, he's the one who did it.”

“Yes, it was him. He works here on my plantation.”¹⁰³

He remembered being sought after by plantation managers to work at different plantations in the region.

¹⁰³ “As vez ele se entendia com as pessoa fora, ou ele pegava e levava, chegava la: ‘Quem fez esse serviço aqui foi fulano.’ Que já conhecia meus trabalho das faz—dos fazendeiro da região já conhecia, me conhecia. ‘Esse trabalho aqui quem fez foi seu Emanuel, num foi? Ele ta aqui na sua fazenda?’ Disse: ‘Ta.’ ‘Eu conheci logo. Essa manutenção aqui foi ele que fez.’ ‘Foi ele mesmo. Trabalha aqui na minha fazenda.’”

Relationships such as these help to clarify some of the different moments and opportunities afforded by respect. On the one hand, respect means the non-transgression of the boundaries established by the hierarchies and other regimentations of plantation life, such as the clock and the worker hierarchy. In the case cited above, earning the respect of the plantation managers and owners, means, on the one hand, that the worker is acknowledged as capable and trustworthy in the execution of his or her work—that is, capable and trustworthy in maintaining the boundaries and regiments of plantation life.

On the other hand, the earning of respect, as in the above example, goes beyond a formalistic kind of respect and begins to merge with forms of esteem that seem to occasion moments of social warmth and mutual identification. The worker begins to see him or herself, in other words, in the positive regard of the plantation owner; and perhaps for a moment, the social distance between worker and plantation manager is reduced as they come to identify their activity as having a shared purpose.

While these kinds of respect and esteem were not by any means enjoyed by all plantation workers, such occasions offer moments of affirmative self-understanding that may exceed the forms of self-understanding that are more commonly available on the plantations and in the wider social world, more generally. Other moments of recognition afford potentially transformative experiences. This same individual, while working as a rubber tapper on a nearby plantation, recalled another situation when this same plantation owner called on him one day:

“Mr. Emanuel,” he called me into his house.

“I’d like to talk with you (*o senhor*) a bit. I see you working here. You’ve got a high standard—you’re not literate, but I see that you’re very experienced in things. And me, I’ve got this plantation, but I’m a little—well, I still don’t have much experience. I don’t have the proper orientation to run things. But you’re an experienced man. You’ve already worked on the other plantations in this region. And well, you see, there’s this work that needs to be done.”¹⁰⁴

¹⁰⁴ “‘E seu Emanuel,’ me chamou na casa dele.//‘Eu quero conversar um pouco com o senhor. Vejo o senhor trabalhano aqui. O senhor tem uma norma assim de um, o senhor não tem a leitura, mas o senhor ta é bem tarimbado nas coisas. E eu tenho a fazenda, mas eu estou um pouco, ainda num tem bem...a orientação de coisa pa fazer. E o senhor que foi home experiente, já trabalhou operário de firmas, então tem tal serviço pa fazer.’”

What the plantation owner was saying here was that he simply did not know how to perform the work that needed to be done, and he was asking Emanuel for help in getting it done. Emanuel replied giving basic verbal explanations of how different tasks were supposed to be done:

“Doctor, to do that job, it’s like this, this, and that—depending on how much work is required. It’s however you want it, sir, however you want it.”¹⁰⁵

At this point, in Emanuel’s narrative, the plantation owner admits his incapacity to perform—let alone plan—the plantation work:

[Then the owner] said:

“No! It’s not however I like it. It’s that I really don’t know what to have done. So I’d like someone who can follow me around, who can start the work, so that I can see how it’s done. Because otherwise, I won’t be able to plan for what other work needs to be done. Because I’m lost, and I don’t know how the work’s done.”¹⁰⁶

At this point, the plantation owner agreed to put himself and the rest of the rubber tappers under Emanuel’s tutelage during the afternoons. Although this is not entirely explicit in the narrative, it appears that when the trainings began, Emanuel was still expecting the plantation owner to lead the way. The plantation owner had to explain to Emanuel that he would be leading the trainings, describing what there was to be done, and giving all of the explanations of how to do those things. At this point in the narrative, then, the plantation owner reiterates his deeper level of dependency on Emanuel:

“No, it’s you, sir, it’s you who’s to lead [the trainings]. I can’t explain anything because I just don’t know how! How can I give [any explanation]—how can I do that?...I can’t

¹⁰⁵ “‘Doutor, tal serviço pa fazer é assim, assim, assim, depender pela manutenção, hum, como o senhor quer, como quer.’”

¹⁰⁶ “Ele disse: ‘Não! Não é como eu quero. É porque eu não sei. Então, quero uma pessoa que saiba me seguir, que é pra começar a fazer que é pra eu ver, que aí eu num vou pranejar como é—porque eu to perdido que eu num sei como é que faz.’”

say that it's this way, when it's not that way. [I couldn't tell you] when you're doing anything incorrectly. You, sir, are doing the trainings, however you feel it's best. You've worked on the plantations, you know how it is done. It's you, sir, who knows how to do it. Me—as far as I'm concerned—I'm lost.”

There are a few things that are notable in this narrative. First, is the conspicuous use of the honorific form, “o senhor,” which, in the narrative, is how the plantation owners addresses Emanuel. *O senhor*, which literally translates as “lord” or more on the order of “sir” or “mister,” instantiates an esteeming of the addressee by the addresser. Under typical social circumstances, the use of this honorific form indexes the durable social hierarchy and restates the inequality between the elevated addressee and humbled addresser. In this narrative, the hierarchical positions of the addressee and addresser are reversed.

This reversal hardly amounts to a wholesale inversion or negation of the social hierarchy, as this endures in most every other respect, nor does it represent a temporary “inversion” of the social hierarchy, as has been suggested for ritualized festivities like the Brazilian carnival. This case also does not seem to count as a case of what Bourdieu called a “strategy of condescension” (1991:68). The reversal here is more subtle and perhaps more unexpected with respect to its effects on the social hierarchy.

Situations like the one described above, in which esteem is accorded to workers by their superiors, has the effect of elevating the workers' self-esteem, without directly challenging the social inequalities that inform workers' self-understandings. In these cases of being esteemed, workers may develop a higher self-esteem insofar as they are able to fulfill the range of social roles that are available to them. Workers may even become exemplary in their role as a “good worker,” but becoming exemplary as such does not necessarily change their self-understanding as being members of a subordinate class within a larger social hierarchy. In other words, workers who are exemplary at fulfilling a subordinate role ultimately reaffirm the social hierarchy. In other words, esteeming the workers for their work does not address the hierarchical maldistribution of self-esteem.

The second situation described here is more subversive with respect to roles and the social hierarchy. The role of the plantation owners and managers alike is to plan, to order others in the execution of those plans, and to evaluate the results of the activity. In other words, the

plantation owners and managers simultaneously define the ends, determine what means are to be employed to achieve those ends, and evaluate whether or not means and ends have been properly brought together. These are at least some of the important aspects of the plantation owner's or manager's role. In properly fulfilling this role, the plantation owners reaffirm their position and the generalized hierarchical relationship between the order of owners and workers.

In the narrative just described, however, the plantation owner resoundingly fails in fulfilling his role, and does not even have the capacity to begin to exercise it properly. The plantation owner admits his deep dependency on an illiterate rubber tapper, while simultaneously acknowledging the rubber tapper's superiority to him, both in the planning and execution of relevant work tasks. The plantation owner is, in a sense, somewhat humbled and rendered more modest.¹⁰⁷ Whereas in cases of condescension, following Bourdieu, there is a feigned assumption of humility by a superior in order to gain symbolic capital, what occurred in the situation described here was a public admission of a real incapacity and a real inferiority, at least in this restricted domain of social practice. There is no pretense here, and this occurs in the face of all of the other plantation workers to whom Emanuel was placed in the role of tutor. This is why this situation cannot be taken to be an instance of condescension in Bourdieu's sense.

Furthermore, the worker is afforded an opportunity to inhabit the planter's role of planner and evaluator. At the same time, however, the worker does not cease to be a worker. As noted previously, the social hierarchy still endures in most respects—most notably in the property relationship between owner and worker. This is the reason why what is described here is not a simple reversal in which the worker and the owner merely switch places, leaving the hierarchy untouched. The reversal *does* involve a reversal as each experiences the other's role. The owner has the opportunity to experience humbleness—and moreover, the humility of being humbled in the face of a social inferior. Beyond the immediate experience of humiliation, the plantation owner takes on a more durable form of humility in the estimation of his abilities and degree of independence from others.

The rubber tapper, more interestingly, has the opportunity to *experience* and *practice* the role of the owner, and to do so in the view of, and in relation to, the plantation owner. As noted

¹⁰⁷ In this case, the plantation owner's "humbling" was not the outcome of an embarrassing or "humiliating" situation that the owner suffered. Rather than having another force him to see his own inabilities and limitations, thereby humiliating him, the plantation owner seems to readily admit to his own incapacities. Other cases might involve actual humiliation.

above, however, the worker continues to be a worker as there is no pretense that this has ceased. This is perhaps the most relevant and interesting circumstance, and the reason why this situation cannot be thought of as a simple reversal. That the worker continues as a worker may be an occasion for looking pessimistically at this situation. Nothing has really changed in the worker's relationship to the plantation owner, and, to be sure, not much has changed.

The kind of experience that has occurred, I would like to propose, is more profound and much more important, and has two aspects:

1) The worker has an experience of an authority figure—the plantation owner—in a moment of failure (insofar as the owner does not fulfill his role) and a moment of acknowledged inferiority. The worker comes to see the actual fallibility of the plantation owner. That one plantation owner has been shown to be fallible suggests the possibility that any other plantation owner, or any other figure of authority generally, can be similarly fallible. In short, the shine of authority becomes somewhat dulled. The workers, who have similarly been shown to be fallible through their subjection to discipline through plantation work, find themselves on a similar footing—one of an emerging and inchoate equality—with the plantation owners.

2) This particular worker, a rubber tapper, was first affirmed and esteemed in his role and capacity as a worker, or as a unifier of means to their ends. And now, while remaining and continuing to experience himself as a worker, he is also given the opportunity to exercise his capacity as the creator, definer, and evaluator of ends. In other words, this worker experienced the unification of both roles, typical of the worker and of the owner, in one material body.

The last aspect of this experience shows the worker that what were formerly separate roles, and constituent elements of a social hierarchy, can be collapsed. Although this experience of a non-alienated self was only momentary—the unification of a wider range of its creative and active capacities, what might colloquially called *planning*, *commanding*, *executing* (or laboring)—it pointed toward the real possibilities for future experience.

In the end, the worker remains a worker and is only given license to occupy a new role—no matter how radical—by the plantation owner. The reason underlying this is the simple fact that the plantation owner is just that, the *dono*, or owner. This fact is never lost on anyone. The land—that physical and material space through which the interplay of planning, commanding, and executing occurs, and the place in which various means and ends are realized in time—belongs to another person that can wholly remove the worker from that space.

Still, I would like to suggest that experiences like as Emanuel's, and their potential consequences, are not uncommon. Such situations reveal that the social hierarchy has potential fractures, and some participants either fall short of, exceed in, or excel beyond their given roles in a manner that points toward the possibility of leveling social hierarchies. In my time in the region, I have recorded several structurally similar stories in which a socially subordinate person, through a series of actions, comes to temporarily usurp the superordinate position of a social other. Unlike the story above, some of these other narratives suggest ways in which social subordinates were able to show themselves to be equal to or somehow better than their social superiors.

Such stories become entextualized and the occasion of their telling becomes a moment of what not only appears to be self-celebration but also a celebration of the underclass, more generally. Furthermore, the telling of these stories also seems both to indicate the occurrence of, and simultaneously make a small contribution to, a potentially larger sea-change in social orientations, especially with respect to forms of social authority and roles, as suggested above. Most importantly, these stories seem to indicate a quest to recover the grounds for social equality in social relationships.

3c. The Limits of Respect and Recognition as Social Goods

In the end, although plantation work may have afforded some sort of respect and recognition, people could not live from these alone. Mateus explained this in the following terms:

[Despite all] that I worked, it wasn't enough to build a future—no future at all.¹⁰⁸

I asked him, for example, if they had a house of their own at the time when they were working on the plantations:

[We] didn't have nothing. My life...was living on the [land] of others, like I told you here. [We] made a little straw hut on others' lands, the others gave [us the space to build], [and we] built a little hut and lived there.¹⁰⁹

This fact would help to explain the high mobility of couples like this one:

We worked more clandestine...[there were] places we worked one month [or] two, [and then we] went out to other places and [worked there]. That was life.¹¹⁰

Other former plantation workers reiterated a similar tension between what they took to be reasonable working conditions, access to the money economy, and an inability to find any substantive security or create a stable future. I asked Cezar, who had migrated to the region for work, if he thought life had improved for the former posseiros who had turned to plantation work, or if living conditions had gotten worse upon the return to plantation work. He replied categorically:

It improved, improved. It improved for everyone.¹¹¹

Even some members of the last generation of posseiros viewed the arrival of the plantations as an improvement. According to Alonso:

¹⁰⁸ “Qui eu trabaiei num deu pa construir futuro—futuro nenhum.”

¹⁰⁹ “Não tinha nada, a minha vida...era morar pelo dos outo, qui nem eu lhe disse aqui. Fazia aquela barraca de paia, pelo therreno dos outo, os outo dava, fazia aquele barraco e aí morava.”

¹¹⁰ “A gente mermo tabaiava clandestino...lugar qui tabaiava um mês, dois, saí pa outos cantos e pronto, a vida era aquela.”

¹¹¹ “Milhorou, melhorou...milhorou pa todo mundo.”

This region here improved after Suor Plantation arrived in here...That was [when] we developed a little more—in [our] work and in possessing something. That was when we [started] to have [something] and to work—when we got some money, to put some money in [our] pockets...After these firms arrived here, that [was when] we always worked like that [for money]...I worked for about thirty years there at that firm [Suor Plantation].¹¹²

But many people, such as Caio who had migrated to the region for work, expressed the tension between improvement in the region and continued material poverty:

It improved plenty, developed almost 100—100%, right? For you to see...almost nobody, nobody had a car [in the early years], nobody had a bicycle, nobody even spoke of motorbikes. [You could] not even [find] a bicycle at that time if you wanted, nobody had [one]. Workers earned lots of money, but didn't have [anything]. Didn't have a house, nobody had any land...They [the plantation owners] didn't permit the people to have [enough] income [that they could save]. If...the rich [were] saying everything was [theirs], right? How could the poor get anything?¹¹³

While working on the plantations, then, seems to have given people access to the money economy, working on the plantations was not a career through which one could build a secure future. In many cases, plantation workers lived a rather itinerant life, moving from plantation to plantation and following better opportunities as they arose.

Many people lived in housing provided by the plantations, and if no housing was provided, many workers were permitted to build their own provisional housing similar to the straw houses (*casa de palha*) or wattle and daub houses (*casa de taipa*) that were described in

¹¹² “Essa região daqui melhorou depois que chegou essa Suor aí pa dentro...Foi que a gente sempre desenvolveu mais um pouco, no trabalho e pessuí alguma coisa. Que a gente pessuí e trabalhar, quando nós arruma algum dinheiro pa botar algum dinheiro no bolso...Depois que essa firma chegou pra aí que a gente sempre trabalha muito aí nessa...Eu trabalhei uns trinta anos aí dento dessa firma.”

¹¹³ “Melhorou bastante, disinvolveu, quase 100, 100%, né? Que você ver, num tinha nem quase ninguém, ninguém tinha um carro, ninguém tinha uma bicicleta, ninguém falava em moto, nem sequer uma bicicleta naquele tempo ninguém tinha aí. Trabalhador ganhava muito dinheiro, mas num tinha. Num tinha uma casa, ninguém tinha um terreno...Eles também num liberava pras pessoa ter renda. Se...o rico dizendo tudo era dele né, como era que os pobre pegava o que?”

the Chapter 3. Few people had goods that stayed in one place—like houses or trees—and what few goods people did have, they took with them when they had to leave one plantation in search of work on another.¹¹⁴

Among these goods that could be taken with you, the primary one was the body and the ability, through a strong and healthy body, to labor. But even this kind of good was not a given, and just as one came into control over the body, one could similarly come out of dominion and control over the body proper. Life on the plantations and working for others over many years unhinged this connection between the self and dominion over the body. A common refrain about working for others—*pros outros*—is that one reaches the end of life with little to show except for a broken body:

I worked, used up all of my strength [working] on others' [lands]...I pray to God that my children don't go through what I went through [working] on others' [lands].¹¹⁵

One woman reflected on her old age and failing physical state, and the limitations this placed on her current activity such that, today, she is relegated to a small house in town, far away from the little *roça* that her family still owns in the countryside:

If I could, my—my goal is to have a *roça*. My intimacy [or intention] is [still] the *roça*.
[But] the *roça* broke me.^{116 117}

She explains, however—mirroring what Diogo had said previously about working under *diária*—that she lost her strength working under the supervision of others:

¹¹⁴ The reason workers leave one plantation for another may have to do with better earning opportunities (e.g., contract work versus day labor), problems or conflicts with management, or may have to do with attending to the needs of family members living in other parts of the region. Many workers can cite a relatively long list of plantations where they had worked. The Firestone plantation, however, does seem to have retained workers for longer periods, sometimes up through retirement.

¹¹⁵ “Trabaei, cabeí minhas força no dos outos...Peço a Deus pa meus fio nunca passar do qu’eu passei no dos outo.”

¹¹⁶ “Se eu pudesse a minha—a minha **intinação** é a *roça*. A minha intinação é a *roça*. *Roça* me acabou.”

¹¹⁷ An alternative and perhaps more literal translation of the “*roça broke me*” would be “the *roça finished* me.” Use of the verb *to ruin* also seems to be an appropriate translations. The meaning here, at any rate, is that working on the *roça* contributed to the ruining, decay, and destruction of her body.

[But] it wasn't on my own roça, I ruined myself more [working] on the roças of others. Because [when] we [are] working for oneself, [you don't] ruin yourself. If you have—you have a headache, you only go [to work] if you want. If you have any little pain, you go to [work on] the roça only if you want. If you don't want to, nobody—nobody obliges you to, right? And [working] on others' farms, whether or not you want to, [you] have to go. Whether sick or well, or laying in bed, you have to go. Because if you don't go, you don't eat. And [you also] can't give food [for others to eat]...[Working] for others is not like [working for oneself], [working] for others we have to fulfill that—that order. Because if you don't fulfill that order, you don't eat.¹¹⁸

3d. Food, Debt & Hunger

On many of the regional plantations, food was brought in on a weekly basis by one of the larger local grocery store owners from Ituberá. Caio explained:

It was that [guy]—who has a supermarket in Ituberá—who brought the groceries. Every week [he] brought groceries for us...He brought meat, beans, milk—whatever we asked for...We made our [own] note [of requests], and then he brought it. On the day that he came to bring groceries [it would be] for the whole little region here, all of the plantations...from here all the way near Suor Plantation.¹¹⁹

Another man named Justo, who arrived in the region around 1975 to work on the plantation, recalled that there was an open air market comprised of itinerant vendors who sold a wide assortment of goods near the entrance to the plantation. The vendors always only came on the workers' pay day:

¹¹⁸ “Num foi a minha roça, me acabei mais pela roça dos outo. Que a gente tabaiano pra si num se acaba. Se tiver—ta cum uma dor de cabeça, só vai se quiser. Se ta cum qoquer uma dorzinha, vai se quiser pa roça. Se num quiser ninguém, ninguém obriga, né? E a, e a roça dos outo, que queira, que não queira, them que ir. Ou duente ou bom a num ta na cama them que ir. Que se não for, não come. E nem dá cumida...Pus outo já num é assim, pus outo a gente them que ir cumprir aquela, aquela orde, porque se num cumprir aquela orde num come.”

¹¹⁹ “Esse...que tem um supermercado em Ituberá que trazia a feira. Toda semana trazia a feira pra gente...Ele trazia carne, feijão, leite, o que a gente pedia...Era a gente que fazia sua nota, era, aí ele trazia. No dia que ele vinha trazer uma feira pa região todinha aqui, todas fazenda...daqui até perto da Suor.”

From there at the gate...there were market tents...on pay day...[They] sold tomatoes, peppers, panties, underwear, clothes, towels, mattresses, [they] had everything there...It was called the open market...It was all tents.¹²⁰

On yet other plantations, there were on-site plantation stores where workers could buy their groceries, but of course at higher costs. These stores were called *cai duros*, which could be literally translated as a “fall down hard” or “fall down broke” or “fall on hard times.” After shopping at these plantation stores, one became financially broke. For many people, of course, these stores were the best available option since transport options for plantation workers were still limited, especially in the early years after the plantations arrived.

On some local plantations, it appeared that the *cai duro* stores were actually owned and operated by the plantation management, and not by the plantation owners themselves. Since many of the plantation owners in the region were absentee owners, this diminished their control of the plantations’ everyday operations. Sebastião suggested that the owner of one plantation only came once every eight or nine years. In many cases, it seemed that the extent of their involvement on the plantations was merely to receive their share of the profit.

As a consequence of such circumstances, some of the plantation managers seemed to have availed themselves of plantation resources and created various schemes through which they could make a little extra money for themselves. While it is difficult to piece together the precise mechanics of questionable money-making schemes, especially as it is part of the nature of such schemes to obscure their operation, the main scheme that emerged (at least two narratives) involved plantation managers operating their own grocery stores on the plantation grounds.

The plantation managers had control over all of the various bureaucratic means for collecting and selling the plantation production—whether rubber, cacao, or both—and, in turn, the distribution of payments to the various sectors of workers at all levels of the plantation hierarchy. In short, they controlled the sources of all revenue and expenditure. Since the owner had control over the disbursement of workers’ pay, in some cases they deliberately delayed payment. When payment was delayed, the plantation workers—in constant need of food—were

¹²⁰ “Dali do portão...ali era barraca de feira...no dia de pagamento...Vendia era tomate, era pimentão, era calcinha, era cueca, era roupa, era toalha, era colchão tudo tinha ali...Tudo tinha ali. Chamava feira livre...Aquilo ali tudo era barraca.”

forced to buy food from the plantation store on credit. These plantation stores, in both cases that I was able to record, appeared to be owned and operated by the plantation managers themselves. As a result, the plantation managers were able to force the plantation workers into an unfavorable exchange relationship by delaying payment and forcing them to purchase on credit at the plantation store. The first narrative presented a structure of relationships and exchange like this:

When we worked there, the payment came. The manager was named Ednalvo. [He] had a store there in the front of the last road there...Well, when he came with [our] payment, he arrived in the morning and said:

“Hey people, that miserly [plantation owner] didn’t send your money. What you’ll have to do is buy there [at the *caí duro*]. I’ll help you guys out.”

He bought merchandise there [in town] and then we bought it from him for the price that he wanted.¹²¹

In this case, as will be seen below, the plantation owner had nothing to do with sending or not sending the workers’ money, but was used as a scapegoat—cast as a greedy miser—in the plantation manager’s scheme. The manager actually had all of the money, but he was holding on to it so that the workers had to buy from him at his store.

The second narrative repeats the theme of delayed payment and the forced turn to the plantation store:

[The plantation manager] took the production [from the plantation], and he delayed our payment, because I say that the [profit from the] production went to him...Because if he was delaying [payment] on our end? [It was] because he went [eating for himself].¹²²

¹²¹ “Quando nós trabalhava aqui, vinha o pagamento. O gerente chamava Ednalvo. Tinha uma venda ali de frente ali a última rua...Aí quando ele chegava com o pagamento, ele chegava de manhã e dizia: ‘Ei pessoal, aquele miserave não mandou o dinheiro de vocês não. O jeito que tem é vocês comprar aí. Eu vou guentano vocês.’//Ele comprava mercadoria lá e a gente comprava na mão dele do preço que ele queria.”

¹²² “É a produção qui ele pegava, ele atrasava o nosso pagamento. Porque eu digo qui a produção ia pa ele...porque se ele atrasava o nosso lado? Porque ele ia—”

He makes a common gesture, putting his hand up to his mouth, indicating the action of eating. He was suggesting that he was embezzling the money for his own ends. He explained that at the time there was a high level of productivity at the plantation, both rubber and cacao, and that there was no reason for there to be insufficient revenue to make their payments in a timely manner.

And well, he delayed our payment. He set up a cai duro, and the cai duro—all of us ate at the CAI DURO—we all became ruined, broke. So I say he was pulling [all of the money for himself].¹²³

Such deceit was a common theme of plantation life, and this deceit led to further forms of exposure, suffering and hunger. According to Sebastião:

In the past, we ate deceived. [My] wife cried so [standing] above the fire, with [the feeling of] hunger underneath. [I often] came here [to the office],

“Where is the money?”

...One time, my wife was very sick, I went [to the office]:

“Ah! There isn’t any money, for you, [there is] no [money]. You—look—the fifteen days are over.”¹²⁴

As a consequence of these conditions of deprivation that existed on the plantations, many people suffered from hunger and had to resort to other means to feed themselves:

On the plantation, we worked day and night. [We] ate [feeling] more hunger than [we felt] our bellies full...My wife tirelessly went to fish [at the river] so that we could [have something to] eat and not die [from hunger].¹²⁵

¹²³ “E aí, nosso pagamento atrasava, ele botou um cai duro, e o CAI DURO—nós cumia tudo no CAI DURO—só ficava arrasado, puro. Aí eu digo qui ele tava puxano—”

¹²⁴ “Antigamente nós comia enrolada. A mulher cansou de chorar enriba do fogo com fome aí em baixo. Chegava cá: ‘Cadê dinheiro?’ ...Uma vez minha mulher tava assistida doente eu cheguei: ‘Ah! Não tem dinheiro não, pra voce não. Voce, olha, a quinzena acabou.’”

Resorting to fishing, hunting and trapping animals during one's free time—over the weekends, in the late afternoon and evenings—was an important theme:

I wore myself out roaming the forest, setting up snares. Putting out snares...[catching] every stupid possum. Rat. I caught [them all] and my wife would clean them, and then I went to [work in] the fields. When midday arrived, [the game I had caught] was already cooked. I ate. Went back to the roça again [to work some more], [and then] arrived [home] late. When Saturday came again: [I put out more] snares. My wife...[went out again] with a fishing line. And [we always] came here [to the office]—[always] nothing of [our] money, nothing of money.¹²⁶

Repeatedly in the interview, he returns to the office to check on their payment, which never seemed to come; the structure of the interview here seems to mirror the structure of their lived past:

When we came to the end of the two week [pay period], then Osvarado came—[the one] who handled payments...I went there [to see about our payment]...

[Osvarado]: “You don't have anything more, no. Of your two weeks [pay], you don't have anything else, what can you do?”

I said: “Man, what am I going to do, going hungry with [my] children and wife there—there [feeling] sick [from hunger]...what am I going to do?”

At this point in the interview, Sebastião voices the manager in a raised voice, only the first part of which was intelligible in the recording, as the other half of the response was more like an angry grumbling:

¹²⁵ “Na fazenda, é, trabaiava de dia a noite. Veio, comia mais fome que a barriga cheia...Minha mulher cansava de bater um azol aí pa poder nós comer pa não morrer.”

¹²⁶ “Eu se disgramava pela mata botano laço. Botano laço...cada burro de saruê. Rato. Eu pegava a mulher ficava pelano, eu ia pro campo. Quando chegava meidía já tava cozido, eu paco. Ia pa roça de novo, chegava de tarde. Quando era sábado outa vez: laço. A mulher...pro anzol. E chegava aí, nada de dinheiro, nada de dinheiro.”

“THERE’S NOTHING WE CAN DO!—”¹²⁷

Apart from fishing, trapping, and hunting, Sebastião finally resorted to begging for help from the plantation manager. One day he encountered the manager driving through and inspecting the plantation on his motorbike:

“Hey there, Alfredo!”

I told my story to Alfredo who was the manager, and he—well, he said:

“Hey Mr. Sebastião, there is nothing I can do.”

“But Alfredo, you’ve been living here [and known me] for so long, you’re going to let us die from hunger?”

He [then said]: “Give him a voucher [for the cai duro].”¹²⁸

On other occasions, however, he recalled the plantation manager being stingier when he asked to borrow some money:

[If you] asked to borrow some money, there was no way. My wife fell sick [one time], and I tirelessly went about:

“Oh, Alfredo, I want some—some money there, to take my wife into town.”

¹²⁷ “Que quando tabalhava quando chegava no fim da quinzena, aí vinha Osvarado—que tomava conta do pagamento...Aí eu chegava...Osvarado://‘O senhor não tem mais nada não, de quinzena, o senhor não tem mais nada não, o que é que vai fazer?’//Eu dizia: ‘Rapaz, como é que vou ficar com fome com filhos e a mulher lá—lá adoentada...aí como é que fica?’//‘NÃO TEM JEITO!’”

¹²⁸ “‘Ô Alfredo.’ Contava meu caso a Alfredo que era o gerente, aí ele—aí ele dizia: ‘É seu Sebastião, eu não tenho jeito a fazer.’ ‘Mas Alfredo voce tanto tempo morando aqui, voce vai deixar a gente morrer de fome?’ Ele: ‘Dá um valinho a ele aí.’”

“I don’t have any [extra money], no. I don’t have any, no. I don’t have any, no. I—I earn just like you do, I’m a [mere] employee. I don’t have any, no. I don’t have any.”¹²⁹

Here the plantation manager, who many people already suspected was stealing money from the plantation, feigned an equality with the interviewee, pretending that he was just the same as Sebastião in the plantation hierarchy—just an employee like anybody else.

On another occasion, when his wife had fallen particularly ill, he remembered the plantation bookkeeper acting somewhat more kindly with his family, and loaning him R\$5 with which he was able to buy a tin of Mucilon¹³⁰ porridge, with which he eventually nursed his wife back to health. He remembered the exact price of the can—R\$3.80—and he still recalled the personal debt he owed to the bookkeeper:

To this day, I owed a favor to Antonio Bookkeeper. [He] lives in the town. To this day, I owe a favor to that little guy.¹³¹

This situation reflected institutionalized relations of exchange that were built on asymmetrical relationships of coercive dependency. Not all of the plantations were set up in such a way that the management could act of their own accord—violating the trust of the owners, and violating the workers outright. Firestone, for example, appeared to have made good on payments to workers, as was commented on above. This contrast of Firestone with other plantations in the region may have been the occasion for comment, as regular payment may have been exceptional.

At any rate, even if not all plantation managers universally acted in the same exploitative manner, what is more important is that the institutional conditions and relationships for those kinds of action always obtained on the plantations. From the perspective of the workers, even if these kinds of outright exploitation were not always a living actuality, there was always the potential that such conditions could manifest over the course of future experience. As such, it might be suggested that the plantation workers’ sense for their future experiences was not one in which they could feel secure..

¹²⁹ “Pidia um dinheiro emprestado, já era. Minha mulé caía duente, eu cansava de: ‘Ô Alfredo, eu quero aí um, um dinheiro aí pa levar a mulé na cidade.’ ‘Num tenho não, num tenho não, num tenho não, eu, eu ganho qui nem o senhor, eu sou impregado, eu num tenho não, num tenho não.’”

¹³⁰ Mucilon is the name of an enriched breakfast porridge made by Nestle, which is marketed for infants.

¹³¹ “Até hoje eu devo favor a Antonio Escriturário. Mora na cidade. Até hoje devo favor aquele rapazinho.”

Depending on the good will of others, as seen just above, was a definite possibility in the face of suffering, but it was not guaranteed either. There was always the possibility that one might slip through the cracks if left at the mercy of good will alone. What was required was recourse to non-personalistic means of security that did not depend on the whims of individual intentionality and willing, on who the plantation manager or bookkeeper just happened to be at one time or another, whether or not those people were generous or greedy, or if they had a good will or were mean spirited. At this point, the state reappears in a different manner from that which was seen in Chapters 4 and 5—as an active party to dispossession—and provides new forms of recourse for plantation workers. The state now appeared as a form of authority that could be leveraged against that of plantation managers and property owners, who were the source of the misery that many people faced on a daily basis.

3e. Housing, Exposure, & The State

Caio recalled very unstable living conditions early on:

At that time it was only violence...At that time [it was] pure violence...people fought because of cachaça [liquor]...gambling, all of this was involved there, [it] led to many fights...it was [gun] shots, machetes there. What there was then were machete [fights]...The old [ones] in the beginning were not a joke!¹³²

Eventually, he explained, things got calmer as the *bravos*—the brave, angry, violent people—either left for other regions or even died off in the fights. I asked him if it was mostly single men living and working in the region at the time, or if there were families living there at the time, and Caio explained:

There were more single men...on the plantations. Because at that time in 1972, 1973 and before, if you had a plantation...you didn't have any houses [for the workers]...On Morro

¹³² “Naquele tempo é que era violência...Naquela época violência pura...o povo brigava por causa de cachaça...jogo, era tudo isso aí envolvido, aí era, dava muita briga...era tiro, era facão aí, aí rolava era facão...o véio de primeiro não era brincadeira!”

Plantation—we lived in a...shithole that was a wooden shack, 100 people lived there...It was big... beds like a type of bunk bed...It was very ugly, really sad business. We considered it to almost be a hell...Because [there were] people of every kind—good, bad, all mixed together.¹³³

I asked him about the plantation manager:

He treated [us] well. He treated us well. Now, the problem was the people, because he—whatever [problem], if [you] fought, [you] disappeared, [you] had to leave. Whoever went looking for problems on the plantations, he sent away...But he paid people okay.¹³⁴

Sometime around 1973, a group of people, whom he surmised were representatives from some state organization, arrived at the plantation driving a Chevy Opala. They were not from the plantation and their motives were initially opaque:

Some strange people came and they asked us some questions...very well educated [people], they really got after us, we told them everything...when [they took us in their car and we all] arrived at the main office, even the plantation manager was startled.¹³⁵

Caio and the other workers answered their questions, and they showed them around the plantation, their living quarters, and the like:

Then we showed them where we slept—on top of boards, because it was all made of boards—nobody had a mattress, [instead] it was just some sheets there. It was a hell.¹³⁶

¹³³ “Tinha mais home solteiro...nas fazenda. Porque naquele tempo em setenta e dois, setenta e três pa trás, você tinha uma fazenda...num tinha casa...Na Fazenda Morro mesmo—nós morava num...muquiço que era um barraco de tauba, morava cem pessoa...Era grande...cama assim, tipo beliche assim...Muito feio, um negócio muito triste mermo. A gente considerava quase como um inferno...Que é gente de toda maneira, é bom, é ruim, tudo musturado.”

¹³⁴ “Ele tratava bem. Ele tratava agente bem. Agora o pobrema era o povo, porque ele qualquer coisa, se brigava desaparecia, tinha que ir embora. Quem procurasse pobrema na fazenda, ele mandava embora...Pagava as pessoa direitinho.”

¹³⁵ “Veio um pessoal estranho e fez umas pergunta a gente...pessoa bem estudado, jogou duro em cima da gente, nós contou tudo...quando chegou na sede até o gerente se assustou.”

The team had gotten a group of the workers together and started asking them questions:

They got a group of us together there, in the shacks where we lived, and they took us to the plantation office, asked some questions about how much we earned. We learned that what we earned was little. They asked why we didn't have families, we discovered. And from that time, they did a project...on all the plantations they had to build houses—because all the men had the right to have a wife, right?¹³⁷

What he meant here, rather than suggesting that the men had a right to women as objects of possession, was that under their current living conditions, it was next to impossible to have mixed company, let alone families:

And well he [asked] why it was that we didn't have [wives] and we explained the situation. We told everything there, he took baseline [notes]—asked what the salary was that we earned, how much was enough to earn to have a woman at home, we explained everything—and I know that they came...[they started to make houses, started to make houses. Children in this—none of these plantations—you saw few children. Families at Morro Plantation, there were three families at that time. Well, when you least thought it, when it was in 1980, 1975, 1976, well it rained houses. They made a world of houses there and everybody—[the plantation manager said,] “I want family people, whoever doesn't have a family can go find one.” And I know that Brazil overflowed with even more people.¹³⁸

¹³⁶ “Aí nós mostrou onde era que dormia, por cima das tauba, que era tudo feita de tauba, ninguém tinha colchão, era botado uns lençol lá. Era um inferno.”

¹³⁷ “Aí foi uma vez que quando tava em setenta e três aí veio uma equipe...de Salvador e pegou um grupo de gente aí, nos barraco onde nós morava e levou pra sede, fez umas várias pergunta sobre nossos ganhos, nós discutiu quanto ganhava que era pouco, perguntou porque não tinha família nós discutiu e desse tempo, fizeram um projeto...em todas fazenda tem que fazer casa—porque todos os home tem o direito de ter uma mulé né?”

¹³⁸ “E aí ele dizia por que que era que não tinha e nós contava a situação. Contou tudo aí, ele levou base—perguntou o salário que nós ganhava, quanto era que dava pa ganhar, pa ter uma mulé em casa, nós expricou tudo—e sei que saiu...começou a fazer casa, começou a fazer casa. Criança nessa, nenhuma fazenda dessas, ce via poucas criança. Família na Fazenda Morro, tinha três famílias, naquele tempo. Aí, quando pensou que não quando foi em oitenta, setenta e cinco, setenta e seis, aí choveu de casa, fez mei mundo de casa aí e todo mundo—‘Quero gente de família, quem não tiver família pode apanhar família.’ E sei que barrotou o Brasil mais de gente ainda.”

The statist assumption, then associated with the Vargas dictatorship, was that marriages between men and women would lead to social order. He explained further that this situation was owed to the fact that many people had migrated to the region from elsewhere. He recalled the empreiteiros going to other municipalities recruiting people to work. Many of those who were recruited were single men, and I asked him if he thought the violence in the early period was owed to having such a large grouping of single men together. Caio agreed and explained:

We blew a lot of money...With women, in parties...Women and drinking...At the plantation, we had so much money that [the plantation owner] came to drop off...he left packages of money tied together with elastic bands, [that was our] payment. We really made a lot of money. But we went to the city and blew everything. Two, three days, drinking. Everyone [in the city] liked when we arrived there because, what were we? Tourism, right?¹³⁹

Caio speculated further about the relationship between male plantation workers, sex workers and the absence of families:

Oh mercy, well, when [we] went to the street, when we arrived in the street, [the] women did business all night long...At that time, nobody—nobody worried about getting married for that reason. Because the guy saw—he worked, had money in his pocket, [and said to himself], “Today I’m going to the street!” There he got two, three women, why would he want...Why would he have any interest in having a woman at home?¹⁴⁰

Caio suggested that they made enough money to buy everything they needed. I asked him if there was enough money to save after they had bought the basic necessities:

¹³⁹ “Nós gastava muito...Com mulher, nas quebrada...Mulher e bebida...Ali na fazenda, nós cansou de ter dinheiro que [o dono] vinha trazer...deixava os pacote amarrado na borracha, pagamento. Muito dinheiro mermo que nós ganhava. Mas nós ia pu, pa cidade e gastava tudo...dois, três dia, bebeno. Todo mundo gostava quando nós chegava que nós era o que? Turismo né?”

¹⁴⁰ “A misericórdia, aí quando ia pra rua que chegava na rua, mulé fazia comércio a noite toda...Aí, ia pa Pirai tinha uma mulé la, tinha uma mulé bonita, naquele tempo de uma mulé bonita...Naquele tempo ninguém, ninguém se preocupava pa casar por isso. Que o cara olhava, trabalhava, tava com dinheiro no bolso “eu vou pra rua hoje.” La ele pegava duas, três mulé, pra que ele quer...Pra que interesse de ter uma mulé em casa?”

There wasn't enough money because we blew it all on drink in the city...on pay day [after paying for groceries], we got the balance, we got [our balance and] went to town to blow it.¹⁴¹

When the weekend was over, they returned to the plantation, but some of them had run out of money to pay their way:

There were those who came walking. Many people went to the street, blew ALLLLLLL the money, [and had to walk] back to the plantation.¹⁴²

This distance would have been anywhere between 10 to 29 kilometers, or from six to more than 15 miles.

4. The State & The Legal Status of Plants

The deepening relationship of the state to the region brought about a series of changes in the institutionalized social practices that became available in the daily lives of workers.

Participation in plantation institutions and the formal money economy channeled workers into new forms of legal personhood and recognition by the state. Plantation workers—whether descended from the posseiros of the region, or migrants from other regions (where their parents might have also been posseiros)—had greater access to personal documents, such as birth certificates, work cards, social security numbers, and different forms and degrees of literacy became increasingly relevant in their lives. Different notions of rights—to adequate housing, to families—entered more deeply into people's vocabularies, and plantation workers themselves gained a legal language through which they could begin to conceive of different rights that were

¹⁴¹ “Dinheiro não dava porque a gente gastava na bebida na cidade...no dia do pagamento, pegava o saldo, já sabia. Ia pra rua gastar.”

¹⁴² “Tinha daqueles que vinha de pé. Muitas pessoa ia pra rua gastava o dinheiro toooodo e vinha pé até na fazenda...Nossa equipe tinha dinheiro pra nós todos os três dia ir pra cidade.”

owed to them.¹⁴³ One such right was to ownership over any physical improvements that workers voluntarily made on plantation lands or on others' lands generally. As will be seen below, this became a means through which Alvina, who was seen in earlier Chapters 3, Section 7b, and Chapter 4, Section 7d, would be able to press a legal claim to the plants she had planted against her in-laws' and Dr. Severino's attempts to dispossess her.

4a. *The Legal Affordances of Planting*

During the period following the military coup in 1964, a series of legal reforms in agrarian relations were passed that were aimed at placating and demobilizing the emerging peasant organizations that were gaining an increasingly strong political footholds throughout different regions of Brazil. These reforms included the 1964 Land Statute (*Estatuto da Terra*).¹⁴⁴ One effect of the statute was to bolster rural workers' claims to ownership over certain forms of property that are colloquially referred to as *bens de raíz*, literally, "root goods." The notion of root goods covers any form of durable improvement to property in land.

For plantation workers, these might include durable structures, such as a drying ovens, but more importantly and more typically, different kinds of valuable fruit-bearing trees. Planting a tree involves an initial outlay of labor: clearing a bit of ground and either planting a seed or transplanting a seedling. Over time, and with the continuous and relatively low-level application of care and attention over a number of years, the productive capacity and value of the trees will grow until they eventually become a stable and renewable source of fruit or other products. These rooted goods, by their very nature—and in contrast to the fruits they bear—cannot be removed from the property once they are created. If, in their free time, workers planted a small orchard on a plantation or another person's land, thereby increasing the productive capacity and value of that property, the workers would not be able to take those goods with them upon leaving the plantation. The Land Statute recognized the workers' durable investment in, and

¹⁴³ See Luce (2009) for an important history of the labor courts (*Justiça do Trabalho*) and the "Rural Worker Statute" (*Estatuto do Trabalhador Rural*) in the central cacao lands around Ilhéus between 1963 and 1973. While Luce argues that that the Rural Worker Statute was ultimately undermined and limited in its effects, the availability of further resources in the legal language of rights—a language to which workers could increasingly appeal—should be significant in the long term.

¹⁴⁴ Law No. 4.504 of November 30, 1964.

modification of, the value of the landowner's property, and the fact that the landowner would continue to reap the value from such root goods. Therefore, the statute recognized that the property owner, who would gain permanent usufruct over the root goods after the worker left, had to compensate those people who had created the values in those root goods.

In her study of workers' syndicates in one part of the state of Rio de Janeiro, for example, O'Dwyer (2008) suggested that one result of the Land Statute—insofar as it was actually enforced through pressure from workers' syndicates—was that tenants living on a plantation had to be indemnified for all root goods that they created while residing on the property. Such compensation would typically be made through monetary payment, but the relevant parties could reach an agreement whereby indemnification could be made in other goods. Without proper indemnification, any root goods could not be alienated from the worker that created them, as those workers enjoyed the legal status of ownership over those goods. As O'Dwyer notes: “The Land Statute guarantees workers, who planted *bens de raiz* on garden plots [*sítios*] located on large properties, the [legal] condition of owner over the improvements made” (2008:237, my translation).¹⁴⁵

Another way of looking at this is to say that the *action* of freely or voluntarily *planting* certain kinds of *durable and economically productive* plants on any stretch of land, whether or not that land belonged to you or to someone else, gives the person who made the plantings a rightful and legal claim to those plants as their own property. Root goods like a cacao or rubber trees give rise to other kinds of goods, such as cocoa beans or latex, which, upon their consumption, do not extinguish the trees themselves. The physical and temporal properties of trees—namely, that they live for several decades—increase the value of the built environment. This durability is the reason why these root goods (unlike plantings of corn or beans which are relatively ephemeral on the landscape) are considered to have such value that their very presence stakes a property claim. Since the person who planted trees had to be indemnified or otherwise compensated for the goods they planted, another route might be to simply cede the physical space occupied by these plants to the person who planted them. For this reason, voluntarily planting on other people's lands—including plantation lands—can become a source of contention with respect to property claims in land. Planting on another's land affords the

¹⁴⁵ The original Portuguese text reads: “O Estatuto da Terra garante aos trabalhadores que plantaram bens de raiz em seus sítios localizados nas grandes propriedades a condição de donos das benfeitorias feitas.”

planting person a claim to those stretches of land. Planting, therefore, appeared as a *legally codified* means through which rural workers have been able to stake property claims for themselves. This is similar in substance to the notion of property that appeared to be active among the posseiros, as seen in Chapter 3, Section 7, except that by this point, the action of planting had been drawn into greater relief and codified into law.

Whereas performing one's role as a plantation worker could be a source of social and self-esteem, as was seen above in the case of Emanuel, the action of *planting* became a further means for achieving self-affirmation that exceeded the limitations of mere esteem and began to address people's relationship with the material world and material goods. In the region in question, people sometimes recount stories about people who have won physical property through planting on unused lands, while other stories end with landowners violently uprooting trees with tractors that others have planted. Planting on uncultivated plantation lands, as will be seen, came to play a significant role in the land reform movements that emerged in the region in the 1980s and 1990s. In the following concluding section, I will examine the last moment in Alvina's struggle against Dr. Severino and her dispossessors, as she and her supporters base their appeal on her root goods in an effort to resist dispossession. The outcome of her struggle is mixed, but through her trees standing on the landscape, she is able to affirm her own standing in her social world.

4b. Alvina's Standing

It should be recalled that Alvina had married a man named Abel, but Abel's family members—and one male relative, in particular, named Ivo—had tried to deny Alvina any space where she could plant her own roças. Eventually, Abel defied his family and granted Alvina permission to plant her roças like any other family member. While it is unclear from her narrative how many years had passed, Alvina explained that she eventually planted a roça of some 340 clove trees on her in-laws' lands, covering perhaps one, or maybe two, hectares. Abel eventually passed away from ill health, and once again Ivo began to put pressure on her to leave.

He planned to sell all of the family's land to a man named Veridiano, and together they had sought assistance from Dr. Severino as land commissioner.¹⁴⁶

Alvina had somehow caught wind of Ivo's plans to expel her by selling the family's land, and she had proceeded to find a young lawyer who had just started practicing in the region. Although Alvina did not have a legal title to the larger piece of land, she did have rights to the roça of clove trees that she had planted. The lawyer that was helping Alvina advised her to count up the total number of trees, and to take them to Dona Márcia who had become public notary:

They wanted to take [the land], so I went to a lawyer. She told me to go count [my plants] and take [them to the notary]. I counted them and took them to [the notary], and when I arrived there, she ordered me to go there...to measure [the land]...So I went there and measured.¹⁴⁷

Alvina knew Dona Márcia through the local Catholic Church where Alvina had baptized one of her daughters years before. Dona Márcia was friendly with Alvina, as she was with most people, and when the conflict emerged over Alvina's land, Dona Márcia helped her register a deed (*escritura*) for her land:

She registered [my land], and when it was done [Dona Márcia] said:

“This [deed], you hold onto it.”¹⁴⁸

Ivo did not know that Alvina had registered her roça in the public land registry, but as soon as he discovered this, Ivo rushed to sell the land to Veridiano to override her new legal claim. This was unsuccessful. Veridiano, for his part, initially offered to purchase Alvina's clove trees, but she refused to sell. Alvina recounted their initial conversation:

¹⁴⁶ In Felícia's version of the story, as was seen in Chapter 4, Section 7d, Dr. Severino was one of the main antagonists, and Dona Márcia had reproached him for his involvement as land commissioner in what she took to be a questionable transaction. In Alvina's version of the story, the antagonists appear as her male in-law Ivo, and the man named Veridiano, who sought to purchase the land from Ivo.

¹⁴⁷ “Eles queria tomar e aí eu fui a [uma advogada]. Ela mandou eu contar e levar. Eu contei e levei, que quando chegou lá ela mandou que eu fosse lá ...pa medir...Aí eu fui e cheguei lá medi.”

¹⁴⁸ “Ela risistou, quando cabou disse://‘Essa, pode sigurá.’”

Veridiano said: “Hey there Dona Alvina, how much ma’am—how much do you want for those plants, ma’am?”

Well, I had already registered [the land], and I didn’t want to leave because it was close to town.

I said: “No, I won’t sell.”

So he [responded] with brutality: “If you don’t want to sell to me, I’ll go there with a tractor and pull everything up.”

I say: “Who do you think you are, Mr. Veridiano? Who do you think you are, sir, who do you think you are?”

[He says]: “I’ll show you!”

I say: “I’ll show you, too!”

I say: “Who do you think you are, sir, for you to go there with a tractor and pull up my plants?”

I was standing there next to my lawyer! Well, he went, he ran to try to register the land. When he showed up there, the engineer said:

“Oh, her title has already been sent to [the capital in] Brasília.”¹⁴⁹

¹⁴⁹ “Veridiano foi://‘Ei dona Alvina, a senhora, quanto, quanto é que a senhora quer por aquelas prantinha?’//Aí, eu já tinha requerido, eu não queria sair porque era perto da cidade.//Eu disse: ‘Eu não vendo não.’//Aí ele com a brutalidade://‘Se a senhora não quiser me vender, eu meto o trator e arranco tudo.’//Eu digo: ‘Quem é o senhor seu Veridiano? Quem é o senhor, quem é o senhor?’//‘Eu vou lhe amostrar!’//Eu digo: ‘Eu lhe amostro também!’//Eu digo://‘Quem é o senhor, pa o senhor mether o trator e rancar minhas pranta.’//Eu na beira da [advogada]! Aí ele vortô, correu, foi pa, pa requerer, quando chegou lá o engenheiro://‘Ah, o tito dela já ta em Brasília.’”

The engineer—presumably Dr. Severino—explained that Veridiano’s only option was to measure all of the land around Alvina’s plants:

[Engineer]: “The option you have is to [measure] around her plants.”

Well then, I even measured the dandelions!¹⁵⁰

She laughs. Veridiano purchased all of the land from Ivo, but they had to measure around the feet of all of her plants, which remained outside of his land measurement. In the end, Alvina had ended up with around 20 hectares of land that was situated in the middle of the larger holding Veridiano had purchased from Ivo. Ivo had sold all of the family’s land, in large part, it seems, to impede Alvina from establishing any claim of her own. Ivo’s decision to sell the family’s land did not only affect Alvina, however, but also Ivo’s own children and relatives:

He left his children and grandchildren all suffering (*se bateno*), especially his children. Because he could have at least [left them some land]—but he only left the house plot for the children.¹⁵¹

Once their respective land claims were settled, Alvina’s roça was encircled by Veridiano’s land, and over time he attempted to impede her access and egress between her roça and town. Eventually, Alvina had enough of the ongoing conflict and resolved to simply sell her roça to another party altogether. She was landless again, but she had gotten her due.

Experiences like Alvina’s, or Emanuel’s in a different way, both portended new possibilities of personhood, new possibilities for action, and new arrangements and distributions of social goods. These episodes both occurred in a rural context where various forms of inequality, material and social, militated against changes in their social status and their chances for wellbeing. In Emanuel’s case, the hierarchical work context occasioned moments of self-discovery that exceeded anything that was predictable from that context. In Alvina’s case, the familiar action of planting and cultivating was drawn into forms of legal recognition that had

¹⁵⁰ ““O jetho que them é voce bérá as pranta dela.’//E aí, eu medi inté o mal-me-quer!”

¹⁵¹ “Deixou os fio e os neto tudo se bateno antonce os fio. porque podia ao menos—só deixou pus fio o chão da casa.”

become available in her world, and that transformed the action of planting itself. In different ways, both Emanuel and Alvina began to create new standings in the social world, which also meant shaking off old ways of living that no longer served them. In the next chapter, I explore the collapse of a broad range of what people take to be “traditional” social categories and relationships, such as older forms of kinship, exchange, or respect. People view the collapse in such relationships in a deeply ambivalent manner. In some ways, people celebrate the end of certain old ways of beings—the loss of social fear, the loss of pathological forms of respect. In other ways, the loss of social categories has been so deep that the social world appears to be increasingly opaque and uncertain. A clear upshot of these transformations, however, is that many members of the rural underclass appear to be discovering new capacities to use their voices, and to stake claims for social recognition, in ways that appear to be attendant to broader reconfigurations in the distribution of the social good. Before turning to the appearance of land rights movements in Chapters 12 and 13, I explore this process of collapse and discovery in the next chapter.

CHAPTER 11:
DISCOVERY OF COURAGE

1. Loss of Respect as the Loss of Fear

In the earlier periods, as described previously, the posseiros lost their world (and their *orientation* in that world) simultaneous with the loss of their land—the material source and ground of meaningful activity. They suddenly found themselves silenced and humiliated, as the language and forms of recognition that were previously available to them had gone wholly unrecognized by their transgressors. Social interaction was reduced to a quiet, humiliating exit, or else brute violence. Such humiliation instituted new kinds of “limits” on their participation in social life; limits that Adonias¹ would have taken to be asymmetrical, pathological, and of a nature that drew the old posseiros and other rural people into relationships based on coercion and inequality. Out of this initial crisis, people were torn from one world and forcibly drawn into another world, a world in which they found themselves inadequate—and made to feel inadequate—to new forms of social action. Their relationships were held together by fear, and asymmetrical access to the language of social recognition.

In Damião’s narrative that was presented in Chapter 1, which helped frame the historical arc of this ethnography, Damião had stated:

Now, the tides have turned against the rich.²

This chapter begins to explore in more detail some of the ways in which the “tides have turned.” Several months after I had recorded this initial narrative, Damião and I were working together, cutting away at the weeds that had been growing in one of his young cacao groves. We were

¹ See Adonias’s reflections on the notion of “limits” (*limites*) in Chapter 6, Section 3.

² “Hoje, o bambu gemeu em cima do rico.”

using biscuits, the long-handled machete blades that gave us more power as we cut through the tall weeds. He had just shown me the proper angle and trajectory with which to swing the blade, so as to maximize its cutting and clearing power.

On days when I did not have plans to interview someone, or visit another family's farm, I often went to work with Damião on his farm. As was common whenever we worked together, Damião and I would enter into long discussions. This day, Damião entered into a discourse about the traditional forms of respect and authority in the region, and how they had ended. The casual conversations that accompanied such farm work often led to reflexive discourses, commonly coinciding with moments when Damião needed a smoke break. On this occasion, he sat down and began to roll a cigarette, and, as was also common, I pulled the small notepad and pen from my back pocket, and started to jot down a few brief notes.

He explained that in the past, whether in the time of the posseiros or the time of plantations, the poor were afraid of the rich. The poor—the “small” people as he described them there—were “timid, afraid to talk with a *developed* person, a wise person, or a doctor. They were the same as gods.”³ Over the course of time, and after a long history of having everything taken from them, the poor found themselves “with nothing more to lose.”⁴ Eventually, they also lost their fear and started to talk back. Now, he explained, the situation has reversed and it's “the rich who are afraid of the poor” and “the respect for the rich is gone.”⁵ Today, Damião explained: “The peons are no longer afraid...The fear is finished...that respect is finished.”⁶

Such conversations and reflections on the loss of “fear” appear as what Bourdieu would call a “critical” or “heterodoxical discourse” (1977: 159-171); “fear” is the name given to characterize and redescribe “respectful” social relationships that have been shaken out of their natural, self-evident, or *doxic* state. What was formerly taken to be “respect,” was, all along, misrecognized for what it really was, “fear.” In these retrospective reflections, which open up the course of past experience to critical revision, respect's other—“disrespect”—is realigned with notions of courage (*coragem*) and realized as a potential social good. The critical discourses about “respect” appear as an attempt to recover more adequate notions of what respect might be, and a moment of normative reflexivity on the limits themselves.

³ “Tímido, tem medo de conversar com uma pessoa desenvolvida, uma pessoa sabida ou um doutor... era mesmo que um, assim um deus.”

⁴ “Se [o pobre] não tinha nada a perder?”

⁵ “O rico tem medo do pobre”; “o respeito pro rico acabou.”

⁶ “Peão não tem mais medo...O medo acabou...aquele respeito acabou.”

This loss of fear, as the loss of false respect, contributed to some of the reversals that briefly emerged in the previous chapter,⁷ and that will be described in detail in the next chapter where I describe the emergence of the first land occupations and land rights movements. Seizing upon land required many people to face fear and to “disrespect” the plantations’ claims to land, claims to the world that were found to be illegitimate, disproportionate, and exclusionary. In the following sections, I first explore various discourses about the loss of respect and the end of various other kinds of social “goods.” Without wishing to overstate the significance of these critical reflections, and these forms of loss, it might be argued that what has occurred is a wholesale loss of social value such that little has been left sacred. These losses are often lamented, as when respect is lost between elders and the youth. Such losses, however, also portend normative renovation insofar as the loss of “respect” also means that some people have discovered new access to language and voice, and new forms of self-esteem, that were formerly distributed in an asymmetrical and unequal manner.

2. Loss of Trust and Respect

Many people in the region lament that things are not the way they used to be, that social relations are no longer transparent or tractable, and that social life has degraded into unpredictability and, at times, brutality. Such assertions might be understood as nostalgic projections of an idealized past, or as hopeful projections of what a possible future might be by way of condemning the present in comparison to an idealized past. For local people, they are general descriptions of an actual breakdown in social relationships, which, as will be seen, are sometimes understood ambivalently and as having various positive and negative upshots.

Among the most broadly conceived failures are those pertaining to the experience of trust and respect. The loss of trust can be understood as the loss of trust in specific kinds of people (e.g., politicians) that never were really deserving of trust in the first place, whereas a more generalized sense of an inability to trust makes for deeper kinds of crises that might be described as existential in nature. The loss of respect, likewise, can be seen as a loss of respect for people

⁷ See Chapter 10, Section 3b on Emanuel and Section 4b on Alvina.

who never really deserved respect in the first place, whereas the generalized loss of respect presents a deeper problem. Discourses about the loss of these general notions of social life both indicate a broad moment of social instability and transformation, and more positively, the search for more adequate terms by which to live. The loss of respect can also be understood as a deepening understanding of just what it means to respect and to be respected.

News stories on television are a frequent occasion for talk about social instability. One afternoon, while taking a lunch break with a family at Settlement 3, a news story appeared about a violent crime that had occurred in the city of Rio de Janeiro. With this, one man who was present became inspired to talk about the lack of justice in contemporary Brazil: the rise of crime, drugs, prostitution. The man took the opportunity to draw a distinction between the city and the rural areas: “Here, we’re in the old times.”⁸ By “here,” he meant in the rural countryside, living on the *roça*, and his idea was that the past was instanced in the present, in the here and now. He went on to explain that, by contrast with the city, he could leave his house unlocked and open.⁹

The loss of trust and respect is frequently discussed in the context of theft, and not all people agreed that the countryside was an idyllic place. One man complained that he had lost various agricultural implements—a machete, bisco, hoe—that he had left outside his house on one occasion. Today, he explained, he had to keep all of his tools inside his house because he could not trust people living at the settlement. He commented: “Nobody trusts anybody any longer.”¹⁰ He and another friend of his began to comment that, in the past, if you encountered a stranger travelling through the region, you might give them *dormida*, or a place to sleep. Today, they both agreed, you would only give *dormida* to people that you knew personally, as *vagabundagem*, or vagabondage, had become too widespread.¹¹

Seu Pedrinho, likewise, lamented the end of trust and respect, comparing the contemporary situation with his earlier years when, he explained: “People were trustworthy.”¹² In those times, they did not need physical boundaries and barriers to protect one’s goods, because people respected them:

⁸ “Aqui ta nos velhos tempos.”

⁹ Fn114.

¹⁰ “Ninguém confia ninguém mais não.”

¹¹ Fn323.

¹² “O povo tinha confiança.”

We'd leave cacao [sitting out] in the ovens, leave it out on the roça, understand? [Sitting out] along the side of the house like this, see, and nobody would bother it—nobody—nobody—nobody—nobody—nobody—nobody—nobody—nobody—nobody.¹³

This trust and respect was likewise observable in forms of speech between categories of people:

Look, I'll tell you, in my upbringing—in my youth (*modernagem*), you didn't swear—“*Peste!*”—“*Desgraça!*”—in view—not in view of an adult person.¹⁴

Trust and respect, in both of these cases, was grounded in the mutual regard that people held for one another, and this trust and respect distributed across various kinds of spaces, whether the spaces between people, or the spaces where goods could be stored. Like many other people, Seu Pedrinho holds that these relationships have eroded:

And today that's over, this sincerity [i.e. respect] ended. It ended—it's terrible—terrible—terrible—terrible.¹⁵

From his perspective, relations of respect had come to be objectified in locked doors that hide one's person and one's goods:

Today you can't sleep unless you lock [the door] first. Because even during the day...[even children] come in here and take things, see? That is, the peace ended...in every place. On the roças, everywhere—it's [ended] on all of the roças. People killing the elderly just to take R\$20, R\$200, all of this happens here...So, the peace around here today, it's bad—bad—bad—bad—every day it gets worse.¹⁶

¹³ “Agente deixava o cacau na estufa, deixava na roça, entendeu? Na beira da casa assim ó, ninguém bulia—ninguém, ninguém, ninguém, ninguém, ninguém, ninguém.”

¹⁴ “Olhe, eu vou dizer pa você, na minha criação—na minha modernagem nem você xingar—‘Peste!’—‘Desgraça!’—na vis[ta]—na vista de uma pessoa adulto, não.”

¹⁵ “E hoje acabou aquilo, essa sinceridade acabou. Acabou—ta péssima—péssima—péssima—péssima.”

¹⁶ “Hoje você num pode dormir a não ta logo trancado. Porque de dia...entram aqui e pega uma coisa aí ó, entendeu? Quer dizer, a paz cabou...Em todo lugar. É na roça, é por tudo, é pela roça tudo tem. O sujeito matano os véio pa tomar vinte reais, duzentos reais, tudo aqui ocorre...Então, a paz nessa parte hoje, ta ruim, ruim, ruim, ruim, vai cada dia mais é pior.”

In Seu Pedrinho's view, distrust and violence had become widely manifest across space and between people, and rendered social relationships deeply problematic:

Today—the conventions that I speak of today—we're in a time when we can no longer come together with just anybody...Because sometimes there's a thief in the middle, a drug addict...a rapist...a violator. Today, we're in a—for this [reason]—today [we live in] a time where we can no longer keep certain friendships.¹⁷

Seu Pedrinho's broad reflections encompass a broad range of social relationships, and this is owed to the import of trust and respect. The import ranges from relations between children and adults, forms of language; the positioning and protection of goods across social space; peace and violence; and the prospects of friendships; and a broadly reaching theme of security and insecurity in social life. In the following sections, I will explore further reflections on the collapse of various social categories, the loss of the word, satisfaction, and value.

3. Loss of Kinship

For Jorge, kinship relations had effectively imploded, and this was because of what he called the loss of the law:

The laws in the old days were dark, but they were laws of respect to be people, not to be animals...The children to respect their father, their mother, their uncles, their siblings.¹⁸

He attributes this to a failure in contemporary forms of education:

¹⁷ “Hoje—os concordamento que eu falo hoje—é que agente tamo num tempo que agente num pode nem se coligar com todo mundo...Porque às vez tem ladrão no meio, maconheiro...estrapador...desonrador. Hoje, agente ta um, uma época hoje que agente num pode nem ter umas certa amizade por isso.”

¹⁸ “Para mim a leis de premero era iscura, mas era leis do respetho de ser gente, não ser bicho...Os seus filho respethar seus pai, suas mãe, seus tio, seus irmão.”

These days, the education that there used to be in the old days, it's disappeared. Today, the education is for us to all live like animals...Today there is no more education...For a child to respect their father, to know what a father is, what a mother is, what a grandfather is, what a grandmother is, what an uncle is. Nobody—children these days don't respect [anyone], they don't recognize [anyone], don't know [what any of these things are]...They don't respect [anyone] at all.¹⁹

This implosion of social categories was extended beyond consanguineal to affinal kin relations:

These days—[compared with] the old days—today, nobody knows who anybody is. You don't know who is married (*casada*), who has a husband. You don't know who's a little girl, who's single (*sortêra*), who's married, nothing. It's all has the same weight.²⁰

Here Jorge is referring specifically to differences in the marital and sexual status of women, suggesting that distinguishing between married and single women, and woman and little girls, has become increasingly problematic. Literally translated, he says, they all weigh one single kilogram.

Later, Jorge explained, “marriage disappeared, never again.” The site of marriage became mixed up; instead of occurring in some sacred space, it only occurred in the profane. He laughed, and imagined a conversation where two people discussed another person's marriage:

“Mr. Fulano got married.”

“Where?”

“In bed.”²¹

¹⁹ “Hoje em dia a indução de, de pemero sumiu. A indução de hoje em dia é pa virar bicho...Hoje em dia não existe mais indução...Pa filho respethá pai, saber o que é pai, o que é mãe, o que é avô, o que é avó, o que é tio. Ninguém—os filho de hoje em dia não respetha, não reconhece, nem conhece...não respetha mais de jetho nenhum.”

²⁰ “Hoje em dia, de premero, hoje em dia não sabe quem é. Não sabe que é casada, não sabe quem them marido. Não sabe quem é moça, não sabe quem é sortêra, não sabe quem é casada, nada. É tudo aí pelo um quilo só.”

²¹ “Sumiu casamento, nunca mais... ‘Seu fulano casou.’//‘Aonde?’//‘Na cama.’”

Antônia, likewise, explained that unlike her generation, today she found that marriage was a much rarer occurrence:

Today it's rare for a girl to marry, but in the early days no—there was a lot of marriages in the early days—many, many marriages.²²

And when young people had to get the consent of their parents in order to marry, young girls now do whatever they please, as they have become masters of themselves:

Today, it's the young girls that—that master themselves (*se domina*) since childhood. They live all *zig-zig-zig* next to—next to men.²³

Antônia is not referencing young girl's self-mastery in any positive sense, and in this part of the interview, she has in mind one of her teenage granddaughters who had already given birth to several children, but had no partner to help her care for them. The relationships between women and men, in Antônia's view, had become characterized as ones of debauchery:

This business of licking each other, moaning together, licking each other—all that business, there wasn't any of that.²⁴

Another man named Mateus develops the same theme, suggesting a generalized collapse in kinship relations and the exercise of respect:

In the old days children all had their fathers, their mothers, their uncles, their aunts. And well, in those days, they obeyed them. Those older people—the older people—children in the old days, they respected them all.²⁵

²² “Hoje é difíci casar uma moça, e de primero não—de primero era muntho casamento—muntho, muntho casamento.”

²³ “Hoje, elas lá que se—se domina desde criança. Já veve—já toda zig-zig-zig pu lado de—de home.”

²⁴ “Esse negócio de ta se lambeno, se rinchano, se lambeno, esse negócio, num tem isso não.”

²⁵ “Os minino de premero tinha seus pai, suas mãe, seus tio, suas tia. Bem, e tudo e finarmente, abedecia todos eles. Aqueles pessuá mais véio—aqueles pessuá mais véio—os minino de premero, todos eles respethava.”

Mateus draws on the interview situation itself— where Mateus, his wife Francinha, my research assistant, and I are sitting and talking in the front room of their home—to illustrate the kind of respect that children would have paid to their elders in the old days:

Because what child would just show up here—just like we're here [talking]—and some kid just comes and walks between us while we're here talking? Not one—not one passed through. If they wanted to go into the kitchen, they had to go around that way, see—to go in through there. But with us here, in the old days, they wouldn't pass [between us]...And today, the kids are over there, we're talking over here. If they want to walk through here, they just walk on through.²⁶

My young research assistant adds:

They don't even ask for permission, right?²⁷

Mateus takes up the thought:

They don't even ask for permission—many don't even ask for permission [to walk through], you see? So, in the early days, I'll explain it this way: in the beginning, on the one hand, there was respect in that way. And these days, on the other hand, there's no more respect...If anyone wants to holler while we're here having a conversation, they don't listen. Children today, they don't listen to anything anybody says...And all of them talk back. And well, in the old days, with us here talking, for two, three kids to show up and make noise and that commotion—well, if we were here having a conversation, that

²⁶ “Porque quem era um minino, pur mode chegar aqui—qui nem nós tamos aqui—e um minino da algum thempo chegar aqui ente nós e passar aqui nós cunversano aqui? Ninhum—ninhum passava. Se quisesse entrar na cozinha, tinha qui arrudiar pur la, oie—pur mode entrar pur la. Mas aqui tinha, nós tamo aqui, de premero num passava...E hoje, os minino ta aí, nós tamo cunversano aqui. Se eles desejar passar aqui, eles passa.”

²⁷ “Nem licença pede, né?”

wouldn't happen. That sort of thing didn't happen in the old days, while these days everyone lives like that—²⁸

My research assistant again interjects:

Parents yelling at their kids, right, [and the] kids yelling [back at their] parents?²⁹

Here he is taking up Mateus's thought, but, perhaps drawing on his own experience and relationship with his father, he adds that the yelling and disrespect is reciprocal. The example that Mateus offers here is a normative model of how children used to conduct themselves. It is a model of how, in his view, children should, but do not, conduct themselves. His example suggests that children were potentially excluded from public appearance, from participation in dialogue, and other asymmetries among youth and elders. The transgression of these boundaries would have meant reprisals, possibly violent, and so the collapse in these relationships can be partly understood through the potential for adults, particularly miserly fathers, to be overly severe and brutal. Mateus continues, and like Jorge above, he cites changes in the law that contributed to this collapse:

It's true. These days, nobody knows what a father is, nor what a son is, or anything. Because whatever a child wants to say to their father or mother, they say it and say whatever they want. And neither father nor mother can say anything in response, because today's laws are different. Today the law no longer wants you to spank a child, parents are afraid of receiving [legal] complaints, of being humiliated [by the law] for [punishing their children]...And so those children all grow up disjointed, you see?³⁰

²⁸ “Nem licença pede—munthos qui nem licença pede, ta veno? Então, de premero, lhe digo assim: de premero, pe'rum—pe'rum lado, tinha respetho a esse fim. E hoje em dia, pa'quele lado, num them mais respetho...Se quiser dar um grito aqui nós cunversano, num iscuta. Qui minino de hoje num iscuta nada qui pessoa nenhuma cunversa...Tudo mal respondheno. Tudo e finalmente, de premero, bom, pur mode a gente ta cunversano, pu minino chegar aí ajuntar dois, três e pur mode ta cum zuada e aquele cunvesero—tudo e finalmente, nós tano cunversano aqui, não. Não tinha esses tipo de coisa, de premero não e hoje em dia véve tudo assim—”

²⁹ “Pai responde filho, né, filho responde pai?”

³⁰ “É verdade. Hoje em dia ninguém sabe o qui é pai, nem o qui é filho, nem nada. Porque o qui filho quer dizer a pai e a mãe, ele diz e diz o qui quer. E pai, nem mãe hoje tem o qui responder, porque a leis hoje é outa. A lei hoje num quer mais qui, qui bata um filho, os criador fica tudo cum medo de iscutar reclamação, passar em disfeitha...E aí fica aqueles minino tudo criado avulso, ta veno?”

For Antônia, young people had become categorized as young troublemakers and thieves:

Because today—today what there is—there are really *malandros* and *malandras*. Lots of *pivetes*—because in the early days there was not of that, it wasn't like it is today...Today things are serious. It's not—at that time there wasn't that—this thing that—how it is—[the thing] that turns people into animals.³¹

Antônia described this loss in terms of a generalized rejection of the elders:

The young today don't want—they don't like the elders anymore. For [young men and young women], the old aren't worth anything.³²

She goes on to explain that the young fail to recognize their dependence on their elders:

If it wasn't for the old, they—they—they wouldn't be alive. They're alive because of the elders—if they really thought about it, they'd take the hands of their elders with care. It's not that just anybody deserves it, but some people deserve it—the people that raised them deserve it. They greatly deserve it, but [the young people] aren't looking at this.³³

4. Loss of Satisfaction

In time, it was no longer enough to offer a visitor a place to sleep; either you offer them a “nicely made little bed, or else nobody will be satisfied.”³⁴ Appearances took the place of substance, and

³¹ “Porque hoje—hoje existe—existe bem malandro e malandra. Muntho pivete—que de primero num tinha, num era que nem é hoje...Hoje ta uma coisa séra. É num—naquela epa num iexistia a tal de—a tal da, da, da, como é da, que embesta as pessoa.”

³² “Os novo hoje num quer, num tão mais gostano dos véi. Os véi pra eles, ou pra elas num ta valeno nada.”

³³ “Num fosse os véi, eles—eles—eles num tava vivo. Tão vivo porque dos véi—se eles bem pensasse, eles trazia os véi nas parma das mão. Não é porque todo mundo merece, mas alguma pessoa merece—até os criador deles merece. Merece demais, mas eles num tão olhano isso.”

³⁴ “Não mostrar quando uma caminha mas bem forradinha, ninguem fica sartisfeito”

somewhere along the way, shame slipped into the world. According to Jorge, this was most readily seen in the relationship between vanity, shame, and overconsumption:

These days [people] buy soaps, perfumes, all of that stuff...So that those pretty ladies don't feel shame. Now then, you have to set up your house, buy things you can't [afford]. You're forced to make a living so that you don't feel ashamed.³⁵

Here he seems to be suggesting a distinction. In the early days, people worked hard to make a living so that they could eat and become satisfied. Now, people struggle to make a living in order to fill their houses with things they could hardly afford. This led not only to new burdens, but also to dissatisfaction and the mere appearance of satisfaction.

Seu Pedrinho builds a contrast with the past by imagining what would happen if a business man or plantation owner showed up at someone's house as a guest:

[If you] don't have a little bed [for me to sleep in], all nicely made, nobody will be satisfied.³⁶

His wife, Heloísa, agreed:

Right, nobody is satisfied.³⁷

He contrasted this with earlier times:

So, in those times, it was good. Everyone was satisfied with what they had, and today—today, people—I don't think there's one man in the world who's satisfied with what they have...What changed was that—things evolved, modified from the old to the new, right? Old things changed, we have abandoned the old things and we practice the new. Because if you come here and see a tiny little sofa, [and then] go to your house [where there's]

³⁵ “Hoje em dia é de comprar sabonete, perfume, aquele bucado de trenhage...Pr'aquelas bunita pa não passar vergonha. Ali agora arrumar aquela casa, compra coisa que voce não pode, mas forçado a se virar pa não passar vergonha.”

³⁶ “Não mostrar quando uma caminha mas bem forradinha, ninguem fica sartisfeito.”

³⁷ “É, ninguém fica satisfeito.”

another [sofa] better than this one... But today things have changed, things—today people want everything to be pretty, everything good [quality], isn't that so?³⁸

He invited us to imagine the early days:

You didn't have anything, but you had a little piece of land, and [you'd] say:

“Oh, my Lord, help me so that I can buy a mule.”

[Eventually] you bought it, and became satisfied with that [mule]... [You] gave thanks. But people today, no, [they've] changed.³⁹

At this point he goes on to give an example of someone who prays to the Lord for a motorbike:

“Lord, I [don't] have a transport, I want a little transportation.”

You go buy a motorbike. God blesses you to pay off that motorbike. Soon after, you don't want just that motorbike. Pretty soon you [say]:

“Oh, I want a car, Lord.”⁴⁰

Not long after that, he goes on to explain, you want another car; and then a Ford F4000 truck; then an even bigger truck to carry freight to Salvador, and so on:

³⁸ “Então, era aquela época, era boa. Todo mundo ficava satisfeito com o que tinha e hoje—e hoje o home—eu acho que nenhum home no mundo fica satisfeito com o que tem...O que mudou foi que—que voluiu as coisa, mudificou o velho para o novo, né? Mudificou as coisa velha, abadonamos a coisas velhas e praticamo a nova. Porque se voce chega aqui e ver sofazinho, vá na sua casa que tem outo melhor que esse...Mas hoje mudou as coisa—coisa—o, o povo hoje só quer tudo bunito, tudo bom, né assim?”

³⁹ “Voce num tinha nada, mas tinha um pedacinho de terra des'tamanho, dizia://‘Ô meu Deus, me ajuda pa eu comprar uma mula.’//Comprava, ficava satisfeito com aquela...Dava graça. Mas o home hoje não, mudou.”

⁴⁰ “‘Senhor, eu ando de transporte, eu quero um transportezinho’//Va você compra um moto. Deus abençoa você paga aquele moto aí. Daqui a pouco você não quer só aquele moto. Daqui a pouco você://‘Ah, eu quero um carro de passeio, Senhor.’”

All of which is to say, nothing is enough. Today things changed, as Jesus said:

“When man wants to be wiser than Him, times will change.”

What I mean is, things changed. Today, man—there isn’t one person that is satisfied with what they have.⁴¹

Whereas in the past, people might be able to offer a guest a grass mat or a wooden lath bed to sleep upon,—which would be satisfying to all—today, people expected more. At some point envy entered into the world. A young woman present for the interview asked if people were not envious in the past:

[Sílvia]: Nobody talked about anyone else, no?⁴²

[Seu Pedrinho]: Nobody talked [bad] about anyone else. And today [people say], “Oh, Mr. Pedrinho has a roça.” “Mr. Pedrinho has a little shop.” “Mr. Pedrinho is retired [and receives retirement benefits].”

If you don’t have anything, you’re unknown (*ignorado*).⁴³

While those who have nothing remain unknown, the young girl adds that those who have something—any level of material wealth—immediately face the prospect of being termed miserly:

Right away they call you a little miser.⁴⁴

⁴¹ “Quer dizer, não dá nada. Hoje mudou, como Jesus disse://‘Quando o homem quisesse ser mais sabido do que Ele, mudaria os tempos.’//Quer dizer, mudou, hoje o home, não tem ninguém que fique sartisfeito com o que tem.”

⁴² “Ninguem falava de ninguém, né?”

⁴³ “Ninguem falava de ninguém. E hoje, ‘Ah seu Pedrinho tem uma roça.’ ‘Seu Pedrinho tem um comerciozinho.’ ‘Seu Pedrinho é aposentado.’ Se num tem umas coisinha é ingnorado.”

⁴⁴ “Chama logo de, de, de canguinha.”

At length over the course of the interview, Seu Pedrinho concluded that the risk of failing to become satisfied was that one might lose everything. He drew on biblical imagery:

But even the Bible itself says that we should give thanks for everything, but today things changed such that there's not one person who doesn't want more...The Bible says that it's of no use to win the whole world but lose your Salvation.⁴⁵

5. Loss of Value

The end of satisfaction was also accompanied by a sense that it was hard for people to measure the value of work. Antônia complained, ironically, that young people—and young women, thinking of her granddaughter—did not have a sense of their activity:

Today it's a good time to live, because today it's all—everything—everything's different. It's all changed, see, even the—the girls—girls who're only ten years old are filling up with children, just ten years old. They don't know how much—they don't know the price of the hot sun. They don't know the price of rain dropping on your back—because today there's the government to—to—to just give [them everything].⁴⁶

She continued:

Me—my [whole] life I worked, do you know—do you know what a day's wage was?...Five *mil réis* [5\$000]...Five *mil réis*. I worked all week, and then on Saturday I went into town to buy my things. I even brought some money home. I dressed, I ate, I

⁴⁵ “Mas merma a propia Bibia diz, agente deva dar Graça por tudo, mas hoje mudou d'uma maneira que não tem esse nem aquele que num queira mais...Porque a Bibia diz que não adianta ganhar o mundo todo e perder sua salvação.”

⁴⁶ “Hoje ta bom de viver, porque hoje ta tudo—tudo—tudo diferente. Ta tudo mudado viu, até a—a, as minina—as minina de dez ano que tão se encheno de fio, cum dez ano. Num sabe qonto é—num sabe qonto custa uma, um, um sol quente. Num sabe qonto custa um caroço de, de chuva nas costas, porque them o governo pa, pa, pa dar.”

fed my children—I clothed my children, I gave my children shoes—it was even enough for me to wear shoes.⁴⁷

In Antônia's view, the interrelationships between working, having, and consuming has been ruptured, and this, according to what she took to be valuable:

And today we don't know what we're doing—we receive so much money, and still we don't know what we're doing. The money is only there—there's only money as long as it's [coming from the government]—when it falls in our hand.⁴⁸

This rupture, at least in her view, amounted to a loss of orientation—an inability to know what one is doing, the severing of the relationship between one's action and one's temporal horizons, and an inability to be satisfied.

6. Loss of Poverty

For many others, the marks that distinguish different social statuses and classes had become indistinct. Alonso, while suggesting that old ways of life (e.g., fishing and hunting) had become largely extinguished and even stigmatized, also noted that everyone now has access to the money economy:

Today, nobody wants to hear about going fishing in the river, nobody wants to set up a cord trap—it's prohibited these days. Nobody's [allowed to] load a shotgun anymore. Well, today everyone is a baron. [Everyone] goes to the market on Saturdays—those who can't [buy] more buy less, but everybody goes to the market on Saturday. So it's

⁴⁷ “Eu—a minha vida eu trabaiava sabe, sabe a diária, qonto era a diária?...Cinco mi réi...Cinco mi réi. Tabaiava a semana toda, no dia de Sabo vinha pa rua comprava minha feira. Inda levava um, um, um réizinho pa casa. Vistia, cumia, dava a meus fio pa cumer—dava a meus fio pa vistir, dava a meus fio pa calçar—dava, me dava eu merma pa calçar.”

⁴⁸ “É hoje que a gente num suber o que ta fazeno—recebe tanto dinheiro e num suber o que ta fazeno. O dinheiro só é ta—só é dinheiro enqonto ta por lá—que caiu na mão da gente.”

changed—today it’s—it’s—life for us is much, much, much, much better, much [better].⁴⁹

Alonso and his brothers grew up planting manioc, fishing, and hunting, and they understood the hardships it involved as well as anyone else. For this reason, he saw the access that many people now have to the money economy as being a very good thing. At the same time, however, he seems to be suggesting that many people feel negatively about going fishing or going hunting and that people seek to posture themselves as “barons.”

Jorge likewise expressed identical sentiments:

These days, no—because after Firestone started arriving, the people started getting rich—getting rich—getting rich. Because you don’t see anybody take a line out to go fishing...or take a dog out [hunting].⁵⁰

He explained:

Everybody became—became billionaires—everybody. But in the beginning, my friend (*meu preto*)—oh, in the beginning it was rough, my brother!⁵¹

Caio, likewise, described these changes that he had witnessed over his life:

Today you see people who work somewhere, they have money, they have television—[in the past] nobody knew what that was—[today] they have radios, [they have] everything. He goes out looking just like he’s his boss—boss and employee, nobody can recognize the difference [anymore]—and still people complain [about wanting more.]⁵²

⁴⁹ “Hoje ninguém quer saber mais de ir no rio pescar, não quer saber de botar um laço—também ta proibido hoje. Armar uma espingarda ninguém pode mais. Então, hoje todo mundo é barão. É fazer feira, deu dia de sábado. Quem não faz mais, faz menos, mas tem que fazer a feira dia de sábado. Então virou—hoje ta—ta—a vida pra gente hoje ta bem, bem, bem, melhor, bem.”

⁵⁰ “Hoje em dia não—que adepois que a Faris foi chegano, o povo foi enriqueceno, foi enriqueceno, foi enriqueceno. Que não vê ninguém pegar mais um anzol pa sair pescano...pegar um cachorro pa ir.”

⁵¹ “Virou tudo—tudo brionário—tudo. Mas de premero, meu preto—ah, de premero era fogo meu irmão.”

⁵² “Hoje voce ver gente que trabalha num canto, tem dinheiro, tem televisão—que ninguém ixtia nem o que era—tem radio, tem tudo. Ele sai aí pareceno que é o mermo dono dele, tal patrão e empregado ninguém ta conheceno—e o cara inda se queixa.”

Antônia similarly suggested that the social world had become increasingly inscrutable:

Today there aren't any more poor people. In the early days, there were lots of poor people, but today, no longer.⁵³

This inability to distinguish poor from rich was less a lament for the end of those categories in themselves, but, from Antônia's perspective, a devaluation of the value of work, as was suggested above. In these reflections, the markers that once distinguished social categories—whether in the goods people own, or how they dress—have collapsed and that differences in social status and class have become increasingly inscrutable.

7. Loss of the Word

The given “word,” or the *palavra*, was a crucial locus of trust and respect, as seen earlier in Chapter 3, Section 6d. The word still commands great value, but if anything, because the grounds upon which words may be safely given, taken, and exchanged appear to be faltering. For Sebastião, the word continued to have great value, but he sees it as having less and less currency:

To this day, I don't like to give my word and let [someone] down. [My word only] fails now because I'm in the midst of this younger generation, and the young ones are playing tricks—so I have to do the same, too. It's just like TV. Television—television only speaks of lies. So now that we're listening [to lies], today we have to accompany the rhythm of the—⁵⁴

⁵³ “Hoje num tem ninguém pobre mais. De primero, tinha muntha gente pobre, mas hoje mais não.”

⁵⁴ “Até hoje eu não gosto de dar uma palavra e deixar abaixar. Baixo agora porque to no meio da, dos mais modernos, e os mais modernos ta fazendo enrola—também tenho que entrar no meio. É mesmo que nem t.v. Televisão—televisão só fala mentira. Aí agora agente ta ouvindo tem que hoje acompanhar o remo da—”

His friend Augusto completes the thought, and Sebastião seizes upon it:

[Augusto]: —of the lie.

[Sebastião]: OF THE LIE!⁵⁵

And they both laugh, and Sebastião continued:

Because [today if] you don't go along with the rhythm of the lie, you don't get anything...Because [these days] if we only live according to the truth, we're not going to get ahead. You have to lie, too, if you're going to keep up.⁵⁶

This point recurs later in the interview. Because lying has become so pervasive, he and others were forced to collude in lies in order to get by:

So, we have to walk in the rhythm of the day...Whoever is tricked, has to trick as well.⁵⁷

He makes these statements in full irony, but is pointing toward the coercive power of lying. I make a joke:

[Jonathan]: As though you were a politician, right?

[Sebastião]: THAT'S IT—THAT'S IT—THAT'S IT! GOOD!⁵⁸

And we all laugh. I asked Sebastião and Augusto if they were in the habit of lying to get their way. They both laugh, but they deny it. Sebastião explained that in his early years, young people trusted their elders, and would seek guidance from them when conducting various affairs:

⁵⁵ “Da mentira.//DA MENTIRA!”

⁵⁶ “Porque num acompanhar o remo da mentira não ranja nada... Porque se agente for viver só na verdade não vai à frente. Tem que mentir também pra poder seguir.”

⁵⁷ “Aí a gente tem que andar nesse remo da'gora...Quem é enrolado, tem que enrolar também.”

⁵⁸ “J: Como se fosse um político, né?//G: ISSO—ISSO—ISSO! BOA!”

People in the old days would get advice from those of us who were a little bit older. They'd go conduct some business, and come here where we lived [seeking advice]...

“Hey Mr. Fulano, I'm going to do some business there. You who are older than me, [can you] show me the way?”

And we'd show the way.⁵⁹

Today the situation has reversed, and Sebastião explained that the younger generation has taken control:

And today, the young are cutting down the old! And that's why we lost the key...We lost the key. Because today, the young cut us down with their talk.⁶⁰

The youth, he claimed, have appropriated “talk” and representation for themselves; not veridical talk, but talk that is riddled with falsehoods. Sebastião gives an example:

They show up to sell something. They say it's one thing. When we go to buy it, it's something else. You go to buy a mule. When you buy a mule, it's a donkey. When you buy a donkey, it's a cat.⁶¹

Despite all of this, Sebastião did not see the loss of the word, and the imposition of the lie, as a viable normative orientation. The word reasserts itself, not through a normative prescription or admonition—“you should tell the truth”—but through a causal process:

Those who don't have a strong word, they neither buy nor sell. You see, we'll go buy from whatever parts store (*casa de peça*) in town. Whoever only speaks lies, they only

⁵⁹ “Os povo antigamente até tomava informação da gente que era mais velho um pouco. Ia fazer um negócio, vinha aqui onde agente morava...//”Ô seu fulano eu vou fazer um negócio aí. Oces que é mais velho, me indica aí.” Aí agente indicava.”

⁶⁰ “E hoje os novo ta dirrubando os mais véio. Aí por isso nós perdeu a chave...Nós perdeu a chave. Porque o muderno hoje dirrubaba agente no papo.”

⁶¹ “Aí chega pá vender uma coisa. Diz que é uma coisa. Quando agente compra é outra, né não? Vai comprar um burro. Quando compra um burro, é um jegue. Quando compra um jegue é um gato.”

buy one time. And us, thanks to God, we buy [as often as we like]. Because when we go, we don't let loose lies. What we say is:

“I would like to buy a part.”

I'll make an initial payment and then I'll go paying monthly. Every month we're there [to make our payment]. And today there are people who buy, pay the first month—in fact, not even one month—and then never go back [to the store]. [Then,] they're locked out of the—[locked out] of the word. And us, thank God, even today I've never gone back on my word.⁶²

In other words, through a concrete example, Sebastião is suggesting that lying is a self-defeating, self-undermining, or self-destructive orientation toward others.

7a. Pens, Whiskers, and Documents

Gilberto, likewise, lamented the loss of trust and respect that were constitutive of the word:

Because [you] have trust and [you] have respect, right? But today, I don't think it's that way any longer...Here in our region, in Bahia, there's no longer this basic trust.⁶³

Gilberto suggested that you can no longer sell moveable goods—such as a bag of cloves—without first receiving the payment or else some sort of proper documentation verifying who owes what in the transaction. The word, in other words, had become increasingly displaced by

⁶² “Quem não tiver a palavra forte não compra, nem vende. Quer ver assim, a gente vai comprar na casa de peça na cidade. Quem sortá mentira só compra uma vez. E nós, graças a Deus, nós compra. Porque, chega e não sorta mentira, o que nós dizer: // ‘Eu quero uma peça aqui.’ // Eu entro eu dou dou uma entrada agora e vou pagano por mês. Todo mês nós tá lá. E hoje tem gente que compra, pagou o primeiro mês—alías nem mês nenhum—e não vai mais lá. Ta trancado na—na palavra. E nós, graças a Deus, até hoje eu nunca bati na minha palavra.”

⁶³ “Porque tem a confiança e tem o respeito, né isso. Mas hoje que eu acho que não ta mais assim... Aqui na nossa região, na Bahia, não tá tendo essa confiança.”

the document. Gilberto drew on an actual case that he was familiar with, in order to illustrate a hypothetical scenario of deceit and trickery. Someone wishing to purchase a bag of cloves approaches:

“Hey buddy, I’m here to buy these cloves.”

And I sell them to you. You take them, put them in your car, [then you say]:

“Hey, I’ll pay you tomorrow or the day after.”

And I say, “That’s fine, take them with you.”⁶⁴

The transaction of the cloves proceeds on the basis of mutual trust, the reciprocal acknowledgement of the transaction that serves as a public guarantee of the transaction. No receipts or any other legal documents are drawn up. This is where the problem begins:

When tomorrow or the day after finally arrives, I’m waiting [for you], but you don’t show up. I say, “Oh Lord, where is he, I’m gonna go look for him.”

I go there [to find you, and say]: “Hey man, I came to see about that money for the cloves.”

“No”—you could reply like this: “Me, no, I didn’t buy any clove from you!...I didn’t buy any cloves. I didn’t buy any from you, man!”

“Oh, but you didn’t buy my cloves, man? Yesterday, the day before yesterday, man!?”

⁶⁴ “Rapaz, vim comprar esses cravos aqui.”//Aí eu lhe vendo. Voce pegou botou no carro.//”Oie, vou lhe pagar amanhã ou adepois,” aí digo, “Ta bem, leva.”

You say, “Look, I didn’t buy anything from you. If you’re going to keep hassling me, we’re gonna go to the police station, and I’m going to file a complaint against you because you’re calling me a thief.”

So you see, see how it works? The guy bought [the clove], but after buying it, since there’s no document [proving it]. The guy denies it—the guy denies he bought it.⁶⁵

They explained that when the actual case went to court, the judge asked the plaintiff to provide some kind of document or receipt (*comprovante*) proving that the transaction had occurred. When the plaintiff was unable to provide any document, as the transaction had been based on trust, the judge threw out the case.

The mistake that the seller had made was that he had sold based on trust (*confiança*) but did not seek out any other document:

[He] sold that bit of clove and didn’t even get a little receipt...[he] sold on trust, see?⁶⁶

I asked the brothers narrating the story why the man who sold the cloves had not sought a “beard whisker” (*fio de barba*)⁶⁷ from the man who bought his cloves, and they explained that today, the beard whisker is no longer valid trust currency:

“Today they no longer accept that.”

His brother added:

“Today it’s the pen.”⁶⁸

⁶⁵ “Quando chega amenhã ou adepois eu espero, voce num parece. Eu digo, “Ó meu Deus, aonde ta, vou atrás.”//Chego lá: “Rapaz, vim ver o dinheiro do cravo.”//”Não”—voce pode dizer assim: “Eu não, eu não comprei cravo na sua mão...Não comprei cravo, não comprei na sua mão não, rapaz!”//”Ah, voce não comprou meu cravo rapaz? Onte, ontente rapaz?”//Voce diz, “Oie, eu não comprei nada disso, se voce ficar me atentano nós vamos pa delegacia, vou dar queixa de voce, voce ta me chamando de ladrão.”//Oie, veja que coisa, né? O cara comprou, mas depois de comprado não tem o documento. Nega—nega que não comprou.”

⁶⁶ “[Ele] vendeu aquela quantidade de cravo e num pegou nem uma escritazinha...vendeu por confiança, né?”

⁶⁷ See Chapter 3, Section 6d.

⁶⁸ “Hoje não aceita mais não.”//”Hoje é caneta.”

8. Seizing Upon Speech

After my initial conversation with Damião about the loss of respect as the loss of fear, we were able to discuss these matters at greater length. One of the most salient aspects of our conversation on this new occasion were those moments wherein he imagined himself being able to finally talk. Indeed, the rich, who used to “appear as gods whenever they showed up,”⁶⁹ were now the brunt of jokes—reminiscent of trickster tales—and other genres of equalizing narratives. One common genre of narrative, for example, would trace the sequence of events through which the subordinate party to a hierarchical interaction proves him or herself, through some demonstrative action, to be equal to, if not better than, their social superiors.⁷⁰

Heckling local politicians, similarly, appears to have become increasingly common genre of speech.⁷¹ For example, in 2010, the local mayor Humberto—the grandson of one of the region’s traditional political bosses—was giving a speech at a local soccer tournament, talking about his various plans for the municipality, including his plans to improve education. During the pauses in his speech, a group of women in the crowd could be heard hollering epithets at him: “liar!” (*mentiroso*) and “vagabond!” (*vagabundo*). These women were angry that he had closed down one of the grade-schools in their rural community, and through the veil of the large crowd, they were letting him know. The mayor became increasingly angry, agitated, and aggressive. Eventually, his speech turned into a furious yell, and his arms flailed about, as though he was striking at something before him. In attacking the air, the *threat—fear’s* counterpart—manifested itself in a public display, as he cried, “I don’t accept any accusations!” But people were more amused than anything else.⁷²

⁶⁹ “Tinha gente que parecia um deus que ia chegar ali...O cara que soubesse ler e escrever naquele tempo e chegasse na zona rural? Era um doutor, um rei, uma coisa assim.”

⁷⁰ As in the example given in the previous Chapter 10, Section 3b, where Emanuel had come upon an image of himself as being superior to his boss.

⁷¹ Fn420.

⁷² Instances such as these might be understood in terms of radical demographic changes that have fostered protection in the crowd. In 1888, the population density in the region was around 3.6 people per square kilometer (Flesher 2006:121), whereas today the population density is over 63 people per square kilometer. With greater numbers of people living in the region, patron-client and personalistic politics faced limitations as a result of increasingly opaque and anonymous relationships that stem partly from the sheer number of inhabitants in the region.

He imagined encountering the municipal mayor, who would appear to him as a supernatural being:

For me, he was a god. Because I'd even be afraid to stand next to him, because I didn't know how to converse and I was afraid of—of—of his reaction. Because he was brutal and only—he didn't want to talk with the poor. But today, no, today it's the contrary. The rich are afraid of the small who don't have anything. Because if a [poor person] tells a [rich person] off:

“Go to hell—I don't give a shit about you—go screw yourself!”

Today [a poor person] could say that, but in the old days, they wouldn't say it...There was no way they would say that.⁷³

The balance of respect between poor and rich, while far from balanced, was equalizing:

Today, the respect for the rich—[today] the small have risen up—[they've] risen up because they're not afraid to tell the rich how they feel. In one part this is good, in another part, it's bad.⁷⁴

The ability to speak—to externalize their feelings and thoughts—and to tell a rich person off was a shift in the constitution of social relations. This had both a downside and an upshot. He explained that respect was nurtured through reciprocity, and when that reciprocity failed, respect failed across various domains. Respecting others, he explained, was still important:

Furthermore, instead of being dependent upon the patrons, people come into increasing contact with impersonal bureaucratic structures.

⁷³ “Pra mim ele era um deus. porque, eu tinha até medo de chegar de junto dele, porque eu não sabia conversar e tinha medo de, de—da reação dele, porque ele era bruto e só—não queria falar com pobre. Hoje não, hoje é ao contrário. Quem tem medo do pequeno—que não tem nada—é o rico. Porque se o cara mandar o cara pra porra://“Vá-se pra porra, que eu não to nem aí pra você, vá se lascar.”//Hoje o cara diz, o pequeno diz, mas antigamente, dizia não...não dizia de maneira nenhuma.”

⁷⁴ “Hoje o respeito pelo rico—o pequeno subiu—subiu porque ele não tem medo mais de dizer ao rico o que sente não. Em uma parte é bom e em outra é ruim.”

It's good for us to have respect for children, respect for an older person, respect for people who have money, [respect for] the people who DO NOT HAVE MONEY.⁷⁵

He emphasized this last point in order to bring clarity to the fact that he is claiming reciprocity of respect. He concluded, however, that most people no longer respected one another, and he lamented this. But there was a clear upshot to the loss of respect, and I asked him to further explain what this was:

The good thing—the good thing—is because in the early days, the poor couldn't speak—not with a rich person. That's the good thing—that the poor are no longer afraid to speak with a rich person. Because before they might feel threatened—that [a rich person] might send the police to beat him up. [A rich person] could send his henchmen to beat him up. But today, no, they no longer have the—[the rich no longer] have the guts to do that.⁷⁶

If, in the past, the rich had an asymmetrical claim to the use of language, that was grounded in the threat of violence, the question now, more than anything else, has become one of reciprocity and the ability to participate in dialogue. Damião:

If someone disrespects me, I'll disrespect them in return...If I have something to say to a lawyer, I'll say it. If I have something to say to a judge, I'll say it. If I'm within my reason, I'll say it.⁷⁷

If the poor have found a greater capacity to respond in a dialogue, they can give reasons for their own criticism of superiors, as well as demand reasons for why they are reprimanded. The typical asymmetry of the paternalist position—“this is my house, my rules, and that's just the way it is”—is no longer sufficient. Silvano, for example, explained that he had no problem regularly debating his father, Damião, something that would have been unthinkable in earlier generations:

⁷⁵ “É bom a gente ter respeito por criança, respeito por um mais velho, respeito por as pessoas que têm dinheiro, as pessoas que NÃO TÊM DINHEIRO.”

⁷⁶ “O bom—o bom—porque, de primeiro o pobre não podia falar não—com um rico...O bom é isso—que o pobre não tinha medo de falar com o rico. Que podia sofrer uma ameaça—ele mandar a puliça bater nele. Ele podia mandar um capanga dele bater nele. E hoje, não, eles não têm mais esse—esse pique de fazer isso.”

⁷⁷ “Se me desrespeita, eu desrespeito também. É assim também...Se eu tenho de dizer a um advogado, eu digo; se eu tenho de dizer a um juiz, eu digo. Se—na minha razão, eu digo.”

I debate with my dad. Why shouldn't I debate someone? Because if I am in my reason, [why shouldn't I debate]—just not with God almighty, right?⁷⁸

In this view, if there are reasons and evidence that motivate a critical stance, then no person of any social category is closed off from potential critique. Silvano imagined debating the former president of Brazil, Lula. He imagined Lula claiming that he was wrong about something or other, and that he would demand *reasons* and *explanations* for Lula's claim thought he was wrong:

“But Lula, where's my error? Tell me, why am I wrong?” I have to be wrong [about something] for someone to correct me.⁷⁹

8a. *Imagining Talking Back*

In another interview, Damião gave himself as an example of someone who is not afraid to talk and talk back:

Whether it's a lawyer, a judge, a police officer, [if] I'm within my right—I won't talk!
Oh my [lord]!

There are people who see a police officer and stand there, see, trembling. But me, no, I open my mouth. If I'm within my right, I'll open my mouth and I'm not afraid. The wisdom that I have is just that [you shouldn't be afraid to talk], because there are people who are just afraid.⁸⁰

⁷⁸ “Com meu pai eu debato, por que eu não debato com uma pessoa? Porque se eu tiver na minha razão—só não o Deus superior, né?”

⁷⁹ “Mas Lula, por que eu to errado, me diga, por que eu to errado?” Eu tenho que ta errado pra pessoa me corrigir.”

⁸⁰ “Se for um advogado, for um juiz, for um policial, com meu direito, eu não converso? Oh meu [Deus]!//Tem gente que se vê um policial fica aqui, ó, tremeno. Eu não, eu abro o bico. Se eu tiver no meu direito eu abro mesmo o bico e não tenho medo. Aí é a questão da minha sabedoria é essa, que tem gente que tem medo.”

Imagining talking back, however, is not so different from actually talking back insofar as the former might be taken to constitute a domain of legitimate practice, in the sense of practicing or rehearsing for an actual performance.

Damião imagined a rich person threatening a poor person:

[Rich Person]: “Oh, I’m going to give you a beating!”

[Poor Person]: “Tell them to give me a beating, because then I’ll kill you!”

The [poor] guy says it right to his face.

[Rich Person]: “I’ll send them!”

[Poor Person]: “I don’t have anything to lose—I’ll kill you! Even if I die that very minute, I’ll kill you.”

And so [the rich person] feels fear. Because—today the poor are no longer afraid of their [threats].⁸¹

He explained that today it was common to see young boys—12, 13 years old—pulling out weapons and robbing people. Violence had become generalized, and it had also turned against the rich, and so the rich had become afraid, too:

So, that’s the fear—today, a rich won’t go out in public anymore. Like Odebrecht himself, you no longer hear people say:

“Odebrecht went to such and such place.”

⁸¹ “R: ‘Ah eu vou lhe dar uma surra!’//P: ‘Mande dar uma surra, que eu vou lhe matar.’//O cara diz assim na cara dele.//R: ‘Eu mando—’//P: ‘Eu não tenho nada mesmo pra perder, eu lhe mato. Nem que eu morra na mesma hora, eu lhe mato.’//R: ‘Aí ele sente medo, porque, hoje o pobre não tem mais medo disso.’”

Nobody knows—they can't [be in public] anymore. Unless it's a big politician—but they're surrounded by security, afraid of dying.

Odebrecht is the worst—he doesn't even show his face on television, he won't show it so that nobody recognizes him.⁸²

In an earlier period, Damião reflected, things were different. When people saw someone like Odebrecht arriving in the region, they would go running to greet him and demonstrate their subservience:

So, back in the old days, things were different.

[People would say]: “Odebrecht is coming there!”

And oh Lord! There'd be a multitude of people that went:

[People would ask]: “Oh, that guy there—is that Odebrecht? Is that guy there Odebrecht? Is that him?”

They'd go drooling—everybody drooling to meet that man—because he was a big businessman, a guy full of money. Everybody would be drooling but they would be too ashamed to say anything.⁸³

He imagined talking to Odebrecht today:

So today, no—if I see Odebrecht there, [I'd say]:

⁸² “Então, o medo é esse—hoje um rico não sai mais no público. Como Odebrecht mesmo não pode dizer assim://‘Odebrecht foi pra tal lugar.’ //Ninguém sa[be]—não pode mais. A não ser um grande político—mas é rodado de seguranças com medo de morrer.//Odebrecht é pior, que nem a cara na televisão ele não bota pra ninguém reconhecer ele.”

⁸³ “Então, antigamente não era assim não://‘Odebrecht vem aí!’//Vixe! Ia uma multidão de gente://‘É aquele que é Odebrecht, é aquele que é seu Odebrecht, é aquele?’//Ia babar—ficar tudo babando pra conhecer aquele homem—que é um grande empresário, um cara cheio de dinheiro. Todo mundo ficava babando e ficava com vergonha de falar alguma coisa.”

“Hello Doctor, how are you?”

I’d speak with him.

“All’s well, Doctor?”

“All’s well.”

He has a tongue, he knows what I’m saying.

So if he—if he says [something bad to me]—then I say to him:

“Look there, Odebrecht, you son of a bitch”—I’ll say it right back—“You’re a disgrace!”—I’ll say it right back.

If I need to say it—if I’m angry with him, I’ll express it, too. And so, that’s what causes his own fear—and that respect dies right there.⁸⁴

9. Denials of Servitude

The loss of respect did not express itself only in speech—or at least imagining being able to speak—but in other domains of practice, as well. If Damião was frequently able to *imagine* talking back, and perhaps less often actually talked back outside of imagination, this only indicates the ways in which transformations of self-esteem and the esteeming of one’s abilities (e.g., to express oneself) may occur at length and perhaps through long periods of imaginary

⁸⁴ Então, hoje não, se eu vê Odebrecht aí://“Oi doutor, tudo bom?”//Falo com ele://“Tudo bom, doutor?”//“Tudo bom.”//Ele tem uma [língua], ele sabe o que é que to falando. Aí se ele, se ele dizer—se eu dizer://“Ei Odebrecht, seu filho da puta”—digo também—‘Voce é um desgraçado’—digo também.//Se eu tirar pro dizer—se eu sentir raiva dele, eu digo também. Então, é onde causa o medo dele—e o respeito morreu aí.

rehearsal. The manifestation of “disrespect” through talking back or self-assertion occurred in other domains as well, but in a way that was analogous to taking cover within one’s imagination.

Joana reflected on some of her own experience with local authorities, most notably when politicians came to visit her and Damião during election season. On this day when I interviewed her, a local politician named Edimário had shown up on the community—seeking votes—and she knew that his arrival would mean that he would be making claims on her time and work. Joana no longer had a stomach for this. When she was younger, Joana explained, she believed in what the politicians claimed to offer to the communities:

I believed in them.

“Oh, Fulano is going to do this and that.”...

They’d say they’re going to do something for us, but in the end they never did anything. Only in the election season they’ll say:

“I’m going to do this.”⁸⁵

In Joana’s experience, politicians’ promise-making ceased to have any appreciable connection to future outcomes. Consequently, in time, the attendant forms of ritual activity that might have served as a mediating link to help bring politicians’ promises into fruition similarly came to an end. In these cases, these rituals would have included expressions of hospitality toward visiting politicians, serving their every need:

Me, in the old days, I used to give them a lot of attention...They’d arrive, converse—talk—

[Someone would say]: “Fulano just showed up [in the community].”

⁸⁵ “Eu acreditava neles.//‘Ah, fulano vai fazer alguma coisa, num sei o que.’...//Ele diz qui faz uma coisa, quando acabar num faz. Na hora da, da política, ele diz://‘Eu vou fazer isso.’”

So I'd go there, shake their hand, talk with them and everything.⁸⁶

In the past, politicians would arrive, seeking out the male household heads. The women would be set to making coffee, and sometimes the politicians would spend the afternoon in the community, visiting different homes and farms. When such politicians arrived, one or a group of women would be set to the tasks of preparing food for them:

In election years, he'd bring food for me to prepare...And I'd make it.⁸⁷

I asked her how it made her feel when that happened, and she laughed:

A bit angry, but I'd do it, because there wasn't a choice, but [I'd do the work] angry.⁸⁸

I asked her if she ever spit in the food, and we laugh together. Over time, however, Joana explained that she stopped believing in the politicians:

Well, sometime between then and now—if I can hide myself, I'll hide...Because—because they're all full of shit. This is the problem. Just like when [the politician Edimário] showed up here today:

“Where's the boss lady?”

But I was lying down, quiet, and I didn't get up.⁸⁹

Instead of greeting him to shake his hand, and prepare his coffee, she remained hidden in the bedroom:

⁸⁶ “Eu antigamente eu dava muita atenção a eles...Chegava, conversava—falava—//‘Chegou fulano.’//Eu ia lá, pegava na mão, falava e tudo.”

⁸⁷ “Na época da política ele trazia a cumida pa mim fazer...Eu fazia.”

⁸⁸ “Meia inraivada...Eu fazia, mas porque num tinha jeito mermo, mas inraivada.”

⁸⁹ “Mas de uns tempo pra cá, se eu puder me isconder, eu me iscondo...Porque é, porque eles tão inrolano muito a gente. É o pobrema é esse. Como Edimário chegou hoje://‘Cadê a patroa?’//To deitada lá, quetinha, num levantei não.”

There I was, quiet laying down [in my bedroom]...My daughter was there looking for me:

“Where’s mom at?”

And there I was, quiet.⁹⁰

At first blush, this episode may appear to be a mere retreat, and a return to fear, as Joana hides herself away, but this episode is remarkable for several reasons. First, is the use of the term “boss”—referring to Joana as his “boss.” This reference is done in the same spirit as politicians and patrons who, in patron-client relationships, similarly refer to everyone as “friends.”⁹¹ While there is little reason to believe that, in earlier periods, that people did not see these assertions of equality and familiarity (“friend”), or even subordination (“boss”),⁹² as instrumental and feigned, Joana’s reaction—her anger—is notable. Second, while she may not feel that she is outright capable of simply and publicly refusing any claims to her labor, she appropriates another means of refusal: pretending like she is not home. This refusal is analogous to the escape to the forest in the early period, insofar as it involves the appropriation of a space—her bedroom, closed off from the rest of the house—in order to effect a separation between her and the politician who had come looking for her, and was very likely going to make further claims upon her labor. By refusing to greet him, she was refusing to reconstitute a kind of public space where a patron-client relation could, yet again, be enacted. Instead, she was exercising a capacity to refuse, an ability to utter the word “no.” She recognized her anger, and gradually, she was able to transform that anger as she began to shape a new kind of role, the ins and outs of which she was still working out (and trying out) in increasing detail.

In her narrative, it is also notable how she frames her husband’s (Damião’s) and his brother’s (Colodino’s) beholdenness to Edimário. In some respects, she saw her husband and other men in the community as being more beholden to the politicians:

⁹⁰ “Eu tava quéta, deitada...[Minha filha] me procurano://”Onde ta mainha?//”Eu to la quéta.”

⁹¹ See Chapter 8, Section 9, especially 9b.

⁹² What Bourdieu (1991:68) would call a “strategy of condescension.”

Damião and Colodino—they've been hanging from Edimário's balls so much that they've almost hit the ground.⁹³

Since the last election cycle, Edimário had effectively disappeared from the community. After more than a year of absence, he finally showed up again in the community with stories to justifying his absence since the last election cycle. Joana mocked him:

He's got some illness, and he just can't get better. All his life, he's always too sick to come here—

And she points out the contradiction:

—but he's never too sick to go visit other communities.⁹⁴

The reality, she suggested, was that he only received about 10 votes in the community in the last election cycle. The men in the community had lavished him with adulation and flattery. She repeated her mockery of her husband and brother-in-law:

[Edimário's] sack was hanging low because they were pulling on it so much.⁹⁵

Joana's reflections—criticisms of politicians, mocking of the men who were part of her family—do not signal that she has wholly freed herself from subordinate relations to politicians, patrons, and patriarchal relationships. Her refusal to serve, however, and her reflective awareness about different aspects of those relationships portend a deeper transformation—above all, in the stance that she has toward herself—that appears to be emerging at length and in small measures.

The changes in Joana's and Damião's orientations toward themselves reflect a broader, and ongoing, process of social transformation in the region. In a way that parallels Alvina's ability to claim to membership in the social world through a socially recognized act of planting

⁹³ “Damião mais Colodino—o saco de Edimário quase bate lá embaixo de tanto eles puxar o saco.”

⁹⁴ “Qui ele ta duente, qui ele nunca fica bom. A vida dele é duente direto, pa vim aqui—agora, p'us outro lugar ele nunca ta duente!”

⁹⁵ “O saco dele tava lá embaixo de tanto eles puxar.”

in the world,⁹⁶ Joana and Damião are both, in their own ways, clearing the ground for new ways of inhabiting the social world. In many respects, their personal transformations can be understood in dynamic relationship with their access to productive resources. Joana felt less beholden to people like Edimário because, simply put, Edimário was less and less important to Joana's and her family's wellbeing. She and Damião had a roça of their own, and they were able to provide for themselves in ways that they were unable to previously. To be sure, as Joana suggested, Damião and his brother Colodino still seemed to be caught up in a patron-client relationship with Edimário, even if, in many other ways, Damião had begun to imagine himself on a more equal social footing.

In order to acquire those productive resources in the first place, however, Joana and Damião, together with a number of other landless families, had to hazard the first step of occupying the lands on a neighboring plantation. This was a crucial step in challenging the unequal and asymmetrical social world in which they had come up. To take that step, they had to face their fears and real threat of violence and reappear as a social force to be reckoned with. In the next chapter, therefore, I trace the emergence of various lands rights movements that appeared in the region in the late 1980s, and blossomed in the 1990s. I begin with the story of a man named Santiago who entered the forest on the outskirts of a nearby plantation, where he then began to plant. At length, he was joined by other companions, and together, they appeared as one of the first land occupations in the region that would be followed by many others into the 1990s.

⁹⁶ See Chapter 10, Section 4b.

CHAPTER 12:
BREAKING PLANTATION LAND & THE NEW SQUATTERS

1. The Contours of Decline

This chapter traces the emergence of the first land occupations and land rights movements that occurred in the region between the mid-1980s and 1990s. This period was one of protracted decline in the region, and in this chapter, I trace some of the contours of this decline that are available ethnographically to provide a sense of the lived dimensions of the transformations that occurred in the region in the late 1980s and 1990s.¹

The new crops that were cultivated in the region on a large scale all underwent significant transitions, whether owed to crop failures, declines in international markets, or significant changes in government policy. The vast majority of black pepper plants, shortly after they were introduced in the 1970s, had all died in mass because of an unknown fungal disease. The clove trees that had been intercropped with these black pepper plants, which had come into production by the mid-1980s, witnessed a steep decline in price between 1984 and 1994; the price per kilogram of dried cloves fetched as little as 50 cents in local markets, only a fraction of the prices it used to command.

The rubber economy, which had grown constantly during the previous decades, was radically altered and influenced the introduction of administrative reforms that accompanied the transition to democracy and the opening of the Brazilian economy to the international market. Brazil's rubber development superintendency, SUDHEVEA, was dismantled and the price supports that rubber producers received were nearly cut in half. Rubber producers who sold in the international market went from receiving between \$2.00 and \$3.00 (USD) per kilogram of dried rubber to between \$0.90 and \$1.70 per kilo, averaging about \$1.30. Similarly, tariffs on imported natural rubber dropped from a 40% tariff to a 10% tariff by 1994 (Martin & Arruda

¹ See, for example, Nascimento et al. (1994); Martin and Arruda (1992, 1993).

1992:37). These changes were a result of the opening up of Brazil's economy to the world market, which was due partly to rapidly increasing internal demand for raw rubber.

Cacao cultivation, most significantly, entered a new period of crisis. The factors contributing to the crisis in the cacao region are complex and varied (see Nascimento 1994), and included a protracted decline in the price of dried, unprocessed cacao. Between 1986 and 1992, for example, the price of cacao on the international market fell from \$2,500 (USD) to under \$1,000 per ton (Alger and Caldas 1994:108). Other factors included increasingly scarce financing for planters; reductions in the availability of agricultural extension services through CEPLAC, as a result of government restructuring; and, crucially, the introduction of the virulent fungal disease *vassoura-de-bruxa*, or "witches' broom" (*Crinipellis perniciosa*), from its native home in the Amazon basin. These factors were exacerbated by occasional periods of extreme weather that occurred at the end of the 1980s and into the early 1990s, including both unusual dryness and excessive precipitation from one year to the next.

Witches' broom was first reported in the cacao region in 1989 (Pereira et al. 1989). Up until that point, Bahia was the site of the largest and most successful attempt at large-scale cacao cultivation in South America, in part because the fungus was previously absent from Bahia. The introduction of witches' broom promised to further devastate the region's cacao economy. The is still shrouded in some mystery and a bit of myth, although, over the past several years, evidence has emerged that the introduction of witches' broom into the region was a deliberate political act, carried out by a group of regional militants affiliated with Brazil's *Partido dos Trabalhadores* (PT), or Workers' Party. The goal of introducing the disease was, apparently, to destroy the region's large cacao latifundia and undermine the traditional political power of the region's cacao elite, or *coronéis* (see Caldas and Perz 2013; Zoladz 2008).

The arrival of witches' broom in the region created a cycle of divestment on the part of the cacao region's plantation owners. Many of these large land owners, who often lived as absentee property owners, lost their enthusiasm to continue investing in their cacao holdings. As Nascimento et al. note:

The appearance of the disease witches' broom in May 1989, and the subsequent rumors that the cacao culture would become unviable after 10 years, led many planters to neglect the use of routine practices (mowing, cleaning the trees, and harvesting), and some of

them even abandoned their plantations completely. [Nascimento 1994:24, my translation]²

During this period, plantation property values decreased by approximately 60% (Nascimento et al. 1994:24-25), and, by 2002, it has been estimated that approximately 50% of the 600,000 hectares (or 1,482,632 acres) of cocoa plantations in the wider cacao region had been partly or completely abandoned (Machado et al. 2004:17).

The confluence of all of these events brought many of the large plantations in the cacao region into a period of rapid decline and eventual bankruptcy. In response to these factors, many different firms in the cacao region began to experiment with new techniques of increasing labor productivity just as they were able to evade social obligations to workers. Over the preceding decades, especially since the 1960s when various rural workers' rights were codified into law, plantations who were engaged in formal wage labor with plantation workers were required to cover the costs of various workers' rights—commonly referred to as *direitos*—that included various “social charges” and responsibilities, or *encargos sociais*, for employers. These various rights and obligations included a bonus month of salary at the end of the year, referred to as the “13th salary” or *décimo terceiro salário*; 30 days of paid vacation, compensated at the rate of 1.33 monthly salaries; and employer requirements to pay into Brazil's social security system and a worker safety net fund which can be accessed and used in the case of illness or upon termination of employment.³ In this period, syndicate and other worker groups pressed their constituents' claims to these various financial rights, which affected the financial accounting for the plantations in the region, for whom labor costs represented nearly 60% of their total production costs (Nascimento et al. 1994:24).

In Ituberá, the effects of this decline were felt throughout. Unlike many other places in the cacao region, which were almost exclusively monocropped in cacao, Ituberá has large-scale plantings of cacao, rubber, clove, and black pepper, and local planters experienced decline on all of these fronts. One person who had worked as an occasional contractor at Suor Plantation,

² The original text reads: “O aparecimento, em maio/89, da doença ‘vassoura-de-bruxa’ e dos rumores que se seguiram de que a cacauicultura ficaria inviabilizada dentro de 10 anos, levou muitos fazendeiros a negligenciar o uso até das práticas rotineiras (roçagem, limpeza das árvores e colheita), e alguns deles, inclusive, a abandonar por completo suas plantações.”

³ Respectively, the *Instituto Nacional do Seguro Social* (INSS) and the *Fundo de Garantia do Tempo de Serviço* (FGTS).

coordinating field plantings, recalled that many of the plantation workers in the region had left to find work in distant cities such as São Paulo, Belo Horizonte, Brasília, and Vitória in Espírito Santo. The regional economy had bottomed out: “There was nothing left, the economy zeroed out, it went to zero.”⁴ New infrastructure that had been built in the period of investment gradually began to decay, and many stores in town closed:

We had asphalt before, the asphalt on that road up there is ruined...It was a dark period from 1984 to 1994, it got ugly, ugly, ugly, ugly...Ituberá was left with just one supermarket...Stores where they sold agricultural implements and the like, they all closed...There wasn't anybody to sell anything to. [Those stores] failed, they failed, too...It was a dark period, dark, dark, dark.⁵

2. New Relations of Production

In response to this historical conjuncture, many of the plantation owners laid off their regular salaried workers, and began using more contract work (*empreitada*). Traditionally, the plantations would retain workers throughout the year. They would work primarily in the harvest during the months between June through December, while during the inter-harvest months of January through May, workers would focus on the upkeep of the groves, pruning the trees, replanting young saplings in the place of dead ones, preparing new groves, fertilizing the trees, adding soil correctives, fixing fences, etc. (Nascimento 1994:24). After the collapse, the plantations increasingly began to contract temporary workers and cultivating a more flexible labor force. Workers in the region were compelled to make their living in an increasingly itinerant fashion, becoming day laborers or what are commonly called *boías-frias* (Nascimento 1994:24).

⁴ “Aí não sobrou nada, a economia zerou, ficou a zero.”

⁵ “Já tivemos asfalto, acabou o asfalto na estrada lá de cima...Foi um período negro de 84 a 94 ficou feio, feio, feio, feio...Ituberá ficou com um mercado só...Casa de vender material pra—utensílios pra agricultura e tudo, fechou todas...Não tinha pra quem vender. Faliu, faliu também...foi um período negro, negro, negro, negro.”

Other firms experimented with novel relations of production,⁶ notably, the (1) *arista* and (2) *parceria* or partnership systems:

(1) *The Arista System* is a work relationship under which a cacao plantation would be divided into separate groves, ranging from 5 to 7 hectares in size, and each plot would be placed under the responsibility of a single, broadly skilled worker, who would be referred to as an *arista*. The worker would be responsible for the full range of productive activities required to care for the grove, and the worker's performance could be measured in terms of relative output over time. Under this system, workers still received benefits such as social security, and their earnings ranged from between 10-30% higher than what a regular salaried worker would earn (Gomes 1998:39-41). In order to stimulate workers' productivity, the plantations used various reward and "prize" (*prêmios*) systems that the *aristas* competed over. These prizes might include salary bonuses or material goods such as radios, televisions, silverware, and boots (Gomes 1998:41). Nascimento et al. described the reward system employed there in some detail:

Annually, pairs of *aristas* would compete over 20% of the net profit by means of indicators such as 'productivity per plant,' 'net profit per plant,' 'production increase in relation to the previous year,' 'least cost per plant.'...Monthly, there was a contest for 35% of a minimum monthly salary, in which the award criteria for each peon [i.e. worker] were: 'quantity' (30%); 'quality' (15%); 'frequency' (30%); 'organization and dominion' (15%); 'discipline' (10%). Furthermore, each month seven *aristas* (10% of the total) were selected to receive the prize for "Highlight of the Month," which was equivalent to 15% of a monthly minimum salary. [Nascimento 1994:63-64, my translation]⁷

If a normal salaried worker would earn 12 minimum salaries per years, the average annual salary on this plantation was about 20 to 22 minimum salaries per year, or almost twice what a normal worker would earn over the course of a year. The best workers could earn as much as 33

⁶ For a wide discussion of these, see Nascimento et al. (1994:63-64); Silva (1997); and Gomes (1998).

⁷ The original text reads: "Anualmente duplas de *aristas* disputam 20% do lucro líquido através de indicadores como 'produtividade por planta,' 'lucro líquido por planta,' 'aumento de produção em relação ao ano anterior,' 'menor custo por planta.'...Mensalmente há uma disputa por 35% do salário mínimo em que os critérios de premiação com os respectivos pesos são: 'quantidade,' 30%; 'qualidade,' 15%; 'frequência,' 30%; 'organização e domínio,' 15%; 'disciplina,' 10%. Ainda mensalmente são escolhidos sete *aristas* (10% do total) para receber o prêmio Destaque do Mês, equivalente a 15% do salário mínimo."

minimum salaries per year (Nascimento et al. 1994:64). With respect to the plantation's bottom line, this work system allowed the plantation to monitor individual workers' performance, and, more importantly, it reduced the plantations production costs by economizing on the labor force, reducing total number of workers by 20% (Gomes 1998:41). Because more skilled workers were employed, it seems likely that this system would have had the effect of flattening the plantation's management structure by concentrating various managerial functions with the workers themselves.

One predictable outcome of this work arrangement was that it would have systematically privileged skilled laborers, who had a better chance of getting these jobs over unskilled workers, who would face increasingly precarious life conditions. Among those skilled workers who did secure these jobs, these relations of production positioned workers in a stance of mutually recognized competition with one another. This would have promoted forms of sociality grounded in a competitive separation and alienation of social interests. The pairs of workers who competed over the 20% annual bonus, for example, would have recognized each other as a personified source of uncertainty and risk with respect to their life chances. At least with respect to one's work and livelihood, other workers could only be a *direct cause and occasion* of one's personal decline and suffering, and *never a direct cause* for an increase in one's wellbeing.

(2) *The Parceria System*, or partnership system, is based in legal provisions found in the *Estatuto da Terra*, or Land Statute, that was passed in 1964. Under this system, the plantation would similarly be divided into groves, from between 5 to 7 hectares in size, which would then be rented out through a legal contract signed by the "grantor" (*outorgante*) and the "grantee" (*outorgado*), who is more commonly known as the *parceiro*, or partner, or what I will refer to as the worker-partner. The worker-partner is then responsible for all aspects involved in the cultivation and maintenance of the cacao grove, from pruning the trees, managing pests, and harvest. The full harvest is then divided between the land owner and the worker-partner, typically a 50-50% division. The precise percentage, however, may vary according to different agreed upon conditions. If, for example, the worker-partner has to cover the cost for inputs such as fertilizer, then they worker-partner may keep a slightly larger percentage of the harvest. On the other hand, it is common for the land owner to make further deductions from the worker-

partner's share, for the use of things the roads, tractors (for transportation), office services, technical assistance, and so on.⁸

The advantage for workers is that they enjoy a larger degree of autonomy as far as plantation work is concerned, and their earnings are directly tied to their effort and ingenuity.⁹ Under the *parceria* system, likewise, it is up to the worker-partner's discretion to employ family labor, trade labor with neighbors, hire occasional day laborers or contract (*empreitar*) out specific work tasks. Like the *arista* system, one advantage for the plantation owner is that they can, presumably, flatten the management hierarchy and save costs in that manner. Furthermore, and perhaps more significant from a cost standpoint, the plantation is no longer required to pay the various "rights" (*direitos*), such as vacation time or social security. Legally speaking, the worker-partner is no longer recognized as a salaried worker, and as such this worker legal status falls outside of the purview of these specific aspects of labor law, and therefore the worker can no longer legally expect these kinds of benefits. The *parceria* system is, in short, a legally sophisticated form of sharecropping through which the plantation owner is able to avoid paying for any of their workers' financial benefits or social security, while at the same time maximizing their own profitability.

3. Partnerships & Suor Plantation

One important way through which the plantations externalize the costs of expansion, notably transforming the forest into new cacao and rubber groves, is by entering into contracts with rural workers who are granted usufruct of a plot of forest. The families are required to fell and clear the forest at their own cost, usually through the use of machetes, axes and fire. Once the land is cleared, the family is permitted to plant non-durable subsistence crops on that land for, perhaps, a period of one or two years. These crops may include any combination of crops like manioc, beans and other vegetables, and bananas such as *banana da terra*, or plantain bananas. Things like bananas and vegetables would typically be for household consumption; manioc, converted

⁸ Fn295.

⁹ Compare this to the discussion of other working arrangements discussed in Chapter 10, Section 3.

into manioc flour, for both household consumption and sale in regional markets; and plantain bananas largely for commercial sale. The unifying feature of all of the crops—including this particular kind of plantain banana plant, which is not the case of all bananas generally—is that they are non-durable and eventually reach a terminal harvest, at which point the land must be replanted with something else. In other words, these crops are not durable, immovable goods (*bens de raízes*) but a form of impermanent and non-durable property.

When the harvests of these crops is completed, as specified in the contract, either the plantation sends its own paid workers to plant the area in some kind of *bem de raíze*—such as rubber, cacao, or pasture grass—or else the worker has to plant the new fields in these crops and then return the field to the usufruct of the plantation. The plantation might, in that case, provide the tree seedlings or grass seed. The exchange, in this case, is rooted in the rural worker's status as a non-land owner, and the trade-off is that the worker needs to have a subsistence and the plantation needs to expand into new groves. The plantation's advantage in this exchange is that it can use the rural people's need to provide for their own subsistence as leverage; it uses the workers' physical necessity for subsistence against them. The plantation completely externalizes the cost of expansion to the workers, while the workers thus face their own *need* as something that stands in opposition to them, as something that holds them hostage and forces their submission to the demands of the plantation.

The contracts in which these planting arrangements are codified, today, are very specific about the relationships of property and ownership. The worker owns all of the non-durable subsistence crops, while the plantation owns all of the durable root goods. If these property relations were not specified in sufficient detail, then the workers who planted them might be able to claim that they had planted them of their own accord.

The *parceria* system was not, however, a means of expanding new groves, but rather a way of managing the labor of existent groves. When it was introduced into the Dendê Coast region, this new system of management became a source of potential conflict.

Some of the plantations in the Ituberá region began to implement the *parceria* system, as well as aspects of the *arista* system, such as the “reward” system. Suor Plantation was one of the larger plantations to introduce a *parceria* system, which is still in operation today. Partnership contracts at Suor Plantation, like in other parts of the cacao zone, were made for periods of three years and were renewable, and when they were first introduced, as many as 150 contracts were

distributed at a time.¹⁰ After all of the various “discounts” (*descontos*) that are applied to the worker-partner’s share, it is not uncommon for the latter to receive as little as a 30% share of the harvest.¹¹ One man, who had contracted a 6 hectare area consisting of about 7,000 trees, suggested that the most favorable share a worker-partner could end up with is about 35%.¹² In addition to the different discounts mentioned previously, another worker noted that a further complicating factor for the worker-partners is that during the non-harvest season, many families have to buy basic goods from the plantation store on credit. These debts are later deducted from the share of the proceeds during the harvest season.

4. The Faltering of Suor Plantation & New Pathways

These new partnership arrangements did not mitigate the immanent crisis that was occurring throughout the region, and in the case of Suor Plantation, it appears to have only exacerbated the plantation’s relationships with the workers there. The volatile period in the early 1990s contributed to situations in which property relations appear to have failed the plantation owners, on the one hand, while the plantation workers began to press for the legitimacy of their own property claims, whether in trees or in land, in their own ways. The changes on this and the other plantations in the region, including people’s experiences with the partner system, helped direct many people onto new paths toward autonomy.

Suor Plantation, specifically, had become financially insolvent by the early 1990s and the workers there had begun to challenge basic relations of production. Reinan, who had been contracted to work at the plantation during this period, remembered that the plantation office had been occupied and taken over:

The plantation office they have there...the peons [plantation workers] started living in it, it turned into a mess (*casqueiro*). I left in 1994. Witches’ broom appeared in 1992 or 1993, and then the worker-partners (*posseiros*) started saying that the [cacao groves] they

¹⁰ Interview with

¹¹ Fn295.

¹² Fn297.

were renting was their own, no longer belonging to the plantation. They wanted to take possession, and then—VIRGIN MOTHER! The workers would say:

“MY cacao, from MY *fazenda*.”

They even built drying-ovens on the *roças*, [and stopped using] the plantations centralized drying oven...The hostility (*bronca*) started—it started in 1991...dragged onto 1992, 1993, and when I left in 1994 the situation was still hot.¹³

This passage presents what were, at least from the perspective of the plantation, several transgressive acts that warranted invoking the “Virgin Mother.” First, some of the plantation workers had occupied the plantation office that would have previously been reserved for the managers. Second, they had begun creating their own productive infrastructure, separate from the plantation’s own, in the form of small drying ovens located on site in their own cacao groves. Finally, they started to make their own property claims based off of the rights that they felt they had to the plantation trees themselves, if not the plantation land itself. As such, the introduction of the possessive pronoun “my cacao” and “my *fazenda*.”

One person who worked on the plantation as a field manager, and was responsible for the plant nursery and the distribution of tree seedlings, suggested that the plantation had actually provided the worker-partners with the tree seedlings, which they could plant in the groves and cultivate to maturity. In exchange, in order to compensate the workers for the costs of caring for the young trees and bringing them into production, the plantation offered the worker-partners a favorable 70-30% division of the harvest share, with the workers keeping the larger portion of the production. This larger share would, presumably, be enough to offset the costs incurred by caring for the plants. When the contract ended, however, the worker-partners claimed that the trees were in fact their own:

¹³ “Aquele escritório que eles têm lá...morava peão lá dentro, virou um casqueiro. Eu sai em 94. Apareceu vassoura-de-bruxa em 92, 93, depois os posseiros disse que as áreas de arrendamento deles eram deles, não eram da fazenda mais. Quiseram tomar posse e daí, vixe! As parcerias falavam://‘Meu cacau, da minha fazenda.’//Fizeram secador dentro das roças, não era secador central aí da fazenda...Começou a bronca—começou em 91...Arrastou pro 92, 93, quando saiu em 94 tava aceso o pau lá ainda.”

“Nonsense, we’re the ones who took care of [the trees], we’re the ones who [planted] it, the plantation didn’t give us anything!”¹⁴

In other words, the plantation workers who were taken in as “partners” claimed that they were the rightful owners of the cacao and rubber groves, and until the plantation compensated them for the improvements they made to the land, they would be able to remain on the land. In effect, the physical space—the land—had been captured by the trees. These property rights claims, which were claims in trees, and *ipso facto* claims to the land upon which the trees stood, were grounded in a new mode of property claim making described at the end of Chapter 10. The problem for the plantation, however, was that the negotiations over the partnerships had been done by word-of-mouth, with the aim of avoiding payment of any of the workers’ benefits:

And then the shit hit the fan, because these negotiations were done by word of mouth...But there was no record of this negotiation for the worker to take care of the cacao trees, [which was done] in order to avoid any labor disputes, as though they never told the workers to care for [the cacao trees], see? But the workers said that they cared for the trees and so the [plantation’s] solution was worse than the problem. And to take those people [off the land], the worker [would say]: “I want to sell my *fazenda* for this price, because I was the one who planted it.” Understand? They declared a value. It was a huge conflict...It cost a lot to remedy.¹⁵

In the early years of the partnerships, the plantation managers quickly realized that these conflicting claims were going to become a problem, and they began to buy out many of the worker-partners from their contracts and refused to renew them. For example, each contract contained an estimated total harvest for an entire year, which included the projected share that both the plantation and the sharecropper would receive. If the plantation wanted to withdraw from a sharecropping contract before the end of the harvest season, the plantation had to

¹⁴ “Que nada, a gente que cuidou, a gente que fez, ela não deu nada.”

¹⁵ “E aí o pau quebrou, porque essa negociação foi de boca...Mas não tinha registrado essa negociação para ele cuidar do cacau já pra não ter problema trabalhista, não ta dizendo pra ele cuidar, entendeu? Mas ele disse que cuidava e aí foi pior o emendo do que o remendo. E aí pra tirar esse pessoal, o cara: “Eu quero vender minha fazenda e é tanto, quem plantou cacau fui eu.” Entendeu? Aí botou valor. E aí foi pega-pa-capar da porra...Custou pra sanar.”

indemnify the worker for the loss of their future harvest that was guaranteed in the contract. Other suits were brought against the plantation for various tools, materials, and other agricultural products that were used in the production process, but which the workers had to provide; things like wheelbarrows or fertilizers. In other cases, the worker-partners wanted compensation for cacao trees that they had planted on their own, and which would benefit the plantation in the long-term.

Most of the worker-partners appear to have settled out of court, however, for values that were far below what the plantation should have paid them. A group of a dozen workers took the plantation to the Labor Board (*Junta Trabalhista*), where they brought suit against the plantation to make good these compensation claims. In a 2004 interview with two men named Orlando and Ismael, who had partnerships with Suor Plantation over the course of the 1980s and early 1990s, they indicated that they had usufruct of cacao and rubber groves plots of 9 hectares and 8.5 hectares each, and remembered that they often earned shares of around 25% of the cacao production, and sometimes as little as 19% of the total harvest. At one point, however, the plantation managers suggested that they could expand into the uncultivated plantation lands near the already established groves where they worked as modern sharecroppers. The plantation would provide them with the tree seedlings, and they would have to carry out the rest of the work. Presumably, these worker-partners could keep all of the harvest from the new groves they planted until they had to return the groves back to the plantation. This was done, as was suggested to me both by these two men and the contractor cited above—who would eventually testify on behalf of the plantation—so that the plantation could get around paying its workers social benefits.

The details of the agreement are somewhat obscure given the limited amount of information that is available, but this contract was established verbally and informally. The plantation, as will be important, had no proof that they had reached an agreement with the worker-partners to plant the new groves. The two worker partners recalled everything he had done to improve the groves, and the nature of the agreement:

[I] made a house, I fixed up a house there and everything. It was us that fixed it up, we put in energy there, water...and they ordered it.¹⁶

¹⁶ “Fazer uma casa, concertei uma casa e tudo. Foi nós concertou, botemo energia, água...E eles mandou.”

He recalled the plantation managers telling them:

“You can invest there, because it’s yours...because it’s for your children and grandchildren.”¹⁷

And he elaborated:

Because they—when they gave us [that space] for us to plant those *roças*, to do everything inside of the contract, right, as though it was ours, but in the contract it didn’t show that. And every year they messed around with the contract. So, the contract, every three years they messed with it—every year they fiddled around [with the contract]—well that’s not a contract. The [plantation] was not fulfilling its obligations, with its end of the deal. That is, we did our part—because we needed the work, but the plantation didn’t fulfill its end of the agreement. Every year, we had to sign [a new contract].¹⁸

These explanations are somewhat confusing. What appears to have happened was something like the following: The plantation’s primary interest was in avoiding payment of its workers’ benefits or “rights”—social security and the like—and, in general, it wanted to avoid any labor disputes or claims for compensation. At the same time, the plantation wanted to expand by planting new cacao and rubber groves, and it sought to do so at a minimal cost. Therefore, it proposed renting out parcels of land to worker-partners, to whom they would provide rubber and cacao seedlings that they would then plant, cultivate, and bring into production at their own cost. Given the productive cycle of cacao and rubber trees, this would have taken place over a period of several years. In order to give the worker-partners a reason to participate in this productive arrangement, the plantation would agree to temporarily favorable terms in the split of the harvest (70-30%) and even used language that appeared favorable to the worker-partners (“it’s yours...it’s for your children and grandchildren”). The plantation managers made these contracts

¹⁷ “Pode investir, que é de vocês...que é pra filhos e neto.”

¹⁸ “Que ele—quando ele deu pra gente plantar aquela roça, fazer aquilo tudo dentro do contrato, né, como era da gente, e no contrato não constava. E todo ano ele mexia no contrato. Então, o contrato, com três anos você mexe, todo ano bole com nele, não é contrato. Ele não ta cumprindo com os direitos dele, com a validade dele. Quer dizer, nós cumpria porque tinha precisão de trabalhar. Né, e ele não cumpria. Todo ano, tinha de assinar.”

verbally, in order to avoid precisely the kinds of claims that the worker-partners eventually made, and when they modified the contract every year, it appears that they were asking the worker-partners to sign away their rights to the new groves they had been planting.

In the end, around 150 worker-partner families planted productive new cacao groves on the plantation. One of them recalled that, on one day—a day that he remembered in particular—his family had collected nearly 70 arrobas of cacao in one cutting. His friend recalled that in the grove his own family had planted, they could harvest as much as 190 arrobas of cacao. These new cacao groves on the plantation’s land were, in other words, very productive. With the exception of the trees that the plantation supplied to them, they planted these groves at their own personal cost. These groves would have taken several years of work to bring into full production. One of the two men that I was able to interview summarized both of their struggles:

And it was his own sweat, made with his own hands—and [the plantation] only gave the seedlings, just the seedlings to plant. I have awareness of this in God—God is in Heaven, he knows. Just because [the court] said that I lost the case, I’m not going to lie now and say I didn’t plant [those groves]. I planted them. I can die tomorrow, but I’ll leave behind the reputation (*fama*) that I had planted them. I left [those groves] harvesting 70 arrobas [per cut]...[the plantation] got it back [producing] even more because the roça only gets better [over time]. So that’s how they do it. They cut down a bit of forest and bring in a worker to do everything else for them for free.¹⁹

These two workers would eventually make their way to another plantation in the region where they would come into a piece of land that they could call their own. In order to understand these worker-partnership arrangements more clearly, and to trace one important life-path that branched off from this situation, we can follow one person’s narrative in more detail.

¹⁹ “E foi do suor dele, do punho do braço—e só deram as muda, as mudas pra plantar. Isso eu tenho consciência em Deus—Deus ta no céu, ele sabe. Não é porque ele disse que eu perdi, que eu vou mentir, dizer que não plantei. Eu plantei. Morro amanhã, mas deixo a minha fama que eu plantei. Deixei apanhando 70 arrobas...ele deixou apanhando mais, porque a roça é sempre mais melhor. Então o tipo deles é assim. É desmatar e trazer o trabalhador, pra fazer aquelas coisas de graça pra eles.”

5. Santiago's Partnership & Quest for Land

“It is in the course of the quest and only through encountering and coping with the various particular harms, dangers, temptations and distractions which provide any quest with its episodes and incidents that the goal of the quest is finally to be understood. A quest is always an education both as to the character of that which is sought and in self-knowledge.”

Alasdair MacIntyre²⁰

One of these people who entered into such a partnership was a man named Santiago, who had come from a nearby municipality named Ibirataia. He began to work at Suor Plantation around 1980 and had left the plantation by 1986. In 1984, according to this interview, the plantation's administration had been instructed to provide plots of land to the worker-partners. The plantation was to allow “each worker-partner to make a roça so that whenever they left the plantation, they wouldn't go to [the labor board] seeking their rights from the plantation, and instead they would receive compensation for that area that they left producing.”²¹ At the time, in 1984, he was one of a few plantation workers who had agreed to enter into these contracts.

By 1986, he had already created a small, but not insignificant, roça on the plantation lands. By this time, the manioc he had planted in the previous year or so was ready for harvest, and he asked the plantation managers for authorization to transport his crop outside of the plantation for sale. For what it was, the roça he had built was impressive. He remembered it being about four *tarefas*, or about 1.75 hectares,²² in size. He had planted much of it in root goods (*bens de raíz*). He recalled the roça he had planted with a remarkable degree of specificity given the time that had passed:

Four *tarefas* of mature manioc, cacao, plantain bananas, silver bananas, sugarcane, coconut trees, everything that the plantation freed me up to plant there...There were 1,650 cacao trees, 15 avocado trees—[the plantation manager] himself had given me some hybrid avocado seedlings—10 coconut trees, 20 orange trees and 1,460 cacao trees. Of

²⁰ MacIntyre (1981:219).

²¹ “Cada um parceiro fazer uma roça pa quando a gente saísse da fazenda num ir atrás de tempos da fazenda, receber indenização daquela área que tava produzindo.”

²² Or about 4.3 acres in size.

just the sugarcane, there were 1,100 sugarcane stalks—counted up and tied together for some buyer to come fetch—and some 600 plantain banana trees all set up, with large bunches nearly ready to harvest.²³

Very likely he had planted many of the root goods, such as the cacao or other fruit trees, inside the manioc fields, so that by the time he harvested the manioc, the other trees would be well on their way toward maturity.

He had sold three truckloads of manioc, which, evidently, had attracted the attention of the plantation managers who came to inspect his *roça*. When the plantation managers arrived, they found that he had planted a *roça* of a value that was exceedingly high. Santiago had understood his contract to the plantation to be something like the following: the plantation permitted Santiago to make a *roça* in a plot of land designated by the plantation. Whenever he wanted to leave the plantation at some point in the future, instead of paying his workers rights to the government administered fund, the plantation would directly compensate him for the improvements he made to that specific plot of land.

When the plantation managers first visited the area, they came prepared to ask Santiago to sign a document declaring that the *roça* he had planted was done as part of the worker-partner project. Santiago remembered the conversation in the following manner:

“You need to sign this *roça* here, as though it’s a partnership project.”

I say: “No. This *roça* isn’t a partnership project. This *roça*—I’m making a good (*um bem*) so that when I leave the plantation, the plantation will indemnify me for this property so that I can buy my own little plot of land elsewhere.”²⁴

²³ “Quatro tarefas de mandioca madura, cacau, banana da terra, banana da prata, cana, coco, tudo que a fazenda liberou pra plantar...Cacau tinha 1.650 pés, tinha 15 pés de abacate—que o próprio [gerente] me deu um abacate de enxerto, de raça—10 pés de coco da praia, 20 pés de laranja e 1.460 pés de cacau. Só cana, tinha 1.100 canas—contadas e amarradas pra o cara vim buscar—e 600 pés de banana da terra tudo iscorado de cacho já na hora de cortar.”

²⁴ “Voce assinar essa *roça* aqui, como é um projeto.”// Eu digo: “Não. Essa *roça* não é projeto. Essa *roça* eu to fazendo um bem pra quando eu sair da firma, a fazenda indenizar essa propriedade pra eu comprar um terreninho fora.”

Santiago refused to sign the document. Not long after the first meeting, the plantation managers arrived with a lawyer. When the lawyer arrived on the little farm and saw what Santiago had planted, Santiago remembered the lawyer declare:

“This here isn’t a roça, it’s already a plantation (*fazenda*). It’s a mansion of a roça. You are going to sign here that this [grove] is a partnership project.”

I say: “There is no way I’ll sign.”²⁵

It is not clear what the nature of the proposed contract was, except that Santiago suspected that if he signed the paper, he would be signing away his rights to the cacao grove he had planted. If Santiago was correct in his suspicion, it may have been that the document the plantation managers wanted him to sign would have declared the cacao groves he had planted were a part of already existent groves that the plantation legally owned. This level of detail, however, is not available given the evidence.

When Santiago continued in his refusal to sign the document at this second meeting, the plantation began to cut him and his family off from carrying out any of their various activities. For example, at that point, the plantation store managers began to prevent him from purchasing any goods in the plantation store. Santiago’s wife, who had been pregnant for many months, was ready to give birth. On the night when her water broke, Santiago sent for the local midwife, but the guards at the gates to the plantation refused her entry, and instead Santiago and his laboring wife had to rush to find alternative arrangements somewhere outside of the plantation. As long as Santiago refused to sign the legal document—evidently, signing away his rights to the groves he had planted—the plantation had order all of the employees on the plantation to refuse any form of commerce or service related to Santiago’s personal business. Eventually, Santiago filed suit against the plantation.

The case was to be heard at the Labor Board, or *Junta Trabalhista*, in the neighboring town of Valença. The round trip to Valença—in addition to the daily costs incurred for eating away from home—would not have been negligible for someone like Santiago whose family

²⁵ “Aqui não é uma roça, já é uma fazenda. É uma boa mansão de roça. Voce vai assinar como é um projeto da parceria.’// Eu digo: ‘Não assino de maneira nenhuma.’”

probably did not have very deep financial reserves. On the first day of hearing, the name of the defendant—the plantation—had been entered incorrectly into the court docket. Consequently, the judge postponed the hearing for another day. At the next hearing, Santiago’s lawyer had, evidently, entered his own name incorrectly:

So the lawyer was Dr. Lúça, my lawyer took down my name. So, my name is Santiago Nascimento, and she put Santiago Nascimento. In the next hearing, my name was written incorrectly and the judge annulled the question, and said:

“What’s the deal with [these names] all being entered incorrectly?”²⁶

The hearing was postponed to a further date. Santiago suspected what had been occurring. He suspected that the plantation manager who came to represent the plantation, and Santiago’s own lawyer, had somehow been collaborating to undermine his case. He recalled a crucial detail from that second day at the court:

When [my lawyer] arrived on the day of the hearing, she came with the manager of Suor Plantation...My lawyer was travelling with the manager of the plantation.²⁷

At the next hearing, the plantation manager arrived alone, and Santiago’s lawyer was nowhere to be found. Everyone waited for several hours, and still the lawyer did not show up. One o’clock came, and the judge went home for lunch. He returned at two-thirty in the afternoon:

[The judge asked]: “Did the lawyer arrive?”

[I replied]: “No.”

²⁶ “Aí a advogada era doutora Lúça, minha advogada pegou o meu nome. Aí meu nome é Santiago Nascimento, aí ela botou Santiago Nascimento. Na outra audiência tava meu nome errado e o juiz anulou, disse://“Que negócio é esse que só ta vindo errado?””

²⁷ “Quando ela chegava no carro no dia da audiência, chegava mais o gerente da Suor...A minha advogada chegava mais o gerente da Suor no carro.”

Three o'clock came, then three thirty, and he said: "She hasn't come." Then he cancelled the hearing.²⁸

In Santiago's read of the situation, the plantation managers had been colluding with his own lawyer to prevent the case from being heard by the judge. It seems likely that they were counting on Santiago not having enough financial resources, or the time, to keep pursuing the case, and they hoped that he would just give up, which is precisely what happened:

I didn't have the money to be pursuing the case every day, so I dropped the question...I quit. It's still there in the labor court.²⁹

Santiago had a great deal riding on the case. When the conflict came to a head between him and the plantation, the plantation had thrown all of his belongings out into the road, some of which had been lost:

Bed, mattress, television, sofa, dresser, chairs, table, stove—Suor Plantation threw them all outside on the ground...The television didn't show up in the things they threw out, it was a nice little white television. The television never showed up, just my other things. Three days later, the stove wasn't there anymore. I had even taken a guy up there and took a photo of my things because he had a camera. We took it all to the court. My banana, cacao groves, everything, went to the hearing. It would have been a large indemnification but then I lost—I lost [the case] because I couldn't pursue it anymore, I didn't have the money at that time to pursue it.³⁰

At this point, with everything at Suor Plantation lost, Santiago left the plantation and set out for a new horizon.

²⁸ “A advogada chegou?// ‘Não.’//Deu três, três e meia ele disse: ‘Ela não veio.’ Tornou a anular a audiência.”

²⁹ “Eu não tinha dinheiro pra todo o dia ta correndo atrás, parei a questão...desisti. Ta lá na Junta.”

³⁰ “Cama, colchão, televisão, sofá, guarda-roupa, cadeira, mesa, fogão, a SUOR jogou tudo fora na palmeira...A televisão não apareceu na bagagem que jogaram fora, era uma televisãozinha branca bonita. A televisão não apareceu, mas as outras coisas. O fogão com três dias não tava mais lá. Aí eu ainda levei um rapaz lá e tirei um foto das coisas que ele tinha máquina. Levei tudo pra junto. Bananeira, cacau, tudo, foi pra justiça. Ia ser uma alta indenização aí eu peri, perdi que eu não fui mais atrás, não tive dinheiro aquela época pra correr atrás.”

5a. *The Beginning of Santiago's Struggle*

Santiago's movement through the region would be characteristic of so many others, both those who had gone before, and those who would follow him:

I walked about [the plantations] with these children, they were all little...When I thought about making a future [for us], the manager always sought out problems with me, they practically wanted me to work for free, and I threw the hoe at their feet and said, "I'm leaving."³¹

He summarized the trajectory of his life, up to that point, in the following manner:

I walked from plantation to plantation. Sometimes I was [working] in one place and the manager arrived:

"Boy, see to that the work is done correctly."

Then on pay day, my pay didn't come right. I said [to myself]:

"Oh, my God, one day—in the name of Jesus—I'll have a bit of land upon which I will work for myself and not depend on having a job."

Then I began that struggle (*luta*).³²

The idea of a struggle, or *luta*, has a deep resonance here, as was seen especially in Chapter 3, Sections 4 and 8b. Thus began his quest:

³¹ "Eu andava com essas crianças, eram pequenos...Quando eu pensava em fazer um futuro, o empregado caçava um problema comigo, queria que eu fizesse o serviço de graça, eu jogava a enxada nos pés deles e dizia: 'Vou embora.'"

³² "Eu andava de fazenda em fazenda. Às vezes eu tava em um lugar e o empregado chegava:// 'Rapaz, voce manda fazer aquele serviço mais direito e tal.'//No dia do pagamento, meu pagamento não vinha certo. Eu dizia:// 'Oh meu Deus, um dia em nome de Jesus, eu vou ter uma terra pra eu trabalhar pra mim pra eu não depender de emprego.'//Aí eu comecei naquela luta."

I had that interest in building up a piece of land. I say:

“I am going to build a place for me to work, and one day, when I die, my children won’t be abandoned to the world as I have been—without having a home (*habitação*) so that from the hour when you lay down, you are forced to get up because the manager is calling you.”³³

At this time, Santiago and a friend named Gustavo had both left the plantation, and Santiago called Gustavo to go find a piece of land together:

“Gustavo, let’s go take out some land there at Suor Plantation?”

Then Gustavo said: “Let’s do it.”

Then we grabbed our shotguns, strapped them to our back, took a handful of *farinha* and put it in our bag, and me and Gustavo got on our way. And when we arrived there...me and Gustavo went into the forest and cut an area, a pathway. We made a pathway [through the forest], a great demarcation for Gustavo, next to a piece of land that his father had owned. And then I went to the other side...I marked out a big piece of land for myself and said:

[Santiago]: “This here is mine, I am going to work here.”

When we came out onto the road, we encountered three police officers and two other guys...Then the guys stopped and said [to us]:

[Police]: “What were you doing there?”

³³ “Eu tinha aquele empenho de construir uma terra, eu digo:// ‘Ainda vou construir um lugar pra eu trabalhar e um dia quando eu morrer meus filhos não ficar à toa que nem eu to, sem poder ter uma habitação pra da hora que deitar, vocês levantar à pulso chamado por empregado.’”

[Santiago/Gustavo]: “No, man, we were just hunting in the forest there, we always go out hunting.”

[Police]: “Oh, you weren’t working [in the forest]?”

[Santiago/Gustavo]: “No, we were out hunting.”³⁴

The pathway they had cut did not come all the way to the road and was hidden from sight. Although the people they encountered were rather suspicious, they went on their way. Santiago and Gustavo never returned to that area for fear of getting caught. It was at that point that Santiago turned his attention to a neighboring plantation, called Angústia Plantation, where there was a great deal of uncultivated forest:

“Let’s go face the question at Angústia Plantation.”³⁵

5b. The Forests at Angústia Plantation

Earlier, after he had left Suor Plantation, Santiago had received an invitation to work as a driver for a neighboring plantation called Angústia Plantation. When he arrived at the plantation, he found that there were vast tracts of uncultivated and uninhabited forest lands.

“Oh my, I am going to enter in these forests. Now, how can I find out if this property has any illegal areas or not?”³⁶

³⁴ “Ei, Gustavo vumbora tirar uma terra na Suor?”//Aí Gustavo disse: ‘Vumbora.’//Aí nós peguemo as espingardas, botemo nas costas, fizemos um punho de farinha e botemo dentro da capanga e eu me mandei mais Gustavo. E quando chegou lá...eu entrei na mata mais Gustavo e cortei uma área, um rumo. Fizemos um rumo uma demarcação braba pra Gustavo, vizinho com um pedacinho de terra que o pai dele tinha. Aí eu cheguei do outro lado...eu marquei uma monarca de terra pra mim e disse://‘Aqui é meu, eu vou trabalhar aqui.’//Quando nós saiu na estrada encontremo três policial e dois caras...Aí os cara parou e disse://‘Voces tavam fazendo o que?’//Disse, ‘Não rapaz nós tava dando uma caçadinha aí na mata aí que a gente sempre dá umas caçadas.’//‘Ah voces tavam trabalhando?’//‘Não, a gente tava caçando.’”

³⁵ “Vamos enfrentar o problema da Angústia.”

³⁶ “Poxa, eu vou entrar nessas matas. Agora, como é que eu faço pra eu saber que essa terra tem parte ilegal ou não?”

In other words, Santiago sought to discover whether or not the full expanse of the plantations land claims had been properly measured and documented, or if, on the other hand, a section of the forest that the plantation claimed as its own was only so by word of mouth. Santiago knew that there was a map of the entire plantation kept in one of the administrative offices, which he, like other workers, had might have seen on pay days or when summoned by the plantation administration:

Then I took the map, I located [the plantation] map, and then I said:

“I don’t understand any of this business.”

So I took a portrait camera, I had a 35 millimeter camera. I put the map down on the ground, opened it up, and I took a photograph of it. Then I took it to Baitaba and developed the film and took it to FETAG.³⁷

FETAG, or the Federation of Agricultural Workers,³⁸ is a nation-wide worker syndicate organization with state level organization. Santiago went to seek out advice from the representatives there:

I said: “Look, I want to enter onto this plantation’s [lands]. It’s very large, and I have the map of this plantation here in the photograph. Now, I don’t know how to find out if there is an illegal part or not.

Then the Dr. Aurelino said: “Look, we’ll hand this photograph here over to our engineers so that they can locate the plantation.”³⁹

³⁷ “Aí eu peguei o mapa, localizei o mapa todinho, depois eu disse://“Eu não entendo esse negócio.”//Aí peguei uma máquina de retrato que eu tinha uma 35, botei o mapa no campo, abri e tirei o foto. Aí levei pra Baitaba e revelei aquele filme e levei pra FETAG.”

³⁸ *Federação dos Trabalhadores de Agricultura.*

³⁹ “Disse: ‘Oie, eu quero entrar nessa fazenda que é muito grande e tenho o mapa dessa fazenda aqui no foto. Agora, não sei o que é que eu faço se tem parte ilegal ou não.’//Aí o doutor Aurelino disse: ‘Oie, vamos entregar essa fotografia aqui ao engenheiro, que é pra ele localizar.’”

Eventually, the employees at FETAG were able to locate the plantation's property records in INCRA's own archives. They discovered that the area of the plantation that was properly measured and titled by the state totaled about 700 hectares. In addition to this, however, according to the map of the plantation, the owner claimed to have possession of more than 1,000 hectares of the forested land as his own, without having legal title to that land. The greater portion of the plantation's land claim was comprised of *terra devoluta* that "without any owner,"⁴⁰ and the plantation owners land claims were illegitimate. The representative from FETAG, understanding the risks involved in a land occupation, did not advise Santiago to occupy any of the land there, but he did suggest that, from a legal standpoint, he could do so:

So he said: "Look, I'm not going to tell you or anybody else to go into that forest. Somebody might get killed. Now, if you guys do go in there, you'll be within your rights. After one year, or two or three, you'll have the right to stay on that land."⁴¹

From Santiago's standpoint, the question was resolved. He would be entering the forest:

So I came back here [to the plantation] and asked for my severance. I went there, I went to live [in the forests] of the plantation, I cut a trail into the forest and set out into the forest. I spent half a day just moving quietly about to see if you could hear the sound of passing cars. I could hardly hear the sound of anything at all. So, I started to work, clearing the *secondary growth* forest and I already had brought some cacao seeds in a bag to go about planting. The next day, what I had cleared in the forest on that day, the next day I went about planting it. I went planting, went about clearing groves (*roça*), I went planting.⁴²

⁴⁰ "Devoluta, sem dono."

⁴¹ "Aí ele disse: 'Oie, eu não mando voce entrar na mata com ninguem. Pode morrerem. Agora, se voces entrar, o direito voces vai ter. Ou com um ano ou com dois ou com três têm direito.'"

⁴² "Aí eu cheguei aqui e pedi a conta. Fui pra fazenda lá embaixo. Cheguei lá, fui morar naquela fazenda, botei um arrasto por dentro da mata e me toquei por dentro da mata. Levei meio dia lá atucaiano pra ver se via zuada de carro passar. Não vi praticamente zuada de nada. Aí eu comecei a trabalhar, roçar capoeira e já levava cacau na sacola pra ir plantando. No outro dia, o que eu roçava de mata naquele dia no outro dia eu já ia replantando. Fui replantando, fui fazendo roça, fui plantando."

Santiago had started work, alone, on the margins of Angústia Plantation. He would have first planted subsistence crops like beans, corn, and various vegetables, as well as manioc and plantain bananas that he would have been able to harvest relatively quickly. These crops, together with occasional odd jobs and that probably took on, would have helped him feed his family in those early years. These odd jobs very likely involved selling some of the timber he was felling. Later on, he could plant more permanent crops like cacao, but this would only occur much later and after he felt that his claim to the land had become stabilized. Not long after he began planting, though, the plantation managers began to challenge to his entry into the forest.

5c. The Gunmen

Not long after, sometime around 1985 or 1986, two gunmen came for Santiago. Santiago had gone to a local butcher named Adelino, who would regularly slaughter a cow to sell the meat. When Santiago arrived there, and as he was talking with Adelino, a jeep from the plantation suddenly pulled up. The butcher warned him:

“Santiago, it’s the people from Angústia Plantation!”

Santiago reacted quickly, because he knew they were there to kill him:

I jumped to the other side of the counter and squatted down...Underneath the countertop, it was full to the brim with meat, and I crawled in and laid down on top of the meat, underneath the counter, see?

And then the guys came in, placing their shot guns on top of the counter.

“Adelino, has Santiago come by here?”

Adelino said: “No.”

“Today we’re going to break that disgrace with these 12 gauge shotguns here. Give us a liter of cognac!”⁴³

They began to drink, make jokes, and argue over would be the first to shoot Santiago”

“I’ll be the first one to shoot him!”

The other: “It’ll be me!”⁴⁴

The butcher was good friends with Santiago, seeking to protect him, and he made up a story to throw the gunmen off of his trail:

“He won’t be coming here today. It’s rare that he comes this way. He’s already taking different roads.”⁴⁵

But the men had heard otherwise, so they stayed and waited for Santiago to arrive. By 11 p.m. they gave up and decided to leave, all the while Santiago had been hiding right beneath them on the pile of salted meat. After the gunmen left and Santiago reappeared, his clothes were all soaked with cow’s blood and the salt had made its way into his skin. Adelino’s wife had gotten him a bucket of water, and he immediately went to undress and bathe his burning body. The skin over the entire front side of his body had been badly burned by the salt. Over the course of the next several days, his skin began to boil and blister, and eventually it fell off before beginning to heal. Santiago had literally lost half his skin.

5d. Finding Friends & The Plantation Fights Back

⁴³ “‘Santiago, o povo da Angústia!’//Eu pulei o barco pro lado de dentro, acoquei e aí ta...o balcão cheio de carne ataiada assim por debaixo né, eu cheguei em cima da carne e deitei, debaixo do balcão né?//Aí os caras chegou, botou as escopetas em cima do balcão.’//Adelino, o Santiago passou aqui?’//Adelino disse: ‘Não.’//‘Hoje nós quebra aquele desgraçado na 12 aqui. Bota um litro de conhaque aí.’”

⁴⁴ “‘O primeiro tiro hoje quem dá é.’//O outro: ‘Quem dá é eu.’”

⁴⁵ “‘Ele não vem cá hoje não, rapaz, é difícil ele passar aqui. Ele anda até por outra estrada já.’”

Santiago worked for months alone in the forest, hidden away from everything and everyone, and up until then he had succeeded at keeping a hold on his life. It is unclear why the gunmen were not able to find Santiago where he was clearing and planting, but the cover of the surrounding forest, and the location's relative inaccessibility by car, probably helped to hold them at bay. Santiago, for his part, probably would have been extremely cautious about his movement in the region. As one lone person, however, Santiago did not pose a huge threat to the plantation, and so killing him was probably not a pressing matter or priority.

At various points, Santiago had tried to invite other friends to join him, but everyone was still too afraid:

After a year of working there—I always called other people to come work [in the forest], but everybody was afraid.

And then I met a guy...from Ipiaú, and I told him [about the land there], and he said:

“I’ll go. Wait for me tomorrow at Travessão and I’ll come with a group.”

I said: “You’ll really come?”

He said: “I’ll come.”

When I went to Travessão [the next day], I arrived there and then he arrived with a [Chevrolet] C-10 [pickup truck] with 19 people on top. Then I brought here [them to the forest], I grabbed on to my machete and I cut out another 19 plots [of land, one for each person]. And so we started to work. That was when the [plantation] discovered we were there, that was when Angústia Plantation discovered us.⁴⁶

⁴⁶ “E quando eu to com um ano trabalhando lá—e chamando gente, o povo com medo.//Aí encontrei um rapaz...de Ipiaú e falei pra ele, ele disse:‘Eu vou. Me espere amanhã no Travessão que eu vou com uma turma.’//Eu disse: ‘Voce vem mesmo?’//Ele disse: ‘Venho.’//Quando foi em Travessão, eu cheguei e ele chegou com uma C-10 com 19 homens em riba. Aí eu tuce cá, eu meti o facão e cortei 19 áreas. Aí começemo a trabalhar. Aí a firma descobriu, aí a Angústia descobriu.”

Now Santiago was joined by a much larger group of people, all of whom were searching for land. Around this time, another group of squatters, comprised of workers from other neighboring plantations, began to occupy the expansive forest on the other side of the plantation. The number of squatters was now growing to a critical mass.

When the plantation discovered that an even larger group of (what would have been referred to as) “invaders” (*invasores*) were occupying the margins of the plantation, the owner and managers began to employ various methods to try to expel them from the land. At first, the plantation tried to bribe Santiago to come back to work for the plantation:

Well, one day when I was at home, a car from the plantation came by here and a woman named Maísa go out. I even called her Maísa, because I know her.

She said: “Hey there, Santiago!”

I really liked her when I lived at the plantation:

[She said:] “I came here to visit with you.”

I say: “No problem, my dear, come on over.”

She said: “I’d like to eat some cajá fruit.”

So we went to the cajá tree—cajá fruit was already dropping.

She said: “Look, I’ve come because Dr. Edson [the plantation owner] sent me...[He says] that he will give you the jeep, he’ll give you R\$300 *contos*—he’ll pay—he’ll give you a job on the plantation where you’ll earn three—two salaries for you to return there [to the plantation].”⁴⁷

⁴⁷ “Aí, quando eu to em casa um dia, passou o carro da fazenda daqui e saltou uma mulé, Maísa, chamava até Maísa, que eu conheço.//Ela falou: ‘Ei Santiago.’//Que eu gostava muito dela quando morava aqui: ‘Eu vim cá lhe visitar.’//Eu digo: ‘Tudo bem meu amor, chega pra cá.’//Ela disse: ‘Eu quero é chupar cajá.’//Aí nós fomos pro pé de

The plantation manager was trying to bribe Santiago to return to the plantation, with promises of money. Santiago refused the offer:

I say: “Maísa, I quit working on other people’s plantations for this—one day I’m here, tomorrow there, after that over there. I have a lot of furnishings in my house, but none of it lasts because it always ends up breaking on top of some car.”⁴⁸

Santiago is emphasizing his desire to escape the itinerant nature of plantation work, and he gives one example of its cost: whenever his family moved from one plantation to the next, they went with their hard-won household furniture, appliances, or other goods strapped onto the top of someone’s truck or car. When they arrived at their new destination, they found that many of their things had been broken during the trip. Santiago was tired of that life, and the multiple forms of suffering it entailed, whether the more mundane forms of suffering to the more violent:

“I don’t want that anymore, no. Because tomorrow I might be there, and [the owner] might send some gunman there to kill me. I won’t go, not for a better salary, not for a jeep, not for nothing. I’m going to stay here in my own.”⁴⁹

When Santiago refused to come back to work at the plantation, the plantation tried other methods to expel Santiago and the other squatters who had entered the forest there:

Then the plantation started putting pressure on us to leave. And so on went that struggle, that struggle, bringing in more people from the outside and us uniting together and growing our group...When the other group...started to enter from the other side, then the group started to surround all of the plantation’s secondary [forested] area. So we began:

cajá, tava caindo cajá né.//Ela disse: ‘Oie, eu vim aqui que doutor Edson mandou...Que ele lhe dá o jeep lhe dá trezentos contos e lhe paga, dá um emprego na fazenda voce ganhando três salário, dois salário pra ir pra lá.’”

⁴⁸ “Eu digo: ‘Maísa, eu já saí de fazenda dos outros por isso eu ta um dia hoje aqui, amanhã ali, amanhã ali. Eu tenho muita mubilha dentro de casa, mas não fica nada, só quebrando em riba de carro.’”

⁴⁹ “‘Eu não quero não, porque amanhã eu posso ta lá ele pode rumá um pistoleiro e mandar me matar, nem salário, nem jeep e nem nada. Eu vou ficar aqui no meu.’”

one [family] working in one part, another working in another place, another working in yet another.⁵⁰

At this point, the plantation had had sent more groups of armed men to expel the squatters. The plantation managers had ordered a makeshift road to be cleared right through the middle of the forest, so that they could more easily reach the squatters:

The plantation ran a bulldozer through the forest so that the [gunmen] could drive through here, so they could come shoot us.⁵¹

Santiago and his group responded in kind:

We got together a group of 90 men with axes and rifles, and we went in with chainsaws [and cut down trees all along the road], we blocked the road from one end to the other [with felled trees], and so we cut off their use of the road. And so we remained, in that struggle, we stayed there working.⁵²

In the next episode, the plantation attempted to frame the squatters for theft:

Dr. Edson ordered [the plantation managers] to hide the tractor, the amateur radio, the firm's time-stamp machine, nine chainsaws, and then he filed a complaint [with the police] that we had robbed all of those things from the plantation. He thought he would gain the right to expel us. The sheriff called for us, we went to give our testimony.⁵³

⁵⁰ “Aí a fazenda começou impressionar pra gente sair. Aí lá vai aquela luta, aquela luta e trazendo gente de fora e a gente se unindo e crescendo o grupo...Quando a [outra] turma...começou a entrar também por cá e começou a turma circular toda a área secundária da fazenda. Aí começemo: um trabalha por uma parte, outro trabalha por outra, outra trabalha por outra.”

⁵¹ “A fazenda meteu um trator ali naquele espigão pra ir pra o ronco pra os caras andar por aí, pra ir detonar a gente.”

⁵² “Juntemo 90 home no machado e na arma e viemo e metemo o motor serra, entuiemo a estrada de fora a fora, aí cortou a ida deles. Aí fiquemo aí lutano, trabalhamo.”

⁵³ “Doutor Edson mandou tirar o girico, o radio amador, uma máquina de ponto da firma, 9 motor serras e deu uma queixa que a gente tinha roubado aquele material da fazenda que era pra ele ganhar o direito de expulsar a gente. Aí o delegado mandou chamar, nós foi e deu depoimento.”

One day, sometime after the start of the investigation which was ongoing, Santiago and some of his companions saw one of the plantation managers arriving in a car down the road:

When we saw, there was the car coming up. We yelled to the guy: “Hey man, stop right there.”

He stopped and [said]: “What is it you guys want?”

“We want to talk with you.”

But then he started to drive away, and one of our comrades yelled: “If you go any further, I’ll shoot you!”

And so he stopped. [We told him]: “You’re going to tell us who took the tractor, the time-stamp machine, the radio, and the chainsaws.”

[The manager replied]: “Oh, I don’t know!”

So we grabbed that guy, and we took him to the warehouse where we hung him upside down...We tied him by his feet and there he was hanging upside down.

[He yelled]: “Oh, you’re all going to kill me!”

“No—you just have to tell us who took those things and we’ll let you go.”

Then we hit him twice really hard, [and the man hollered]: “AH! I’ll tell you! I’ll talk, you can let me go!”⁵⁴

⁵⁴ “Quando a gente viu, vai o cara subindo ali. Nós gritou o cara: ‘Ei rapaz, para aí.’//Ele parou e: ‘O que é que voce quer?’//‘A gente quer conversar com voce.’//Aí ele foi pra andar e [um dos camaradas] gritou: ‘Se voce ir, eu lhe corto no tiro!’//Aí ele parou. ‘Voce vai dizer quem foi que levou o girico daqui, a máquina de ponto, o radio amador e o motor serra.’//‘Ah, não sei não!’//Aí nós pegou aquele cara, pendurou dentro do depósito...Marrou os pés pra cima e ele ficou de cabeça pra baixo.’//‘Ah voces vai me matar!’//‘Não, é só voce dizer quem foi que pegou as coisas que nós lhe solta.’//Aí nós demos duas tacadas boas.’//‘Ah eu vou dizer, eu digo, pode me sortá!’”

They untied the man, let him go, and he explained that the plantation owner, Dr. Edson, had ordered them to hide all of the supposedly stolen goods. He told them precise location where missing thing could be found. They brought the man into town, where they arrived in the middle of the night, and took him to see the sheriff and made him confess.

6. Speaking & Hearing One's Own Voice Through Another

Santiago and the other squatters continued their fight against the plantation, and eventually they took over the entire area of the plantation, including the cultivated cacao groves and administrative buildings that were part of the actual plantation. After several years, the squatters would win tenure or the “right to possession” (*direito de posse*) over the forest where they began their occupation. When this occurred, a local judge issued an order that the squatters—whom, significantly, he referred to as “posseiros”—had to return the plantation’s cacao groves and administrative buildings to Dr. Edson, but the judge ruled that the squatters could remain in the forested areas where they had already begun to clear and plant.

Dr. Edson did not accept the judge’s order, however. He wanted to retain the entire area of the old plantation, including the forests over which he did not have a legal claim:

[Dr. Edson]: “I won’t accept that, Doctor. I want my entire property, the whole of my plantation.”

The judge said: “Look, doctor, the order that I have here from the tribunal is for me to order the squatters (*posseiros*) to only hand over the productive part of your area. You only have a right to 100 hectares.”

[Dr. Edson:] “I don’t want that, no. Either you give everything back to me, or I don’t want it.”

Then the judge went and took the order that had come:

[Judge]: “Take this, now you’ll have to go negotiate with the central office in Brasilia, because there’s nothing I can do for you.”

So then he took off. And that’s where we remained. We kept the plantation headquarters, collected the cacao there, bought food for the people there and went working in that struggle.⁵⁵

In other words, because Dr. Edson refused to accept the court’s ruling, Santiago and the other squatters were simply able to remain in *de facto* control of the entire plantation.

Some years later, the federal government through INCRA forced Dr. Edson into negotiations over the sale of his property to the state. As will be explored in detail in the next chapter, it appears that Santiago and the other settlers were able to finally gain access to and support from INCRA by aligning themselves with the MST, which appeared in the region in late 1997.⁵⁶ When the settlers had gone with negotiations with Dr. Edson, he began by demanding an exorbitant price for the property. Even one of INCRA’s officials gawked at the price that Dr. Edson had demanded. Santiago recalled the official’s expression of doubt:

“Doctor, in this country there is almost nobody with a property of this [value]. For us to pay you [that much]—”⁵⁷

At this point, Dr. Edson became angry that the government official—someone close to his own social class—had spoken up against his demands. Dr. Edson retorted:

⁵⁵ “‘Não queria não doutor. Eu quero meu imove concreto, onde for minha fazenda.’//O juiz disse: ‘Oie doutor a orde que veio do tribunal é pa eu mandar os posseiros entregar a sua área produtiva. O senhor tem direito a 100 hectares.’// ‘Eu não quero não. Ou me entrega tudo ou eu não quero.’//Aí o juiz foi lá pegou a orde que veio: ‘Tome, agora o senhor vai niguciá com o escritório central dentro de Brasília, porque eu aqui não tenho nada a fazer.’//Aí ele se picou. Aí nós ficou naquela função. Nós tomou a sede, colhia o cacau, comprava a feira pro povo e tabaiano naquela luta.”

⁵⁶ The details are somewhat obscure on this point, but the evidence suggests that Santiago and the other settlers were unable to secure INCRA’s support until the MST arrived in the region. It is possible, however, that this episode in Santiago’s story preceded the MST’s arrival in the region and instead represented an early negotiation with Dr. Edson.

⁵⁷ “‘Doutor, no país quase ninguem de uma propriedade dessa, pra gente lhe pagar—”

“Oh, now you’re going to cross over to support these invaders?”⁵⁸

At this point, Santiago interrupted and spoke up:

Then I say: “Look, Doctor—will you pardon me?”

They let him speak:

[Santiago]: “In the same way that we’re invaders, he is, too. Because we invaded the forest just like he invaded it. For him to have not invaded—his plantation needed to be all measured, titled and legalized.”

Then president of INCRA said: “Sir, do you see?”⁵⁹

Santiago was pointing out, as he had discovered from the plantation map, that Dr. Edson had claimed a large stretch of forest over which he did not have a formal legal title. Dr. Edson was humiliated by a squatter, by the force of Santiago’s reasoning, and he lashed out at everyone:

“All you do is buy up land for these invaders! That’s why they take all of these liberties to enter into our forests!”

The lawyer repeated what I said: “Look doctor, didn’t you hear him? In the same way that they’re invaders, you’re just the same. Because you, sir, you’ve also invaded [the land there]. Because not all that land belongs to you—you’ve only measured one part of it.”

Then [Dr. Edson]—then he shut his mouth. The lawyer shut him up.⁶⁰

⁵⁸ “‘Ô, não trevesa dar apoio aos invasor?’”

⁵⁹ “‘Aí eu digo: ‘Ó doutor. Tu me dá licença?’”//“Do jeito que a gente é invasor, ele também é. Porque a gente invadiu e ele também invadiu. Porque pra ele não ter invadido—era a fazenda dele ser toda medida, titulada e legalizada.”//Aí o presidente do INCRA disse: ‘O senhor ta vendo?’”

Just minutes before the lawyer brought Dr. Edson to silence, Santiago had crystallized the logic that justified the squatters' occupation of the forest. He had drawn an equivalence between their own and Dr. Edson's occupation of the forest, since both sought to stake a claim to public lands they did not own. Both parties were "invaders." The difference, of course, was that Dr. Edson wished to claim the land without actually appropriating it. This moment is significant, moreover, as Santiago's voice was taken up into social discourse in the form of quoted speech. Whereas, in the previous chapter, Damião was working imaginatively upon the use of his own voice, Santiago was not only able to find and exercise his own voice, and begin to articulate an argument, he also heard his own voice and words quoted by the lawyer, who deployed those same words to ultimately win the argument against Dr. Edson. To be sure, Santiago's words were being quoted by a member of an elite social class who was authorized to speak in a way that he was not. Coming from the lawyer's mouth, Santiago's words reappeared with more force and authority. Still, at least in Santiago's rendering of the events, the lawyer cites Santiago as the source of the argument as the lawyer quotes Santiago's words. In this moment, as Santiago hears his own voice through that of another, both his and his companions' specific claim to land, and the general validity of their standing in the social world, are recognized and affirmed in a transforming social world.

7. Pequi Community, Houses, and New Beginnings

Years before the occupation at Angústia Plantation, Pequi Community began to slowly emerge at the intersection of two country roads that were situated amidst several of the region's new rubber plantations as they expanded in the late 1960s and 1970s. The land on the southeast side of this intersection had been bought up by the rich Brazilian banker, Ângelo Calmon de Sá, and was planted in rubber. Morro Plantation was located on the north side of the intersection. The land

⁶⁰ “Voces ficam pagando terra pra invasor, por isso que eles ficam com essa liberdade de entrar nas matas da gente.”//O advogado capitulou o que eu disse e disse: ‘Ó doutor, o senhor viu? Do jeito que eles é invasor o senhor também é. Porque o senhor também invadiu. Porque não é só tuas terras—é só medido um pedaço. ’//Aí ele—aí ele calou a boca. O advogado tapou ele, né?”

on the southwest side of the intersection was still in forest, uncultivated and largely uninhabited. The owner of another nearby plantation owner to the west, named Lúcio, claimed that all of the forest there belonged to him. This forest is where Pequi Community would eventually emerge. Today, Caio works on Lúcio's plantation, and he recounted the story of how Pequi Community surfaced:

Lúcio claimed that it was all his. There in the forest—all of it, where you find all of these farms there [today]—[Lúcio] said that you weren't allowed to cut a single shrub. At Pequi Community they said you weren't allowed to cut down one stick.⁶¹

In the late 1960s, when Caio first arrived in the region, most of the land around the intersecting roads was still forested, uncultivated, and uninhabited:

These lands were considered state lands (*terra devoluta*), without any owner...This land was pure forest, just the forest. These [agricultural] plants that you see all over the place...it was all forest, you could walk from here to [the plantation]...all of that was forest. The jaguar walked through there regularly...animals walked through there all the time. And then things started developing, developing, developing—someone cleared [the forest] here, another cut there. Today it's all plantations, it's planted all over the place.⁶²

After the rubber plantations began to expand into the area, Lúcio claimed the southwest corner of forest for himself. While he claimed all of the forest for himself, he sought to prevent other people from entering. The landless migrants who had come to the region in search of wage labor were a notable threat to Lúcio's claim, and he did not permit anyone to do anything in the forest:

⁶¹ “[Lúcio] dizia que era dele. La pela [mata]—tudo, por essas roça tudo aí—[Lúcio] dizia que não era pra cortar uma vara. No Pequi dizia que não era pra cortar nem uma vara.”

⁶² “Essas terra era considerada como terra voluta, sem dono...essa terra era mata pura, só mata. Essas pranta que você ver aí, tudo quanto é canto...Era mata pura, ce andava daqui até pa [fazenda]...aquilo aí tudo era mata. A onça passava aí direto...passava de bicho aí direto. Aí foi disinvolverno, disinvolverno, disinvolverno, corta daqui, outo corta dali. Hoje tem fazenda, prantio por tudo quanto é canto.”

Nobody built any houses there because they wouldn't let you, nobody built houses there because they said it wasn't—the land wasn't for—for invading with houses.⁶³

Lúcio's claim to that land, however, was by mere “word of mouth” (*por boca*). A man named Manoel, who was a worker at the nearby Morro Plantation and had married into a local posseiro family, had set his sights on that swath of forest—probably sometime in the 1970s.⁶⁴ He went to see some local INCRA officials for legal guidance,⁶⁵ and there he discovered that Lúcio did not have a legally valid claim to all of that land. The INCRA officials told Manoel:

“If there's no INCRA [tax document] for this land, then you can declare a part [for yourself] and let others know, too.”

And that was how he did it. They went there [into the forest], nobody paid for the land, no.

Lúcio said: “It's all mine!”

But that's the thing, there wasn't enough work for everybody while that land remained idle.⁶⁶

In other words, Lúcio claimed all of the land for himself but did nothing with it, while preventing other people from entering the forest who could have benefitted from its use. When Manoel discovered that Lúcio did not legally own the land, he and a number of plantation workers began to occupy the area:

⁶³ “Ninguém fazia uma casa que eles num deixava, ninguém fazia porque dizia que num era, a terra num era de—pa fazer invasão pa casa.”

⁶⁴ While the timing is somewhat obscure, it appears that the formation of Pequi Community began sometime in the 1970s, but not before the second phase of rubber expansion that was described in Chapter 4, Section 7.

⁶⁵ These officials would have probably worked at the federally managed Colônia near Ituberá.

⁶⁶ “‘Se não tiver INCRA desse terreno, você pode declarar uma parte e abrir mão pr'us outro, os outro.’//E foi assim que ele fez. Chegou la ninguém pagava não.//[Lúcio] dizia: ‘Tudo meu!’//Quer dizer, não tinha emprego pra ninguém e as terra parada.”

So Manoel went there, he went there to INCRA, [and found] there was no document at all [for that land]. That was when he reacted, he immediately declared 40 hectares for himself. He needed to work, because the man was a hard worker...And so he started to work [in that forest], and then he went and told everybody else.⁶⁷

This led to a profound change in the area, as a number of small roças and homes began to crop up in the forest there, at the same time that the new rubber plantations were expanding into the region:

Not long ago there was nothing there, there was only forest there, you only heard frogs croaking. Today it's all developed.⁶⁸

Not all of the plantation workers in the area benefitted from this early land occupation at Pequí Community. Caio recalled that, at the time when this occupation first occurred, he was working at Morro Plantation. The plantation manager there attempted to forbid the workers from participating in the land occupation, perhaps out of fear of a more generalized set of land invasions:

At that time, I should have gotten my own land, because I worked down there [at Morro Plantation], but the manager there said:

“Whoever works here at the plantation is not going to invade any of those lands, because I won't accept it. Because somebody might try to harm the people there, and the plantation won't be responsible [for anybody getting hurt].”⁶⁹

⁶⁷ “Aí ele Manoel foi lá, foi no INCRA, num tinha documento nenhum, ele meteu bronca ali, é declarou logo 40 hectare. Ele precisava de trabalhar que o homem é trabalhador...Aí começou a trabalhar, chegou e abriu o bico pra o pessoal.”

⁶⁸ “Mas quando o Manoel chegou lá que descubriu, a turma partiu pa dentro...Teve inteligência e disinvolveu mais...Uns tempos atrás sem nada aí, só tinha mata aí, só via sapo gritar. Hoje tá bem disinvoldido.”

⁶⁹ “E eu nesse tempo era pra eu pegar, mas eu trabalhava aí em baixo, aí o gerente disse...//“Quem trabalhar aqui na fazenda não vai invasar nessa terra nenhuma que eu num vou aceitar. Que pode alguém fazer o mal a pessoa por lá e a fazenda não é responsável.””

Caio obeyed because he was afraid, and as a consequence, he remained working on the plantations:

I really am a fearful (*medroso*) person. And well, the fearful never get anything...And me, because of that fear, I've stayed working on the plantation to this day. But the important thing is that I'm not in debt to anybody, right? I live free [of debt], thanks to God.⁷⁰

Today, Pequi Community is a mixed rural community, comprised of a number of smallholding families with their *roças*, and a large number of landless families that work on the nearby plantations. The community has a small, municipally-operated elementary school as well as a medical post. There are both high and low-tension power lines running throughout most of the community, which also has several sources of water, including well water and water from some nearby springs. The community has a defunct manioc flour mill (*casa de farinha*) that was built in the late 1990s, which is now used as housing for several landless families. One of the oldest buildings in the community is an old abandoned building that was built by DERBA,⁷¹ Bahia's road-building authority, in the 1970s. DERBA used the building as a small depository, presumably, to house materials and equipment related to road maintenance. Eventually, the structure was abandoned, probably at the same time that the overall region entered into decline.

Pequi Community expanded into the relatively large rural community that it is today after Manoel and some of his in-laws began to sell small house lots to plantation workers in the area. Selling off small house lots, presumably, helped Manoel and his family create small amounts of capital that they could use to invest in their own *roças*. Over the years, Pequi Community eventually developed along three branches in the road, a middle, bottom, and upper road. The middle road was built and is inhabited by Manoel's family and in-laws, and now includes nearly three generations of people—Manoel, his children, and their young children. The entrance to the middle road also contains a number of houses owned by families who purchased lots from Manoel.

⁷⁰ “Eu sou medroso mermo. Aí, o medroso nunca tem nada...E eu com medo me deixou trabalhano na roça até hoje. Agora o importante que eu não deva a pessoa nenhuma, né? Vivo em liberdade graças a Deus.”

⁷¹ *Departamento de Infraestrutura de Transportes da Bahia.*

The bottom road in the community has the greatest amount of vehicle traffic, including trucks from the plantations, kombis, and buses. A large number of plantation workers have house plots there, and Morro Plantation built worker housing nearby on the north side of the road. Some of the residents on the bottom road have opened up small, independently owned country stores (*vendas*). The old DERBA structure is also located on the bottom road, and after it was abandoned, the structure was occupied a couple families that refashioned it into their primary residence. Over the years, these families made various improvements to the building, including reinforcing the roof.⁷²

The upper road has been increasingly occupied since the 1980s by former plantation workers who purchased house plots from Manoel and his family. The transactions for these house lots were recorded in hand-written sales receipts (*recibos de compras e vendas*), which were authenticated at the local police station in a nearby town (*delegacia*). Damião, for example, had bought a house at Pequi Community around 1992. At that time, Damião had just left Suor Plantation. He had been working there for nearly 14 years, and he had to take the plantation to court for severance pay that he had not received.⁷³ He won the case in court, and used the money to buy his first house at Pequi Community. He bought the house from another plantation worker who, in turn, had bought his house plot from Manoel's brother-in-law some years earlier.

Sometime around 1995 or 1996, a group of families living on the upper road formed a small community association, and they negotiated with the municipal mayor to purchase a small piece of land from Manoel in order to build a soccer field for the community. When the construction of the soccer field was complete, there was a strip of unused land between the road and the field that was about 15 meters wide and at least 200 meters long. The local association divided this strip of land into further house lots and donated these lots—apparently for free—to a number of landless families who were living in the area. One man, who was president of the community association at the time, explained that he had been responsible for donating these lands: “All those houses, I was the one who donated all that land so people could build houses.”⁷⁴ This resulted in a significant number of the newest houses along the upper road that were built, in large part, made by a former plantation workers like Damião over the course of the late 1980s and early 1990s. The location of these house lots throughout Pequi Community was

⁷² Fn594.

⁷³ Fn172.

⁷⁴ “E aquelas casas, foi eu que aduei os terreno tudo pra dar ao povo pra fazer casas.”

convenient for rural workers, as it gives them access to a wide variety of work options—both on the nearby plantations, and for smallholding families with *roças*—all of which were easily accessible by foot.

For landless plantation workers, having a house that was not directly tied to the plantations provided a new measure of autonomy and security apart from the vicissitudes of plantation life. Owning a house plot fostered new kinds of productive activities. Many of the houses have small backyards planted in various kinds of trees, including cacao trees but also other fruit trees such as papaya and bananas, as well as various vegetables and herbs that are used in cooking. Many of the houses have access to electricity, and this means that families are able to produce goods that can be used for domestic consumption or directed toward sale in the local community or in town. Most households own refrigerators with small freezers, and it is not uncommon for families, for example, to make small popsicles (*geladinhos*) that can be sold for around 25 *centavos* each.

Many of the houses have accounts with the local energy company, whereas for some households, acquiring access to electricity meant illegally tapping into power lines running between the nearby plantations. Families, whose houses are situated too far from standing the power lines, might have to save up to buy spools of electrical wiring, which they can run to their nearest neighbor's home with electricity. In some cases, this might mean saving up to buy a few hundred meters of wiring. In such cases, households who borrow energy from neighboring households will have to cover the cost of their energy usage. Poorer households—which may be comprised of young families, households headed by single mothers, or households comprised of aging men who live alone—might borrow energy from better-off households who might offer it for free. Damião, for example, helped his young nephew, who had just started a new family, with his energy bills. Damião commented one afternoon: “Poor guy, he earns a lot less than I do.”⁷⁵ Their houses were close by one another, and Damião had set up an improvised electrical circuit between the two homes.

After the small uprising that had occurred on Suor Plantation in the mid-1980s, and the subsequent occupation of Angústia Plantation, Pequi Community continued to grow into the early 1990s. Pequi Community, itself the result of an even earlier land occupation, provided many plantation workers in the region with a stable place they could call home and new material

⁷⁵ “Coitado, ele ganha muito menos do que eu.”

resources. Familiar with the increasingly successful land occupation that had occurred at Angústia Plantation, their example provided other landless families with the courage to consider their own prospects of acquiring bits of land for themselves. Damião, his family, brothers, and many of his friends, who had taken up residence at Pequi Community, had been eyeing the old abandoned plantation at Nossa Senhora for many years. The plantation there was partially planted in rubber in the 1970s, but it had been abandoned soon after. By the 1980s, it had reverted back into secondary growth forest. Before the collapse of the region's economy at the end of the 1990s, Nossa Senhora had been occupied by other squatter groups on at least one, and maybe two, occasions in the mid-1980s. But unlike the occupation at Angústia Plantation, these groups were violently expelled. It was only after the collapse in the regional economy that Nossa Senhora, and several other plantations in the region, became renewed targets for land occupations as well as negotiated land purchases. Between 1995 and 1996, an independent association of rural workers entered into negotiations with one, and eventually two additional plantation owners who wanted to sell their plantations and get out of the rubber and cacao business. The association proposed to buy these lands using agricultural loans, and then divide the land up among the families. Finally, sometime in 1997, word had come that the MST was planning a series of occupations in the region. The MST was nationally known by then, and the atmosphere in the region became charged in anticipation of the MST's arrival. This was the moment when Damião and his companions decided that it was time to occupy Nossa Senhora, and a few months later, the MST finally arrived in the region.

The plantations that the MST had identified for occupation, however, were the same ones that the local association had already entered into negotiations to purchase. This circumstance gave rise to a new, and unexpected, period of internal conflict among these different agrarian social movements. The next chapter focuses upon the MST's arrival in the region, and the reappearance of hierarchical and unequal relationships. The chapter begins by exploring a moment of outright conflict between one MST leader and the settlers at Angústia Plantation, and then explores the MST's form of collective labor and property that proved inadequate to local people's sense of distributive and recognitive justice. The figure of legal land "documents," and the lack of control over them, appears yet again as a crucial site of social contestation.

CHAPTER 13:
THE ONGOING WORK OF EMANCIPATION

1. A Small Rebellion; or, Expelling the MST

*“Slavery ended, but it’s just like slavery...”*¹

“...we are convinced that liberty without socialism is privilege, injustice; and that socialism without liberty is slavery and brutality...” M.A. Bakunin²

After Santiago and the other squatters occupied and took control of Angústia Plantation, they were finally able to cultivate the forest there as their own. The community that they formed will be referred to in this chapter as Settlement 6, as can be seen on the map in Figure 23 below. As described in the previous chapter, Settlement 6 initially began in the mid-1980s when Santiago began squatting and planting the forest on the outskirts of a large cacao plantation in the middle of the 1980s. Sometime thereafter, he was joined by two other groups of squatters, one that was comprised of other plantation workers from the area, and another group that had come from the nearby municipality of Ipiauí. Their joining together brought about a turn of fate for these plantation workers, and a reversal of fate for the local owning class who, in earlier decades, had acquired their lands by expelling the posseiros who had inhabited the forests.

Santiago and the other families at Settlement 6 were finally able to formalize their land claims, and get institutional support from INCRA, around 1997 when the MST arrived in the region. Up to that time, Santiago and the other squatter families had been unable to access the bureaucratic channels necessary to formalize their land claims. When the MST arrived, they decided to affiliate their community with the organization, hoping that the MST would help them

¹ “O escravidão acabou. Mas é o jeito do escravo...”

² M.A. Bakunin (1972[1867]:127).

achieve better results. At that point, “militants” from the MST came to establish their presence in the squatter settlement.³ Within a couple years, however, the settlers became dissatisfied with their experiences under the MST’s leadership. Santiago suggested that the leaders of the MST had gone “putting us [to work] as slaves, more than when we worked on the plantation.”⁴ These experiences culminated in the settlers’ decision, emboldened by an outspoken settler named Honório, to expel the MST from their community. In Honório’s words, the families sought to recover what he described as the time when they lived “independent [and] with our liberty”⁵ during the first years after they had stabilized their occupation of the old plantation.

Honório recalled some of the early conversations through which they had become conscious of their situation and decided to remove the MST:

And then we started to talk, we started to talk, we started to become conscious (*conscientizar*), and so it went, becoming [more] conscious.

[Someone asked]: “Man, could this really work?”

[I answered]: “Yes, it will work. We just have to be courageous, but it will work. We’ll send these guys running from here, and we’ll take back our freedom.”

Then the people started to believe and said: “How do we do it?”

³ The Portuguese term *militante* may also be translated in English as “activist,” although the latter has a more direct counterpart in the Portuguese term *ativista*. While the translation of *militante* as “activist” may be appropriate under certain circumstances, the English term “activist” fails to capture relevant sociological distinctions. In this ethnographic context, the idiom of “militancy” is an explicit denotational trope that invokes combative resonances in the struggle for land against landowners. Because landowners sometimes resort to the use of violence to defend their land claims, a military-style organization comprised of a large number of well-coordinated people provides a means for protection. Such an organization differentially distributes the exercise of command, control, and force across people that occupy different locations within the MST hierarchy, which is described in further detail below. When I use the English term “militant,” I attempt to remain faithful to these sociological resonances in people’s discourses. When I use the term “activist,” I am referring to actors who similarly take themselves to be engaged in potentially dangerous struggle, but who are sociologically marginal to the exercise of command, control, and force.

⁴ “Pondo a gente mais escravo do que quando trabalhava na fazenda.”

⁵ “Independente com a nossa liberdade.”

I say: “Do the following...”⁶

At the time, the MST militant who was living in the region was a man that will be referred to as Osório. The settlers were searching for a way to get Osório and the rest of the MST to leave. Honório suggested a plan to commandeer the car that Osório had for his personal use, precipitate a confrontation, and tell Osório to leave:

They were at a party [in a neighboring settlement, driving people back and forth] with the car, and I say...“As soon as the car arrives, we take the car and then Osório will come. And when he comes we will tell him the reality [of things]. Close [the conversation] there and we expel him from here, say that we no longer want him here, period. And if he stays, we’ll break him.”

And well, the people [said to one another], “Could this work?”

[I said]: “It will.”

[Then the people were resolved]: “Well then, alright, let’s go finish this. And whoever doesn’t accept the proposal can leave together with [Osório].”⁷

Honório explained that people living in the community “really didn’t like [Osório] anyway, people already disliked [him],”⁸ and that there was little chance that anybody would be against the plan. He advances the story at this point:

⁶ “E aí a gente começou a conversar, começamos a conversar, começamos a conscientizar e lá vai, conscientizando. ‘Rapaz, será que dá certo?’ ‘Dá certo sim. É só nós tomar coragem, que da certo. Nós bota esses caras pra correr daqui e nós vamos retomar nossa liberdade.’ Aí o pessoal começou a acreditar né e disse: ‘Como é que a gente faz?’ Digo, ‘Faz o seguinte...’”

⁷ “Eles tavam numa festa no Limoeiro com o carro e eu digo—e tavam carregando gente de lá pra cá e tal—“Na hora que o carro chegar, nós prende o carro que Osório vem. E na hora que ele vim a gente conta a realidade pra ele. Fecha aí e nós expulsa ele daqui, diz que nós não quer mais ele aqui e cabou. E se ele continuar a gente quebra ele no pau aqui.” Aí assim, o pessoal, “Será que da certo?” “Dá.” “Então, pronto, umbora fechar assim. E quem não aceitar a proposta sai junto com ele.”

⁸ “O pessoal não gostava dele mesmo, já o pessoal não tava gostando”

When the car arrived, we went and took the car. [Osório] had a guy who drove for him, and [we] went and took the keys from the guy. Then we got a motorcycle, put the guy on the motorbike so that he could go let [Osório] know that we had taken the car... Shortly after he arrived [yelling], “AH, SUCH-AND-SUCH!” with a big 38 [pistol] in his hand, wanting to shoot [someone]. Wanting to shoot, and so it went. The guys immediately surrounded him, a bunch [of people] immediately surrounded him [to confront him].⁹

Predictably, conflict ensued. Osório returned to the settlement later that night, armed with a gun, and a large truckload of people from other nearby MST settlements whom he brought to help suppress what was turning out to be a small rebellion. Honório and his companions expected that he would return later that evening, and so everyone in the community stayed up to keep a lookout:

Sometime around nine at night we saw a [flatbed] truck up there, full of people. A truck full of people and [Osório in] a rental car... [He drove] into the middle of the field, drove about in this [car] and had a gun in his hand.

[Osório]: “Where is Honório? Where is Honório? Where is Honório?”¹⁰

By that time, however, Honório had gone into hiding. Instead of finding Honório, Osório encountered the whole community united against him:

Then the people [said]: “Honório’s not here, man. It’s all of us here and the conversation is over. If you’ve come here to kill one, you have to kill everybody, so stop acting stupid.”¹¹

⁹ “Aí quando o carro chegou a gente foi lá e prendeu o carro. Tinha um cara que dirigia pra ele, aí foi lá e tomamos a chave do carro do cara. Aí pegamos uma moto, botamos o cara na moto pro cara ir avisar a ele que nós tinha tomado o carro...Daqui a pouco ele já chegou: “Ah, não-sei-o-que!” com um trinta e oitão na mão querendo atirar...Querendo atirar e lá vai. Os caras cercou logo ele, um bucado cercou logo ele.”

¹⁰ “Na base de umas nove horas da noite quando viu um caminhão riscou aí cheio de gente. Caminhão cheio de gente e locou um carro...chegou no meio do campo rodou esse Uno e pegou uma arma, ficou na mão. ‘Cadê Honório, cadê Honório, cadê Honório?’”

¹¹ “Aí o pessoal: ‘Aqui não tem Honório não rapaz. Aqui é nós tudo e acabou a conversa. Se voce vem aqui matar um, voce tem que matar todo mundo e deixe de bestagem.’”

The other community members had decided that Honório should stay out of the impending confrontation, for fear that he or someone else might be injured if the situation escalated, so they hid him away nearby. Honório remembered people saying to him:

“You stay back because we—with us, he won’t get anything because—you leave it [to us] be because we’ll break him if he tries anything.”

Well, [Osório] didn’t do anything, because he wanted me. Whatever the cost, because he thought it was me—that it was me who was leading the people (*fazendo a cabeça do pessoal*), and [in fact] it really was.¹²

The episode ended without any violence, and evidently the MST left the settlement and never returned. Honório reflected on the episode, which had occurred nearly 10 years prior to our interview in 2010. The MST had introduced a novel mode of decision-making into the community, rule by majority vote, which the settlers employed to determine their affiliation. Honório explained:

At the time, there was some who wanted [the MST] to stay. Except they didn’t hold out because the majority didn’t want it...The majority didn’t want it. That was why we were able to win, because the majority didn’t want them. So we were able to expel this guy, Osório. Expelling Osório, we expelled the MST because he was the only leader that remained [from the MST]...So we removed him, we succeeded in removing him at the time...except that...by the time we came to expel them, they had already taken half of the resources we had won.¹³

¹² ““Voce fique de fora que a gente—com a gente ele não vai ter nada que—pode deixar que nós vamos quebrar ele no pau aqui se ele der a cara.” Aí ele não deu a cara, que ele queria eu, né. A qualquer preço que ele achava que era eu—que era eu que tava fazendo a cabeça do pessoal, mas era mesmo.”

¹³ “Na época tinha alguém que era a favor de ficar. Mas só que não resistiu porque a maioria não queria...A maioria não queria. Foi por isso que a gente conseguiu ganhar por isso, que a maioria não queria eles. Aí a gente conseguimos expulsar esse tal de Osório. Aí expulsando Osório, expulsou o MST que era só o único líder que restava do...Aí nós tiramos, conseguimos tirar ele na época....só que...quando chegou a expulsar eles, eles já tinham levado metade do recurso conquistado no caso.”

The episode ended without any violence, Osório was expelled, and the MST's leaders never returned to the settlement. This moment of collective action raises many questions: Why, in the end, were people so dissatisfied with the MST's presence in the community? What was it about the MST's presence that the settlers felt compromised their freedom and required them to forcibly wrest it back? What was the nature of their specific complaints about the MST?

This rest of this chapter aims to build an ethnographic framework for understanding this episode and others like it in the region, and argues that the conflicts that emerged between many of the local rural people and the MST have to be understood in terms of the region's history and peoples various notions of "the good," recognition, and distributive justice. Even though redistributive land reform may be understood as an important part of the emancipatory project following the abolition of slavery, the account presented in this chapter here examines some of the ways in which durable relationships of domination may reemerge in what are otherwise liberatory contexts.

The present chapter, therefore, examines processes of contestation internal to the MST and in the MST's relationships with other kinds of land reform settlements in the cacao growing region of Bahia, Brazil. The evidence in this chapter suggests that some aspects of the MST's institutional structure allow for the reproduction of "patron-client analogues" internal to MST settlements. This will be attributed in part to (1) ongoing problems of land tenure insecurity on MST settlements, and (2) settlers' personal dependence on movement leaders who mediate access to government resources.¹⁴ Furthermore, as will be seen, settlers in the region sometimes draw analogies to plantation life and slavery as they make sense of their experiences with reproduced inequalities on MST settlements. The first epigraph to this chapter, for example, is a statement from a man named Sandoval, a resident at Settlement 5, who was summarizing his experiences with some of the MST leaders from the region. The persistence of these interpretive frames among settlers and other rural people raises the question of the extent to which the legacy of worker-owner relations on the plantations have been reproduced in the MST's organization—whether in militants' *habitus*, or the structure of settlement institutions. In response to such conditions, this chapter calls attention to anti-authoritarian challenges internal to the MST the settlements, in particular in relation to the MST's organizational hierarchy.

¹⁴ Wolford (2010b) provides a useful discussion of the relationships between MST movement leaders and grassroots settlers, and similarly suggests that the way in which these relationships are institutionalized can contribute to the reproduction of inequalities.

2. The Proliferation of Land Reform in the Cacao Lands

The land rights communities that emerged at the end of the previous chapter included communities of the following kinds, which can be seen on Figure 23 below:

(1) Squatter Groups: These decentralized groups, more anti-authoritarian in character, initially lack legal status and are unaffiliated with social movements. They tend to be made up of local rural workers who occupy and cultivate abandoned plantation lands where competing claims from the former owners are not typically forthcoming (see Simmons *et al.* 2010). Squatters' property claims are initially established through continuous occupation and cultivation on the land. These land claims may gain subsequent legal status through appeals to squatter rights that are codified in Brazilian civil law concepts such as "possession" (*posse*) and "usucaption" (*usucapião*), also known as acquisitive prescription. These groups may eventually seek the status of legal associations as their occupation of the lands becomes stable, and as they secure legal "documents" (*documentos*) that formalize for their landholdings (see Section 8 below). Squatter landholdings are apportioned to individual families, and no settler exerts any institutionalized form of power over any other. In Figure 23 below, the squatter communities include Settlements 4, 5, and 6. These were all later transformed into independent legal associations, described next.

(2) Independent Associations: These groups are similarly comprised of local rural workers that have organized into legally recognized associations. These associations have locally elected leaders (e.g., president, secretary, and treasurer) who seek to directly negotiate the purchase of land from plantation or other landowners. Although these groups are independent in character, they may acquire institutional support from local syndicates or other extra-local social movements, and their transactions with landowners may be mediated by the state or federal entities. Their property claims are established through legally recognized market transactions that result in the transfer of definitive legal title. Property holdings are based on individual families. As with squatter groups, landholdings are apportioned to individual families and no one family can exert control over any other family's landholdings. Legal associations, including

those that may be formed by squatters, have low operation costs, and they come in and out of existence as the needs of settlers change. In Figure 23 below, Settlement 8 is the only location where settlers are purchasing the lands from the former owners. Settlements 1, 2, and 3 were supposed to take this same route, but later these communities became affiliated with the MST for reasons that will be explained below. While the families at Settlements 4, 5, and 6 are not purchasing the lands, but instead they are relying upon squatters rights and other means of documenting their land claims, these squatter settlements have over the years become transformed into independent legal associations.

(3) MST Settlements: These settlements are embedded in two general sets of relationships: (1) with the MST's larger national organization, and (2) with the federal government. First, MST settlements are affiliated with the MST, which is a centrally coordinated social movement with levels of organization that comprise a hierarchically nested set. The direction of command tends to proceed from national, state, regional, and settlement levels of organization, although each level of organization has relative autonomy from higher levels of organization to resolve its local affairs. The grassroots of the organization is comprised of families living in MST encampments and settlements, which are represented by locally elected association leaders. Families living on these settlements, at least ideally, form a disciplined rank-and-file that is responsive to increasingly higher levels of MST militants. Militants at lower levels of the organization are, at least ideally, accountable to militants at higher levels of the organization. In Figure 23 below, Settlements 1, 2, 3, and 7 are presently associated with the MST. Like Settlement 6, Settlements 5 and 8 were temporarily affiliated with the MST, but eventually dissociated themselves.

The structure of the MST's militancy involves a hierarchy of position and agency. One young MST activist explained that there were at least three distinctions that could be made among those who might be counted within the overall militant hierarchy:

(A) "Front Line" (*Frente de massa*), or low-ranking militants who help recruit people to join the MST in their encampments and to build numbers;

(B) “Base Support” (*Serviço de base*), or low-ranking militants who help coordinate any work to be done in the encampments, for example, procuring food and selecting sites to build shelters;

(C) “Militant” (*Militante*), or a higher ranking militant who, as the young activist explained, “does the articulation, talks with people from the government, people from INCRA, goes to Brasília to talk...The militants have a better argument...They have a better facility of talking with the people.”¹⁵

Below these different positions in the MST hierarchy of command are those who are referred to as *integrantes*, or those grassroots members of the MST who hope to be settled on the land. These members are the majority, and do not exercise a command role but rather the role of execution. Relationships between *integrantes*, or what I will merely refer to as settlers, are varied. Structurally, settlers are closer to “front line” and “base support” militants.

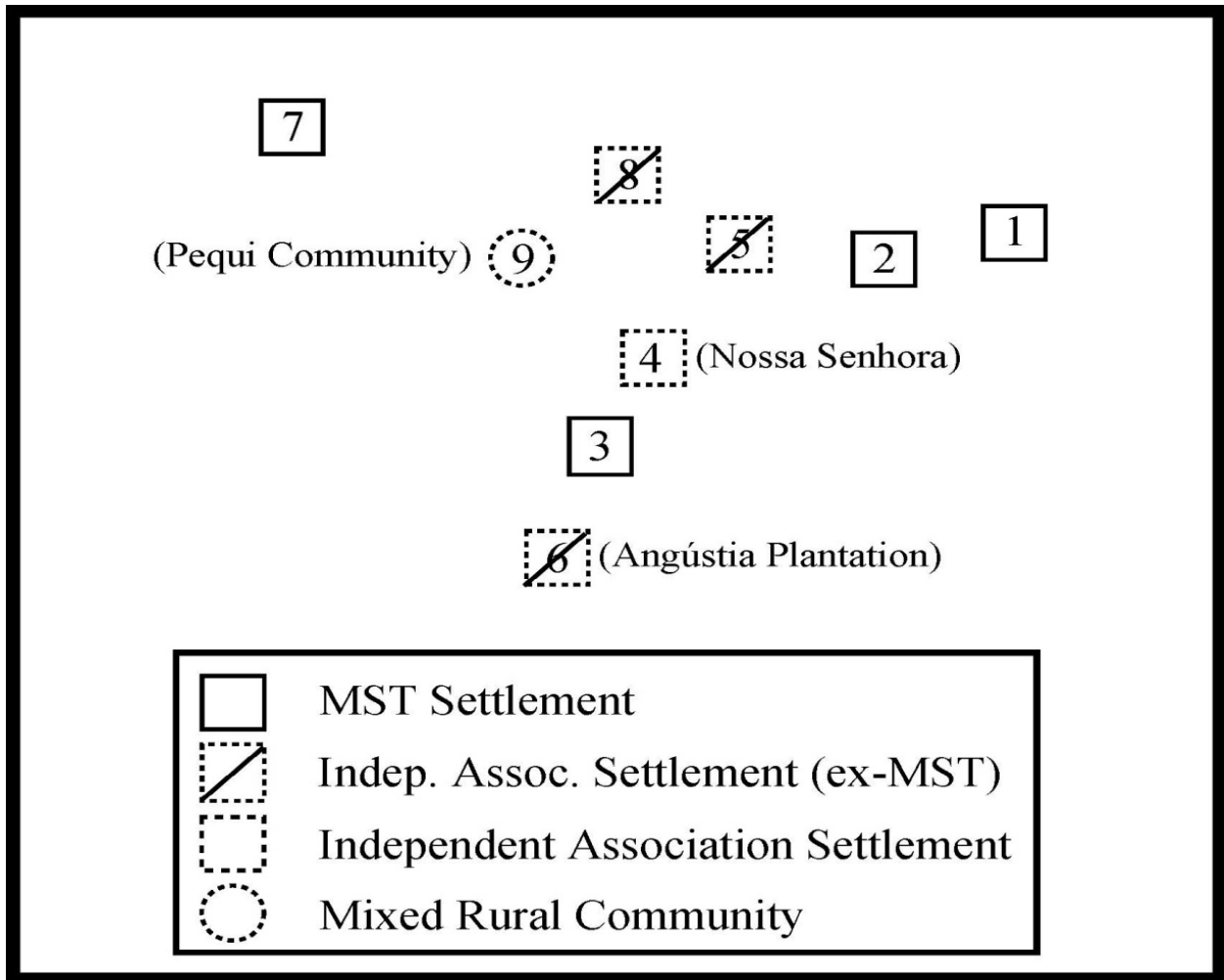
Second, the MST settlements are embedded in a legal relationship with the federal government through the National Institute of Colonization and Agrarian Reform, or INCRA, which is responsible for providing settlements with various services and administering agricultural credits. Although the MST is not a legally recognized entity, it serves as an intermediary between the settlements and INCRA,¹⁶ and the MST leaders and INCRA officials engage in informal relationships at various levels of both organizations.

The property claims on MST settlements are established collectively, through a legal “declaration of possession” (*declaração de posse*) in which the federal government grants usufruct to a legally recognized association of families seeking land. Landholdings on MST settlements are, at least initially, held collectively. After the initial declaration of possession, the federal government is supposed to promote land “emancipation” (*emancipação*) in which each family would receive a separate parcel of land with land title. This would involve a series of transactions in which each family repaid the state for the land and any financial credits they received, at which point they would receive “definitive title” (*título definitivo*) to their land.

¹⁵ “Que faz a articulação né, conversa com o pessoal do governo, pessoal do INCRA, vai pra Brasília conversar...Os militantes que têm um argumento melhor...Tem uma facilidade melhor de conversar com o pessoal.”

¹⁶ See Wolford (2010b).

Figure 23: Relative Settlement Locations



3. Landless People, Land Reform Institutions, and Participation in the MST

Officially, the MST is opposed to the “emancipation” of settlements, which would amount to each family receiving an individual plot of land with title. Publicly, the MST’s opposition is owed to various fears that emancipation would promote negative forms of individualism, a concern that settlers might decide to sell their land, and a worry that emancipation would limit the settlers’ ability to access various kinds of support from the state. Settlers themselves have diverse reactions to these concerns, which are variously seen as valid or paternalistic. Many

settlers suggest that the more immediate reason the MST is opposed to emancipation is because of the organization's financial dependence on the settlements.

The MST's opposition to emancipation and its institutionalized form of hierarchical authority helps to make sense of the politics that sometimes emerge between different kinds of settlements as well as struggles that emerge internal to these MST's settlements. These latter especially occur in relation to the MST's institution called the "collective" (*coletivo*). The collective variously refers to collectivized landholdings, forms of labor, and the collectivization of financial resources made in the form of various "discounts" (*descontos*) that people living on MST settlements are compelled to pay to the organization. I will examine settlers' critical engagements with the collective, the ways that the MST's local authority is instituted, and the problem of emancipation as settlers attempt to create what they take to be more just and non-hierarchical settlements.

As previously suggested, one of the general structural features of the MST's organization that transcends local particularities is its hierarchical organizational structure. This hierarchy is constituted through various methods of implementing what is called *disciplina*, or discipline. Discipline refers both to the general processes through which settlers learn to inhabit the MST's hierarchy—respecting community rules and respecting militants' orders—as well as the specific practices that are involved in creating settler discipline. These practices may be pedagogical in nature, or they may refer to various practices of physical instruction that may include forms of punishment. Pedagogical activities, as one school teacher explained, are aimed at "working with the identity of [students]."¹⁷ These may be activities such as planting a garden or going on a pretend march. Physical forms of discipline, as described below in Section 5, are often times contentious and are an occasional source of tension between some of the MST's militants and some settlers who view these forms of discipline as analogous to the forms of domination and humiliation that rural workers experience on the plantations. These contentious encounters appear to inform some of the challenges that settlers have made to settlement institutions such as the collective.

Before going into further detail, I would like to suggest three points:

¹⁷ "Trabalhando com a identidade deles."

(1) Although the MST is an explicitly socialist, and hence an ideologically egalitarian movement, its hierarchical organization creates structural opportunities through which some members of the leadership appear to avail themselves of excessive power and sometimes engage in coercive or exploitative activity vis-à-vis the rank-and-file.

(2) Despite the occasional and unfortunate facts of reproduced coercion and exploitation, it does not follow that the MST has an essentially exploitative “nature” outside of the specific institutions and relationships that its membership builds.

(3) This process of institution-building can be usefully examined by looking at how settlers challenge and contribute to building community institutions. These challenges are done partly in response to, and partly in anticipation of, problematic relationships. This last part of the argument has an especially empirical thread, which I begin to present at this point.

Early evidence over the course of fieldwork began to suggest a distinct preference for participation in non-MST settlements, and I investigated these patterns through a survey instrument that I developed in 2011 after several months of fieldwork. The final survey instrument consisted of a total of either 338 or 575 potential items, depending on whether or not the respondent was landless or had some form of land ownership. With the help of a research assistant over the course of 2011 and 2012, we were able to administer the survey to 100 respondents, including 55 men and 45 women, across Settlements 3, 4, and Pequi Community. Among these respondents, 38 identified themselves as landless. Another 62 people claimed ownership of a *roça*, of which 35 respondents were MST settlers at Settlement 3.

The survey results that I present in this chapter asked settlers to rank their participation preferences between the different settlement types identified above, and to provide some account of their choices in an open-ended follow-up interview. Instead of using references to abstract settlement types, we resolved to use local settlements as paradigm cases for comparison. While this has the disadvantage of making comparative work more complex, this has the distinct advantage of giving respondents a tangible point of reference that can account for local experiences and knowledge about institutions. For these, I selected Settlements 3, 4, and 8, each

of which corresponds to the three settlement types presented above: Squatter, Association, and MST. The results from that survey are presented below in Figure 24.

Figure 24: Land Reform Participation Preferences

General Questions about Participation in Land Reform Settlements [n=100]		<u>Yes</u>	<u>No</u>	<u>Maybe</u>			
(1)	Are you interested in participating in land reform?	94	6	-			
(2)	Would you be interested in entering an MST settlement?	70	28	2			
(3)	Would you be interested in entering an Association settlement?	90	10	-			
(4)	Would you be interested in entering a Squatter settlement?	96	4	-			
Ranked Participation Preferences [n=100]		<u>MST</u>	<u>Association</u>	<u>Squatter</u>	<u>No Reply</u>		
(5)	MST vs. Association	34	62	-	4		
(6)	MST vs. Squatter	13	-	82	5		
(7)	Association vs. Squatter	-	19	71	10		
First Place Preferences (by subcategory)¹⁸		<u>MST</u>	<u>Association</u>	<u>Squatter</u>			
(8)	Current MST Members [n=34]	7	7	20			
(9)	Current Landless [n=30]	2	2	26			
(10)	Women [n=36]	4	3	29			
(11)	Men [n=50]	6	9	35			
Second Place Preferences (by subcategory)		<u>MST</u>	<u>Association</u>	<u>Squatter</u>			
(12)	Current MST Members	14	10	10			
(13)	Current Landless	6	21	3			
(14)	Women	12	20	4			
(15)	Men	10	27	13			
First/Second Place Paired (by subcategory)		<u>MST/ASSOC</u>	<u>MST/SQUAT</u>	<u>ASSOC/MST</u>	<u>ASSOC/SQUAT</u>	<u>SQUAT/ASSOC</u>	<u>SQUAT/MST</u>
(16)	Current MST Members	3	4	1	6	7	13
(17)	Current Landless	1	1	0	2	20	6
(18)	Women	2	2	1	2	18	11
(19)	Men	2	4	0	9	25	10
Documents vs. Productivity							
(20)	Would you prefer a plot of forest with a 'document' (<i>documento</i>) vs. a productive farm with no 'document'?						
		<u>Forest with Document</u>	<u>Farm without Document</u>	<u>No Reply</u>			
		82	14	4			

¹⁸ The information presented in items 8-19 includes ranked responses for people that responded to all items 5-7. Partial responses, no replies, or contradictory responses (n=4) to items 5-7 did not allow responses to be ranked.

Items 1-4 show very strong interest in land reform generally, with interest in squatter and association-type settlements slightly higher than in the MST. When participants hierarchize those preferences, a distinct pattern emerges: item 5 indicates a significant preference for association-type settlements over MST settlements, and items 6 and 7 indicate a very strong preference for squatter-type settlements over both MST and association settlements.

Items 8-11 suggest that squatter-type settlements hold top preference among current MST settlers, landless people, women, and men. Item 12 suggests a more even spread of second place preferences among current MST settlers. Items 13-15 suggest a strong second place preference for association-type settlements among landless people, women, and men. When first and second place preferences are paired, items 16-19 show the same overall preference for squatter-type settlements.

One important factor constituting this pattern relates to land tenure and control over legal documents for their land claims. In this respect, at least in local estimations, families living at places such as squatter Settlement 4 are understood to have greater tenure security than families at other settlements. Although none of the families on any of the settlements types have secured what is legally referred to as “definitive title” (*título definitivo*) to their land, the families living at Settlement 4 have been able to legally document their claims through other means that are available to squatters. These include documents such as the “Declaration of Ownership of Rural Property” (*Declaração de Posse de Imóvel Rural*), which can be secured through local land registries (*cartórios*) that are sanctioned by the state government, or the “Certificate of Registration Certificate of Rural Property” (*Certificado de Cadastro de Imóvel Rural*), which is issued through INCRA and enables squatters to pay an annual land tax that creates its own legal paper trail. These forms of documentation, which are specific to individual families and individual land claims, are not institutionally available to families on the MST settlements. In the context of the region’s history, where earlier generations had been dispossessed of their land because their claims were unrecognizable to the state, securing various means to legally document one’s land claims had become a pressing social issue. Whereas I have recorded no case of any family being expelled from Settlement 4 after nearly 17 years of residence, the potential for interpersonal conflict with MST leaders (see Section 5) appears to ground a sense of insecurity among some settlers on the region’s MST settlements. From the perspective of many

MST settlers, it is the militants' personal authority, and not the authority of the "document," that mediates their access to the land (see Sections 8 and 9 below).

Item 20, as such, brings the social value of documents into greater relief. When asked if they would prefer owning a legally documented plot of uncultivated forest (*mata bruta*) or a fully productive roça (*roça safreira*) without legal documentation showing ownership, the vast majority opted for a documented plot of forest. Bearing in mind the steep investment of time and labor required to build a cacao roça from uncultivated forest, the document emerges as a salient figure.

To develop a more robust understanding of the social meanings of documents, we can examine brief excerpts from follow-up interviews with three women. A woman named Beatriz, who lived at Settlement 5, suggested that if someone has a plot of land "without any document, then she still doesn't have anything."¹⁹ Beatriz explained the significance of having a document:

Nobody takes [the land] because it goes directly into the person's name, and who'll take [that away]?...God is above all—and these days, under God, everything else is the document. Without a document, a person is nothing at all, and doesn't have anything either.²⁰

Another woman named Valentina, a resident at Settlement 5, expressed a similar worry that if you don't have a document, there's always "someone who is more cunning than the next, who'll take [the land] out of greed."²¹ On the other hand, with a document, she explained, "then nobody takes [your land]. The only one who takes it is God, right?"²²

Finally, another woman named Domingas, who lived on one of the MST settlements in the region and had been active in the local association as a "work coordinator" (*coordenadora*), suggested:

A person with a document, he—he's got freedom. And us here in the Movement [MST], we are—we have roças—we have our roças—but we don't have the same freedom like a

¹⁹ "Uma ara assim sem documento, ela não tem nada ainda."

²⁰ "Ninguém tira que vai, passa pro nome da pessoa logo, e quem vai tirar?...Deus primeiramente —e abaixo de Deus, hoje em dia, tudo é o documento. Sem documento, ninguém nem é nada, e nem tem nada."

²¹ "Tem um esperto mais do que outro e vai na usura, toma."

²² "Ali ninguém toma. Só quem toma é Deus né?"

person who really has an individual plot [where they, and not others] command and uncommand (*desmandar*).²³

Here we see some of the ways documents connect issues about land tenure, social agency, and autonomy from other's potentially problematic demands. Predictably, control over land titles continues to be a point of contention for settlers on the region's MST settlements.

4. First Contact, First Conflict

Starting sometime between 1995 and 1996, an independent and legally recognized association of rural workers had formed with the intention of purchasing the plantation at Settlement 1. The association had already entered into direct negotiations with the plantation owner there, and shortly thereafter had also begun negotiations with the former plantation owners at Settlements 2 and 3. The majority of the association members were already residents on these plantations. The plan was for the association to divide the plantation into lots for each family, which would purchase their lot from the former owner with the help of bank financing. The association had acquired support from the federal organization INCRA, which helped facilitate this process. By January 1997, Settlement 1 had been successfully disappropriated and placed under INCRA's administrative control, while negotiations with the owners of the other two plantations were still in the works. A brief correspondence that was recovered from April 1997 shows a further appeal to INCRA for the disappropriation of what would become Settlement 3. Apart from some earlier Association meeting minutes from 1995 and 1996, few other forms of documentation regarding these early negotiations were recovered in the municipality.

Sometime during that same year, it was rumored that the MST was going to begin staging a series of occupations in the region. With this news, and all of the other activity going on around them, another informally organized group of rural workers—made up of friends and relatives—decided that the time was right to occupy and begin planting another plantation

²³ “Porque eu acho que a pessoa com documento ele—ele tem liberdade. E nós aqui no Movimento, nós somo—tem roça—que nós tem roça—mas não tem aquele liberdade que nem a pessoa tem uma roça individual mesmo pra ele mandar e desmandar.”

indicated on the map as Settlement 4. This plantation had long been abandoned and had already grown into a mature *capoeira*, or secondary growth forest.

Meanwhile, a third group of workers at the plantation that would become Settlement 5 had just received word from the absentee owner that they could maintain the plantation lands for themselves provided that they protected and did not expand into the forest there. The owner lived somewhere in Germany, was apparently aging, and seemed to have lost interest in trying to maintain the plantation from abroad.

Prior to late 1997, the MST did not have any representation in the region. Around this same time when INCRA had been coordinating with the local association of plantation workers, the MST appears to have established contact with local syndicate leaders to stage a series of occupations in the region. In November 1997, the MST finally arrived in the region, bringing with them a large number of hopeful settlers from municipalities to the west, where the MST was already established. The MST's leaders set up a central encampment (*acampamento*) along the road in front of the plantation that would become Settlement 5, which was supposed to serve as a staging-ground from which the local movement leaders would establish further encampments at the plantations that would become Settlements 1, 2, and 3. This was the source of initial conflict between the workers' association and the MST.

A couple weeks after the MST arrived in the region, meeting minutes from the association suggested that the plantation workers were under a lot of pressure from the MST to either join the MST or leave the plantation, and that many of the local workers were feeling afraid:

One participant said that [the workers] are afraid [of the MST], as they are oppressing the workers that have already been there for some years, and [the workers] are seeing that they will remain landless because of the invaders [i.e. the MST] who provoke them.²⁴

The last pages of the minutes for that meeting concluded:

²⁴ “Um convidado disse que está com medo, pois, eles estão oprimindo aos trabalhadores que já tem alguns anos e estão vendo a hora de ficarem sem terras por causa dos invasores que os provocam muito.”

[G]iven what is happening, we are going to lose everything, because we are sheep and we do not want violence...[One worker reported that] complete dominion remains under the yoke of the MST, and said that there they do not even have the right to speak or give an opinion. They are living as slaves of this MST...[Another person reported that the MST] took one of the old inhabitants and beat [them] and then left them tied up.²⁵

Sometime at the end of 1997, about a month after the MST militants arrived in the municipality with a number of hopeful settlers in tow, a municipal commission was formed to try to mediate between the conflicting claims of the Association, on the one hand, and the MST on the other, which had acquired the support of a local syndicate leader. The voice used by the person who wrote the meeting minutes suggest that they were written by someone who was convinced of the Association's claim, as will be seen:

[It has been] more than one and a half years regarding the disappropriation of the three mentioned plantations that are [Settlements 1, 2, and 3], whose disappropriations were solicited and received by the organization, INCRA, for which [reason] the workers were patient and certain to become the true occupants of these areas.²⁶

They also present different evidence that appears to support the priority of the Association's claim:

The Administrator...of the plantation [at Settlement 3] said that, as to the disagreement that was occurring between the Association and the syndicate regarding the disappropriation of the plantation, he knows and has proof that the syndicate never sought out, nor ever accompanied, any of the processes of disappropriation, [and] yes, [that] he has the witnessed conviction of the majority of the workers [at the plantation] that it was

²⁵ “Pelo que está acontecendo é que vamos perder tudo, porque nós somos cordeiros e não queremos violência...o domi[ni]o total fique sobre o jugo do MST e disse que lá eles não tem direitos até mesmo de falar ou opinar. Estão vivendo como escravos desse MST...pegaram um morador antigo e espancaram e depois deixaram amarrados.”

²⁶ “[Há] mais de um ano e meio referente as desapropriação dessas fazendas mencionadas que são...que foram solicitada suas desapropriações e atendida pelo o órgão o INCRA, por isso os trabalhadores estavam pacientes e convicto de serem os verdadeiros ocupantes dessas áreas.”

the Association...that undertook the negotiations with the owner in accordance with INCRA.²⁷

One curious portion of these meeting minutes suggests that the workers at the plantation had started to come to agreements to work with the syndicate and the MST, which complicated the Association's claim whether or not it had priority:

[The group interviewed] 10 workers on the plantation...responded that they were in common agreement with the syndicate [and the MST] and the other landless who had arrived [there], [therefore] we remained without a definitive decision in relation to taking actions toward the delivery of the settlement to the Association.²⁸

Immediately following this section, the minutes report on a statement from the plantation administrator who suggested that he and the workers had all been threatened:

[He] was threatened together with the plantation workers to join [the MST] no matter what, [and] in not accepting [the MST], [the MST leaders] made various kinds of threats.²⁹

At this point in the minutes, the author breaks out and uses his or her own voice, and suggests:

For this reason witnessed, I affirm that these ten workers from the plantation [at Settlement 1] were forced to join the movement of the MST.³⁰

²⁷ "O Sr. Administrador...diz que quanto a discordância que está havendo entre a associação e o sindicato quanto a desapropriação da fazenda, ele sabe e tem prova que o sindicato nunca o procurou e nem acompanhou a nenhum processo na desapropriação, sim, ele tem a convicção testemunhado pela maioria dos trabalhadores que foi Associação...que fez a negociação com o proprietário segundo o Incra"

²⁸ "...10 trabalhadores da fazenda os quais responderam que estavam de comum acordo com o sindicato e os outros sem terras que chegaram, ficamos sem uma decisão definida em relação ao tomar atitudes referentes a entrega do assentamento a Associação."

²⁹ "foi ameaçado juntamente com os trabalhadores da fazenda a se aderirem a eles de qualquer jeito, ao não aceitarem, [eles] fizeram vários tipos de ameaças."

³⁰ ""Por essa virtude presenciada, afirmo que esses dez trabalhadores da fazenda foram forçados a se aderirem ao movimento do MST."

The standoff between the two groups continued for several months until April 1998. In a letter from the association leaders, addressed to the superintendent of INCRA in Salvador, the letter reaffirmed their prior claim to the plantation "for the settlement of landless people from [the municipality], giving priority to the ex-employees of the plantations and to association members." Shortly thereafter, though, the tone of the letter changes what seemed to be a loss of hope, and a loss of faith in INCRA:

To this day we wait in peace for the disappropriation and the [legal decree] of possession [for the Association]...Today, to our surprise, we learned that INCRA...gave possession of the plantation to the leader of the MST, giving [them] the keys to the office and to the front gate...³¹

In an interview about this moment with one of the former association leaders, he recalled a verbal confrontation he had with local MST leaders at that time:

The leader of the MST at the time said: "Here we—this here is ours."

I say: "No. We were the ones who did all the work here. We have the proof—proof from the municipality, proof from INCRA. If you guys want, we'll—we can schedule a meeting about this. And—us here, this is ours. This is our work, we've been working at this for three years. We're not just going to hand this over to you. You guys there aren't—you're invading the landless themselves. The *Sem Terra* [MST] invading the *sem terra* themselves, [invading] the workers themselves. That's not right."³²

³¹ "Até hoje esperamos em paz pela desapropriação e imissão de posse...Hoje para nossa surpresa sabemos que o INCRA...deu posse da Fazenda para o líder to M.S.T. dando as chaves do escritório e portão..."

³² "O líder do MST na época disse: 'Aqui nós—aquí é nosso.'//Eu digo: 'Não. Aqui quem fez todos os trabalho fomos nós. Nós temos prova—prova do município, prova lá no INCRA. Se voces quiser nós—nós pode fazer uma reunião dessa. E—nós aqui, é nosso. O trabalho é nosso, tem tres anos de trabalho. Nós não vamos deixar pa voces. Que voces aí não tao—voces tao invadindo o próprio sem terra. O Sem Terra invadino o próprio sem terra, o próprio trabalhador. Isso não é legal.'"

5. Discipline, Fear, & Voice

The MST's national strategy involves organizing rural (and increasingly urban³³) workers into a rank-and-file that is tightly integrated with a command hierarchy. Such a well-coordinated organization, according to the MST, will be more successful in accessing resources and support from the federal government, especially given the traditional unresponsiveness of the Brazilian state to the needs of the rural poor.³⁴ The process of establishing rank-and-file discipline in the communities is multifaceted and involves different methods and practices of teaching³⁵ or imposing respect for the authority of the MST's leadership hierarchy.

The process of consolidating the community begins with the consolidation of control over the encampment (*acampamento*) as a physical space, which turns a legal claim into a materially tangible presence. This goes beyond merely building a publicly visible encampment near the plantation entrance, which is usually comprised of a series of huts covered with iconic black tarps, or the *lona preta*. Because the MST's leaders are seeking to make an exclusive claim to the plantation for their own organization, they have to mitigate the possibility that other groups will make conflicting claims. In the case discussed above, the MST leaders encountered a series of prior claims that they were successful in overriding.

One method of mitigating the possibility that other groups might make a competing claim is to reduce the number of physical spaces where other competing groups—for example, a family or group of squatters—might materialize their own claims, perhaps by building or occupying already existent inhabitable structures. When Settlement 3 was occupied by the MST in 1997, the MST's militants who were operating there ordered the demolition of all plantation houses that were distant from the central plantation headquarters (*sede*) and the primary location where workers were housed (*avenida*). One settler there explained that the militants did this in order to prevent other landless people from squatting in those houses, or occupying land on the distant corners of the large plantation.³⁶ In this way, the MST began to consolidate the *acampamento* in physical space against other possible claims.

³³ Simmons et al. (2009) provide evidence that suggests that more organized social movements such as the MST do a relatively larger proportion of recruiting in urban areas than do their more decentralized counterparts.

³⁴ The case of the association discussed above, however, raises legitimate doubts about this.

³⁵ See, for example, Tarlau (2012).

³⁶ Fn516.

Movement leaders likewise engaged in a form of human consolidation by attempting to bring former plantation workers into the organization. In the cases of Settlements 1, 2 and 3, this posed a particularly important problem as the workers in those plantations had already formed associations to directly negotiate the purchase of those plantations with the former owners. Many of these people recall being pressured to either join the MST or else leave the plantation. Conversely, many of the people who arrived in the region with the MST remember being pressured by the old workers to leave. At Settlement 1, in particular, where the workers' direct negotiations with the owner were already at an advanced stage, the tensions between "the old" plantation workers (*os velhos*) and the prospective "newly arrival" settlers (*os chegantes*) who took over the plantation with the MST are still salient and a lingering source of pain.

After coming across and examining the association documents in 2010, I realized that several months earlier I had interviewed one of the former plantation workers whose name was cited in the minutes. He had recounted the day the MST arrived at the plantation. He had been out working in the cacao groves. When he got home, he found that the MST members had removed the roofing material that covered the kitchen of the plantation house where he lived with his daughter, who was home at the time. The MST leaders had used those materials to build a larger shelter where they would hold organizational meetings. While he quickly made friends with the people who had come to the encampment with the hope of eventually being settled at the plantation, he recalled that the MST's militants "wanted to put us all out running."³⁷ In the end, however, he was able to secure a spot on the settlement.

Telma, who was also a resident on the plantation before the MST arrived, recalled her decision to finally join the MST. She similarly recalled that the MST's militants put a great deal of pressure on her family to either join the MST or leave the plantation:

They came and put on the pressure...[They said] that those who were [already on the plantation had] to leave, and those who were from outside [the plantation were going] to come in...Those who were there had to go, and those [who came] from the outside [were going] to be settled.³⁸

³⁷ "Eles queria botar a gente tudo pa correr."

³⁸ "Eles chegam e botam pressão...que é pra os que ta, sair, e os que ta de fora, chegar...Os que ta sair, e os de fora chegar pra se assentar."

Telma explained the manner in which they would pressure people to leave:

They threatened, [they] threatened [us]...They said that, if [we] didn't come to their side, [if we] didn't go to their side—we would be—would be expelled, [we] would be expelled. There would be evictions, there would be evictions, and so many things, so much talk...We didn't feel very happy, no, because the threats were too much.³⁹

She recalled that those who were making the threats were the “big” (*os grandes*) movement leaders, “these [guys] who come from the outside [the region]...the big [leaders] who come from the outside.”⁴⁰

She and her husband, Justo, had only been living and working at the plantation for several months when the MST arrived. Her husband was around 44 years old at the time, and at that age it was hard to find work on the plantations as they preferred hiring younger men. Their family depended on their income from the plantation, especially as they were raising two adopted children, and so she figured that they had no option but to join. She recalled saying to herself:

We're [already] here, we have nowhere to go. We're already here and to go find another plantation to work on [at this point would be difficult]! Me, with these two little children.⁴¹

Justo husband similarly recalled when the MST established their encampment, and the pressure they put on the workers to either join the movement or to abandon the plantation. He remembered occasional gunfire at the river near his house, which, he surmised, was supposed to scare people so they would leave the plantation. He remembered Telma saying: “I won't run. I'll die in my house, but I won't run.”⁴² They had a little vegetable garden they had planted

³⁹ “Eles ameaçava, ameaçava...Eles falava que, que se num ficasse do lado deles, num ficasse do lado deles ia—a gente ia ser—ia ser expulso, ia ser expulso, ia ter despejo, ia ter despejo e era tanta coisa, tanta conversa, ai...A gente não sentia muito feliz não, porque a ameaça era demais”

⁴⁰ “Esses que vêm de fora...os grandes que vêm de fora.”

⁴¹ “Que a rente ta aqui, a rente não tem pra onde ir, já ta aqui e procurar outra fazenda pra trabalhar! Eu com esses dois minino piqueno.”

⁴² “Eu não corro, eu morro dentro de casa, mas não corro.”

behind the house where they lived that was destroyed by some of the more aggressive MST militants:

We had a garden (*plantio*) of tomatoes...They got their hand into it (*metia a mão*) and collected tomatoes, broke the corn, pulled up the beans, and took it [all with them]. I didn't say anything [to them, but I said to myself]:

“I won't run.”⁴³

While Telma and Justo, early on, found themselves in a rather antagonistic relationship with the MST militants, soon after they were able to enter into better relationships and friendships with the militants at the lowest level (*frente de massa*) of the organization, some of whom would eventually be settled at the old plantation. Telma discovered that one of the *frente de massa* militants was, in fact, a distant cousin whom she had never met before. Before they had found this out, Justo recalled, this particular militant was “one of the first people who might attack and hit you.” When they discovered this common bond, and through shared food and drink, they were eventually able to become friends and the animosity was lost between them. Because of the kind of pressure that the MST militants placed on some of the residents, many of the former plantation workers eventually left the plantation. Some of them left frustrated and resentful, as they had hoped to purchase the plantation through the association they had formed. While many people joined the MST willingly, many having been recruited in neighboring municipalities, other people, as with the family above, joined the MST because they felt that they had no choice.

These processes of human consolidation also involved either subduing or culling those people that were more fiercely independent and who came into conflict with the MST's militants. This was a potentially conflicted process as people living in the encampments and settlements must learn how to properly occupy the MST's rank-and-file. Settlers remembered people who were told to stand in the community square for an entire day while holding up the MST flag; others recalled people who had been ordered to clear all of the weeds from some

⁴³ “Nós tinha um plantio de tomate...Os caras metia a mão e colhiam tomate, quebrava milho, arrancava feijão e levava. Não dizia nada, ‘Eu não corro.’”

particular plot of land; another person mentioned the fear of being sent back to an encampment in the arid interior (*sertão*).

Gustavo, who lived at Settlement 6, characterized his experience with MST militants in the following manner: “Go do this, go do that, go do this.”⁴⁴ He suggested that the settlers were unhappy with the authoritarian form of discipline and command that the MST’s militants exercised, as this was no different than life on the plantation. Damião explained that if you wanted to secure your spot on an MST settlement, you had to keep your head down. He gave the example of two people who were expelled from Settlement 5, and today work as sharecroppers (*meeiros*) at Settlement 3.⁴⁵ Another man from Settlement 7 similarly suggested that if you cross the MST leadership while living at the settlement, you risk being told “to leave without a right to anything.”⁴⁶ Sandoval, who lived at Settlement 5, elaborated on this widespread fear:

You have to do whatever the militant wants. Either you do what they want, or they take [your things] and drop them out in the road...They take your belongings, bed, whatever little things you have, and put them out in the road. And there’s none of that business of complaining, no. Because otherwise, they put—take your goods, bed, whatever little things you have, and put them out on the road.⁴⁷

The fear is not a mere impression. Indeed, on the five settlements that were or still are associated with the MST, people remember individuals who had come into conflict with the MST militants only to be met with these more coercive forms of discipline and even expulsion. While the MST has understandable policies about prohibiting violent criminals into their settlements, none of these cases involved any violence or abuse between settlers.

On Settlement 5 and Settlement 6, for example, the MST militants who were in charge, and who had come from outside the old plantation, employed some particularly aggressive forms

⁴⁴ “Vai fazer isso... Vai fazer isso... Vai fazer isso...” Fn60.

⁴⁵ Damião was referring to the same two men, mentioned in Section 4 above, who had been beaten up, at the order of some MST militant, and tied to a tree. Sharecropping is contrary to the MST’s politics and its official positions. The continued presence of sharecropping on the region’s MST settlements illustrates the complexity of realities on the ground. Fn504.

⁴⁶ “Sair sem direito a nada.”

⁴⁷ “A pessoa tem que fazer aquilo que [o militante] quer. Ou faz aquilo mesmo que eles quer, ou então, eles pegam [as suas coisas] e botam na rua. E não tem negócio do cara reclamar não, porque senão, eles bota—pega a mercadoria, a cama, o que o cara tiver, as coisinhas e bota lá na rodagem.”

of discipline through which disciplined individuals were rendered into public exemplars. Both of these cases involved people who had been long-time residents on the plantations that had somehow crossed the MST leadership. In the case at Settlement 6, Honório remembered one man who had publicly disagreed with one of the militants there. As a result, the MST leadership ordered the settlers to remove the man's personal belongings from his house: "[they] took his things, put them on top of a truck, and took [them away]. And [when they] arrived out on the road (*pista*), they threw all [off his stuff out of the truck]."⁴⁸

Another other case involved a woman named Izaura who was a resident on the Settlement 5. Sandoval recalled that the people living at the former plantation had not formally invited the MST to occupy the plantation, but did allow the MST to set up a provisional camp along the road from which they would stage other occupations in the region. The absentee plantation owner, as suggested above, had ceded to plantation to the workers, but he had done so by word of mouth. After a period of time, however, the MST's leaders decided that they would also occupy Settlement 5, since they had been unable to find enough spots (*vagas*) for all of their prospective settlers at Settlements 1, 2 and 3. Thus, they began the process of establishing a formal encampment at Settlement 5 with the aim of occupying the plantation, without the permission of the workers. The militants insisted, Sandoval recalled, that those families who already lived on the plantation had to leave their homes and go to the encampment where they would "stay under the *lona [preta]* just like everybody else."⁴⁹ To make this happen, the militants began the process of physical consolidation of the encampment. They explained that they would be removing all of roofing material from the old plantation houses in order to make them uninhabitable. This would force all of the plantation workers to either leave the plantation or come to the encampment. For the woman Izaura, this was an understandably difficult proposition for her to accept. She had lived in her house, relatively independently, for a number of years, and she spoke out angrily against the militants' proposal. Sandoval recalled how the encounter between Izaura and the MST militant there played out:

Well, the woman confronted them. [She said that she] wouldn't let them [remove the tiles from her house] and she wouldn't go [under the *lona preta*]...And well, they got into

⁴⁸ "[Eles] pegaram a muda dele, botaram em cima do caminhão e levaram e chegaram lá na pista e jogou."

⁴⁹ "Ficar debaixo da lona [preta] também que nem tava os outros"

a fight, and [then the MST leadership] really went [and removed the roof from her house]. They took 30 people up there, took the tiles off the house, and took them away.⁵⁰

Sandoval explained the logic behind the militant's action against Izaura:

He made an example [of her] for the others to see. And, well, the [settlers] started to obey. He did something to give the others [settlers] an incentive, so that [whatever] they said, the others would obey.⁵¹

He concluded:

If they came to me and also said: “Hey Mr. Sandoval, your house, too, you're going to have to [leave and] go [live] under the lona. Your house too, we want the [roof] tiles, we're going to demolish your house, you will go stay [there] just like the others.”

Well then, me too, I would have to accept it.⁵²

While actual cases of abuse like these were quantitatively rare, their social psychological effects generalized in a quantitatively greater manner. As stories about such events quickly circulated, a single event takes on generalized semiotic life. Izaura was offered as an exemplar demonstrating the consequences of certain kinds of conduct, and this event christened new participatory norms on the settlement, solidified the militants' voices, and transformed a simple act of mere physical coercion into a complex social fact. This grounded the authority, if not the legitimacy, of these MST militants in experiences of anxiety and fear.

⁵⁰ “Aí a mulher lá deu duro, que não ia deixar isso e que não ia. Que não ia e jogou duro. E aí ficaram naquela briga e aí eles foram mesmo levou umas 30 pessoas lá no alto e chegou lá destelharam a casa e trouxeram as telhas.”

⁵¹ “Fez um exemplo pr'os outros conhecerem e então, começarem a obedecer eles. [O militant] fez uma coisa pa poder incentivar os outros pa o que eles falassem os outros obedecessem.”

⁵² “Se eles chegassem pra mim e também dizer://“Ó Sandoval, sua casa também, voce vai ter que ir pa debaixo da lona. Sua casa também, nós vai querer aí as telhas, nós vai acabar com sua casa, voce vai ficar igual aos outros.”//Aí então, também, eu ia ter que aceitar.”

Experiences and memories like these understandably create a certain amount of fear and insecurity, both in relation to militants, but also in relation to agricultural activity on the settlements—notably, the investment of labor in trees and other elements of the built environment. Wealth in the cacao zone is measured in trees, primarily in cacao and rubber trees that are intercropped together. Because these trees take a long time to grow, people need a stable sense of their future time horizon if they are to make such long-term investments on their labor. Cacao trees take 3 to 5 years to come into production; rubber trees take 7 to 10 years. In other words, the dominant form of cultivation in the region requires a good deal of land tenure security. One landless man named Ueliton, who was doing some day labor at Settlement 4, explained that people on the MST settlements “are afraid” (*tem receio*) to plant and replant their holdings, because “tomorrow they may have to leave” the settlement. The reason for this, Ueliton explained, was that if you do something wrong, and you don’t want to pay the disciplinary action, then “you’re out” of the settlement. He concluded that “people work with fear.”⁵³ Another person settled as Settlement 4, Edgar, drew together the fear of discipline or expulsion with ambiguities in terms of land tenures. He suggested that “you have to live with a lot of respect [toward the leadership] so that you aren’t sent away.”⁵⁴ Because of some of the ambiguities of land tenure on the MST settlements, Edgar explained, “you aren’t the owner [of your land], and you’re afraid of working.”⁵⁵ The reason people seem to afraid to work, he suggested, is owed to the fear of being kicked out of the settlement, and losing the fruits of their labor.⁵⁶

In the context of community meetings and assemblies, relationships of fear affect community participation and the issues of voice. As a young activist, who is actively involved in the MST, explained on one afternoon:

If you have an assembly, those who speak loudest are the people from the leadership... You don’t have complete liberty to say:

⁵³ “A pessoa trabalha com medo” Fn300.

⁵⁴ “Tem que viver com muito respeito para não vá embora” F47.

⁵⁵ “Você não é o dono, e tem medo de trabalhar” Fn47.

⁵⁶ Although INCRA should ostensibly be able to protect the rights of settlers from potential cases of abuses, Wolford (2010b) provides evidence that allows us to question both the access that settlers have to INCRA officials, and whether or not such officials would be adequately equipped to respond in a timely manner.

“That’s wrong.”

For example, [if one of the leaders] makes a point, [a settler can’t say]:

“Oh no, that’s wrong, no, we won’t accept that.”

If [that militant] says it, you have to accept it, understand? Even having a majority [against it]. You have to accept it.⁵⁷

The militants, in other words, are understood to have a stronger voice, while settlers tend to have a weaker voice that they repress themselves through internalization of authority relations. This appears to be supported by an element of fear that has reappeared on some of the region’s MST settlements.

Augusto recalled a situation where he and many other settlers felt that they were being cheated out of their rightful earnings during the period of the collective. He had become upset with the situation he perceived on the settlement:

I became upset (*chateado*) with that. To this day, I still feel that [anger]. Going hungry and [watching] the others eating.⁵⁸

Augusto explained that he had complained during one meeting, but he only met with a threat that they would kick him out of the settlement. He recalled what the leadership had communicated to him:

Whoever didn’t like it, they’d kick them out. Whoever wanted [to live on the settlement], that’s how it was gonna be. Whoever didn’t like want [things how they were], that’s how it was gonna be anyway.⁵⁹

⁵⁷ “Se voce tiver numa reunião, quem fala mais alto é o pessoal da liderança...o pessoal do assentado não tem uma total liberdade pra falar: ‘Isso ta errado’ ...Por exemplo, [se um militante] tem um ponto://‘Ah não, isso ta errado, a gente não vai aceitar isso, não.’//Se ele falar tem que aceitar, entendeu? Mesmo teno a maioria. Tem que aceitar.”

⁵⁸ “Eu fiquei chateado com aquilo. Até hoje eu sinto aquilo. Ficar com fome e os outo cumeno.”

⁵⁹ “Não gostasse eles botavam fora, quem quisesse era aquilo, quem não quisesse era aquilo mesmo.”

Augusto explained that the purpose of these threats was to “make [people] afraid...so that people obeyed [the leadership’s] orders.”⁶⁰

A woman named Bia, who lived at Settlement 3, concurred. She suggested that many people “are afraid of the threats,” and as a result they “are afraid of what they say.”⁶¹ Bia explained that those who are more outspoken:

They go through one of their disciplines...they’re punished...[The leadership] keeps perturbing them, all of those things...They don’t let they person participate in things...They don’t like when the person speaks the truth, and they keep hammering them—“No!”

They don’t want to help that person, they don’t want to let that person grow...And then often times they threaten them:

“Oh, you did this, so there’s none of that [for you]. We won’t free up this [resource] for you because you are like this, this and this.”⁶²

Bia concluded: “In the MST, there are good people and bad people.” If someone in a position of power does something wrong, she explained: “Not everybody supports it. But many times they don’t say anything because they’re afraid. They’re afraid to speak.”⁶³ She summarized a prevalent outlook on the settlement in the following manner: “I don’t know anything, I didn’t see anything.”⁶⁴

⁶⁰ “Ameaçano e metheno medo...pa pessoa abedecer às ordens dheles.”

⁶¹ “Eles tem medo das ameaças. Tem medo do que fala”

⁶² “Passa por uma disciplina deles, no caso, é castigado...Eles castiga. Fica dando marcação, aquelas coisa toda...Nao deixa a pessoa participar de coisas...Eles nao gostam quando a pessoa fala a verdade. Ne, e eles ai fica martelando, ne, que “Nao!”//Nao quer ajudar aquela pessoa, nao quer deixar que aquela pessoa cresca...E ai, muita das vezes ate ameaca://“Ah fulando, voce fez isso, entao nao tem isso. A gente nao vai liberar isso pra voce porque voce eh assim assim e assim.”

⁶³ “Dentro do sem terra, tem pessoas boas e pessoas ruim...Nem todo mundo apoia. E muitas vezes nao fala porque tem medo. Tem medo de fala.”

⁶⁴ “Nao sei de nada, nao vi nada.”

6. Inequality, Privilege, and the Extraction of Wealth

Although the MST largely depends on volunteer labor provided by settlers, as well as various kinds of financial and other support from the federal and state government, such as food baskets (*cesta básica*) that are sent to encampments, one of the primary means through which the MST leadership finances plantation occupations is through form of “taxation” that settlers pay to the organization—what settlers refer to as “percentages” (*percentagens*) or “discounts” (*descontos*), invoking analogies to forms of extraction that people are familiar with on the plantations. The official position of the MST’s national organization is that these financial contributions are crucial to advancing the cause of land reform in other parts of Brazil, and that it is the social duty of those who have been settled in land reform settlements to contribute financially to the broader social cause. These financial contributions may come from agricultural production. For example, each family is obligated to pay 10% of their rubber production to the MST.⁶⁵ This percentage is automatically deducted from what settlers receive, as families do not control the sale of their rubber harvest. Other financial contributions come from percentages that settlers pay to the MST organization from loans that settlers receive through government funded agricultural credit programs. Practices such as these are acknowledged by INCRA and are otherwise well-known in Brazil (Ondetti 2008, 187–188, Wolford 2010a, 173).

While many of the settlers understand and acknowledge the importance of advancing the cause of land reform, very few people trust that the MST’s local and regional leadership use the money in good faith. One man from Settlement 3 explained that in order to occupy a plantation, the movement leadership depends upon a large number of people. After the occupation, however, the relationship toward the settlers changes: “Once they’ve occupied that land with one hundred, two hundred people, they suck the blood from those people who are killing themselves [working] on the roça, [while the militants] are there walking about and messing around.”⁶⁶ Sentiments like these refer to what another man at Settlement 3 referred to as “disgraceful discounts”⁶⁷ that settlers are required to pay to the MST leadership.

⁶⁵ People from Settlements 5 and 6, which were affiliated with the MST in earlier periods, reported paying 20% of their production.

⁶⁶ “Quando ocupou aquela therra com cem, duzentos home, eles quer chupar o sangue daquela pessoa que ta se acabano na roça e eles lá andano e bestano.”

⁶⁷ “Descontes desgraçados.” Fn314.

There are different factors contributing to these attitudes, which can only be given cursory treatment here. One important factor contributing to this sense of discontent, shared almost categorically by people I interviewed at MST Settlements 1, 2, and 3, are memories of significant financial hardship during the first years of collectivized work, before the settlers forced the division of the collective, as will be seen in the next section below. The collective, in this case, referred to the collectivization of all settlement lands, labor, and marketing of the harvests. Many people recalled receiving a pittance after each week's work. There were various reasons for this, including the "collectivization" of debts that some of the militants had accrued in town, which settlers were required to help pay.

Many people from Settlements 1, 2, and 3 remembered that during the period when all of the work and harvesting on the settlements was done collectively, it was normal for them to receive a pittance after a week's work. Augusto explained: "They got their hands on the money and held onto it, kept it all for themselves, they held onto the money."⁶⁸ Ofélia, who lived at Settlement 1, remembered making R\$0.60 cents per day, or about R\$3 after five days of work; others recalled earning R\$1.20 or R\$1.50 per day. This was a fraction of what people would have earned working on the neighboring plantations. In 1997, for example, the minimum monthly salary in Bahia was R\$120 per month, and a day wage would have been about R\$4.00 per day's work.⁶⁹ Assuming a five day work week, one would earn approximately R\$20 per week.

Two settlers that I interviewed from Settlements 1 and 2 had kept independent records of the harvests, which was presumably a habit from their days as plantation workers and sharecroppers (*meeiros*). According to their own calculations, the numbers were not adding up. Even in the absence of record-taking, though, it seems reasonable to suggest settlers had developed a practical sense of returns on labor after years of plantation work. It seems likely that they had a fairly accurate sense of when they were being cheated.

Emanuel, who lived on Settlement 2, recalled some of the production figures there more precisely, and he suggested that one of the reasons the settlers received so little was that the MST took a 20% discount from the proceeds of all rubber and cacao sales. He remembered the

⁶⁸ "Eles lá bafava a mão no dinheiro e guentava, ficava tudo na mão deles, guentava o dinheiro."

⁶⁹ This wage would be negotiable between the employer and employee, and an actual day wage for a worker in the informal labor market might be slightly higher since the employer would not have to pay social security or other benefits to the state but rather directly to the worker.

collection and division of the harvest occurring every 15 days, and that in this period they collected between four and six thousand kilograms of latex rubber, and between 170-200 *arrobas* of cacao. If these figures are accurate, then from the cacao alone, which reached a *low* price of R\$60 per arroba in 2001, Settlement 2 should have been earning between R\$10,200 to R\$12,000 every two weeks from cacao alone. If the settlers there were earning R\$3 per weeks, this would have been sufficient to pay for 1700 day wages in a one week period. Since the settlers worked with their families, and women and children received day wages as well, Sebastião, who lived at Settlement 3, recalled that sometimes there would be as many as 800 day wages to be paid out.

Assuming that the figures between Settlements 2 and 3 are even remotely accurate, bearing in mind that these were based on low prices for cacao and do not even include any of the proceeds from rubber sales, this accounts for about half of the proceeds that should have been paid out to the settlers. In the absence of more accurate figures, these brief considerations do seem to support these settlers' intuitions that they should have been receiving more than they did: "When our day wages should have been more than a [minimum] salary, it only came out to less than a salary."⁷⁰ Even in the best case scenarios, however, the settlers working in the collective areas felt almost always cheated. At the end, "nobody knew"⁷¹ where the money went, but people widely believed that those who were in charge "lied [about it], they lied."⁷² "They," in this case, variously implicated the MST's regional leadership and the elected association leaders (president, secretary, treasurer), who were frequently viewed as subservient and prone to flattering (*bajulando*) the regional leadership.

These were not mere intuitions, however. Many settlers perceive militants as occupying a privileged position, not only in terms of authority, but also in terms of material well-being. For example, a young man who worked as a sharecropper for a local militant at Settlement 3 suggested that the latter was able to sell his rubber production separately from the collective. Unlike the other settlers there, this militant did not pay the same percentage of his rubber production to the MST's organization. At Settlement 3, furthermore, those settlers who were more deeply integrated with the local MST leadership during the initial occupation ended up living in some of the nicer buildings located near the old plantation headquarters. None of the higher-order militants who lived in the *avenida*, or the quarters that formerly housed the

⁷⁰ "Aonde uma diária de nós era pa sair até mais do salário, só saía menos do salário".

⁷¹ "Ninguem sabia."

⁷² "Mentiram, eles mentiram."

plantation workers.⁷³ One afternoon while I was working with friends making manioc flour (*farinha*) at small flour mill a little river at Settlement 4, one of the people present took note of a retired militant named Alberto on the other side of the river at Settlement 3, where he had finally settled down. He was there with his car and a group of young men who were helping him wash it. The man making *farinha* commented: “Yesterday there were five people washing Alberto’s motorcycle, today there are four people washing his car.”⁷⁴ Another person at Settlement 7, in referring to the division between the settlers and the militants, suggested that, “those who work the hardest [i.e. the settlers] aren’t the owners, those who work least [i.e. the militants] are the owners.”⁷⁵ For the settlers, all of these observations hold deep resonances with relationships that constituted plantation life.

7. Counting the Trees, Dividing the Collective

Settlers on these MST communities have taken various routes to mitigate some of these more contentious and difficult circumstances. Since the initial consolidation period of the settlements, the militants operating at the regional level have taken a less and less active role in the communities, and settlers have found more and more courage in asserting their own viewpoints. One young activist, commenting on relationships with militants in the settlements, suggested: “Things are getting better. The people aren’t respecting the leadership anymore.”⁷⁶ The loss of respect in this case is the discovery of courage, and an affirmation of self-worth. While finding renewed courage is important, another way through which settlers have created spaces of self-determination is by challenging and ultimately reworking particular community institutions, such as the collective.

On all three MST settlements there is a distinct trajectory away from collectivized forms of work and land tenure, and a move toward increasingly family-based divisions of plots. In the early years, many settlers recall receiving a pittance—far less than what they would have earned

⁷³ Fn305.

⁷⁴ “Ontem tinha cinco pessoas lavando a moto de Alberto, hoje tem quatro pessoas lavando o carro dele.” Fn285.

⁷⁵ “Os que trabalha mais não são donos, os que trabalha menos são donos.” Fn406.

⁷⁶ “Tá melhorando, o povo não ta respeitando a liderança.” Fn541.

working on the plantations—for a day’s work in the collective. The share that the settlers were receiving after the cacao from the old plantation was harvested and then the proceeds divided were simply not adding up. Many settlers inferred that the militants were “eating” (*comendo*), or appropriating and squandering, the money for themselves.⁷⁷ As a result of these kinds of experiences, according to interviews and narratives I was able to collect, some of the more courageous and audacious individuals on each settlement secretly organized a group of the ten most “firm and strong,”⁷⁸ or more courageous, settlers to directly confront the leadership in an assembly. These were tense moments between the settlers and the regional leadership. The settlers demanded that the collective be divided into individual holdings that were controlled and worked by individual families. Settlements 1, 2, and 3 all pursued this transformation of the collective in a similar fashion.

In a long series of conversation with Adonias, who lived at Settlement 1, he explained all of the forms of suffering that the settlers there had been facing:

It was a serious problem for us to make [a living]...Then one day I made a decision that things were not working out [with the collective work]. [Living in] this place here, we were getting stepped on.⁷⁹

Adonias had worked hard to improve his literacy over the years working on the plantations, and he had learned some basic arithmetic. When the settlers started working collectively, he started to keep track of the settlers’ harvests:

Nobody here did [the calculations], but I was already more, a little more active [about these things]. During one year, we collected forty-five thousand [kilograms of latex]—just...the rubber alone...And [there we were,] always suffering, always suffering, suffering, suffering.⁸⁰

⁷⁷ See Chapter 7, Section 4 for an analysis of this idiom.

⁷⁸ “Firme e forte.”

⁷⁹ “Foi um problema sério pra nós arrumar isso aí...aí um dia eu tirei a decisão que não tava dando certo. Isso aqui, a gente era pisado.”

⁸⁰ “Aqui ninguém fazia, mas eu sempre era mais, mais ativo um pouco. Dentro de um ano nós tirou quarenta e cinco mil—só...a seringa...E sempre sofrendo, sempre sofrendo, sofrendo, sofrendo.”

He realized very quickly that the share the settlers were receiving was not adding up through collective work. Although neither he nor anybody else could prove it, he and others suspected that some of the leaders were squandering the money that they should have been receiving from their harvests. This was something that many people already seemed to know intuitively. Instead of working and marketing their produce collectively, he came up with a plan to divide up the rubber and cacao trees on the old plantation, and distribute them equally among the families:

And then one day I made a decision...I invited the people...[I invited some of] the [other] settlers [to talk]. Then [they] supported [the plan, and said,] “Yes.” And I already knew how we would go about it, so, I say, I say—I took a position like this: “If I find 10 companions here, really strong, who know [and will publicly support] what we are going to do, then I’ll go forward.”⁸¹

Adonias expected that most of the other settlers would be supportive of the proposal to divide up the collective, but that many of them would be too afraid to speak out in support in a public assembly. Therefore, he went about to organize the group of 10 of the more outspoken and courageous settlers whom he thought who would support him in an assembly with the MST’s regional leadership:

And well I went out from house to house, from house to house [asking people]: “You guarantee?” “I guarantee.” I got together 10 of them [settlers]...I confirmed [with them], got together 10 strong—really good and strong—and then I called the Movement, the people from the Movement.⁸²

Once they had organized a group of 10, Adonias went to the local association president and told him to invite Hugo, one of the head militants in the MST’s regional organization, to come to their next assembly:

⁸¹ “E aí quando foi um dia eu tomei uma decisão...E aí convidei o povo...os assentados. Aí apoiaram que sim. Mas eu já sabia aqui de que maneira era, então, é eu digo, eu digo—eu tomei uma atitude assim: “Se eu encontrar 10 companheiros aqui firme mesmo que saiba o que é que nós vai fazer, aí eu meto a cara.”

⁸² “E aí saí de casa em casa; de casa em casa: “Voce garante?” “Garanto.” Arrumei 10 dentro desses...Eu afirmei, arrumei dez firme—firme e forte mesmo, e aí chamei o Movimento, o pessoal do Movimento.”

“You can tell Hugo to come—so we can hold an assembly, we’re going to divide [this], to see if we divide [this up]. If we really put our foot down, we’re going to divide this up.”⁸³

Hugo and other members of the regional leadership came:

They came—they came and we sat down and argued. Oh! It was an ugly discussion, you know? But then the 10...unfortunately [for the leadership], the 10 really held to [their word] and they backed me on that point, and we put our foot down.⁸⁴

After a contentious debate, the MST’s regional leadership eventually ceded to the settlers’ proposal. The settlers were to count up the total number of rubber and cacao trees on the old plantation, divide the rubber and the cacao into individual lots, and then have a lottery to see which lot each family would receive. Adonias showed me the notebook they had used at the time to count up all of the rubber and cacao trees in order to divide them up into separate lots. I asked him what he called the work in this notebook. He called it, “Work Question; or, Question of the way we would work with liberty.”⁸⁵

By 2001, after a few years of working collectively, families living at Settlement 2 had also become dissatisfied with the hardship that they experienced under collective work. They, too, decided to divide up the old plantation lands. Emanuel, who was a resident there, recalled:

After a while, we no longer liked [working collectively] because we ended up—we were getting in the red.⁸⁶

He continued:

⁸³ “Pode falar com [Hugo] pa vim—a gente ter uma assembleia, nós vai dividir, vê se nós devede. Se a turma pisar o pé em cima nós devede.”

⁸⁴ “Eles vieram, vieram e nós sentou e discutiu..., ah! Foi uma discussão feia viu? Aí os 10...Infelizmente que os dez garantiram mesmo, e me ajudaram nessa parte e aí pisemo o pé em cima.”

⁸⁵ “Questao de Trabalho; ou, Questao de que maneira a gente ia trabalhar com liberdade”

⁸⁶ “Adepois nós num gostemos porque nós ficemo, nós tava ficano no prejuízo.”

Well, we took a stand...In 2001, we had a meeting to change the presidency [of the association], and we pushed back hard, we made our intervention (*participação*). We explained things, in the meeting with us all, we made our intervention to divide the areas. To count it all up and divide things, so each one of us would have their area.⁸⁷

An identical process occurred on Settlement 3 around the same time. People there were similarly dissatisfied with collective work, and notably, the meager returns they were receiving. As with the other old plantations that had been converted into MST settlements, the settlers proposed to count and divide all of the rubber trees first, and later the cacao trees.

The first meeting with the MST leadership, where the settlers made that proposal, was nearly unsuccessful. Justo recalled that a group of settlers had gotten together outside of the assembly in order to plan a way to divide the plantation into equal shares. He recalled that when the time came to hold the assembly, his role would be to stand up and speak out in favor of dividing the old plantation lands into individual *roças*. He recalled coordinating with his companions:

“I’ll say that I’d like each person to have their own [roça].”⁸⁸

At that point, the others were supposed to speak up in support. When the MST’s regional leaders arrived at the assembly, and the time came for them to make their proposal, the others who had agreed to speak up in support had lost their courage:

Everybody was without the courage to speak...They were afraid [that] the [leaders] would kick them out [of the settlement].⁸⁹

When Justo stood up and spoke out, explaining to the MST leadership that they wanted to divide up the land into equal shares, he suddenly found himself alone. This created a stir among the MST’s regional leadership. Justo recalled:

⁸⁷ “Aí nós fizemos a, a posição...Em 2001, aí nós já fizemos a reunião aí, ela já passou a presidência, aí nós jogamo duro, aí nós fizemo nossa participação. Expriquemo, aí fizemo a reunião todo mundo, fizemo uma participação, hum, pra fazer dividimento. Contar e fazer o dividimento, cada qual ficava com sua área.”

⁸⁸ “Eu vou dizer que eu quero que cada um cuida do seu.”

⁸⁹ “Todo mundo sem coragem de falar...Eles tinham medo dos caras botar eles pra fora.”

They almost kicked me out [of the settlement]!⁹⁰

He recalled that Augusto—who was already in his 70s by that time—finally spoke up in support of Justo. Justo recalled his words:

“I want to speak in support of Mr. Justo, because I want everyone to divide [up the land] and each to have their own.”⁹¹

In a separate interview, sometime later, Augusto recalled the situation. In a hurried voice, that recalled some anger and frustration he used to feel working in the collective, he recalled how he and many other settlers felt they were being robbed of money that they should have received from the harvests. On some occasions, instead of paying each family directly for their production, the association directorate took generous discounts from their payments in order “to pay other peoples” debts.”⁹² Augusto remembered complaining about this in the settlement’s assemblies, but being met with threats:

“We’ll kick you out [of the settlement].”⁹³

For Augusto, then, the opportunity to divide up the land equally and end the collective work was the opportunity he and many others had been waiting for. Augusto recalled the settlers’ proposal to divide up the trees:

Well, the people—many people there started to push back.

[They said]: “Let’s count [the trees] and each one divide their own.”

Then we divided and each one had their own plot [of land].⁹⁴

⁹⁰ “Quase me botaram daqui pra fora!”

⁹¹ “Eu quero falar com seu Justo, que eu quero que todo mundo divide e cada um vai no seu.”

⁹² “Pa pagar débito dos outros.”

⁹³ “A gente bota fora.”

⁹⁴ “Aí o pessoal—muito aí deu à testa.//“Vamo contar e cada um dividir o seu.”//Aí dividiu e cada um seu pedaço.”

In all of these cases, the collectives fell apart because of settlers' experiences with tangible and widespread injustice on the settlements, and not because of abstractions like "individualism" or "capitalism" or "neoliberalism." While it was not clear who exactly was taking their money or where it was going, it was clear enough to the settlers that they were being cheated. They had enough experience to know that the amount of wealth being harvested from the old plantations trees was not proportionate to what they were receiving. Some people even suggested that people had been better off financially through work on the plantations. Their fear of confronting this situation on their own, however, is understandable given their intuition that people at different levels of the MST hierarchy were the ones who were siphoning off their production. They had seen in earlier years what the consequences were for lone individuals who rocked the boat. Dividing the collective through clandestine organizing among the settlers was one means of mitigating the hardship they experienced under the collective, but dividing the land did not resolve all of their problems.

8. Documents & Land Insecurity

In early 2011, a young activist related an encounter that he had witnessed in the office that housed the MST's regional headquarters. A woman had come to inquire about some INCRA officials who had recently visited the settlement where she lived. She wanted to find out if INCRA's presence in the region meant that the settlers there would soon be receiving titles for their land. The young activist recalled that the militant who was present "got angry with her,"⁹⁵ and yelled, "You guys can forget about that!"⁹⁶ explaining that they would not be getting any land titles. This brief scenario succinctly illustrates an ongoing source of tension about land tenure that often recurs between settlers (including local association leaders) and some members of the MST's regional leadership.

⁹⁵ "Retou com ela."

⁹⁶ "Voces pode esquecer disso!"

Justo, who lived at Settlement 3 gave a series of analogies to describe settlers' land tenure there. He variously compared their landholdings to that of renters who do not have to pay rent,⁹⁷ as well as in terms of a transaction between the settlers and the government, but for which the transfer of money was never actually made. Throughout the interview, he reiterates that all of the settlers would like to complete the transaction, and that what they want are "documents" (*documentos*), or titles, for their land. Justo explained that he would like to be able to say:

"I have my area, I'm the owner [of my land]."

But it's not in any document showing that I'm the owner...Everyone here is an "owner," but we want to see:

"I want my document!"⁹⁸

The theme of wanting land titles, or what are simply referred to as "documents," repeated itself throughout the conversation with Justo:

Everyone wants the document [for their land]...[this] talk about collective work, nobody wants that anymore, [they] want the document, everybody wants the document, I want the document.⁹⁹

Another man named Arnaldo, who arrived late in the conversation with Justo, similarly suggested:

The [settlement] here belongs to the state, right, it's the government's. They can show up and wave their hands about and send me away.¹⁰⁰

⁹⁷ Wolford presents similar evidence in which a settler, who seems to be waiting and hoping to receive title for his land, suggests that the settlers' tenure is a mere 'contract of occupation' rather than full ownership (2010:199).

⁹⁸ "Eu tenho minha área eu sou dono."//Mas num consta um documento como eu sou dono...Todo mundo é 'dono' aqui, mas qui nós quer constar é: 'Quero meu documento!'"

⁹⁹ "Todo mundo quer o documento...falar trabalho coletivo, ninguém quer mais isso, quer o documento, todo mundo quer o documento, quero o documento."

¹⁰⁰ "Aqui é do estado, né, é do governo. Ele pode chegar e passar a mão e mandar eu [embora]."

This raised the question of why, if so many people would much prefer have their documents, they don't attempt to make these changes. Justo explained: "You can't complain and say, 'I want the title to my land,' you couldn't do that."¹⁰¹ I ask him why not, and he explained that it was risky business to make such claims:

[Justo]: No, WHO'S THAT CRAZY, man!?

[Jonathan]: No? But who—is there someone who's against that?

[Justo]: WHO ARE AGAINST [IT], AGAINST [IT]!

[Jonathan]: But who?

[Justo]: Everybody, a bunch of the movement.¹⁰²

Justo explained further:

It's because the association, it pays for a lot of things, right, pays for a lot of things. And if we go question that, we end up for the worse, right, we end up for the worse. We don't question it, we let it go, right, we let one [person from the leadership] come say how it's gonna be, how they want it.¹⁰³

In other words, the interest in providing or not providing land titles to the settlers appears to be in opposition to financial interests that are facilitated by current institutional arrangements on the settlements, and who live from funds that are removed from the settlements. Having control over land titles would amount to a more definitive exit from plantation life. This observation was brought home as Justo drew these reflections on documents together with a description of the militants:

¹⁰¹ "Num pode recramar e dizer: "*Eu quero o título da terra*", num podia dizer isso."

¹⁰² "Não, QUEM É DODHO, rapaz?" "Não? Mas quem—tem alguém que é contra isso?" "QUI É CONTRA, CONTRA!" "Mas quem?" "Todo mundo, mei mundo de movimento."

¹⁰³ "É por que tem associação, é banca muita coisa, né, banca muita coisa. E aí e se nós for questionar, nós sai por ruim, né, aí nós sai por ruim. Nós não questiona, nós deixa passar, né, pra vim um falar como é qui é, o que quer."

Those who don't want to work, want to live in ...those who don't have courage to work, want to live all mixed together (*no bolo*), work in the collective, working, live mixed together, eat and drink and sleep and walk around like a militant, walk around the world [running] after the government. No, we don't want that, nobody wants it.¹⁰⁴

By drawing on tropes of exploitation that are typically applied to plantation managers—who appear to be idle, well fed, living from others' sweat—the speaker invites further analogies between plantation life and life on the MST settlements. Indeed, rural workers can gain access to land on settlements and plantations alike, even if, as sharecroppers, the share of what they keep is significantly less.¹⁰⁵ The problem that settlers identify with respect to control over land titles, however, is less an argument about percentages and proportions. What seems to matter to settlers is that the share they receive is mediated by uncertain and sometimes precarious relationships to movement leaders, who also appear to have unwarranted say over who gets access to land. Insecurity in personal relationships—whether to patrons, plantation managers, or movement leaders—is connected to insecure access to land. This problem is crystallized in access to legal documents like land titles.

The settlers understand that there is a wider range in the hierarchy such that they are potentially in a situation where they can appeal to higher authorities. In response to this, Justo suggested that one of the higher authorities in the country—President Lula, who came just after God, at least in his view—wanted the settlers to have their titles:

Lula wants to deliver [land titles] to everyone so that they can take care of what is theirs, for us to be micro-planters (*micro-fazendeiros*), right? So that we have the land. He [wants to] give the title so that we can then pay [taxes] every year on the land title, so that we can say we are the owners [of our lands]. Because [today] we aren't owners of the

¹⁰⁴ “Aqueles qui num quer trabalhar, quer viver na balaiada...aquele qui num tem coragem de trabalhar, quer viver no bolo, trabalha no coletivo, ta trabalhano, viver de bolo, cumer e beber e durmir e andar de militante, andano pelo mundo atrás de governo. Não, nós num quer, ninguém quer.”

¹⁰⁵ Rubber sharecroppers in the region typically keep between 30% and 50% of their production, depending on the contract. On the MST settlements, as suggested above, the settlers keep between 80-90% of their rubber harvest. Notice that this is not a *qualitative* shift in terms of settler control over their production, but a quantitative shift in the percentage that they keep.

land, to be owners of the land—[we] are not owners of anything. Whoever planted has to be the owner of what they planted.¹⁰⁶

He suggested that there is a conflict now between the President and INCRA, on the one hand, and the Movement, on the other hand. In referring to a leader from the MST's regional organization, who lived away from the settlements, Justo explained that he would no longer have a say in settlement life:

He can't insist on anything and say how he wants things, because [now] INCRA wants [to give us our documents], it's the government who ordered it, the president who ordered it. So, what we want is our document, what we want is our document.¹⁰⁷

He invoked President Lula's voice to support his claims:

Those militants, when they take us to the land, that's good, but Lula said:

“Put them on the land today, first put them on the land, then after three days, I emancipate (*libera*) the land. Now, I want—[once the land is] measured and I'll give the title.”

That's Lula's opinion.¹⁰⁸

9. Documents, Money, & Other Forms of Insecurity

¹⁰⁶ “Lula quer entregar cada um pa tomar conta do qui é seu, pa nós ser um micro fazendeiro, né? Pa qui nós pegue a terra. Ele dá o título pa nós voltar pagano todo ano o título da terra, pa nós dizer que nós somo dono. Qui nós num somo dono de terra, ser dono da terra—num são dono de nada. Quem prantou tem qui ser dono daquilo que prantou.”

¹⁰⁷ “Ele num pode bater a teca agora e, e dizer qui quer, porque é o INCRA qui quer, é o governo qui mandou né, é o presidente qui mandou. Então, o qui nós quer é o documento, o qui nós quer é o documento.”

¹⁰⁸ “Aquele militante, quando pega gente pa terra, ta certo, mas Lula disse://‘Botou na terra hoje, antes botou na terra, cum três dia, eu libera a terra. Agora, quero, midiu e dou o título.’//A opinião de Lula é essa.”

Land titles are not everything, however, as control over other kinds of documents presents new possibilities for conflict. One conflict emerged when planting credit became available to the people living at Settlements 1, 2, and 3 through a federal agricultural credit program called PRONAF.¹⁰⁹ In early 2009, a regional cooperative approached settlers with a proposal to cultivate and market palm products through the local cooperative. Many people on the settlements were initially excited about the project and the prospect of improving their lot. Each family that opted to participate would receive a loan totaling R\$21,500 that would be applied in parcels that would be applied to a range of activities, ranging from preparing new fields, nurseries, and transplanting seedlings from nursery to field.¹¹⁰ A total of 60 families between Settlements 1 and 3 agreed to participate, while Settlement 2 opted out of the project.

Although the regional leadership of the MST was involved in neither elaborating nor implementing the project, the leadership at the regional level had to give final approval of the project. To receive the MST's approval, those families participating in the project had to agree to pay a total of 7.3% of their total loan, or R\$1,500 per family, directly to the MST, or else they would not be able to participate in what seemed to be a promising project. One man remembered the MST regional leadership "saying...that [the money] was for the [MST's agronomists]" who would presumably be coming to aid the settlers, but no agronomists or technicians ever materialized. Instead, he suggested, "it was just for the Movement to eat."¹¹¹ One man living at Settlement 3 was upset about this, but explained that they had no choice as "the leadership lives from [discounts made from] these projects."¹¹²

The people living at Settlement 1, however, insisted on participating in the project, but most of them refused to pay such a large sum of money, as they would ultimately be responsible for repaying the money to the federal government by themselves. As a result of this, the MST's regional leadership¹¹³ refused to approve the project there by not releasing a particular legal

¹⁰⁹ *Programa Nacional de Fortalecimento da Agricultura Familiar.*

¹¹⁰ This is a rather large sum of money in local terms, which raises a series of critical questions about the project itself. Around March 2009, when the project was first proposed, this amounted to approximately \$9,000 USD. To give the reader a sense of the amount of money in local terms, this is equivalent to just over 46 minimum monthly salaries, which amounted to R\$465 per month in 2009. In other words, this is equivalent to what a person would make after 3.83 years of plantation work.

¹¹¹ "Dizendo eles que é do técnico, mas não é isso é pro Movimento comer."

¹¹² "A direção sobrevive dos projetos."

¹¹³ The regional leadership appeared to have the power to either override the wishes of resident association leaders at Settlement 1, or else gain their support in opposition to the other settlers.

document, referred to as the DAP.¹¹⁴ As a result, while planting preparations went forward at Settlement 3, the project at Settlement 1 came to a halt. After the stalemate dragged on over a period of several months, the settlers realized that they had no choice in the matter.¹¹⁵ Either they had to give up hopes of participating in the planting project, or else pay the percentage to the MST. In the end, the settlers agreed to pay the 7.3%, at which point the DAP document was released and the project finally moved forward. This amounted to a total of R\$90,000 from both Settlements 1 and 3, or what one person would earn after more than 16 years of plantation work.¹¹⁶

Similar occurrences involving other planting projects appear to have occurred on Settlement 6 and Settlement 7. In a casual conversation with a man from Settlement 7, he explained that the settlers there had similar problems with their PRONAF money. He recalled that the settlers there had taken out of project loan of R\$15,000, of which 13%, or R\$2,000 per family, was deducted for the MST regional leadership. Similar to the case above, the MST's regional leadership was minimally involved in the implementation of the project.¹¹⁷ The MST was supposed to send agricultural "technicians" (*técnicos*) to help implement in the project, but the extent of their participation was merely to tell people there that they had to work collectively. In the course of the conversation, like so many other people living on the settlements in the region, he lamented that the settlers there have no documents for their land, and that if they had them, then people would feel like the real "owners" (*donos*) of the land there. If they were owners of their own land, they would likewise be the owners of their own project loans. The kind of coercive force that the MST's regional leadership was able to exercise in these cases would have been eliminated.

On Settlement 6, the MST had helped settlers acquire project money through a government loan program called PROCERA, for what this settler recalled was R\$16,500.¹¹⁸ Of the loan total, he remembered that R\$6,500 per family, or 39.4% of the total, was designated for

¹¹⁴ "Declaration of Aptitude for PRONAF" (*Declaração de Aptidão ao Pronaf*)

¹¹⁵ As noted previously, this may have never been a matter of choice but rather an institutional understanding between the MST and INCRA, as the latter had long been aware of the so-called "tax" that the MST deducted from settlers public credit loans (see Ondetti 2008, 187). This does not mean, however, that settlers were aware of these institutionalized arrangements, as they clearly did not approve of them.

¹¹⁶ According to Brazil's minimum monthly salary for 2009, which was R\$465 per month.

¹¹⁷ Fn406.

¹¹⁸ PROCERA refers to the "Special Credit Program for Agrarian Reform" (*Programa de Crédito Especial para Reforma Agrária*). PROCERA was available until 1999 when it was replaced by PRONAF.

“collective” use and administration by the MST. The precise amounts here are not clear. Other settlers recalled that each family had paid somewhere between R\$6,000 and R\$9,000 of their loan monies to the MST’s regional organization. One settler there recalled the loan amount being R\$18,000 and the MST’s share of their loan being half of the total value, or R\$9,000, while another recalled the MST’s share being R\$6,000. This would have amounted to

With their share, the MST’s regional leadership was supposed to establish a cooperative for the settlers using this money, but this never materialized. One settler remembered the occasion when they tried to locate the cooperative office in a neighboring municipality, only to find an “old abandoned warehouse.” The cooperative, he concluded, was “just a ghost.”¹¹⁹ If these figures are correct, the total amount taken from the 82 settler families, and transferred to the MST leadership, amounted to R\$533,000. If these figures are correct, this amounts to 326 years of plantation labor at 1999 minimum wage levels. If the lowest figure is accurate, this would mean that the 82 families living at Settlement 6 would have transferred some R\$492,000 of federal loan money to the MST. Assuming 1999 wage levels,¹²⁰ this amount would have been equivalent to 300 years of plantation work.¹²¹ Even a fraction of this would have been enough to spark the small rebellion that occurred at Settlement 6. This was the proverbial straw that broke the camel’s back and led to the revolt at Settlement 6. Honório had explained:

We had no choice, but we had no choice...At the time we said we wouldn’t accept it, [we] even sent letters to INCRA saying we didn’t except the project in that form...but that the project, this PROCERA credit, it only came out like this, [with] a collective portion.¹²²

In the end, the planting project failed at Settlement 6. The cooperative never materialized, and the settlers there never received any technical support from the MST’s agronomists who were supposed to be part of the project:

¹¹⁹ “Depósito véi abandonado...era só fantasma.”

¹²⁰ The Brazilian minimum monthly salary for 1999 was R\$136 per month.

¹²¹ If the higher figure is accurate, this would have amounted to R\$738,000, or an equivalent to 450 years of plantation work.

¹²² “A gente não tinha escolha, mas a gente não tinha escolha não...A gente apelou na época que não aceitava, mandou até ofício pro INCRA dizendo que não aceitava o projeto daquela forma...mas era o tal do projeto, esse crédito PROCERA, só saía assim, uma parte coletiva.”

When they took that money they wasted it (*deram fim*), [and] never came here again...That was why the people revolted...They took all of that money from us to waste [it elsewhere] and afterward they still wanted to order people about. That was where the revolt began to expel them from here.¹²³

The precise relationships of control and coercion in these situations are not entirely clear, as settlers struggle to decipher the opacity of social relationships. Answers to the questions of who is making, who is collaborating in them, and who is benefitting from them, is often times opaque to settlers. While the MST's official position is that these funds are supposed to be used to further the struggle for land in other parts of Brazil, there has never been any accounting as to where these different monies went and how they were applied. What was clear enough to settlers, however, was that they felt coerced between the desire to improve their material and social wellbeing and unfavorable conditions that were imposed upon them to participate in these planting projects. Many people felt that this situation bordered on outright theft and misappropriation of what were, ultimately, government funds.

These different kinds of discounts are connected to two problems on the settlements on the settlements. One has to do with ongoing source of insecurity, namely the lack of documents, and the other has to do with what appear to be a widespread sense of inequality, which rests upon the lack of documents.

Many people infer that the reason MST settlements are not given titles to the land on MST settlements is so that the movement leadership can continue to have access to percentages that are taken from production and from project loans. One settler on Settlement 4 explained that “the militants—the directorate is against it.” If the settlers at Settlements 1, 2 and 3 had their documents, he explained, then the militants would not be able to live from the money that they extracted from the settlements. The militants, he explained, “Eat first and then give [the settlers] the leftovers.”¹²⁴ A man from Settlement 3 similarly explained that “the directorate survives off

¹²³ “Quando eles pegaram esse dinheiro deram fim lá, nem aqui vieram mais...Por isso foi que o pessoal revoltou...Aí levaram esse dinheiro todo da gente pra istora e depois queria ainda botar ordens nas pessoas. Aí foi onde criou mais a revolta de expulsar eles daqui.”

¹²⁴ “Come primeiro e dá o resto.” Fn234.

the projects,” and that their interest was in continuing to receive the percentages from the projects and from production.¹²⁵ Another man from Settlement 2 explained in more detail:

Here [the land] should have already been [divided]—INCRA should have already lotted this all up to settle all of the settlers in [their own] lots, all complete...with documents.

But then, they trick you...the militants of the regional leadership...they do a trick, they make a fuss that INCRA shouldn't divide [the lots] right away, because they—because if INCRA divides it, [then] they lose their commission...They lose, because if INCRA comes here to divide the lots...then they're finished, they don't have anywhere to eat, because [they] only eat from the settlers. Because, look, each settlement produces a big commission for [the leadership].¹²⁶

The militants' interest, he concluded, was “just to take, just to take”¹²⁷ so that they can “party, drive around in pretty cars...That is, the position of the regional leadership, [the position] of the regional leadership is just that.”¹²⁸ Another man from Settlement 3 evoked a similar image of the militants: “[Arms] crossed, walking about, messing around, drinking—drinking beer at other peoples' costs and not working.”¹²⁹ A young activist who grew up with family ties between Settlements 3 and 4, reflecting on the circumstances, similarly asked, “Where else are those people going to get a new car, [car] of the year, forty, fifty thousand, eighty thousand? Where?”¹³⁰

In short, many settlers have a sense of growing inequalities between the settlers themselves and those militants who live outside of the settlements. Settlers account for these material inequalities by inferring that movement leaders are “eating,” or misappropriating and pilfering, the money they take from the settlers' harvests and government project loans. Whether

¹²⁵ Fn304.

¹²⁶ “Que aqui já era pa ser—o INCRA já ter loteado isso aqui e puciar todos os assentados nos lote, já feito...com documento.//Mas aí, eles trambica...os militante da regional...Eles trambica, eles faz zuada que é pa o INCRA não dividir logo, mode eles—porque o INCRA dividino, eles perde a comissão...Eles perde, porque se o INCRA chegar aqui e lotear...aí ele se acaba, que eles num tem donde comer, que só come dos assentamento. Assim ó, que cada assentamento eles tem comissão grande.”

¹²⁷ “Só tirar, só tirar.”

¹²⁸ “Pa farrar, andar em carro bonito...No caso só a posição da região, do, da regional é só isso.”

¹²⁹ “Porque fica [de braços] cruzado), andano, bestano, tomano—tomanos ceveja nas custa dusôto e sem trabalhar.”

¹³⁰ “Onde é que esse pessoal vai tirar carro novo, do ano, quarenta, cinquenta mil, oitenta mil? Da onde?”

or not these settlers are right about some of the militants and wrong about others, it seems that a contributing factor to their resentment not something they do not have to infer, namely, that they are not entirely in control of their livelihoods. Control over documents would give settlers greater control over their livelihoods, and the ability to bow-out of relationships that they found unacceptable *without* sacrificing their access to various productive resources, such as land. It is this logic, together with a broad range of relevant social and historical experiences, which helps us to make sense of the participation preferences that were presented above.

10. Friendship & Friends of the MST

“We need very strong ears to hear ourselves judged frankly; and because there are so few who can endure frank criticism without being stung by it, those who venture to criticize us perform a remarkable act of friendship; for to undertake to wound and offend a man for his own good is to have a healthy love for him.” M. de Montaigne¹³¹

While the MST may be a less-than-ideal option for many people in the communities described here, people may not always have the privilege of choosing among options. Eventually, I was able to catch up with the two men who had been beaten up and tied to a tree by MST militants during the initial occupations—as had been described in section 7. Some sixteen years later, now 55 and 66 years old, the older of the two men suggested that although he had been deeply humiliated by the MST’s leadership in the past, he would still take up a spot on one of the MST’s settlements if he was given the opportunity. After all, this was where many of their old friends—from their days together as plantation workers—now lived. Both men now worked for a few of these old friends as rubber sharecroppers at Settlement 3—the older man, in order to supplement the meager retirement benefits he receives from the state. These were some of his old friends from their days working on the plantations.

As was seen in Chapter 8, people in the region often use the idiom of “friendship” (*amizade*) to evaluate the kinds and qualities of their relationships. Unlike paternal, patriarchal,

¹³¹ Montaigne ([1587]:825).

manorial, managerial, or other relationships that are grounded in various kinds of coercive authority, the ideal and practice of friendship is understood to lack this important element of coercion. While patron-client relationships are often times cast in terms of the idiom of friendship, people in the region are astute at recognizing differences in the kinds and qualities of friendships, and they make epistemic distinctions between true (*verdadeiro*) and false (*falso*) friends. The mode of friendship operative in the patron-client relationships is grounded in an asymmetric distribution of social resources, such as land and voice, which makes it easier for one party to coerce and potentially disenfranchise the other. This threat stabilizes such relationships, at least in some measure, but this does not make for much of a friendship.

For many people living on and around the MST settlements, the structure of life on these settlements reproduced too many of the conditions that they had become familiar with under plantation life, whether that meant various “discounts,” different forms of insecurity (e.g., with respect to land tenure, or the fear of being sent away), or a dependence on powerfully positioned people whose favor one had to carefully maintain. These are reasons why historically salient idioms of plantation life, and at times even “slavery,” continued to resonate in many people’s experiences under the MST’s leadership. For those who still participate in the MST but have found some means of mitigating some of the asymmetries that underlie inequalities, whether by dividing the collective, or beginning to cultivate the land as their own, there appears to be a shift toward a genuine form of “friendship” with the MST’s various leaders. This may occur as much between the settlers themselves—who were pitted against one another, as occurred at Settlement 1 between the old plantation workers and new arrivals—as it may between settlers and various MST leaders.

Even for people at Settlements 5 and 6, which exited the MST altogether, the stance is not one of unbridled enmity, but potential friendship. One man living at Settlement 5 suggested that while he would never want to work with the MST again, he noted that he had nothing against the MST and could still remain friends with the movement. The ability to be friends with the MST, however, meant leveling the playing field and undermining the conditions that gave some parties coercive power over others. Under conditions of friendship, no party has the power to disenfranchise any other, and they can support each other in shared work and political struggle. When collective action comes about under circumstances where electivity and mutual recognition can take hold, the meaning and meaningfulness of “the collective”—and collective

action, generally—is fundamentally changed. These ideas resonate with similar insights that emerge in anarchist social politics, which is why I have suggested that some of the social transformations occurring in this context are “anarchistic” in character.

For Honório and other community members at Settlement 6, the exit from the MST was a moment of conflict that was necessary to regain the freedom that gave their quest for equality meaning. Their exit from the MST was not, however, a disavowal of the broad struggle for human dignity that, to be sure, animates most supporters of the MST. Honório still feels a kinship with the MST, one that is based in friendship:

I left the MST, but I didn't stop helping...in some things, in some visions... If I have to go under a tarp (*lona*) to hold onto a spot for someone who doesn't have land, I will help. I'll go, too.¹³²

He recounted a brief story of when he had gone to help occupy another nearby plantation:

I got my bag, put in some clothes, blankets, a hammock, and I went there. I went into town and bought a few tarps (*lonas*)...purchased a tarp for me and a couple for anybody else who needed [one]. [Then] I showed up [at the occupation], [and to collect building materials I helped] cut down some trees with the group that was invading the road. [We were] building tents on the side of the road...I made a tent for myself, and was able to make two more tents for the people there, I helped them make it. [We] covered [my tent] with a tarp, [and] gave the two other tarps to people who needed them...Then, after three days, I left [my tent] there [for somebody to use,] and I went back [home]. But I went to help...We went there for the good of some others—of everybody...Well, we have this custom of trying to help others. Even though you're here and such—you already have your land—are you not going to go help? We'll go help—yes.¹³³

¹³² “Eu saí ali do MST, mas eu não deixei de ajudar...em algumas linhas, em algumas visões... Mas se precisar ir pra debaixo de uma lona aguardar uma vaga pra alguém que não tenha terra, eu vou ajudar. Eu vou também.”

¹³³ “Peguei aqui minha bolsa, botei a roupa, coberta, uma rede e fui pra lá. Fui na cidade e comprei umas lona...comprei uma lona pra mim e mais duas pra alguém se precisasse. Cheguei lá, cortei pau mais a galera que tava lá invadindo na estrada, fazendo os barraco na beira da estrada...Fiz um barraco pra mim e consegui fazer mais dois barracos pra o pessoal lá, ajudamos a fazer. Já vai cobri de lona, cedi mais as duas lonas que o povo tava precisando...Aí com três dias, deixei ele lá e saí fora. Mas fui ajudar...A gente vai lá procurar uma coisa que é pra o bem dos outros—de todos. Pra conflito não me chame não que eu não vou...Então, a gente tem esse costume né de

Honório's sense of freedom does not prevent him from recognizing the importance of collective action, and his sense is that in the struggle for equality, one cannot ignore the needs of others and the importance of reciprocity. But in this case, however, attending to the needs of others is more an activity of virtue rather than a coercive duty. In the end, Honório makes an important distinction with respect to the MST:

The MST has leaders, right? And the [one who is] guilty of some wrongdoing is not the MST [in general], it's some of the leaders of the MST, understand?¹³⁴

What Honório is acknowledging is that movement leaders are never mere extensions of some official movement ideology, however well or poorly conceived. Rather, one is always compelled to live with the concrete particulars and embodiments of those ideals, however true or corrupted they may be. Their experiences with members of the leadership, and the collective institutions that supported them, amounted to experiences of humiliation and privation that were not so different from those that people sometimes faced on the plantations. In short, the structure of community institutions under the MST was simply not adequate to their sense of dignity; the way of life that the MST imposed there was not one the settlers could recognize as their own, and this was why the MST had to go.

11. Struggles of Community

The settlers' rejection of collective practices introduced by the MST is not a rejection of collective action, generally. As has been seen at various points in earlier chapters, the egalitarian ideals of generosity, sharing, and mutual aid are by no means foreign to people in Bahia's cacao lands. Such practices are voluntary and grounded in mutual trust and respect. If conditions

tentar ajudar alguém. Não é porque voce ta aqui e tal, já conseguiu sua terra, que voce não vai ajudar? Vamos tentar ajudar, sim."

¹³⁴ "Porque o MST tem líderes, né? E o culpado de algumas coisas erradas não é o MST, são alguns líderes que tem no MST, entendeu."

grounding collective action fail, then the parties may freely exit the relationship without fear of any one party disenfranchising another. It was precisely the coercive dimension of some MST practices that ran contrary to many settlers' sense of what makes for a good life. This is what motivated some settlers to exit the MST altogether, and others to dismantle the collective and create institutions through which they could recognize and affirm one another. Although settlers still do not control vital and sought-after documents—such as the DAP or the almost mythical land title (*título definitivo*)—they continue to make the MST their own.

In *The German Ideology*, Marx famously wrote: “Only within the community has each individual the means of cultivating his gifts in all directions; hence personal freedom becomes possible only within the community” (1998[1846], 86). He goes on to observe that community has often taken on “illusory” forms in which personal freedom is only possible for the minority owning class, while the majority is excluded, individuated, and cut off from real community. In short, the forms that “individuality” assumes hinge, at least partly, upon the forms of personhood available through particular historical communities. The form that community ought to take—and how such communities could be brought about—informed internal disputes that occurred in the 19th century among major socialist figures such as Bakunin and Marx. These questions remain with us today, as the conflict in this ethnographic setting is precisely a conflict over the form of community. Some observers might imagine that the division of the collective and the desire for land titles is derived from an abstract notion of liberal “individualism” imposed upon people from without, whether by a sweeping appeal to “neoliberalism,” “capitalism,” or some other abstraction. But the notion of “individuality” in the cacao lands is anything but an abstract or universalizing notion. Whatever else it may be—or may become—it is the result of a long and persistent history of social domination that has recurred in unexpected ways. People’s efforts to recover positive notions of “individuality” are part of a longer process of struggling to wrest dignity from the multiple bonds that subsume it, while creating forms of life together through which individuated “I”s can be realized as affirming “we”s.

CONCLUSION:
CULTIVATING HOPE

1. Befriending Trees

“All these various stages of vegetation are united by countless lianas, which, taking root in the earth, twine their bare tendrils from bough to bough, from stem to stem, often extending across considerable spaces, and at length, when attaining the highest point, and meeting the air and sunlight, bursting forth themselves into leaf and flower. The struggle of all plants towards the light, throughout the whole forest, is very remarkable.”¹

One of the last films I helped make before I left Bahia was for Adonias and his spouse, Teresa. I had been able to visit with them on a handful of occasions over the years. They knew that I had helped a number of other families film their farms, and they asked if I would help make one for them as well. Adonias was 80 years old, and Teresa was 65, and they had been together for less than a year. Teresa had children from her first marriage, but they were all grown up and leading lives elsewhere; her first husband had died 15 years earlier. Adonias had also been married previously, but his first wife had passed many years before and they never had any children.

Adonias and Teresa lived on one of the region’s MST settlements, and they worked together on the cacao and rubber groves they had received after the settlers had divided the collective. Both of their bodies were aged, but they did all of the work themselves. They moved slowly, but with deliberation. They were participating in the palm planting project, described in the previous chapter, and so they were busier than normal this year, preparing and tending to their new groves of young palms. Unlike the cacao and rubber trees they

¹ Ferdinand Maximilian Joseph (1868:346-347)

had inherited from the plantation, they were cultivating these young palms from seed. They were cultivating them as their own, a stretch of the world that reflected an image of their activity.

Dividing the collective was a first step for these families who were coming into their own, a step toward finding and making their place in the world. Ofélia, who had appeared in Chapter 10 describing her earlier life as plantation worker,² expressed the relief she felt after the settlers had finally divided the collective. She described the pleasure she now feels whenever she goes out to work on her family's roça:

The good thing for me is that we do what we can. We go to the roça at seven, or if we don't want to go at seven, we'll go out at six in the morning. And we'll feel joy in being there. But when we were all working in the collective, I hardly had the courage to go out in the morning.³

Her husband Tomás, who was listening to the conversation, added: "There was no pleasure in it." In saying "we do what we can," Ofélia meant that whatever she and her family were able to achieve through their work, it would not be unjustly or unfairly taken from them. She continued, describing the work in the collective:

There was no pleasure going out in the morning—tying a rag on your head to go to the roça—because you knew that your blood was going to be sucked just like a bat...So there was no pleasure, there was no joy being on the roça.⁴

Being able to work free from the tutelage of plantation managers, bosses, or movement leaders who had taken up an analogous stance, Ofélia could find new joy in her work. She worked with her family, and her family at times worked with friends and neighbors, and they could increasingly do so under circumstances that were acceptable, that accorded with

² See Chapter 10, Section 2d

³ "O: A vantagem pra mim é porque a gente faz o que pode.//A gente vai pra roça sete horas, se não quiser vim sete vem seis hora da manhã de novo né? E ter alegria de ta lá. E quando a gente tava assim ao bolo, não tinha nem coragem de sair de manhã."

⁴ "T: Não tinha prazer.//O: Não tinha prazer de sair de manhã, amarrar o pano na cabeça pa ir pa roça, porque sabeno que tava seno chupado igual a morcego chupano né...áí não tinha prazer, não tinha alegria de ta na roça não."

their sense of fairness, and fostered a sense of mutuality. The necessary experiences of *suffering* and *struggle* were joined, once again, with the experience of *satisfaction*. They had begun to recover the kind of wholeness that the old posseiros were supposed to have experienced before the hills had been taken from them.⁵

Dividing the collective was only a first step, however, in finding and securing their place in the world. The cacao and rubber trees that each family received were all old and aging, and they bore the marks of plantation life. Ofélia and Tomás, perhaps more than other settlers, had wagered on replanting their rubber and cacao groves, replacing the dead and dying trees with young new ones. As they replanted, Tomás explained, those groves could be considered what he called “collective-individual” (*coletivo-individual*) groves. Tomás seems to have invented this term himself. He explained that as they replanted and recuperated the old cacao and rubber groves with new, young trees, the groves more definitively exited the status of having been part of the “collective,” as he and his family could stake an increasingly stable claim to the groves as their own “individual” roças. He explained that one of the cacao groves they received immediately after dividing the collective had come with 1,130 cacao trees. After they replanted all of places where older trees had died in that grove, the grove now had 2,000 trees.⁶

Not all of the other settlers had done the same, however, perhaps because planting trees meant wagering on a future that still felt uncertain. Although the collective had been formally divided, many settlers did not feel like they had proper “ownership” of their groves. For Tomás, though, planting was a means of affirming himself in a place and establishing his ownership, as he had suggested in Chapter 9, Section 3. For those who had not cared for, or further cultivate their groves, they remained “collective” as they continued to be effectively unappropriated. Tomás explained:

In those cases, it’s still collective...Because while my area is collective-individual, they’re not giving [their groves] the same care.⁷

⁵ See Chapter 3, Sections 8.

⁶ Fn498.

⁷ “No caso, ta ainda seno coletivo...Porque a minha é coletivo individual, eles lá não tão fazendo esse cuidado.”

The groves that he and Ofélia had inherited from the plantation were now interspersed with trees and plants they had planted themselves:

[Tomás]: It's because I'm transplanting, like you're seeing here—

[Jonathan]: —these cacao trees, right?

[Tomás]: —it's bananas, cacao, *cupuaçu* trees. Sometimes there'll be a little clearing [in a grove], and I'll plant manioc around there. When it's time to pull up those manioc plants, I don't need to plant any more manioc. Because the fertilizer that gets distributed to the banana trees, to the cacao trees, well, it also gets into the roots of the old cacao trees. And you can see the difference in the cacao, no?⁸

What Tomás meant was that by replanting empty spaces in the old cacao and rubber groves, the care he offered to the new banana and cacao trees also carried over to the old trees he had inherited. As he replanted the groves, the old trees were rejuvenated, and the “curse” that came with appropriating other people's trees, as Honório had suggested,⁹ was gradually lifted. Whereas Honório explained that he had felt estranged from the old plantation trees, Tomás explained that he tried to show the same degree of care for those trees. He described his relationship with those trees in the language of “friendship”:

I have the same friendship.¹⁰

As with the MST leaders, and the estrangement that settlers like Honório had felt toward them before they were eventually able to create conditions for friendship, Tomás was similarly now able to build new relationships with the old plantation trees through

⁸ “T: Porque eu to transplantano como voce ta veno—//J: —esses pés de cacau, né?//T: É banana, é cacau, é cupuaçu. Às vezes por dentro tem uma falhazinha eu planto mandioca por dentro aí. Quando arrancar aqueles pés de mandioca eu já não planto mais a mandioca. Porque com o adubo que vai jogano naquela bananeira, naqueles pés de cacau, e aí vai também pegano nas raízes do cacau velho. E aí que voce ta veno a diferença do cacau aí, né?”

⁹ See Chapter 9, Section 4.

¹⁰ “Tenho a mesma amizade.”

friendship and care. In that way, he was able to remove any sense of estrangement from the old trees; increasingly, the old plantation trees appeared as part of their world, and not as strange, alien, or hostile objects of their suffering. The trees had become *significant others*, beings with a new sort of social standing.

2. Baptizing Roças

When I had collected my survey data in 2012, one of the few hundred questions we had asked people was whether or not they had named their roças. While many of the MST settlers had been living on the settlement for as long as 15 years, few families reported that they had given any names to their farms. Thirteen out of the 19 respondents living on the MST settlement, for whom I had specifically collected farm data, explained that they had simply not named their farms, whereas, almost categorically, those families living at the independent settlements, such as Nossa Senhora, had all named their farms. Lázaro and Guiomar, who appeared in the introduction, had named their farms for the saints. Many others named their farms for God, “Given by God” (*Dado Por Deus*); some cited hope, “Good Hope” (*Boa Esperança*); while others conjured images from the landscape, perhaps the name of a large, old-growth tree from the forest.

On the MST settlements, many of the settlers referred to their roças by the old names that had either been given by the plantation, such as “Barracks” (*Barracão*), or by the lot numbers that each family had drawn when they divided the collective, such as “Block 9” (*Bloco 9*) or “Block 49” (*Quadra 49*).¹¹ One of the people who had not named his roça explained that if the settlers ever received title, or any individual documents for their land, he would give his roça the following name: “Farm Given by God” (*Sítio Dado Por Deus*). Until that happened, it seems that he preferred to wait.

Of the six people who had named their farms, three of them reported that they had named their farms in the past one to three years. Two of these six initially responded that

¹¹ These latter names are reminiscent of the way that numbered work areas would be distributed to individuals or small teams of workers on the plantations.

they had not named their farms, but then off to the side on the survey paper, my research assistant had written down what appeared to be an improvised name for their farm. It appears that these two respondents had resolved to name their farms at the moment of being surveyed.

The sixth person who had named his farm was Augusto, who had similarly offered a name for one of his roças on the same afternoon when I was talking with him as we were completing his farm survey. He had not named the two groves of cacao and rubber that he had inherited from the old plantation. Instead, he still referred to those groves using the old toponyms that were in use when they still belonged to the old plantation. He explained that it wasn't worth naming those groves because the settlers might have to redivide and redistribute the trees again, and so he might not be able to hold onto those groves in the long term.

The only grove that he did name, however, was the grove of young palms that he, like many of the other settlers, had recently begun to cultivate through the planting project. In fact, Augusto explained that he had not yet officially named the farm, but he explained that he had definite plans to do so. I asked him if he felt it was important to name his farm, and he explained:

[Augusto]: I think it's very important.

[Jonathan]: Why's that?

[Augusto]: Because I think—it's beautiful.

[Jonathan]: It's beautiful?

[Augusto]: It's the name of that roça. It's beautiful.¹²

¹² “A: Eu acho importante, muito.//J: E por que?//A: Porque eu acho—é bonito.//J: É bonito?//A: É o nome daquela roça. É bonito.”

He explained that his wife could draw up a map of the farm, and write the farm's name at the top. He had been thinking of the name he wanted to give to this new roça for some time, and he cited the name for me:

“Flower of Brazil”¹³

I was unclear as to why he had not yet given the name to his farm, and so I asked. He explained that he still needed to make a proper sign for it, with some design and name painted on it, while adding that he also had to wait until one of the young palm trees was tall enough so that he could hang the sign from it. The farm was not mature enough to bear its own name, and so it was not yet time to make it official. He repeated the name he wanted to give to his palm grove:

“Flower of Brazil”

At length, I asked him why he seemed to have more affinity for the palm grove he was cultivating, as it appeared to be the only grove he had intentions of naming. He explained that he found more pleasure in the palm roça as he had been making it himself, unlike the cacao and rubber groves from the old plantation that had been merely given to him. By making a new roça himself, he gave it value:

[Augusto]: You have to make to give it value—so that the plants are occupying the land here.

[Jonathan]: So you think that when you do it yourself, the person—

[Augusto]: —feels more satisfied. Because I did it myself, with my own two hands.

[Jonathan]: And when somebody finds it—

¹³ “Flor do Brasil.”

[Augusto]: —already prepared—if you find it already prepared, you can already start eating there, drinking and eating. But my grove was cultivated—with my own two hands, so you become more content.¹⁴

Here again the interrelationship between struggle, suffering, and satisfaction reappears, the same relationship toward which Ofélia had also gestured. For Augusto, being given mature cacao and rubber groves, groves that he had not struggled or suffered to create, seems to have undermined the potential sense of satisfaction that he could derive from them.

Receiving a mature roça obviated the need for struggle, and allowed for a more consumptive relationship toward the old groves. He could eat and drink from that roça, but without having exerted the same struggle; without having made the expenditure of sweat and blood that would be exacted in the process of making the roça himself. He felt more deeply connected with the palm roça—not because it was made from palm trees—but because he was cultivating it himself.

He then went on to imagine a conversation with someone who had asked him where his roça was located, draws out a contrast between the roça he was given, and the one he had made:

[Person]: “Where’s your roça?”

[Augusto]: “Look here, it’s here, I made this here. And over there, I found that already made—but here I’m making it, and this one really is mine.”

[Jonathan]: It’s really yours, eh?

[Augusto]: With my own two hands.

¹⁴ “A: Tem que fazer pra dar valor—que as plantas sejam ocupano aquela área de terra.//J: Então, voce acha que quando voce mesmo faz, a pessoa—//A: —fica mais sartisfetho. Porque eu mesmo fiz com o punho dos meus braços.//J: E quando o cara acha—//A: —pronto—encontrou pronta, já faz entra cumendo, bebeno e cumeno. Mas o meu foi zelo—o punho dos seus braços, fica mais conthente.”

[Jonathan]: And do you feel more like an owner?

[Augusto]: More like an owner—and happy.

[Jonathan]: And happy, eh?

[Augusto]: With my life.

[Jonathan]: And when you find [a roça] that's already made?

[Augusto]: When it's already made, you can say, "It's mine," but I don't feel any pleasure since I wasn't the one who made it.¹⁵

At length, people could find pleasure in their work, pleasure in the trees they worked with, and feel that they had made a place in the world for themselves. Their relationship with that upon which they worked becomes, in effect, an affirmation of who they are, allowing them to bring together the necessary moments of *suffering*, *struggle*, and *satisfaction*, moments that had been broken and severed apart in their work on the plantations. Augusto and the other settlers could find increasing joy in the trees, some of which began as "children" that they cultivated, and others that had become "friends"; all would eventually become "mothers" that would care for them as the ex-plantation workers entered into a time of old age, increasing frailty, and greater dependency.¹⁶ As the roças took on names, they took on an increasingly secure place in the social world.

3. Cultivating Hope

¹⁵ "P: 'Cadê sua roça?'//A: 'Oie aqui, é aqui, aqui eu fiz. E aqui encontrei pronta—e aqui eu to fazeno e aqui é que é minha.'//J: É sua mesmo né?//A: É punho de meus braços.//J: E voce sente mais dono?//A: Sente mais dono—e alegre.//J: E alegre né?//A: É na minha vida.//J: E quando acha pronta?//A: Pronta, pode dizer, 'É minha,' mas não tenho prazer como não fui eu mesmo que fiz."

¹⁶ See Chapter 9, Section 2b.

I finally helped Adonias and Teresa film their farm in late November 2010, about one month before I left Bahia. As we walked about and filmed the farm, Adonias would sometimes stop to recount various experiences of suffering he had experienced. At other times, instead of addressing, or orienting, toward the camera, we simply filmed shots of ongoing work and of the landscape as it was being reshaped. Teresa explained that when she was a young woman, she frequently worked on other people's farms as a day laborer or worked in other people's kitchens as a domestic laborer. Her family had never had any land:

[Teresa]: Since I was little, for many years, I worked on the roça. On the roça, in others' kitchens, that sort of thing.

[Jonathan]: And your—did your parents have a roça, or what was the case?

[Teresa]: No—ha! It was in others' kitchens, in others' kitchens, on others' roças. My father didn't have any roça, no. I was raised in the world.¹⁷

Being raised “in” or “about the world,”¹⁸ she meant that she had grown up always in search of what was next. In her youth, there was little stability, and perhaps no place where her parents truly felt at home.

They discussed the heavy labor they were investing in their new palm groves, and Teresa emphasized that “from here on out” (*daqui pa frente*) things would be getting better. Adonias added that they would finally have respite from the “suffocation” (*sufoco*) and suffering that they had experienced in their earlier years; both the suffering they had experienced while working for others and on the plantations, and their earlier years of hardship on the settlement. Adonias began to talk about their “hope,” their *esperança*, for the future. Their work for today, he explained, was oriented toward their future:

¹⁷ “T: Há muitos anos, desdenadepiquena trabalhava na roça. Em roça, cozinha dusoto, é isso.//J: E seus, seus pais tinham roça ou qual era o caso?//N: Não. Qui! Pelas cozinha dusoto, pelas cozinha dusoto, pela roça dusoto. Meu pai não tinha roça não. Fui criada assim pelo mundo.”

¹⁸ See Chapter 6, Section 4 for a brief discussion of this idiom of “living in” or “living about the world.”

And we have—this hope. They say:

“Wherever there’s life, there’s hope.”

Well, this is the life and the hope. Still others say:

“Build in your youth so that you can eat in old age.”¹⁹

What he meant by this last expression is that one should work, while young and strong, and that if the fruits of one’s labor prove sufficient, one would (hopefully) have enough to eat in old age as the physical body fades. Of course, both Adonias and Teresa were facing old age, and the hope he was referring to was through the *roça* they were planting. He explained that they hoped for the day when they would be able to harvest the fruits from the trees they were planting and finally encounter the sense of security for which they were striving through their work. That way, when it was absolutely necessary that they cease working, once their bodies had given out completely, the mature trees would be there to continue producing fruit, to care for them, and ultimately outlive them.²⁰ When he says “we have—this hope,” he is still looking directly into the camera, and the “this” seems to be referring to tomorrow, looking toward the harvest, toward old age, and toward a future that was still beyond.

Teresa explained that she had never hoped or imagined that she would have a *roça*. Her parents did not have one; land was always out of reach for her family, as it was too expensive. In their current circumstance, she had found something unexpected:

Today, thanks to God, I’m here. And I’ve already said to him that—

¹⁹ “Nós temos é—essa esperança. Diz que://‘Enquanto vida, esperança.’//Então a vida e esperança é essa. Que outro já diz que://‘Fazer no tempo de muderno pra comer na velhice.’”

²⁰ Another analogous saying from the region follows: “Work with your teeth so that you can eat with your gums.” (“Trabalhar com os dentes pra comer com a gengiva.”)

“I won’t ever leave here!”²¹

She points to Adonias and they laugh. She did not wish to be there working, cultivating the roça, only to leave tomorrow. She was there to stay. Teresa continues:

I’m staying HERE. From here, I won’t leave. No, there’s no way.²²

She puts a great emphasis on the “HERE.” Something she had never even ventured to hope for in her earlier years, while she was working on others’ roças, laboring in others’ kitchens, she now had “here,”; a roça that was hers and that appeared there before her. She was no longer living “in” and “about” the world; she had a place in the world now, and she would not leave. She reflected on her ability to work:

Every day I ask God, that God gives me my health. That’s what I ask for. Because I enjoy it—I enjoy the struggle.²³

Her daughters sometimes ask her why she goes off working with Adonias on the roça when she could be resting at home, but she scoffs at the idea of being idle and alone. As long as she is able, she would remain working, as she says, there in the struggle.

Adonias begins to talk about the need to leave all doubt behind, to “throw the doubt behind” (*jogar a dúvida pra trás*). To begin to hope, he says, you must discard all doubt:

Throw all that was—that old burden—throw it away and look toward the front...That old burden of doubt.²⁴

He explains that one must look forward, firmly, and hope. Hope, though, remains something for the future:

²¹ “Hoje, Graças a Deus, estou aqui. E já disse mesmo a ele que: //‘Daqui eu não sai!’”

²² “Eu fico é AQUI. Daqui eu não saio. Não, de jeito nenhum.”

²³ “T: Eu todo dia peço a Deus que Deus me dê minha saúde; é o que eu peço. Mas eu gosto da—gosto da luta.”

²⁴ “Jogar tudo aquilo que foi—aquele fardo velho—jogar pra trás e olhar frente...Aquele fardo velho de dúvida.”

To hope things get better from here on out.²⁵

He explains that the only way is work, working without doubt, or fear of dying before seeing the harvest. Release doubt, he repeats. Rest when one must, and continue in the struggle, but leave doubt behind. Some might say, he explains, that it's no use to work if you do not know that you will reap the harvest:

“I'm not going to work just to leave this behind for others.”

Quit—end this doubt. Look forward, end this doubt, hope for—²⁶

Look forward, he repeats, look forward. Then he discusses their hope more directly, the planting project, the new palms they were cultivating, and all of the work that was involved. He begins to look about him, he points to the weeds, and Teresa explains that as they work, the fields would become better kept and cultivated. Adonias explains that he looked forward to the day when they would begin to harvest, when their “worry” (*preocupação*), “doubt” (*dúvida*), and their “defeat” (*derrota*) would all end. He explains that they had taken up the palm planting project with courage (*coragem*), so that they could see their “work” to the end; see the creation that they had sought to make (*fazer*):

[Adonias]: Working so that tomorrow or thereafter, we see improvement in our lives, improvement in our home, and improvement on our TABLE.
The time will come when we look and say:

“What a different table, what a beautiful table, what a pretty table.”

Adonias is imagining a bountiful table.

²⁵ “Esperar a melhora daqui pra frente.”

²⁶ “Eu não vou fazer pra deixar pra outro.”//Acabe—tessa dúvida. Olhe pra frente, acabe essa dúvida, espera por—”

[Adonias]: But if we don't work? If we don't work—

[Teresa]: —how will we eat?

[Adonias]: So here I present: all of our hope is this here.²⁷

He raises his hand and points directly at a young, short palm tree in front of him. He holds his hand in place, pointing in the tree's direction:

This is all of our hope. And so, we can finish with me showing you—where it is that our hope is found.²⁸

Adonias suddenly breaks into a few lines from an evangelical hymn, about the hope for Jesus's arrival:

*“Our hope is your arrival,
For the King of kings to come for us,
Still we wait for Jesus,
And the light of tomorrow to shine.”*

It's our hope. That tomorrow or thereafter, light shines upon our table, upon my house. This is our hope.²⁹

Evidently, God had not abandoned them, and was present in all of their work, perhaps immanent in the trees they were cultivating. Whatever it was, the hope that God seemed to

²⁷ “Fazendo pra amanhã ou depois, vê melhora na nossa vida, melhora na nossa casa, melhora na nossa mesa. Chegar o tempo de nós olhá e diz: “Que mesa que diferente, que mesa que ta bonita, que mesa que ta linda.” Então, e se nós não faz? Se nós não faz—//N: Como é que vai comer?//E: Então, eu apresento aqui: a toda a nossa esperança é isso aqui.”

²⁸ “É toda a nossa esperança. E assim, nós vamos terminar eu apresentando ela qualé—aonde é que está a nossa esperança.”

²⁹ “Nossa esperança é sua vinda, //O Rei dos Reis vem nos buscar, //Nós aguardamos Jesus ainda, //E a luz da manhã raiar.” //É a nossa esperança. É a luz raiar amanhã ou depois na nossa mesa, na minha casa. É isso a nossa esperança.”

offer—and perhaps “God”—was not otherworldly. Hope was there in Adonias’s world, there before them in a tree, something that they had helped to create and something that also stood apart. Hope was cultivated in the other, in these trees, and they helped to usher in a future. Adonias pauses again and he reflects further:

[Adonias]: Our hope is for your arrival tomorrow or thereafter, that you come visit us. And then you’ll see the difference in our table, you’ll see the difference in our roça. Why do we wait for your arrival?

“Oh, I’m going to go there—I’m going to go to that—to that roça to see if they’re happy or if they’re—”

Because this here is yours, too. You have say-so here, too.

[Teresa]: Whatever we have—whatever we have, we can eat together.³⁰

Through their roça, and beyond their trees, their hope was to find togetherness, to share what was theirs, and to satisfy the needs of others. Adonias had previously suggested that being able to “receive” (*receber*) was part of what he had described earlier as a “limit” (*limite*). It was not clear to me how this worked, since by “limits,” I had understood him to mean respecting boundaries, and maintaining a sort of separateness. But having “limits” was not only about keeping distance or keeping away. If it were not for limits, it would be impossible to receive the generous offering of another, for receiving supposes letting another in.³¹ So before I departed later that afternoon, we all shared a meal. Teresa ate together with me and Adonias, and unlike many women receiving guests in their home, she sat at the table with us and she ate unashamedly. Sharing in the abundance from the roça, the three of us were there together, and with one another, at least for a moment that still resonates through to this last word.

³⁰ “A: A nossa esperança é a sua vinda amanhã ou depois vim nos visitar. E agora ver a diferença da nossa mesa, ver a diferença da nossa roça. É por que nós esperamos a sua vinda?//“Ah eu vou lá—vou lá naquela, naquela roça pra ver se tão alegre ou se tão—”//Que aqui é seu também. Aqui você manda também.//T: O que tiver aqui nós—o que tiver aqui nós come.”

³¹ Fn496.

APPENDIX 1¹

“Treaty Proposed to Manoel da Silva Ferreira By His Slaves during the Time that They Remained in Revolt

My Lord, we want peace and we do not want war; if My Lord also wants our peace it must be in this manner, if he wishes to agree to that which we want.

In each week you must give us the days of Friday and Saturday to work for ourselves not subtracting any of these because they are Saint's days.

To enable us to live you must give us casting nets and canoes.

You are not to oblige us to fish in the tidal pools nor to gather shellfish, and when you wish to gather shellfish send your Mina blacks.

For your sustenance have a fishing launch and decked canoes, and when you wish to eat shellfish send your Mina blacks.

Make a large boat so that when it goes to Bahia we can place our cargoes aboard and not pay freightsage.

In the planting of manioc we wish the men to have a daily quota of two and one half hands and the women, two hands.

The daily quota of manioc flour must be of five level *alqueires*, placing enough harvesters so that these can serve to hang up the coverings.

The daily quota of sugarcane must be of five hands rather than six and often canes in each bundle.

On the boat you must put four poles, and one for the rudder, and the one at the rudder works hard for us.

The wood that is sawed with a hand saw must have three men below and one above.

The measure of firewood must be as was practiced here, for each measure a woodcutter and a woman as the wood carrier.

The present overseers we do not want, choose others with our approval.

At the milling rollers there must be four women to feed in the cane, two pulleys, and a *carcanha*.

At each cauldron there must be one who tends the fire and in each series of kettles the same, and on Saturday there must be with-out fail work, stoppage in the mill.

The sailors who go in the launch beside the baize shirt that they are given must also have a jacket of baize and all the necessary clothing.

We will go to work the canefield of Jabirú this time and then it must remain as pasture for we cannot cut cane in a swamp.

We shall be able to plant our rice wherever we wish, and in any marsh, without asking

¹ Cited in Schwartz (1977:77-79).

permission for this, and each person can cut jacaranda or any other wood without having to account for this.

Accepting all the above articles and allowing us to remain always in possession of the hardware, we are ready to serve you as before because we do not wish to continue the bad customs of the other *engenhos*.

We shall be able to play, relax and sing any time we wish without your hinderance nor will permission be needed.”

APPENDIX 2

“Mote em Decassílabo” by Arnaldo Cipriano and Paulo Pereira

1 A idade chegou e não permite//Que eu viva mais desta profissão//Agradeço de todo coração//Aos que me encheram de convite//A viola chegou a seu limite//Eu findei o capítulo da novela//Vou fazer um museu e guardar ela//Onde o braço do homem não alcança//Vou deixar a viola por lembrança//Pra família saber que viveu dela.

2 Essa simples viola companheira,//Sente falta dos dedos do seu dono, //Testemunha ocular que passei sono, //Divertindo a família brasileira//As viagens que fiz a minha feira//As toadas que eu dedilhava nela//Eu partindo ela fica e não revela//Que na luta foi minha segurança// Vou deixar a viola por lembrança//Pra família saber que viveu dela.

3 Nove filhos criei com a viola//Ajuda de Deus e dos amigos//Percorri os lugares mais antigos//Mais não deixei nenhum pedi esmola//Dei calçado, dei roupa, dei escola//Não faltou alimento na panela//Fomos duas batalhas, eu e ela//Quem lutou como nós um dia cansa// Vou deixar a viola por lembrança//Pra família saber que viveu dela.

4 Toda minha família foi criada//A custa da minha inteligência//Nos afagos dos meus e na ausência//A viola por mim foi respeitada//Me deu tudo e de mim não cobrou nada//Foi a mãe da família que me zela//Se meu filho entender que deve a ela//“Não me esconde da nossa vizinhança.”// Vou deixar a viola por lembrança//Pra família saber que viveu dela.

5 A saudade que sinto de deixar//É do tanto que sinto de saber//Que por onde passei só dei prazer//Não faltei com respeito em nenhum lar//Vou sair mais meu nome vai ficar//Divulgado por toda clientela//Se um ferir o meu nome outro revela://“Era pobre mais tinha confiança.”// Vou deixar a viola por lembrança//Pra família saber que viveu dela.

6 Se eu for recordar todo momento//Essa deusa tão pura e tão legítima//Se eu lembrar a todo instante serem vítima//De saudade, de choro e sentimento//Recordando o passado eu não aguento//Uma crise nervosa me atropela//Já parei de cantar e guardei ela//Vejo o tempo findar minha esperança// Vou deixar a viola por lembrança//Pra família saber que viveu dela.

7 A velhice chegou sem me avisar//Me trazendo a doença como premio//Disse: “Deixe essa vida de Boêmio//A viola, bebida, mesa e bar.”//Eu o jeito que tive foi deixar//Que quem vai contra os anos se atropela//Que depois que o tempo bota sela//Por valente que seja o brabo amansa// Vou deixar a viola por lembrança//Pra família saber que viveu dela.

8 Se a minha família conhecer//Que a viola merece ser guardada//Companheira que fica separada//De quem tanto cantou e lhe deu prazer//Não procura trocar e nem vender//Vende outro objeto e deixa ela//Muita gente não pode pegar nela//Que os de fora não mexe com herança// Vou deixar a viola por lembrança//Pra família saber que viveu dela.

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