

History, Heritage, and Resistance

Brazil was one of the first colonies in the Americas in which enslaved Africans toiled on plantations and in the mines, and it was the last nation to abolish slavery. Brazil was also the largest slave society in the Americas. Approximately 40 percent of the estimated 12 million Africans enslaved during the transatlantic slave trade were shipped there. Yet, even in captivity, Africans and their descendants sought rights to “provision grounds” (small plots of land, known in Brazil as *roças*) and created their own internal economy of slavery (Barickman 1994; Schwartz 1977). The nexus of land and liberty stood at the center of the emancipation struggles throughout the Americas. In Brazil, enslaved women and men desired nothing less than to leave the plantations and mines, and to define the terms of their new freedom. Access to land, control over labor, and family connections were central to the struggles of ex-slaves to establish themselves as citizens in the post-emancipation period.

This chapter builds on recent historiographical perspectives on slavery and the post-abolition period involving black communities, the defense of customary rights through land and the slaves’ own economy, and the management of black populations during slavery and after abolition (Barickman 1994; Fraga 2016). The experiences of enslaved Africans, *quilombolas*, and freed and free blacks are connected. Moreover, this chapter portrays what historian Flávio dos Santos Gomes (2016) has called a *campo negro*, or black encampment, and its complex alliances with surrounding communities that were often riddled with conflicts and contradictions. Historians have shown that in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, black rural communities expanded their economic

bases, autonomy, and protection through networks of exchange, protection, and solidarity formed with private farms, settlements, markets, and towns (Fiabani 2005; Gomes and Yabeta 2017; Miki 2018; Reis and Gomes 2016).

The next section analyzes the intersection between race, class, and land. Since colonialism, Brazil has had a highly racialized and concentrated ownership structure characterized by large, often unproductive, properties. Within this highly unequal setting, governments have denied small black rural producers secure land rights that would have allowed them to remain on territory they have lived on and cultivated for generations. In contrast, European-descendant elites have benefited from laws and state-sponsored programs that granted them large landholdings, despite their inability to use it productively. In the subsequent sections, histories are presented through which black rural communities and a free black peasantry developed in the Bahian Iguape and São Paulo Ribeira areas, respectively. Afro-descendants' experiences, conflicts, tensions, and negotiations over rights and resources are examined, up to the mid-1980s. These rural life experiences were gender differentiated, especially when it came to labor, because of policies and practices that impinged on the changing nature of agriculture and work that women had to take.

RACE, CLASS, AND LAND

The politics of race, class, and land have long been intertwined in Brazil. Under slavery and colonialism, the Portuguese Crown favored the concentration of landholdings among the European landed elite and their descendants, parceling out huge estates on which enslaved Africans produced export crops. The 1850 Land Law (*Lei da Terra*), the first land law in Brazil, enabled the Crown to seize native territories and transform them into *terras devolutas* or public lands for government allocation (Miki 2018, 115–17).¹ Free black populations and the lower classes were also displaced because they did not possess documents to prove their right of land occupation or were unable to pay the taxes to register their properties. After the end of slavery in 1888, there was no national program for land reparations or other reform to integrate former slaves

¹ According to Yuko Miki (2018), one of the most significant articles in the Land Law regarding indigenous lands was Article 12, which stated that “the government will reserve *terras devolutas* necessary to the colonization of Indians” (117). Henceforth, Indians were dependent on the State’s largesse for use of the same land that was previously theirs.

into the rural economy, and they eventually lost “rights” acquired under slavery. In the mid-twentieth century, the military government promoted agro-industrial modernization schemes that deprived smallholders of land and other resources. Until the 1988 constitution, which attempted to address racial and land inequality, land politics and policies were skewed against smallholders and the landless poor in general, and Afro-descendant small producers in particular. As the case studies illustrate, black communities steadily resisted state policies and interventions that deprived them of land and citizenship rights, but with limited success. These historical antecedents of struggles and resistance have nevertheless formed part of their collective memory, which has precipitated and shaped contemporary quilombo consciousness.

From the sixteenth to the mid-nineteenth centuries, the Portuguese Crown used the system of *sesmarias*, royal land grants, as a strategy for controlling the distribution of land and promoting the cultivation of so-called unoccupied lands that indigenous people already inhabited in Brazil (Holston 2008, 118). Under this system, European landed elites received enormous landholdings with the sole condition that they use the land productively. The *sesmaria* system was riddled with problems that had lasting effects on landownership in Brazil. The Crown awarded many land grants, often with little knowledge of what lands were legally occupied and whether they were actually cultivated. Authorities frequently duplicated grants, resulting in litigation and violent conflicts between people claiming rights to the same lands (Holston 2008, 120). Land grabbing became a normal practice. In the Bahian Recôncavo area, where most of the land was privately owned, the *sesmaria* system guaranteed that *engenhos*, or sugar plantations with mills, were maintained within the same families through inheritance (Schwartz 1985, 96). It was common for an heir of a deceased landowner to administer his *engenho* and for planters to claim multiple ownerships (Barickman 1998, 105–12).

During the same era, it was also typical for European subsistence farmers to squat on remote land that had not been granted as a *sesmaria*. Although squatting on unclaimed Crown lands was illegal, this law was seldom enforced unless another person later acquired a grant over the squatter’s land (Dean 1971, 607). In 1822, the new independent government abolished the *sesmaria* system, but it did not put any new land allocation laws into place until 1850. For the first twenty-eight years of independence, the disposal of government land occurred through claiming by occupation (the right of *posse*). Expansion of holdings through informal occupation contributed to the growth of large estates,

because wealthy landowners had the capital and other resources to occupy and defend additional land claims (Dean 1971, 608–9).

When the Land Law of 1850 was enacted, it was supposed to regulate the largely uncontrolled land situation. Yet scholars have argued (Leite 2015; Miki 2018) that this new law created numerous legal means for territorial expropriation, including expulsions, removals, enclosures, the registration of vacant lands, and the seizure of lands for failure to pay taxes. This statute legalized *posses*, or informal squatter claims, and revalidated all *sesmarias* obtained to that date. It was a windfall for landed elites with outstanding claims; they could afford to pay the fees for registering their properties at notarial offices. Few smallholders and peasants, however, could afford the fines or fees required to register their plots in accordance with the law (Holston 2008). The new law also disenfranchised small landowners, peasants, and other lower classes by prohibiting further land acquisitions through occupation or squatting. After 1850, land could be acquired only through purchase, thereby instituting private property. Even in 1889, when the jurisdiction over public land was transferred to the states, there were no radical deviations from the basic principles of the Land Law of 1850 (Alston, Libecap, and Mueller 1999, 35–36). Under the Land Law of 1850, *terras devolutas* became part of the public domain and were differentiated from private lands. According to Article 12, the State would reserve these public lands for Indian settlement. In practice, however, its enforcement was subverted. For more than 100 years, this law transferred *terras devolutas* to private ownership, favoring large landowners and the accumulation of huge properties (Leite 2015, 1231). Over time, it became common to use the term *terra devolutas* to mean empty or unoccupied lands.

The Land Law of 1850 also made literacy a requirement of landownership, a change that excluded many free blacks at the time and would continue to exclude considerable numbers from landownership after the final abolition of slavery in 1888. The inability of free blacks to own land left them at a social and economic disadvantage to landowning whites, in a country where land was a symbol of racial status and wealth. It also disadvantaged subsequent generations, as many of their descendants grew up landless. Thus, the new land law maintained the racial hierarchy of landownership and widened the gap between the wealthy landowners and the landless poor.

Still, the nineteenth-century Brazilian elite strategically invested in their children's higher education to ensure their hegemonic control over land in the future. James Holston describes how the landed elite sent their sons to

the University of Coimbra in Portugal to study law so they could return as “judges, legislators, politicians, administrators, and heads of state” and “enact laws to further their interests” (Holston 2008, 121). He shows how Brazilian elites manipulated and complicated the legal system to their advantage for centuries. Consequently, in twentieth-century *Recôncavo*, large landowners and cattle ranchers who disputed quilombo communities’ land rights were also well-connected businessmen, politicians, and lawyers who knew the laws, and weaknesses in the laws, in part because they and their ancestors had written those laws in their favor.

After slavery ended, the Brazilian government, as others in the Americas, did not develop a land reform program to integrate or compensate former slaves and their descendants. Former slaves had little recourse. Some established black rural communities, occupying abandoned plantations or land donated by their former owners and the Catholic Church – some of which the government would recognize as quilombo-descended in the late twentieth century. Other landless former slaves had three main options: (1) remain on the plantations as wage laborers, sharecroppers, or labor-tenants; (2) join quilombos or small farmer communities of earlier freed and free blacks, growing their own food for subsistence and sale; or (3) migrate to the expanding urban centers. Despite these limited options, former slaves and their families in Bahia and São Paulo struggled to control their lives and to establish themselves as free citizens in a complicated and chaotic environment.

In the aftermath of abolition, thousands of freed people from the Bahian rural *Recôncavo* migrated to nearby towns and cities, especially Salvador, and other agricultural areas, such as the cocoa region in southern Bahia (Mahony 1998), in search of better opportunities for work and income. Men and women relocated to *Recôncavo* urban centers, where they had created community and family ties, as well as common customs and traditions, during slavery (Fraga 2016, 211–24). Some exercised professions they learned on the plantations such as stonemason and blacksmith; others, especially women, were absorbed in household labor as nannies and cooks; and others even opted to return to Africa (Butler 1998, 142–43). Yet scholars agree that there was no mass flight from the *Recôncavo* plantations in 1888 but that freed men and women and their children gradually left the plantations over the course of years, as in other parts of Brazil (Fraga 2016, 217). By the end of the nineteenth century, ex-slaves provided itinerant skilled labor and domestic service in the urban centers, despite municipal and provincial authorities’ attempts to control their activities by imposing vagrancy laws and regulating

mandatory registration policies. Still, beginning in the late 1880s, an effect of the movement of freed people from rural Recôncavo was to increase the bargaining power of those who decided not to move, which included those of the Iguape Valley in this study.

Walter Fraga's history of the Recôncavo (2016) illustrates that former slaves who stayed on the land, often on the same plantation where they had been captives, tried to determine the work conditions for themselves. These ex-slaves used their newly won freedom to renegotiate the terms of their mobility, land use and cultivation, and compensation. Fraga explains that they were able to renegotiate these terms because of rural labor shortages, dating back to the termination of the transatlantic slave trade in 1850, subsequent emancipatory legislation, and the economic crisis of the sugarcane sector in the 1870s.² Recôncavo sugar planters were unable to attract or coerce a sufficient number of free laborers or European immigrants to work in the cane fields. Thus, they relied on a shrinking captive labor force until the eve of abolition, earning the reputation as "the most intransigent slaveholders in the province" (Fraga 2016, 13). After emancipation, former slaves still labored on plantations and large farms, but now as agricultural wageworkers and tenants, and sought to retain and expand their right to provision grounds – an entitlement they had won, with great difficulty, during slavery. For freed persons, extended days devoted to their own plots on which to cultivate crops for consumption and sale provided an alternative to full-time laboring in the cane fields, guaranteed some level of independence from former owners, and allowed them to assert their new status as citizens. Yet the case studies show that former slaves and their descendants were only partially successful. Renegotiating their rights in the immediate aftermath of slavery did not guarantee them for future generations. Furthermore, in the absence of a national land reform program, there was no structural change to concentrated landownership in the countryside.

In Brazil's southeast region, former slaves confronted different challenges in asserting their freedom because of the government's national policy of *embranquecimento* (or whitening) to aggressively whiten the nation through immigration and racial mixture. Brazil, like other Latin

² Bahia's slave labor shortage was also aggravated by internal commerce established after the end of the transatlantic slave trade, which moved enslaved workers from the increasingly stagnant sugar-producing provinces in the Northeast to the booming coffee states in the Southeast (Andrews 1991, 33–34).

American countries, declared war on “blackness.” It tried to erase the legacy of slavery by whitening and Europeanizing itself to achieve so-called civilized status as a nation, equivalent to the nations of North America and Europe. As historian George Andrews noted, “Nowhere in Brazil was this effort to Europeanize the country more in force than in São Paulo, and nowhere in Brazil were its effects more strongly felt” (1991, 52–53). A massive state program to subsidize European immigration resulted in 2.0 million of the 3.5 million Europeans who entered the country between the 1880s and the 1930s coming to São Paulo (Andrews, 2004, 136).

Beyond the goal of Europeanizing the state, whitening was a racialized labor migration policy that sought to restore coffee planters’ control over an alternate labor force to slaves after abolition. In particular, the state government of São Paulo, in collusion with coffee planters, encouraged, recruited, and subsidized European immigration. From the coffee planters’ perspective, the former slaves were lazy and recalcitrant, and their demands for competitive salaries, diminished hours of work, and protection for their families were unacceptable. Specifically, the planters rejected the free black workers’ nonnegotiable condition that women and children be exempt from agricultural fieldwork. The planters prevailed: together with the state, they undercut the bargaining power of freed people by flooding the labor market with the poorest and most vulnerable Europeans to work under carefully controlled labor conditions – many of which freed people dismissed as counter to their understanding of freedom (Andrews 1991, 88).³

Waves of European immigrants began to arrive in the 1880s, displacing former slaves and freed blacks in the Southeast rural and urban areas. Yet patterns of European immigration and the resulting displacement of freed people varied across the region and in the state of São Paulo. In the countryside, European immigrants avoided the Paraíba Valley in northeast São Paulo and the neighboring coffee-growing areas of Rio de Janeiro and Minas Gerais because planters were unable to provide acceptable wages and working conditions (Andrews 1991, 66). Rather, they concentrated in the coffee-growing region of São Paulo, where planters replaced slavery with the *colono* contract: they imported European immigrants and their entire families, all bound by contract, to

³ The state subsidized the poorest of emigrants from Italy, Spain, Portugal, and other countries with labor surpluses who had little capital, correctly assuming that these Europeans would offer little resistance to employers’ demands.

work on the large estates in exchange for transportation costs, wages, housing, and a plot of land for subsistence farming (Butler 1998, 27). Former slaves had little recourse but to move to other rural areas in search of work or to towns and cities, where they joined the expanding urban working class. Yet even in the cities, European immigrants enjoyed preferential hiring in commerce, manufacturing, and the skilled trades. Some Afro-Brazilians secured regular jobs in factories or as laborers building the capital's railroads, tramways, and power grid, but most were relegated to domestic service and informal day labor, which were the lowest paid jobs in the urban economy (Andrews 1991, 66–71; Butler 1998, 68–78).

Although former slaves in the Ribeira Valley of São Paulo were not removed from farmland and forced to migrate to urban areas, the whitening project still affected black communities, which were invaded by working-class Brazilians whom immigrants had displaced in the countryside and cities. Displaced workers retreated to the Ribeira Valley and more depressed parts of São Paulo state to farm so-called vacant land that indigenous people, black peasants, and other smallholders already occupied, triggering land conflicts (Andrews 1991; Skidmore 1993). Without a title, black populations and other historically marginalized groups were evicted from the land, which often happened in the twentieth century. In other cases, absentee owners and *grileiros* were granted land based on titles dubiously acquired in the colonial period.

Efforts to promote agrarian reform in the twentieth century led to little improvement in Afro-descendants' ability to acquire land. In 1964, the Land Statute (*Estatuto da Terra*) provided a legal basis to redistribute land through expropriation of large estates. It included a progressive land tax, the aim of which was to penalize owners of unutilized or underutilized land. Yet, as in the past, owners of estates were too politically powerful and successfully resisted the state's taking of their property. The result was a land statute that exempted "rural enterprises" from expropriation and high taxation, with minimum specified productivity. Succeeding military governments quashed hopes for agrarian reform.

In lieu of agrarian reform, the military dictatorship, which lasted from 1964 to 1985, shifted to settling landless peasants and the rural poor on public land in the Amazon region rather than on expropriated land (Alston, Libecap, and Mueller 1999). The military also widely supported agro-industrial modernization schemes, which were the precursors to agribusiness in Brazil. These schemes exacerbated land concentration and intensified inequality between large-scale and small-scale agriculture

production units. For the black rural communities in Bahia and São Paulo, the state-imposed modernization schemes brought new challenges and new opportunities. These modernization projects affected labor, gender, and land rights in black communities that were already struggling with squatter invasions, land grabs, surplus labor, outflow migration, economic decline, and new laws that denied inhabitants access to land, forests, mangroves, and other resources.

AFRO-DESCENT COMMUNITIES OF THE IGUAPE VALLEY IN THE BAHIAN RECÔNCAVO

The Iguape Basin and Valley is located on the western side of the Bay of All Saints, about 160 km from Salvador, Bahia's capital, in the region known as the Bahian Recôncavo (Recôncavo Baiano) in northeastern Brazil. The three municipalities bordering the Iguape Bay are Cachoeira, São Félix, and Maragogipe, which together are now home to thirty-one certified quilombo-descended communities, the largest concentration in the state of Bahia (see Table 1.1). In 2016, the Workers' Party's last year of governance, none of these communities held title to their land. The eight communities studied here – Kalembá, Kalolé, Kaonge, Dendê, Engenho da Ponte, Engenho da Praia, Santiago do Iguape, and São Francisco do Paraguaçu⁴ – are part of the group of sixteen communities in Iguape, the largest district in Cachoeira (see Table 1.2). Many of these communities are harbored between the margins of the mangroves and the Atlantic Forest (see Map 1.1).

The seeds of contentious relations between these black rural communities and the state were sown when enslaved Africans fled captivity and created quilombos beginning in the mid-sixteenth century. Fugitive and freed slaves established clusters of quilombos around the resource-rich mangals, or mangrove ecosystems, of Iguape Bay. In the port parishes of Santiago do Iguape and São Francisco do Paraguaçu, escaped slaves and freed blacks set up quilombos on the peripheries. After emancipation, former slaves also settled on the property of old *engenhos* and transformed them to stable black rural communities (Azevedo 2009;

⁴ Villagers spell the names of their communities with the letter K to reflect their African Bantu heritage rather than with the letter C, which appears in government documents and some texts (correspondence with Ananias Viana, Kaonge leader, May 26, 2017).

TABLE 1.1. *Quilombo communities with FCP certificates, municipalities bordering the Iguape Bay, Bahia (2004–15)*

Municipality	Certification/Year								Total
	2004	2005	2006	2007	2009	2013	2014	2015	
Cachoeira	10	2	3	0	0	1	0	0	16
Maragogipe	1	4	5	0	1	0	0	1	12
São Félix	0	0	0	0	0	0	3	0	3
Total	11	5	7	1	1	1	3	1	31

Note: According to Decree 4.887/2003, quilombo communities must receive a certificate of self-identification from the federal agency, Palmares Cultural Foundation (FCP), which is a prerequisite to initiating the process to receive title to their land.

Source: Palmares Cultural Foundation (FCP). 2016. “Certidões expedidas às comunidades remanescentes de quilombos (CRQs) atualizada até a portaria n° 104/2016,” www.palmares.gov.br/wp-content/uploads/2016/06/COMUNIDADES-CERTIFICADAS.pdf, accessed February 22, 2017

TABLE 1.2. *Legal situation of constellation of sixteen quilombos in the Iguape Valley, Cachoeira, Bahia*

Quilombo communities	Situation (2016) ^a
Brejo do Engenho da Guaíba Kaimbongo Velho	Identified
Kalolé, Imbiara, Tombo	
Engenho da Cruz Engenho Novo do Vale do Iguape Engenho da Vitória Tabuleiro da Vitória	
Santiago do Iguape Kalembá, Kaonge, Dendê, Engenho da Ponte, Engenho da Praia São Francisco do Paraguaçu	RTID ^b in progress RTID completed but not published RTID contested

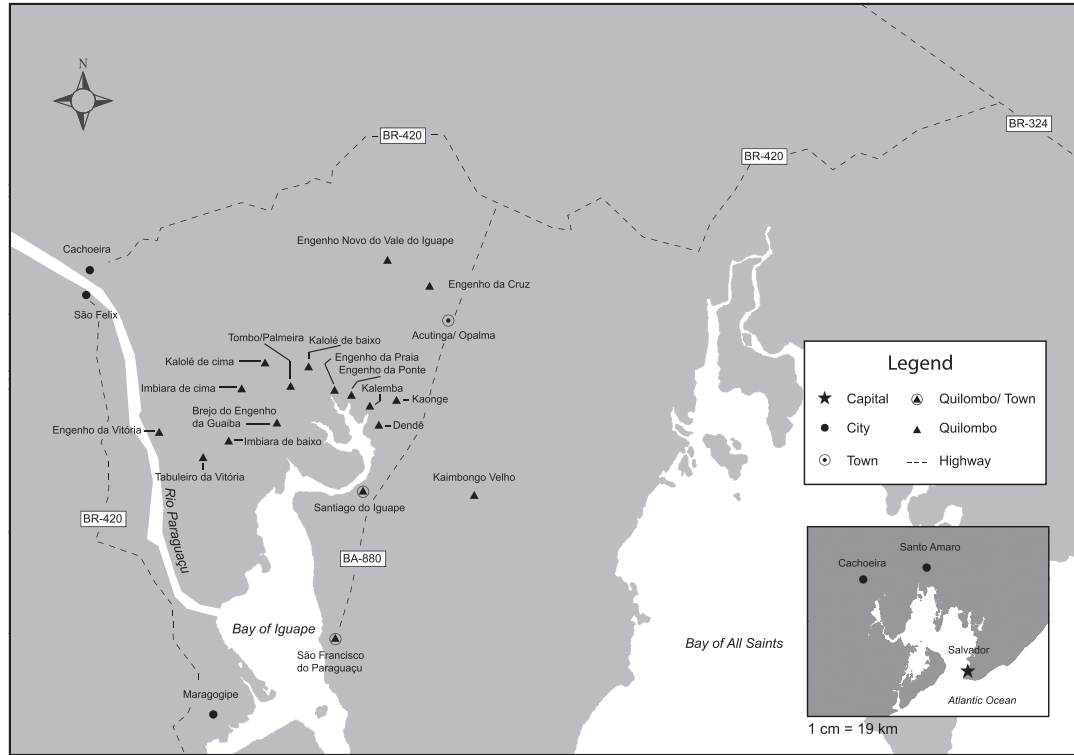
^a Identified: First normative act regarding the existence and regularization of the Quilombola Territory by INCRA.

^b RTID: The INCRA Recognition Ordinance, a technical study to characterize the territory economically, spatially, and socioculturally.

Source: INCRA, “Acompanhamento dos processos de Regularização Quilombola,” www.incra.gov.br/incra-andamentoprocessos-quilombolas_quadrogeral.pdf, accessed March 12, 2017

Fraga 2016; INCRA 2013, 2014). For those ex-slaves, the territories of the old sugar mills represented the maintenance of land “rights” acquired through captivity. Today’s quilombo-descended communities’ claims of territory include the very land parcels that their ancestors cultivated or

Selected Quilombo Communities, Iguape Basin and Valley, Bahia



Cartographer: Grace Newton, 2017. Sources: Author; OpenStreetMap.

MAP 1.1. Selected quilombo communities, Iguape Basin and Valley, Bahia

TABLE 1.3. *Past sugar mill plantations (engenhos) to present black communities, Iguape Basin and Valley, Bahia*

Former <i>engenhos</i> of the Iguape Basin	Current communities
Engenho Acutinga	Opalma Community/present Acutinga Community
Engenho Vitória	Vitória Community
Engenho da Praia	Engenho da Praia Community
Engenho da Ponte	Engenho da Ponte Community
Engenho da Ponta	Engenho da Ponta Community
Engenho Calembá	Kalembá Community
Engenho Campina	Campina Community
Engenho Maroim	Kaonge Community
Engenho Brandão	Santiago do Iguape Community/part of heavy clay soil
Engenho Central	Santiago do Iguape Community/residential center

Source: Acervo ObservaBaía in ObservaBaía (2017, 25)

occupied during slavery and in the immediate post-abolition years, when these communities formed. Table 1.3 illustrates some of the former sugarcane plantations on which ex-slaves and freed persons came to settle and create new communities.

The current inhabitants of the Iguape Valley black communities are descendants of enslaved Africans, escaped slaves, freed blacks, and free blacks who made the Recôncavo region one of the wealthiest in Brazil. Besides providing skilled labor in the sugar mills, both freemen and freedmen were employed on tobacco farms and cattle ranches, as well as at ports. District port parishes such as São Francisco do Paraguaçu and Santiago do Iguape hired black laborers as stevedores to move crates of sugar, rolls of tobacco, and other products. But for the majority of current inhabitants, their ancestors produced sugarcane on the hundreds of *engenhos* and cane farms in the area, which accounted for at least 45 percent of all revenues Bahia earned from exports from 1760 to 1860 (Barickman 1994, 655). Others cultivated tobacco and manioc (also called cassava) on settler farms in the western and southern Recôncavo.

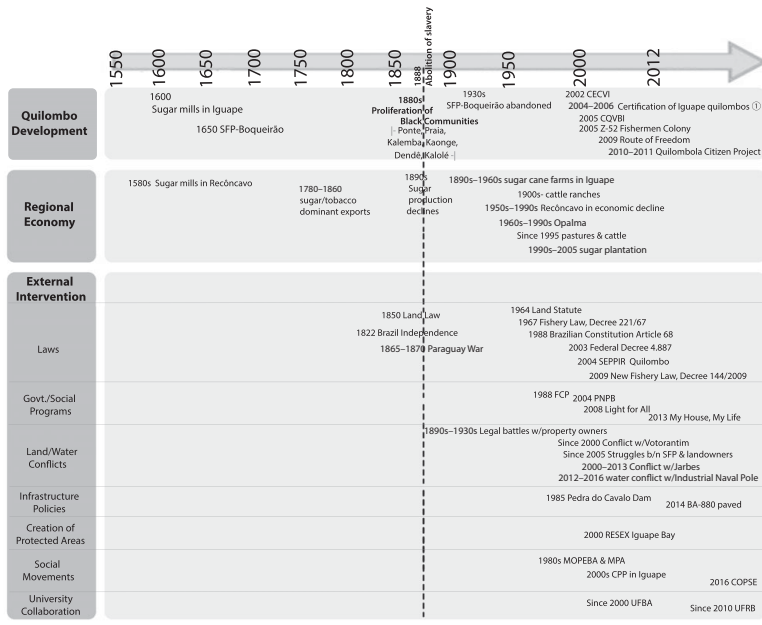
Despite their invaluable contributions to national economic development, the former slaves were not compensated at the end of slavery in 1888. According to scholars of abolition, the majority of former slaves of the Bahian Recôncavo remained on or near the same plantations as sharecroppers, tenants, or laborers, and sought to define freedom in their own terms (Fraga 2016; Graden 2006; Scott 1988). Yet Afro-descendants

of the Iguape communities were denied secure and legal access to sufficient land and other resources, which would have allowed them to assert their new status as citizens. Without legal rights to land plots they had historically occupied or cultivated since slavery or to resources in the mangroves, Afro-descendants' livelihoods were vulnerable to private farmers' and ranchers' land use changes and state modernization schemes.

In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, Afro-descendants in São Francisco do Paraguaçu and Santiago do Iguape parishes, who sought autonomy by cultivating small farms, found that powerful landowners were able to circumvent Bahian land procedures, effectively limiting their opportunities in a local economy that provided few alternatives. Over several generations, local landowners and cattle ranchers, in alliance with other rural political elites, created multiple networks of legal orders to deny land rights to Afro-descendants (Müller and Machado 2016; Oliveira, Silva, and Diamantino 2010). In some cases, they systematically encroached on black land parcels and erected fences barring Afro-descendants from easy access to the forest, mangroves, and rivers. For other black communities located near the mangroves that had long produced and marketed *dendê* (the Afro-Brazilian term for palm oil), the Bahian government's top-down modernization strategy of the mid-twentieth century threatened their multifaceted subsistence strategy. Government-backed industrialists invested in the agro-industrial monoculture of oil palm through a new corporation, Opalma, which displaced, but did not eliminate, small-scale producers and processors of *dendê*. In the twentieth century, Afro-descendants of Iguape saw little improvement in their ability to secure land and were denied state assistance required for agricultural development (see Figure 1.1 for time line).

Territories of Resistance

The history of the sugarcane-growing region of the Bahian Recôncavo, an important terminus of the transatlantic slave trade, is central to the history of the Iguape Valley quilombos and other black rural communities. The *massapé*, or heavy clay soil, and weather of the Bay Area offered excellent conditions for sugarcane cultivation, the Brazilian economy's most important export between 1560 and 1820. For centuries, planters and cane farmers used enslaved Africans and their descendants to cultivate sugarcane and to grind the cane in the plantation mills. Describing the region during this era, historian Stuart Schwartz emphasized the importance of slave-based sugar plantation agriculture: "To say 'Bahia' was to say 'the Recôncavo,' and the Recôncavo was always



(1) Eight studied quilombos: (2004) Kalemba, Kalolô, Kaonge, Dendê, Engenho da Ponte, Engenho da Praia; (2005) São Francisco do Paraguassu (SFP); (2006) Santiago do Iguape

FIGURE 1.1. Time line, political economy of the Iguape Valley quilombo communities in Bahia, sixteenth to twenty-first centuries.

engenhos, sugar, and slaves” (1985, 97). Although the Recôncavo deserved its reputation as sugar country, the region was also a center for tobacco cultivation and, to a lesser extent, commercial farming of fruits and vegetables, especially manioc (Barickman 1998).

By the seventeenth century, Bahian modes of agricultural production reflected a racial and social hierarchy. Farmers of European descent (the landed elite) typically produced for export markets (sugar, tobacco, coffee, cotton, and cacao), although some grew manioc for rural and urban markets (Watkins 2015, 198). By the eighteenth century, however, free and freed blacks (mainly through manumission) along the southern coast of Bahia were the principal cultivators of manioc. With few opportunities in the export markets, free and freed persons of African descent grew manioc and other food crops for consumption and sale on the internal market. They owned small farms and held minimal formal property relative to their counterparts of European descent. Enslaved Africans and their descendants provided the labor that was critical to all these agricultural units. While major agricultural changes occurred in other parts of Brazil for the 300 years between the start of colonialism and

the abolition of slavery, slave-based agriculture remained entrenched and practically unaltered in Bahia (Dean 1971).

The Portuguese colonists who first settled the Recôncavo in the mid-sixteenth century arrived with plans to establish *engenhos*. By the late 1580s, the settlers and their Brazilian-born descendants had established thirty-six *engenhos*, two-thirds of them on the northern side of the Bay of All Saints. The number of *engenhos* in the Recôncavo rose rapidly from about 200 in the 1790s to more than 500 in 1842 and almost 600 by 1860 (Barickman 1994, 655). By then, there were twenty-one *engenhos* in the Santiago do Iguape parish, which was at the heart of the sugar-producing areas. The expansion of the Bahian sugar industry from the late eighteenth century onward generated an increasing demand for slave labor, supplied largely through the transatlantic slave trade. Between 1785 and 1850, Bahia imported nearly 600,000 captives from various regions of Africa, the majority of which were male adults destined for the Recôncavo's cane fields.⁵

Plantation slavery in Brazil was as brutal and violent as anywhere else in the Americas. Historians have described how slaves were subjected to violence and food shortages, resulting in high rates of infant mortality (Kiple 1989; Reis 1993). Although most Recôncavo slaves had access to land and cultivated *roças*, they did not grow enough food to sustain themselves and rarely sold surpluses, compared to slaves in other sugar-producing regions of Brazil and the Caribbean. As Barickman (1998) explained, the Recôncavo slaves had little free time to devote to their *roças* because of accelerated work routines and intensive labor demands. Thus, the plantation slave population had an extremely short life expectancy owing to the dire conditions under which they lived and worked, as well as to the treatment they received from their owners. Not surprisingly, many African slaves resisted their plights.

Throughout Bahia, as elsewhere in Brazil, slave resistance took many forms – from routine bargaining to insurrection, and even transformation of landscapes to accommodate plants of African origin (Carney and Rosomoff 2009; Reis and Silva 1989; Watkins 2015). Enslaved Africans also fled to resist slavery and to gain access to land and other resources. The first documentations of quilombos in Brazil come from Bahia in 1575, just a few decades after the start of the transatlantic slave trade (Moura 2004). In the Iguape region, revolts and flight were frequent throughout the slave era (Graden 2006; Reis 1993; Reis and Gomes 1996).

⁵ According to the Trans-Atlantic Slave Voyages Database, 599,837 enslaved Africans disembarked from ships in Bahia between 1785 and 1850. See www.slavevoyages.org.

Afro-descendants of São Francisco do Paraguaçu affirm that their ancestors were Africans who escaped slavery (personal interview 2010). From the seventeenth century onward, enslaved Africans were transported to São Francisco do Paraguaçu, a main regional port, where they were then distributed throughout the Recôncavo. Those who remained in the town worked in the cane fields and on the construction of the Saint Anthony Convent of Paraguaçu (Convento de Santo Antônio do Paraguaçu), a Franciscan monastery founded in 1649, but not completed until 1686. Situated at the edge of town on the banks of the Paraguaçu River, the convent represents a sinister period in local history and another reason for slave flight. Town residents claim that under the monastery there is a *salão do mar*, a “room in the ocean,” that once served as a prison for insubordinate slaves. Because the prison was built under the monastery in the water, prisoners would slowly drown when the water from the river rose (Farfán-Santos 2016, 84; personal interview 2011). The black oral tradition of the Bahian Recôncavo is replete with stories of cruel plantation owners who killed their slaves in gruesome ways (Campos 1942; Fraga 2016); residents retell this story to assert their historical connection to the area and a history of suffering that underwrite their claims to land rights.

The current quilombolas of São Francisco do Paraguaçu consider their ancestors the enslaved Africans who erected the monastery, the fugitive slaves who fled the town during the convent’s construction, and the runaways who deserted the cane fields of Engenho Velho. In the seventeenth century, escaped slaves sought refuge in the nearby elevated region of the dense Atlantic Forest and formed the quilombo Boqueirão, occupying the areas of Boqueirão, Alamão, and Kaimbongo Velho (INCRA 2007; Kuhn 2009). Freed and free blacks arrived in different migratory waves and, together with escaped slaves, occupied the quilombo for generations. They established a social organization that endured over time and retained elements of African culture such as religion, music, and food (INCRA 2007, 25–26). Quilombolas grew potatoes, beans, manioc, and other crops for subsistence. Unlike other escaped slaves who sought permanent refuge in the mangroves, these quilombolas were forced to forage clandestinely at night. It was only decades after abolition that the quilombolas of Boqueirão returned to the São Francisco do Paraguaçu town center, where only the owners of the *engenhos* had previously lived.

For the majority of the Iguape black populations, access to the mangroves and the African oil palm was critical for their subsistence and reproduction. The mangal harbored fugitive and free slaves, serving as a



PHOTO 1.1. The Convento de Santo Antônio do Paraguaçu is located on the Iguape estuary of the Paraguaçu River, which was the main source of access for much of its history. According to quilombolas of the São Francisco do Paraguaçu community, their enslaved ancestors built the monastery at the end of the seventeenth century.

refuge and resource. The saline soils were of little use for export agriculture. Consequently, the landed elite was not interested in the mangrove areas, and royal decrees maintained tidelands as public property. By selecting locations that balanced access to the sea and mangal with fields for farming, escaped and freed blacks developed a sustainable subsistence strategy. They accessed the mangal to hunt, fish, and gather shellfish, as well as for other subsistence and commercial activities. For those living near the coasts, the mangal provided a vital lifeline, supplying protein in seafood and from stands of African oil palm, which yielded a preferred oil rich in calories and nutrients (Barickman 1998, 54–65; Carney and Rosomoff 2009, 123–38; Schwartz 1985, 45–47; Watkins 2015, 214–16). For these reasons, the locals have traditionally referred to the mangal as the “supermercado de Deus,” literally God’s supermarket.

They also counted the subsynchronous African oil palm groves among the many assets of the mangal. Enslaved, escaped, freed, and free blacks



PHOTO 1.2. The Iguape Basin mangal is a socio-ecosystem that harbors a great diversity of flora and fauna. Since slavery, the mangal has served as a critical resource for black populations' subsistence. Pictured are *camboas*, or wooden stake enclosures for fishing; mangroves; and in the background a spontaneous grove of *dendezeiros*, or African oil palms.

tended African oil palms for economic and cultural uses. The effort to produce palm oil was physically demanding for women, who were primarily responsible for processing, just as in West Africa. Yet marketing *dendê* was profitable. In the early nineteenth century, a bottle of the oil claimed a relatively higher price compared to processed manioc flour in the regional food market (Watkins 2015, 223). Although Afro-descent small farmers in Bahia's southern coast produced the bulk of domestic palm oil, enslaved and freed persons in the Recôncavo's Iguape district also held a local niche. Case Watkins's account (2015, 220–22) of Benta, a Brazilian-born enslaved woman on Engenho Maroim (now the Kaonge quilombo) in Iguape who produced and sold surplus palm oil to enhance her nutrition and economic situation, is unique for its direct reference to palm oil, its implication for labor divisions, and its insight into the internal economy of slavery.

Besides its economic value, palm oil became central to Afro-Bahian identity, with culinary, cultural, and medicinal uses. Tying it to

Afro-Bahian spirituality and the Candomblé religion,⁶ Watkins (2015) describes how the African oil palm represented a botanical link to Africa and had by the nineteenth century become a symbol of Afro-Brazil. Palm oil remained an important tradition and source of revenue for the black rural population at the close of the slavery era, but market changes were on the horizon. By then, landowners in Bahia moved to appropriate Afro-Brazilian palm oil production, presaging the agro-industrial development that began in the next century (Watkins 2015, 233).

Emancipation came against a backdrop of agricultural decay in Bahia, even as coffee plantations in São Paulo were booming. In the last decades before abolition, sugar exports stagnated and declined, partly due to unfavorable conditions on the world market. A three-year drought beginning in 1887 further contributed to the fall in agricultural exports. In addition, labor shortages in the cane fields increased as slave flight intensified and the poor free population produced coffee, tobacco, and food crops as alternatives to working in the sugar industry. With no alternative free workers to replace slave labor, the Recôncavo sugar planters relied heavily on enslaved men, women, and children right up to the end of slavery.

Land Conflict in the Aftermath of Emancipation

With abolition, sugar production in the Recôncavo almost completely collapsed. Labor shortages on plantations were widespread as former slaves used their newly acquired freedom to renegotiate the terms of their mobility, labor, land use and cultivation, and compensation. Yet scholars of emancipation and its immediate aftermath have argued that there was more continuity of social norms and hierarchies than rupture in the Bahian countryside (Fraga 2016; Graden 2006; Scott 1988). Many former slaves remained on or near to the properties where they were once forcibly held. Fraga (2016) explains that ex-slaves did not stay out of loyalty to their former owners, but “to retain access to limited rights and a plot of land that they acquired over the course of a lifetime of struggle in slavery” (184). In the Iguape district, they transformed many of the abandoned *engenhos* into stable black rural communities. These ex-slave communities drew on family connections among the former slaves on the

⁶ Matory describes Candomblé as “an Afro-Brazilian religion of divination, sacrifice, healing, music, dance, and spirit possession. The only rival to its beauty is its complexity. . . . Believers attribute miraculous powers and exemplary flaws to gods known variously as *orixás*, *voduns*, *inquices*, and *caboclos*, depending on the Candomblé denomination” (2005, 1).

same plantations and nearby properties to reconstruct communities in freedom. In the post-abolition period, these communities were the basis on which the former slaves and their descendants sought new options for survival.

Within these former slave communities, the recently freed population was socially differentiated, primarily on the basis of access to *roças* or small plots of land.⁷ Fraga (2016) found that the civil registers for the period nearly always distinguished between *roceiros* and *lavradores*:

The term *lavrador*, or living from agriculture (a *lavouira*), covered a wide variety of situations on the plantations, from rural worker to farmer, but *roceiro* always implied access to a plot of land. *Roceiros* enjoyed more options for survival than agricultural workers, even though *roceiros* were usually obliged to work their ex-owners' plantations in addition to their own farms. With their own plots, they could grow diverse crops and sell the surplus in local markets.

(203)

For freed people, the right to cultivate a piece of land was a significant factor in the decision to remain on plantation property. In this way, some communities of former slaves and their descendants managed to develop a degree of independence from their former owners.

The right to cultivate farmland was also an incentive for freed and free blacks, and their families to move to the area. Dona Geovanda (Juvani) Viana Jovelino, current spiritual leader, matriarch, and resident of Kaonge, described how her father, José (Zezé) Nery Viana, relocated his family from the nearby Acupe village to present-day Kaonge at the invitation of his cousin:

In response to orders from Xangô/Yemanjá [Candomblé gods] and with the police in pursuit, Zezé Viana received a new instruction: “the message from Orixá was to leave Acupe, accept the offer from his cousin and go to live and work with him in Kaonge.” It was in this context that Zezé Viana with his cousin finalized the sale of 25 *tarefas* of land.⁸ What the current residents refer to as the “house avenue” already existed in Kaonge in this epoch. It was hidden in the bush with difficult access, a perfect location for protection from persecution by the police and more tranquility as they carried out the Orixás practices. In Kaonge, he built a temple, his own residence and started a family.

(INCRA 2014, 43)

⁷ The term “roças” usually refers to small plots of land or provision grounds that enslaved women and men were able to farm on plantations belonging to their owners during slavery (Barickman 1994; Fraga 2016). But the term has continued to be used after slavery. Sometimes it is translated as small farms or garden plots, depending on the context (Shore 2017b, 2018).

⁸ One *arefa* is about one acre (Barickman 1998, xvii).

According to Dona Juvani, Kaonge served as a place of refuge for enslaved blacks in the era of captivity, in the same way that later, her father went there to seek refuge, even though he was born free. Her father's main motives to change residency were access to land and freedom to practice Candomblé, unfettered by the authorities. Zezé Viana, the early spiritual leader of Kaonge, was also a successful small farmer and entrepreneur. Besides planting sugarcane on his farm and milling it at the Acutinga plant, he grew food crops that he transported by boat and barges to market in Salvador. Zezé Viana then purchased products in the city that he resold at his kiosk in Kaonge. Dona Juvani explained that her father worked hard to spare his children from agricultural wage labor, or as she expressed, having "to take handle of a hoe" (INCRA 2014, 48).

In Santiago do Iguape, freed persons also avoided wage labor in the cane fields by relying on their long-standing activities in the mangroves. For them, alternative ways of making their living by fishing and gathering shellfish represented work that they themselves controlled. Other freed persons on the *engenhos* near the bay also relied on gathering shellfish to supplement their diets and to raise income. Spontaneous groves of *dendezeiros* (African oil palm), confined mainly to the mangal, were a boon for these communities. In the Recôncavo region, as on Bahia's Dendê Coast, palm oil was still a relatively lucrative value-added commodity for Afro-descendants emerging from the ruins of the plantation economy (Watkins 2015, 233).

For the next hundred years (1890s–1990s), Iguape Afro-descendants' livelihoods were threatened by (1) powerful landowners and ranchers who were able to circumvent land measures, effectively limiting Afro-descendants' access to land and other resources and (2) changes to land use that jeopardized their farm plots and rights to the mangroves. Within the first three decades after abolition, Afro-descendants in São Francisco do Paraguaçu and Santiago do Iguape became mired in legal battles with influential property owners who sought to prevent them from legitimately acquiring land through use (i.e., equitable right of possession through open use of the property) and started to annually charge them for residential lots in the town centers.

In the aftermath of emancipation, the quilombolas of Boqueirão gradually moved closer to the town center. Some villagers explained that their ancestors voluntarily moved in search of better living conditions, easier access to the sea and the mangroves, and a larger market to sell their goods (INCRA 2007, 25–26). Others claimed that the powerful landowner João de Antonio Santana and other private farmers and ranchers coerced the quilombolas who had dispersed in Boqueirão to move nearer

to town in order to curb the expansion of quilombo territory (Magalhães 2013, 85). The countryside-to-town migration could have been the result of both pull and push factors. The 1934 constitution instituted *usucapião*, that is, the acquisition of property through “adverse possession.” It is a method, rooted in common law, of obtaining title to land through use. According to the law, a person in possession of land owned by someone else may acquire valid title to it, so long as certain common law requirements are met and the adverse possessor is in possession for a sufficient period of time, as defined by a statute of limitations. By the 1930s, the descendants of quilombolas had met the basic prerequisites of *usucapião*: continuous and uninterrupted possession for a defined period of time. The landowners, who feared losing property on the town outskirts, evicted them. Landowners then instituted a pattern of socio-legal relationships over generations through lease agreements between owners and families of former slaves who became *agregados* (tenants). They rented housing, leased land plots, and worked as cheap laborers on private farms (Kuhn 2009, 58).

Afro-descendants of Santiago do Iguape faced similar legal challenges beginning in the 1930s, when the owner of Engenho Central divided and sold her property to several third parties. In 1933, Elvira Novis, who inherited Engenho Central and several other nearby plantations after her husband died, sold the present-day residential area of Santiago do Iguape to Pedro Paulo “Piroca” Rangel, a wealthy merchant and landowner. He allowed the families already living there to stay, but he divided the property into lots, which he leased or sold to residents of the region. After his death, Piroca Rangel’s heirs used legal measures to prevent black occupants from purchasing remaining lots and continued to lease or charge them an annual tax for occupancy, known as *foro de chão*, a form of emphyteusis – that is, transferable property subject to a perpetual leasehold (Cruz 2014; INCRA 2013). For generations, even families who purchased lots were legally obliged to continue to pay *foro de chão*, fueling animosity between them and the Rangel family. Dona Calú, a resident of Santiago do Iguape, questioned the legitimacy and the perpetuity of such practice – a sentiment widely shared by other villagers: “My father was born and farmed there with my mother. He died still paying *foro de chão*. I am already 62 years old and still paying. What kind of debt is this that never is paid off?” (INCRA 2013, 87). The Brazilian Civil Code of 2003 prohibited new *foro de chão* contracts, but existing ones continued to be enforced in Iguape.

In both San Francisco do Paraguaçu and Santiago do Iguape, the land conflicts between Afro-descendants and the private farmers were rooted

in the broader agrarian question in Brazil. Landownership was concentrated, as elsewhere in the countryside. In Iguape, twelve property owners controlled 80 percent of the available land in the middle of the nineteenth century, and that pattern continued into the twentieth century (Fraga 2016, 11; Kuhn 2009).

Modernization of Dendê Production: Opalma in Iguape

As the first decades of the twentieth century passed, property owners and other powerful rural authorities decided to transform the use of land, which also threatened Afro-descendants' rights to fields. Among those transformations was the expansion of the cane fields belonging to the modern central sugar factories, known as *usinas*. Recôncavo plantation owners and their heirs tried to modernize their old properties by installing an industrial central sugarcane plant. Others ceased sugar production altogether and converted their properties to cattle ranches (Fraga 2016). These latter changes came about because former plantation owners began to invest in cattle rather than sugar, which resulted in turning the spaces previously devoted to Afro-descendants' farm plots into pasture. For descendants of enslaved Africans, the expansion of modern sugarcane plantations and the transformation of traditional sugar mills to cattle ranches meant fewer possibilities to survive on the land, which drove many families to move to Salvador. Black community households, which depended on a combination of economic activities (fishing, farming, extraction, and wage labor), had fewer options for subsistence.

In addition to private owners' changes in land use, the Bahian government decided to modernize, rationalize, and create what James Scott (1998) calls "legibility" of the state's palm oil economy in the second half of the twentieth century.⁹ Central components of its top-down agricultural modernization program were large-scale oil palm monocultures of *tenera* hybrid seedlings treated with chemical fertilizers, according to Western scientific principles. Growing domestic and foreign demand for oils, especially from the United States and France, fueled the Brazilian government and commercial interests in development of palm oil (Watkins 2015). In 1959, Brazil's National Steel Company, an agro-industrial collaboration with the Brazilian government through the Superintendency of Development in Northeast Brazil (SUDENE), began to plant the hybrid *tenera* variety of oil palm in Taperoá on the Bahian

⁹ Scott has described the administrative struggle to control or order landscapes and those who inhabit them as "a state's attempt to make a society legible" (1998, 2).

southern coast. Operating as Opalma, the corporation set up operations in the Recôncavo three years later.

In 1962, Opalma opened a subsidiary plant in the Acutinga village (later renamed Opalma village) about ten kilometers from Santiago do Iguape. The company purchased the former sugarcane plantation of Engenho Acutinga and set up its first oil palm plantation in the Iguape district (IPHAN 2005, 51). The impact of Opalma on the local economy was mixed: (1) residents lost access to land plots they occupied on ex-sugar plantations, as these lands were converted to oil palm monocultures; (2) men and women were hired as full-time and seasonal laborers in a region where rural wage jobs were few; and (3) government-backed agro-industrialists who sought to control *dendê* production through industrialization downgraded small-scale producers of African oil palms to “artisanal,” with the implication that their production was marginal to the state economy. Because public and private funding privileged agro-industrial production, Afro-descendant small-scale processors struggled for resources in Bahia’s *dendê* economy.

In addition to the Acutinga Plantation that Opalma bought from the old aristocratic Bulcão family in Iguape, the company purchased more of Iguape’s cane fields over the years, reinvesting its profits to expand cultivation. Afro-descendants closest to the former *engenho* lost rights to the plots they had cultivated for multiple generations, including villagers’ plots of land on the former property of Engenho da Ponte. Current residents of Engenho da Ponte testified that the adult children of Elvira Novis, who inherited the property after their mother’s death, sold it to Opalma even though she had allegedly promised (but not made official in a will or by a notary) the land to her former enslaved workers. Dona Nega regretted that they had not requested Elvira Novis for written documentation to prove the donation before she died: “At that time, people did not have the mentality for wanting to see things in writing, in black and white. We did not receive that. They said it belonged to Opalma [company property] but in Opalma you could not find the name of Ponte” (INCRA 2014, 60). Without written proof, Elvira Novis’s heirs deprived descendants of former slaves of their land plots; this was a repeated practice across rural Brazil (Gomes and Yabeta 2017).

Similarly, Opalma incorporated the former property of Engenho Brandão, which resulted in more than forty families of Santiago do Iguape losing fields to grow food crops (Cruz 2014). The Opalma oil palm plantation replaced the very sugarcane plantations where “a century and a half earlier, an enslaved Afro-Brazilian woman named Benta resisted her plight by processing palm oil for use and sale” (Watkins 2015, 379).

In 1966, Opalma planted 1,600 hectares of *tenera* seedlings on its Iguape plantation (Watkins 2015, 376). Some residents who had been dispossessed of land plots moved to Salvador in search of jobs, and others were forced to sell their labor, some to Opalma, to make a living.

The company's expansion deprived many Afro-descendants of the land plots that were critical to their subsistence and independence. At the same time, Opalma also provided wage jobs in a rural area of high unemployment and migration. Between 1950 and 1980, the Recôncavo populations experienced another profound transformation in rural life. The combination of land concentration, reduced coffee fields, and demise of tobacco farms resulted in displaced rural workers moving to cities and other regions in search of better living conditions (Santana 1988). For the Iguape population, especially the youth who had little prospect of finding agriculture and off-farm employment, Opalma was an alternative to regional migration.

For almost three decades (1960s–1990s), the company employed local men from Acutinga, Dendê, Kaonge, Santiago do Iguape, and other nearby communities to work primarily in the fields – planting, fertilizing, cutting, harvesting, and transporting bunches of *dendê* fruit to the factory. Former agricultural laborers described the different jobs they performed over the years, as technicians to treat *tenera* seedlings with chemical fertilizer, harvesters to cut the fresh fruit, collectors to amass and transport the fruit, and drivers to collect fruit from other farmers (personal interviews 2011 and 2017). While villagers were mostly assigned to unskilled manual fieldwork, the company hired specialized technicians and administrators from outside the area. Nonlocals produced palm oil, soap, and industrial products in the factory. At that time, oil palm was processed for conventional purposes as part of the state's modernization project. In the next decade, the government would encourage the cultivation of oil palm and sugarcane for biofuels.

In his account of service at Opalma, seventy-year-old Salvador Pereira de Jesus, a resident of Kaonge, confirmed that locals did not usually work inside the factory:

I used to do so many things there, I worked in the fields and I can't even remember all the things I used to do. What was there to be done, I did it. Look, I worked demarcating the land for planting oil palms, I worked planting oil palms, cutting no, but picking up the bunches that the cutter cut. With animals I never worked, no, I did not like that work. Manure, it was two 20 kilo buckets, one on each arm. I myself never worked in the factory.

(Cruz 2014, 94)



PHOTO 1.3. Ruins of the Opalma factory in the Bahian Recôncavo's Iguape Valley. Local inhabitants, many of whom were dispossessed of their land for Opalma oil palm plantations, worked as agricultural laborers for the company; while others produced palm oil, soap, and industrial products in the factory.

His main duties were to plant, fertilize, and collect *dendê*. Men were nevertheless employed in a wider variety of jobs and in higher-paid positions than women. Opalma established a gendered division of labor, with women concentrated in the most unskilled and lowest-paid positions. The company hired women only as seasonal day laborers on its plantations, especially for threshing (removal of fruit from the bunches). Much of the other work that women did was “hidden” in their homes, where they separated the palm kernel from its shell.¹⁰ A former worker of Opalma described this labor-intensive activity:

The palm nuts were ground and the oil was extracted. They arrived here with the shells, broken with the shells. Many people brought them [for us] to separate the kernels from the shells. They brought them in carts, and [we] earned according to the number of sacks. During the harvest season, carts arrived at the door, how many sacks do you have, they weighed the sacks and payment was made the following week. Another cart arrived; people had a lot of palm nuts with shells at

¹⁰ A by-product of palm oil extraction is the palm nut, which, when cracked, yields a kernel containing a completely different kind of oil that can be used for soaps, detergents, candles, and cosmetics (Watkins 2015, 421).

home and they only took the kernels. The shells were left as trash creating a covering on the unpaved streets.

(Cruz 2014, 100)

Opalma profited by paying women only for the bags of palm kernels rather than the real labor time involved in this work. Dona Crispina, a woman who separated the nut from its shell at home, explained that “it was a work that did not follow fixed work hours,” and she often had to continue through the night to meet the company’s quota. Dona Crispina elaborated:

I worked with palm nuts, I used to crack the shells; the palm nuts arrived here, they brought them in buckets and dumped them there, then people took them inside, cracked the shells inside and then sold them, they didn’t sell, they were paid for the work by the [company] people who weighed and paid. Everybody in the family helped from the start and well into the night. People cracked the small nuts, making oil for the people who were there.

(Cruz 2014, 101)

Thus, Opalma benefited not only from the labor of a single woman worker but also from unpaid family labor, including children. From Dona Crispina’s point of view, everyone had to help in order to accomplish “*o catar coco*,” or what had to be done, which meant children and relatives had to pitch in to produce the quantity of bagged palm kernels.

Past employees emphasized that agricultural work on the Opalma plantation was an important source of income and financial security (“*o dinheiro certo*,” or regular monthly paycheck) for the families of Iguape. A retiree, who worked more than nineteen years for Opalma as a field overseer, explained that his annually renewed contract enabled him to build the home where he still resides in Kaonge (Cruz 2014, 110). Contract laborers had benefits including regular employment with fixed hours, Sunday off to rest, annual salary increases, and social security after retirement. In contrast, the day field laborers were hired for specific tasks, with no benefits or guarantee of subsequent employment. Seu Joãozito, a resident and fisherman of Santiago do Iguape, remembered how he juggled work shifts at Opalma with night fishing to provide for his family:

I also fished during my time at Opalma. I was able to still fish because they gave us task assignments. I worked Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, and Friday, I fished on Saturday and Sunday. When Monday came I worked there, at Opalma; when I had time off I would fish because there, at Opalma, we worked by task, there was a certain quantity of dendê put on an industrial tray to process. Each week we were given a tray, I always was working there and fishing. I fished at night, sometimes at night I would go, and when I arrived home tired I would not

go fishing, sometimes the car broke down, I would arrive late. At times, I was behind service at Opalma and I could not go fishing.

(Cruz 2014, 109)

Seu Joãozinho was like most villagers, who valued employment at Opalma but did not totally abandon fishing and other economic activities that were critical to their livelihood.

Besides hiring its own employees, Opalma supported other rural jobs that generated revenue. Small-scale producers of the African oil palm increased their production and sold their fresh palm fruit to Opalma to be processed in its factory. Locals who owned draft animals received daily payment for the transportation of palm fruit from the plantation fields to Opalma truck drivers parked on the road. Former workers described the Opalma village as a site of vibrant commercial activity. It brought together resident vendors and those from surrounding towns who set up stalls at the local market, which the workers called the “rat market” (Feira do Rato) because of the diverse products (“a bit of everything”) sold there. Vendors mostly marketed an assortment of crops cultivated on small gardens, beef and pork products, and fish. A retired employee of Opalma reminisced: “Open market, every week a market was set up there, everything you could imagine was to be found there, it attracted people from Acupe, Santo Amaro, Cachoeira, from Saubara. They sold everything there, anything you could imagine was to be found there” (Cruz 2014, 89). Fishermen recalled that they sold more produce in the past to “Opalma people,” referring to those connected directly and indirectly with the company. They, too, associated Opalma with lucrative trade.

The company exerted great economic influence in the region, yet Opalma was also part of a broad public-private industrial palm oil development that aimed to replace Afro-descendants’ spontaneous African oil palm landscapes and cottage industry of palm oil processors. Officials classified the activity as “artisanal” to devalue nonindustrial small-scale producers’ traditional management and cultivation techniques. This designation persists today. In his study of small-scale producers along the *dendê* southern coast, Watkins argues that the rhetoric negated the economic contributions of smaller-scale producers and processors, instead framing them as quaint, anachronistic artisans (364). Government prioritization of agro-industrial production, combined with misleading labels, ensured that Afro-descendant *dendê* producers and processors were denied the necessary economic assistance to expand their business.

The implication was that Afro-descendant *dendê* farmers should have only minimal supporting roles in the modernization and rational development of Bahia's palm oil economy as supplemental suppliers of the capitalized industrial operations. Agro-industrial monocultures like those constructed in Iguape nevertheless failed to completely overtake Afro-descendant small-scale processors, who remained the preferred sources for cooking oil. Whereas large-scale manufacturers such as Opalma supplied domestic industrial demand, small-scale processors continued to supply the culinary and religious markets in Bahia and other states. Nevertheless, in the twenty-first century the Iguape quilombolas that produced and processed *dendê* would be portrayed as tourist attractions in the Recôncavo and not as economic entrepreneurs worthy of credit and support, as examined in Chapter 5.

On the eve of the transition to democracy in Brazil, Opalma maintained plantations and oil-processing facilities in Iguape, but its mechanized operations had substantially reduced the number of local workers. Within a decade, an acute outbreak of *Bursaphelenchus cocophilus*, commonly known as red ring disease, would destroy almost 50 percent of oil palms in Iguape, precipitating the closure of Opalma in Iguape. The resulting economic hardships initiated another rural migration to urban areas and prompted those who remained behind to mobilize in support of quilombo land rights.

BLACK COMMUNITIES OF THE RIBEIRA VALLEY IN SÃO PAULO

The Ribeira Valley covers a total of 2.8 million hectares (Santos and Tatto 2008) and is situated between two of the wealthiest states in Brazil: the southeastern region of São Paulo and the eastern region of Paraná. Taken together, this area is now home to eighty-eight quilombo-descended communities, of which sixty-six are located in the state of São Paulo (Andrade and Tatto 2013, 14). The São Paulo portion of 1.7 million hectares is made up of twenty-three municipalities, distributed in three subregions from the river basin of Ribeira de Iguape, called Lower, Medium, and Upper Ribeira. The four black communities examined here – Ivaporunduva, Nhunguara, Pedro Cubas, and Piririca – in the municipalities of Eldorado (Lower Ribeira) and Iporanga (Upper Ribeira), are part of a constellation of seventeen quilombo communities in the Ribeira Valley, about 350 km from São Paulo, the state capital (see Table 1.4). Amid the largest area of Brazil's Atlantic Forest,

TABLE 1.4. *Stages of land regularization for seventeen quilombos in Ribeira Valley, São Paulo*

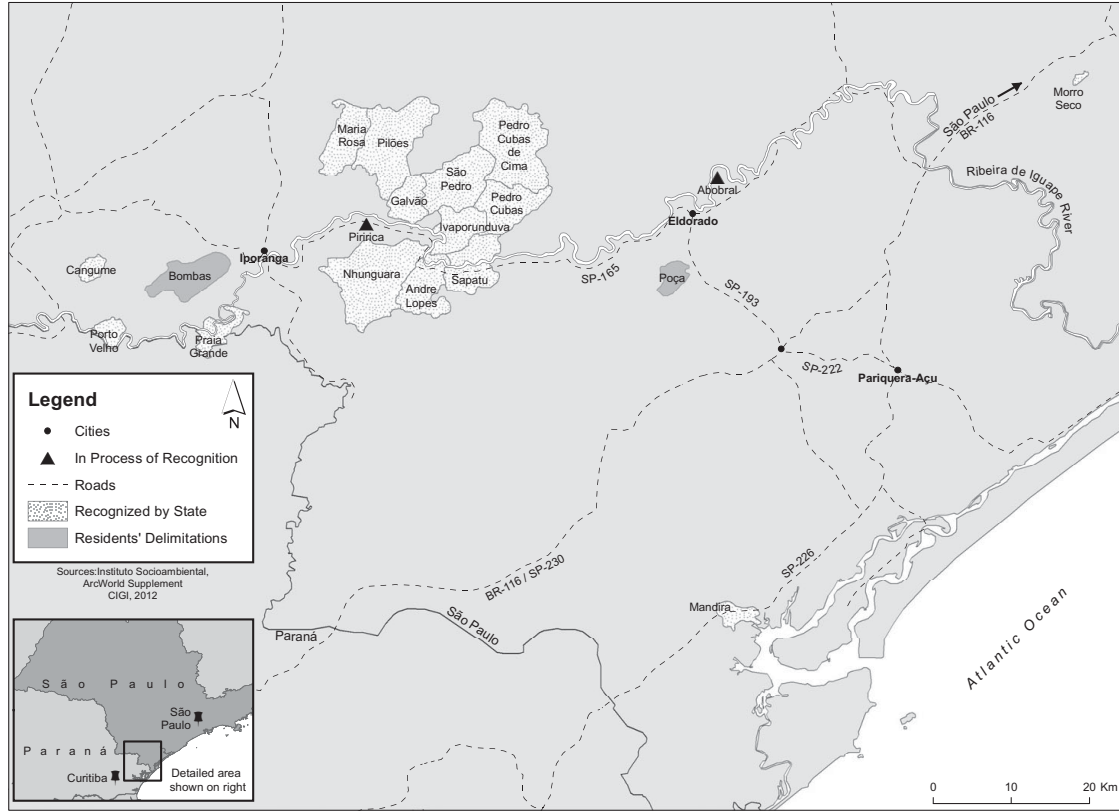
	Quilombos	Municipality	Stages (2016) ^a
1	André Lopes	Eldorado	Recognized
2	Bombas	Iporanga	
3	Cangume	Itaóca	
4	Mandira	Cananéia	
5	Nhanguara	Iporanga/Eldorado	
6	Pedro Cubas de Cima	Eldorado	
7	Piririca	Iporanga	
8	Poça	Eldorado/Jacupiranga	
9	Porto Velho	Iporanga	
10	Sapatu	Eldorado	
11	Morro Seco	Iguape	
12	Pedro Cubas	Eldorado	Partially Titled
13	Pilões	Iporanga	
14	São Pedro	Eldorado/Iporanga	
15	Maria Rosa	Iporanga	Fully Titled
16	Galvão	Iguape	Partially Registered
17	Ivaporunduva	Eldorado	Fully Registered

^a RECOGNIZED: Recognition of the Territory as a Remnant Quilombo according to the INCRA Recognition Ordinance (RTID) or the Technical Scientific Report (RTC) in the case of ITESP (Instituto de Terras do Estado de São Paulo/Land Institute of São Paulo State). Partially Titled: Grant of the domain title referring to a partial area of the territory. INCRA registers title for particular areas and/or state agency for vacant public areas. Fully Titled: Grant of the domain title referring to the entire area of the territory. INCRA registers title for particular areas and/or state agency for vacant public areas. Partially Registered: Registration in the Property Registry of the domain title referring to a partial area of the territory. Fully Registered: Registration in the Property Registry of the domain title referring to the entire area of the territory.

Source: Andrade and Tatto 2013, p. 14; www.palmares.gov.br/wp-content/uploads/2016/06/COMUNIDADES-CERTIFICADAS.pdf, accessed on February 14, 2017

consisting of 2.1 million hectares, the Ribeira Valley quilombos occupy one of the world's hotspots of biodiversity and threatened biomes.

These black communities have varied historical origins. Whereas some communities were established by quilombolas, others were formed by a combination of runaway slaves, freed blacks, and freeborn blacks that came to be recognized as *comunidades negras rurais*, or black rural communities. Fugitive slaves established the quilombos of Bombas,



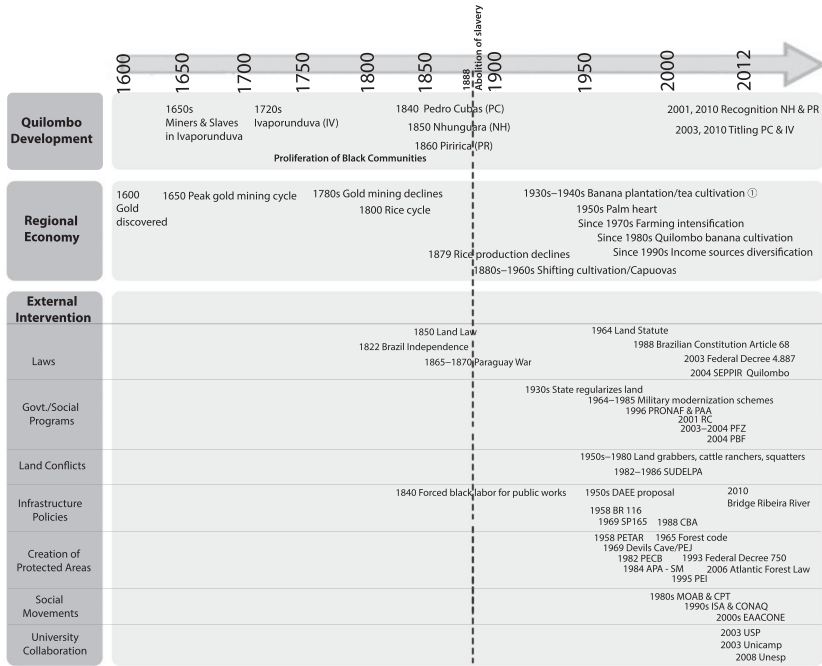
Selected Quilombo Communities, Ribeira Valley, São Paulo

MAP 1.2. Selected quilombo communities, Ribeira Valley, São Paulo

Pedro Cubas, Pedro Cubas de Cima, Piririca, and São Pedro; slave owners donated land to former slaves in Ivaporunduva, Mandira, and Porto Velho; miners abandoned both slaves and territory in Maria Rosa and Pilões; blacks fleeing forcible military recruitment formed André Lopes, Cangume, and Sapatu; and agricultural workers inherited a portion of land to create Morro Seco (ITESP 1998a; 1998b; 2000a; 2000b; 2001; 2003a; 2003b; 2004; 2010). Over time, inhabitants spread out and created the neighboring communities of Galvão, Poça, and Nhunguara (Santos and Tatto 2008). Today, as in the past, family and kinship ties, combined with cultural practices and work, bind these communities together.

The different origins of the Ribeira Valley quilombo-descended communities are not unique in Brazil. Historical studies have shown that, contrary to the common definition of quilombos as runaway slave communities, most had diverse and complex past formations and were inhabited by fugitive slaves, freed blacks, and free blacks (Fiabani 2005; Reis and Gomes 2016). Even so, Brazilian anthropologists in 1994 agreed on the re-semanticization of the meaning of quilombo to re-appropriate what they considered an outdated definition from the colonial past (i.e., runaway slave community) and to capture the varied ways that black settlements appropriated land, claimed their rights, and built their identities (Almeida 2002a). Thus, they broadened the criteria for designating a living group of quilombolas by defining *remanescente* in a way that did not require direct descent from fugitive slaves. The controversies among anthropologists and historians around the terms “quilombo” and “remnants of quilombos” are more than academic debates: These definitions weighed in on the legal and operational practices of land entitlement, as discussed in the next chapter.

The Ribeira Valley communities have links to the local economy and the surrounding social sectors that date from the seventeenth century. Previously, geographers and economists had described the communities as isolated, with mountainous terrain, steep slopes, and lack of roads limiting their accessibility (Giacomini 2010; Müller 1980). In contrast, anthropologists Queiroz (1983) and Stucchi (1998) found that the Ribeira Valley communities had always maintained social and economic relations with the small regional urban centers, large rural property owners, and local authorities. As illustrated here, for generations these black hamlets were part of a broad network of social and economic relations (i.e., what Gomes has termed the *campo negro*) formed in conjunction with certain sectors of society from slave owners to merchants that had a vested interest in their permanence. Moreover, the economic significance of these communities went beyond their contribution to the regional economy to the



① The Getúlio Vargas government (1930-1945) encouraged foreign investment in banana and tea plantations. Decades later, the military dictatorship (1964-1985) provided incentives for investment in plantations.

FIGURE 1.2. Time line, political economy of the Ribeira Valley quilombo communities in São Paulo, seventeenth to twenty-first centuries.

production of export commodities for the national economy. Between the seventeenth and twentieth centuries, Africans and their descendants produced the gold, rice, and palm heart of the region’s great economic cycles – along with Europeans. The relatively autonomous status of these black rural properties (*sítios*) during slavery allowed for the configuration of territories, which changed over time, and the consolidation of predominantly black rural communities.

After slavery was abolished in 1888, landless former slaves in the Ribeira Valley moved to existing black settlements, established new villages, remained on farms as wage laborers, or migrated to areas in the interior. Their position nevertheless remained precarious, just like long-settled black residents’. Without officially recognized land deeds, they were all vulnerable to land grabbers, squatters, and land speculators, as well as state-supported modernization development projects. From the late nineteenth century onward, land conflicts, state intervention, and resistance mark the history of black communities’ occupation of the Ribeira Valley (see Figure 1.2 for time line).

From Slavery to Emancipation

The black communities in the Ribeira Valley date from the establishment of gold-mining settlements along the Ribeira de Iguape River. As early as the sixteenth century, with the discovery of alluvial gold in the mountainous interior of São Paulo, mining parties set out from the state's southern coast, taking with them indigenous peoples and enslaved Africans (Carril 1995; Queiroz 1983). By the seventeenth century, fortune seekers had poured in, and mining operations proliferated along riverbeds and hill-sides. These mines, though not as productive as those in the neighboring state of Minas Gerais, were profitable and contributed to Brazil's production of 80 percent of the world's gold supply during the eighteenth century (Carney and Rosomoff 2009, 81).

Mining, like sugar and coffee production in São Paulo, was carried out on the backs of enslaved Africans. By 1811 enslaved Africans and their descendants accounted for 23 percent of São Paulo's population, a proportion that rose to 28 percent by the 1830s and remained at that level through the 1850s, before dropping to 19 percent in 1872 (Andrews 1991, 26). The brutal labor conditions of the mines, combined with endemic food shortages, resulted in high rates of slave mortality (Fiabani 2005, 215). Slaves repeatedly turned to flight, and quilombos sprang up in the countryside, including in the Ribeira Valley. While some quilombos were located in inaccessible areas in the mountains, others existed side-by-side with both European settlements and communities of freed and free blacks. Over time, quilombos developed relations with nearby black communities through marriage, labor supply, and trade.

Ivaporunduva, the oldest black community in the Ribeira Valley, was settled in the 1650s. According to documents and local memory (personal interview 2010; Stucchi 1998), the Cunha brothers, Portuguese gold speculators, arrived with a small group of enslaved Africans in the seventeenth century, principally to work in the gold mines. By the 1720s, more Portuguese migrants and their slaves had joined them, and the Ivaporunduva camp flourished. Gold mining, which lasted almost two centuries, was the first of several profitable activities in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Besides the backbreaking labor of the mines, enslaved Africans and their descendants grew beans, manioc, maize, and sweet potato for consumption on small plots. From the mid-eighteenth century onward, they also produced rice on slave owners' farms that was sold in the nearby towns of Xiririca (renamed Eldorado in 1948) and Iporanga.

When the gold deposits were exhausted in the Ribeira Valley, many miners left the region for the new gold discoveries in Minas Gerais in the eighteenth century. Rather than taking their slaves, they manumitted or abandoned them – decades before slavery’s official abolition in 1888. Miners freed their slaves in this period partly because they knew that other enslaved Africans could easily be purchased in Minas Gerais with the funds provided by those manumitted. As Kathleen Higgins noted in her study on the manumission of slaves, “as long as the mines in Minas Gerais thrived it was not difficult to buy new slaves for gold. There was not a shortage of available substitute workers” (1997, 11). Furthermore, the life expectancy of enslaved Africans who worked in the mines was notoriously short. Miners’ expectations that slaves bought as young men would not be fit for more than twelve years of mine labor influenced their decision to abandon adult male slaves in the Ribeira Valley. The demise of gold extraction and the exodus of miners, who were the largest contingency of Europeans, resulted in the racial reconfiguration of the area, whereby freed and abandoned blacks joined fugitive slaves to form permanent settlements in the Ribeira de Iguape River Valley.

According to the Book of Tombo (*Livro do Tombo*) in the Parish of Xiririca, Joana Maria, a slave owner in Ivaoporunduva, freed her slaves and compensated them with land before her death in 1802 (ITESP 1998a).¹¹ By the early 1800s, Europeans had departed from Ivaoporunduva, and freed slaves remained on the donated land (Santos and Tatto 2008, 93). Prior to emancipation, Ivaoporunduva was regionally recognized as a settlement inhabited by blacks, *mulattos*, and *pardos*¹² who were classified also as fugitives, freed blacks, and free blacks. Its inhabitants, initially enslaved blacks working in mining activities, stabilized with the growing presence of free-blacks-cum-small-farmers engaged primarily in production of food crops on *capuovas*, traditional shifting cultivation fields. They dominated navigation techniques on the rivers (the main routes of regional communication and commerce) and created a network of relationships that resulted in the formation of other black hamlets situated on the banks of the Ribeira de Iguape River.

¹¹ She was not unique. New manumission studies of wills and inheritance in Brazil’s south-east found that small holders of up to twenty slaves showed more largesse than larger owners when manumitting in wills (Slenes 2012).

¹² Elites developed labels (racially mixed, *pardo*, *mestizo*, *caboclo*, or other) to describe their poor neighbors, dependents, and slaves. *Mulatto(a)*, a generic term, referred to a person of mixed African and European ancestry; *pardo(a)*, another term for mixed race, literally meaning brown, was usually modified by light or dark.

Black communities multiplied in the Ribeira Valley, with inhabitants accessing territory primarily through marriage, land and labor customs, and land purchase. Records show, for example, that in the 1850s and 1860s, Ivaporunduva and São Pedro provided wives for persecuted runaway slaves who would have been driven out by slave hunters if they had not been married (Giacomini 2010). Documents also disclosed the relationship of *compadrio* (god-parenthood) between slaves and free blacks. Freed persons in Ivaporunduva, for example, chose plantation slaves as godparents to strengthen the social and commercial links that tied the community to the enslaved population in the Xiririca lowlands (Shore 2018). Family surnames of free blacks registered in the Land Book of Xiririca – such as Furquim, Pupo, Marinho, Meira, Vieira, Pedroso, Moraes, Araújo, Machado, Pereira, Santos, Costa, and Silva – were common across communities, signifying the importance of marriage among first generations to expand territorial possession (ITESP 1998a; Stucchi 1998).

Bernardo Furquim and his offspring are examples. He is considered one of the founders of São Pedro, from whom most of the residents descended, and a successful entrepreneur who amassed large tracts of land in the *bairros* (neighborhoods) of Abobral, Galvão, Ivaporunduva, Pilões, and São Pedro primarily through conjugal relations. Bernardo fathered more than twenty-four children with various women in different communities, and they later wed and moved to Nhunguara, André Lopes, Sapatu, and Maria Rosa, among other places (Carvalho 2006, 41). Based on relatives' testimonies, Bernardo Furquim, an escaped slave from Minas Gerais, arrived in the region alone, with fear of being captured for slave labor in the 1840s: "He told us about coming on the run, coming in flight. He stopped here and began to render service out there, found some women and started his families here in this community of São Pedro" (Andrade, Pereira, and Andrade 2000, 75). Edu Nolasco de França explained that his great-grandfather acquired land through a regional practice known as *tocar serviço*, or rendering service, "the category that qualified the ancestors to make their stay permanent, an aspect still valued today as the privileged mode of access and permanency on the land" (Andrade, Pereira, and Andrade 2000, 75). In the words of his great-grandson,

Bernardo Furquim used to work in farming and food processing. He had a mill for grinding coffee and rice, a still for making spirits, he raised cattle (...), he built a barn for hulling rice near to where we were building a tank. In that era, he had no vehicle to carry the clay to make the dam, so he took the dried hide of an ox, spread it on the ground, filled it with earth and stones and succeeded in building the dam.

(Andrade, Pereira, and Andrade 2000, 75; Stucchi 1998)

Because land was abundant in Ribeira Valley, Bernardo only had to occupy and invest in the land – much like elsewhere in rural Brazil at that time. Before the Land Law of 1850, Brazil disposed of government land through claiming by occupation or the right of *posse*.

The local black population also relied on another pre-abolition traditional practice to guarantee access to land known as *cessão das áreas*, or assigning areas. The transaction was usually, but not always, between family members: one person would acquire a large tract and, over time, as relatives requested plots, the owner would divide and assign portions for planting (Andrade, Pereira, and Andrade 2000, 85). The case of Américo Morato de Almeida, a free black, and one of the founders of Nhunguara, who practiced *cessão das áreas*, is notable. Laurentino Morato de Almeida, his grandson, explained that his grandfather initially purchased a huge piece of land from Miguel Antonio Jorge, a wealthy merchant and landowner of extensive rice plantations in the region:

My grandfather bought these lands here from a man named Miguel Antonio Jorge, still in the time of the monarchy. My grandfather, Américo Morato de Almeida, bought two *curitibadas* to make a farm in 1882. My grandfather's lands were divided where they meet the eye. On the Pedro side, you go down to a place where they used to pan gold called Cata de Ouro, on the Jeriva. From the Jeriva you cross to the right on the Tenente, from the Tenente you take the mountain, right up there at the top and descending here. All this belonged to my grandfather, 351 *alqueires* (about 850 hectares).¹³ My grandfather bought these 351 *alqueires* for 200 *mil réis*. He paid for these lands with maize; he sold maize from here in Iguape at 60 *centavos* per sack. To travel from here to Iguape it took 15 days of travel by canoe. He used to go through Caiacanga to get to the port.

(Andrade, Pereira, and Andrade 2000, 85)

The circumstances surrounding Almeida's land purchase from Miguel Antonio Jorge remain ambiguous. Decades earlier, black smallholders started to capitalize on the collapse of the rice economy by expanding their control of territory (Shore 2018, 179–80). Small- and medium-sized planters, who represented the majority of landowners in the Ribeira Valley, accumulated debt with the economic downturn and sold their farms to black smallholders to reduce their losses. Even large landowners like Miguel Antonio Jorge may have been affected by the collapse of the rice economy, which would account for his land sale to Américo Morato

¹³ Since colonial Brazil, the measurement of an *alqueire* has varied according to states and regions: one *alqueire* in São Paulo is 2.42 hectares and one *alqueire* in Bahia is 9.69 hectares.

de Almeida. Miguel Antonio Jorge sold properties to not only freed blacks but also fugitive slaves, including the brothers Gregório and Vincente Marinho, founders of the Pedro Cubas community. The Marinho brothers acquired the two properties of Catas Altas and Pai Romão through purchase and registered them at notarial offices in Xiririca in 1856, 1857, and 1861 (Shore 2018, 182). In the twentieth century, their descendants presented these preserved deeds to defend their communities against the invasion of foreign capitalists, large landowners, and state government-sponsored projects, albeit with little success.

These examples illustrate how economic ties formed between free blacks, fugitive slaves, and whites in the region permitted some black smallholders to increase their possessions, and how important to their livelihood local commodity markets were. Furquim (in São Pedro), Almeida (in Nhunguara), and the Marinho brothers (in Pedro Cubas) belonged to a small but significant group of Afro-descendants who expanded their economic bases, autonomy, and mobility through intricate trade systems with local authorities, diverse production units, and rural and urban markets. They stand in sharp contrast to those in the villages of Pilões and Maria Rosa, whose descendants describe their ancestors as subsistence producers “who only sold surplus crops to meet their needs for goods not likely to be produced within the family unit, such as cloth, salt, and kerosene” (Carril 1995, 103). Although historical accounts (Queiroz 1983) portray black smallholders only as subsistence-oriented peasants mainly living outside the market and employing rudimentary techniques of production in this region, these cases illustrate that, even during slavery, there was social stratification within black communities. A tiny but growing group of market-oriented black smallholders lived among the majority of subsistence black producers.

Contrary to scholarly and official accounts that describe the Ribeira black rural communities as marginal or on the fringes of economic activities (Andrade, Pereira, and Andrade 2000; Queiroz 1983), they were important in local, regional, and national commerce. After the collapse of mining in the 1750s, agriculture became the main economic activity, with the production of rice, sugarcane, manioc, beans, and tobacco. The demand for food from other areas and the arrival of the Portuguese royal family in Brazil in 1808 stimulated the growth of rice monoculture, which dominated the region throughout the nineteenth century. By 1836, the Ribeira Valley, the largest producer of rice in São Paulo, was home to 100 of the 109 rice mills in the state, and by 1852 there were 107 mills in the area (Müller 1980, 36). Ribeira Valley rice was sold in Rio de Janeiro and other Brazilian provinces

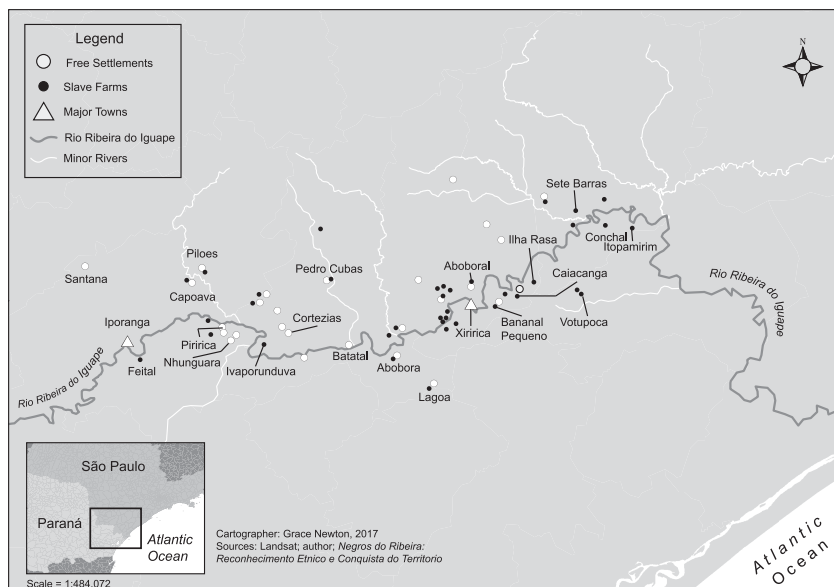
(designated states after Brazil became a republic in 1889) and exported to countries in Latin America and Europe.¹⁴

Slave labor on large farms and plantations produced the bulk of rice for domestic and export markets, but black smallholders and fugitive slaves also sowed rice with other staple crops on their shifting fields (Carril 1995, 30; Giacomini 2010). Drivers of barges went up the river and purchased rice, beans, coffee, and maize from groups of black smallholders for merchant warehouse owners in Iguape. Until the mid-nineteenth century, commercial agriculture grew exponentially and was based mainly on the export of rice and other cereals, resulting in great prosperity for the Ribeira Valley region.

Black smallholders and other area farmers also sold food crops and animals to *tropeiros* (muleteers), owners and traders of livestock who supplied cattle to *fazendas* (large farms or rural estates), and towns. *Tropeiros* navigated the Ribeira de Iguape River, buying cattle and produce, thus enriching the local economy. These market-oriented black smallholders, unlike poor subsistence producers, usually registered their occupation of land in the local land registry. Some, but not all, assumed that officially registered lands would be less susceptible to surveillance, thereby protecting fugitive slaves who also resided on the occupied territory (Giacomini 2010). Yet black smallholders' access to and productive use of land was partly contingent on their alliances with neighboring white occupants.

The Ribeira Valley black communities were located near slave-owners' estates. In the mid-nineteenth century, thirty-four slaveholders owned the largest farms in the Xiririca and Iguape regions (see Map 1.3). They purchased produce from black smallholders to feed their slaves and depended on them as reserve labor during harvest (Stucchi 1998, 180). Yet their relations with free blacks and quilombolas were fraught with tension and contradictions. Local powers tolerated market-oriented black smallholders, but also perceived the influx of free blacks in the communities as a threat to the security of the white population and encouraged the use of violence and repressive measures that were intended to curb their permanent settlement in the region (Giacomini 2010). From their perspective, free blacks were dangerous because they could provoke and organize rebellion, since they could slowly circulate

¹⁴ Vessels transported rice, and increased rice production stimulated the development of shipbuilding in Cananéia and Iguape (Nascimento 2006, 50). Black labor was used in the rice mills and to build the ships.



MAP 1.3. Map of the partial distribution of slave farms and free black settlements in the Xiririca and Iporanga regions in the mid-nineteenth century

and act as liaison agents between the slaves of the neighboring farms (Andrade, Pereira, and Andrade 2000, 74).

Slaveholders also complained of the frequency of slaves running away and admonished local police to eradicate the quilombos tucked away in the mountains, known locally as the Serra do Quilombo or Quilombo Mountain Range. Iporanga police chief João Dias wrote to the Presidency of the São Paulo Province, in a letter dated September 28, 1863, to describe the challenges:

According to information provided by some residents living near the Rio Pardo in the Freguezia District, slave settlements (*aquilombados*) are to be found in the mountains near the same river, more or less twenty or twenty-five leagues distant, in the backlands like that in Parana Province. These are slaves who fled from the north of this province. It is necessary to destroy them, because if not, it becomes very dangerous with grave circumstances. All this is heightened because some criminal elements have settled there who may be linked up with them; and with the Sub-delegation wanting to see if it could subdue them and not being able to do so because of the cost not measured just in distance but in the dangers of the trip on the River since there are rapids. . . . I need to remind Your Excellency that with local people you cannot do diligence of such nature because it is dangerous and there are even some who will warn those you hope to capture.

(Andrade, Pereira, and Andrade 2000, 98–99)

Black communities and quilombos were intertwined by affinity and marriage, so it was common that villagers regularly alerted quilombolas of imminent militia raids.

Despite economic motives driving their relations with black smallholders, slaveholding landowners and merchants ultimately viewed free blacks as permanent threats to the Brazilian slave order. Thus, Ribeira Valley free blacks tried to avoid the attention of local officials by assuming a low profile. They usually did not register their use of land in the Land Book of Xiririca so that they could remain invisible to the local police – a decision that made them vulnerable to land grabs generations later. Their anxiety was, however, valid at the time. When provincial presidential reports decried the shortage of labor for public works in Xiririca in the 1840s, administrators proposed the re-enslavement of free blacks as a solution. The narratives of residents describe how this black population took refuge in the forest, caves, and other difficult-to-reach places (Andrade, Pereira, and Andrade 2000). As Carneiro da Cunha (1985) explained, “Negro and slave were thought of as coexisting categories. Conceptually, to be black was to be a slave and to be a slave was to be black” (86). Local authorities did not distinguish between slaves and freedmen when they needed black labor.

Decades later, during the Paraguay War (1865–70), area law officers, under pressure from state bureaucrats to meet quotas, routinely and violently recruited blacks, including minors between ten and seventeen years. Unmarried men (without family and land), blacks, mulattos, and pardos, though freed and free, were among the mass of recruits for the army. Forced recruitment was widespread throughout Brazil, despite government proclamation that free blacks who volunteered would receive land as compensation for fighting in the war. José Julio da Silva was born in the Ribeira Valley and died in 1914 at the age of eighty. He was one of the few identified individuals who received land as a reward for his participation in the Paraguay War. His son explained that his father “was an expeditionary, selected, as were other young men over 21 years of age. [After the war ended, where] some died in combat, he returned to his land because he was strong, and set up a shop” (Andrade, Pereira, and Andrade 2000, 106).

In most cases, enslaved and free blacks in the region resisted military recruitment by taking refuge in the Devil’s Cave and other local hideaways. One of the consequences of the Paraguay War was a growing network of kinship ties between existing communities and fugitive slaves. Nhunguara, André Lopes, and Sapatu were known as places that harbored those who fled forced recruitment and others who had been branded “deserters” and “criminals” (Stucchi 1998). Today, numerous

families in those communities carry the surname Paraguay – a legacy of those who either fought in the war or resisted forced conscription.

New Challenges: State Policies and External Intervention

Between abolition and the first decades of the twentieth century, the population of the Ribeira Valley black communities and the quilombos formed during slavery increased with the settlement of ex-slaves and black families, whom historian Ana Rios describes as an “itinerant peasantry” in search of land and work (Rios 2001; Rios and Mattos 2005). Agriculture remained the main economic activity for the majority of Afro-descendants living in hamlets. From the nineteenth century to the mid-twentieth century, they continued to practice crop rotation and slash-and-burn techniques on shifting cultivation areas, combined with animal husbandry, hunting, and fishing (Adams, Munari, Van Vliet et al. 2013).

During these decades, generations of Afro-descendants mastered sustainable farming in the tropical forest, which they would use to assert their land rights in twenty-first-century Brazil. Each household had between four and six hectares in use, which they cultivated following customary management practices. At the end of the rainy season in June, they cleared secondary vegetation with machetes and then set the fields ablaze. The soils were naturally fertilized with the nutrients released from the ashes of trees, vines, and shrubs. Families planted food crops on the cleared fields for two seasons and then abandoned them, allowing the forest to regenerate (Adams, Munari, Van Vliet et al. 2013, 126). They then cleared other areas of the forest to cultivate new farms. After several years, families typically returned to the site of the original farms to recycle the land that had been left fallow, starting the agricultural cycle over again. Black families in Ribeira Valley were practicing agroecology decades before social movements and scholars promoted this farming method in twenty-first-century Latin America (see Chapter 4).

According to ecologist Cristina Adams and her colleagues (2013, 126–27), most black community households comprised two distinct areas: the *moradia* (living space) and the *capuova* (the shifting cultivation plots). The *moradia* included the family home, a garden, an area for raising pigs and chickens, and planted fruit trees. The *capuova* was the cultivated area, where farmers sowed rice, maize, beans, and manioc; it usually included a mobile multifunctional hut that farmers used during the planting season. Each family typically maintained more than one *capuova* at the same time, which were interwoven with *capuovas* from

other families and common areas. In their 2013 study, the Brazilian ecologists found that rural Afro-descendants still distribute *capuovas* according to usufruct rules in which the family who first arrives and clears the area to grow crops can use it for as long as necessary (Adams, Munari, Van Vliet et al. 2013, 127). It was common for market-oriented households to cultivate several *capuovas* and to sell rice, maize, and manioc to commercial wholesalers in Xiririca, Iporanga, and other nearby small towns. Between the decline of rice production (1850s) and the rise of foreign capital in the region (1930s), this group shrank as markets for their cash crops disappeared.

For the first two decades of the twentieth century, the São Paulo government provided minimal development assistance to the Ribeira Valley but invested heavily in the coffee plantations of the northeast. Müller (1980) described the valley as an island of poverty in a sea of prosperity based on coffee growing and, later, industry in the state of São Paulo. Beginning in the 1930s, the situation changed dramatically for the Ribeira Valley black communities, with increased state investment in the region. The São Paulo administration's decision to intervene in the Ribeira Valley was influenced by the Getúlio Vargas government that ruled Brazil for two terms (1930–45, 1951–54), with a populist authoritarian mandate to modernize the countryside through internal colonization projects. From the 1930s to the mid-1980s, the São Paulo government implemented a series of developmental and environmental policies in the Ribeira Valley that led to an inflow of foreign investment, an intrusion of land grabbers and land speculators, and the loss of Afro-descendants' critical usufruct land rights. Even though black communities resisted by appealing to Brazilian property law, state policies transformed and destroyed residents' livelihoods. The main developmental policies included (1) large-scale commercialization of bananas and tea (1930s–1940s) and palm heart (1950s); (2) infrastructure projects (1950s–1960s); and (3) modernization schemes under the military regime (1960s–1980s).

In the 1930s, the São Paulo government tried to develop the Ribeira Valley by restraining smallholder occupation of land and distributing allegedly vacant public lands to investors, especially foreign entrepreneurs and international companies. Japanese immigrants received more than 50,000 hectares in the Lower Ribeira Valley to develop tea and banana plantations, displacing the original occupants without land deeds. By the 1940s, the large-scale cultivation of bananas and tea on formerly vacant state-owned lands had spread through the Lower and Medium Ribeira valleys, strengthening the region's links with the market economy (Müller

1980). Many of the evicted squatters and families were employed as seasonal day workers on these enterprises (Queiroz 1983). In the mountainous Upper Ribeira, which was unsuitable for mechanized agriculture, the government provided public lands for cattle ranching and mineral exploration (Santos and Tatto 2008, 8; Thorkildsen 2014).

In response to the São Paulo government's expanding "enclosure campaign" (Shore 2018, 183–84), the Ribeira black communities initiated legal proceedings over the rightful ownership of land and resources – some of which remain pending today. Among the first individuals to contest the status of vacant state-owned land were the heirs of the founders of communities that held legal title to plots, including the descendants of fugitive slaves Gregório and Vicente Marinho of Pedro Cubas. For years, José Silvério da Costa led a protracted legal battle with the São Paulo State Land Commission to maintain ownership of the *Catas Altas* and *Pai Romão* properties that he inherited from Gregório Marinho (Shore 2018, 183–91). Although da Costa possessed the land deed to these properties, the municipal and state courts denied him territorial claims over the years based on technicalities, and he died before the case was settled.¹⁵ Da Costa and other heirs of Gregório Marinho, like the quilombolas of São Francisco do Paraguaçu in Bahia, lost their land claims to large landowners because lawyers manipulated the legal principle of adverse possession to the advantage of the propertied elite. Yet one of the key insights drawn from this case study, and other Afro-descendants who appeared in Ribeira Valley courts with titles that belonged to their ancestors,¹⁶ is that quilombo-descended farmers harbored historical genealogical memories and legal claims predating emancipation to challenge territorial dispossession decades prior to the enactment of Article 68 in the constitution (Shore 2018, 188).

¹⁵ Initially da Costa and his family lost their case at the municipal level because they lacked documentation to authenticate their identities and substantiate their descent from Gregório Marinho – for example, da Costa was married in the Catholic Church but had not recorded the marriage in a civil registry, which was not uncommon at that time. Years later, the Land Commission attorney argued that da Costa and his neighbors failed to demonstrate adverse possession and justification of their dominion (Shore 2018, 186–87). This was the same legal principle that landowners used to prevent the quilombolas of São Francisco do Paraguaçu in Bahia from claiming land in the 1930s.

¹⁶ For example, inhabitants in Ivaporunduva claimed to be heirs of Salvador Pupo, a former slave of Joana Maria, and in 1943 they presented Salvador Pupo's 1842 deed in court to substantiate their long-term dominion. Another family in Ivaporunduva provided the court with the 1872 deed that belonged to José Meira Marinho, a relative of the Marinho brothers (Shore 2018, 189).

More changes were on the horizon for the Ribeira Valley black communities with the large-scale commercialization of native palm heart in the 1950s. Households' agricultural production systems and economic activities were transformed as they prioritized the lucrative palm heart trade, resulting in labor shortages on the *capuovas* and, in some cases, the abandonment of distant fields in the forest. Indigenous and African-descent populations had long exploited the palm hearts of *Euterpe edulis* (locally known as *juçara* and *palmito-doce*) as a food source (Galetti and Fernandez 1998), and they recycled the entire palm tree to make rafters and slats for roofing. But within one decade (1950s–1960s), the widespread commercialization of palm heart led to an overharvest of natural stands.

In the mid-twentieth century, the Ribeira Valley became the most important region in the state of São Paulo supplying palm hearts, which were sold in national markets and exported abroad. Processing plants in Eldorado, Juquiá, Miracatu, Iguape, Jacupiranga, and Registro hired local workers, including women and men from surrounding black communities. Men worked not only in these factories but also as *palmeiteiros*, harvesting palm from the forest. Collecting palm was traditionally an individual activity, with usually one man cutting down the palm trees and transporting the loads of hearts home. *Palmeiteiros* then sold the palms to the middlemen, who transported them to factories for processing. This division of labor between the *palmeiteiros* and the middlemen did not change until the mid-1960s, when it became illegal for the palmito harvesters to gather palm hearts in the government-protected reserve areas, forcing them to cook and bottle the palm hearts in the flasks while in the forest or at home.

The increased marketing of palm heart altered the division of labor within family households and reduced male participation in traditional collective agricultural practices. Initially *palmeiteiros* were occasional workers who harvested palm in combination with their farms or with wage work during inactive periods on the banana or tea plantations. As the trade became profitable, more men became full-time palmito harvesters, and small producers neglected cultivated areas in Ivaoporunduva, Maria Rosa, Pedro Cubas, Pilões, São Pedro, and the surrounding localities. With men frequently absent to harvest palm heart in the forest, there was less available labor for the male tasks of felling trees and working in the *capuova* fields. Women, who spent labor-intensive days on domestic work (cooking, cleaning, and caring for children and elderly family members) and on the garden surrounding the home, now had to shoulder most farm duties on the distant *capuova* fields.

Moreover, the traditional collective labor practice of *mutirão* (also referred to as *puxirão*) – cooperative labor groups organized for specific nonremunerative tasks such as tilling fields, planting seedlings, and harvesting crops – disappeared in some communities. Families that abandoned their *roças* or farms became dependent on the vagaries of markets to purchase food that they had previously produced – a situation that more families faced in the decades ahead. Domestic disputes also increased as men spent their wages on alcohol to consume in the forest while harvesting palm heart (Queiroz 1983, 72).

By the late 1960s, the overharvest of palm hearts resulted in the depletion of most natural stands. Even though the government declared the extraction of palm heart illegal and a criminal offense in the preserved areas of the Atlantic Forest with the 1965 Forest Code, an illegal trade continues today. This native palm economy has not followed a path of domestication like that of a related species, the *açaí* palm (which is native to the Amazon region), despite its potential for sustainable management. Demand remains high, and the trade is profitable for those with few economic alternatives in the poorest region of the state.

Infrastructure development further facilitated the internal colonization of the Ribeira Valley in the 1960s and 1970s. The government authorized the construction of a new federal highway (BR 116, linking São Paulo to Curitiba, opened in 1961) and a state road (SP 165, linking Eldorado to Iporanga, opened in 1969). Under the military government, the Ribeira Valley was targeted as a high-priority area of investment, which resulted in economic development, as well as more land problems for black smallholders. In selected areas, the government built elementary schools and health centers – as part of a development strategy and as a military response to counteract the guerrilla movement in the region (Hecht 2010; Queiroz 1983). By the 1970s, families living there dispersed and moved their houses near to community centers to access public services. At the regional level, state authorities gave tax incentives and other benefits to large-scale farmers for cattle ranching and banana and tea plantations. The combination of new highways and tax incentives for entrepreneurs to modernize the region through private investment increased the value of the land and attracted buyers interested in real estate speculation from São Paulo and other major cities. These included construction companies, steelmakers, metallurgists, real estate companies, agro-industrial companies, and commercial companies that acquired properties (Müller 1980; Queiroz 1983). During this period, commercial liquor companies destroyed the local *cachaça* (sugarcane liquor) industry, which had met the regional demand

since the nineteenth century. Trucks transported lower-priced *cachaça* produced outside the area, using the improved roads and new highways.

The infrastructure projects, combined with public and private investment in the region, had mixed effects on black rural communities. The road systems, military installations, factories, and other construction projects provided off-farm wage employment for locals. Some community residents abandoned production on their own land in exchange for wage labor on commercial farms and plantations. Others refused to work on the large estates because the wages were low. In his conversation with a Brazilian anthropologist, an Ivaporunduva elder equated salaried labor on private farms to slave labor:

This is like slavery coming back again. The gentleman may not believe this, but formerly, the elders told us that slavery was obligatory. Today it is not. Slavery is coming back to us but not to everybody, that's for sure, but for those who hand themselves over. They work and earn forty *contos* per day. But what do you do with forty *contos*? It is not enough to buy a bottle of medicine. Things are coming to an end and turning into nothing. And the landowners with means get ahead, are very happy, with free labor [and] with free land.

(Queiroz 1983, 81)

For this community elder, “those who hand themselves over” to slavery were those who accepted below-living wage employment on estates. Still, his claim, which showed disdain for those who required a wage income for survival, reflected his class status. The elder was likely from a family whose members were economically secure enough to avoid off-farm wage labor. Yet small-town urbanization and off-farm employment boosted the demand for staple food crops, particularly maize, rice, and manioc, of which the latter was almost exclusively a commercial crop of black small farmers. From the 1960s to the 1980s, market-oriented black smallholders profited from these developments.

These new opportunities also attracted large farmers, ranchers, and other land grabbers, leading to accelerated land conflicts. Residents of Pedro Cubas, São Pedro, and Sapatu recalled that during the 1970s and 1980s, outsiders arrived in their communities, threatened physical violence, and expelled families. They still hold painful memories of land grabbers and their paid gunmen, who destroyed crop fields, killed small animals, and burned houses to force local families to leave the land (Futemma, Munari, and Adams 2015; Shore 2017a, 66). During this intense period of land struggles, many displaced Afro-descendant families moved to cities such as São Paulo and Curitiba, while others sent their adolescent children to work in urban areas. The individuals who resisted

land grabbers and confronted police were often arrested, and some eventually fled their homes and stayed away for decades.

The São Paulo government's development programs based on commercial agriculture, mining, and cattle ranching negatively affected black communities. Yet it was state conservation initiatives purported to protect the Atlantic Forest that had the most profound impact and which continue to threaten black livelihoods today. State-led conservationism prohibited black smallholders from practicing their traditional shifting cultivation system, reduced farming areas, and changed labor practices. Environmental protection, however, also provided the Brazilian government with huge swaths of black communities' territories for state parks and ecotourism, as well as access to minerals, timber, caves, and other valuable resources.

Beginning in the 1950s, the Brazilian government appropriated territory of several black communities (Bombas, Maria Rosa, Pilões, Sapatu, Nhunguara, and André Lopes) to create protected areas (PAs). The first PAs – the Upper Ribeira Valley Touristic State Park (35,712 ha, 1958) and the Jacupiranga State Park (PEJ, 150,000 ha, 1969) – were ostensibly created to protect the limestone caves from mining, the Atlantic Forest from logging, and fauna and flora from extinction (Adams, Munari, Van Vliet et al. 2013, 123; Silveira 2001; Thorkildsen 2014). Scores of Afro-descendant farmers and fishers lost areas for cultivation and residence. Families from André Lopes and Nhunguara were evicted and forced to move to the edge of the PEJ, which squatters already occupied, increasing tension among the groups. Moreover, the government-imposed restrictions on agricultural activities in the PAs made palm heart extraction illegal, thereby depriving family households of their main or secondary economic activities (Queiroz 1983).

In the 1980s, three new state parks were created in the region: Carlos Botelho State Park (37,644 ha, 1982), Serra do Mar Environmental Protection Area (569,450 ha, 1984), and Intervales State Park (49,000 ha, 1995). These parks also overlapped with several black communities (André Lopes, São Pedro, Maria Rosa, Galvão, Pilões, Pedro Cubas, Nhunguara, and Ivaporunduva), jeopardizing their farming activities and access to forest resources. In order to enforce state conservationism, São Paulo forest rangers closely monitored shifting cultivation, hunting, and palm heart extraction in these parks, which often led to violent confrontations with long-time residents. Environmental surveillance further compelled many Afro-descendant farmers to abandon *capuovas* in

the distant areas, which reduced the size of household farms from 2 to 0.5 hectares and reduced the fallow period between harvests from approximately ten to twenty-five years to zero to six years (Adams, Munari, Van Vliet et al. 2013, 127; Shore 2018, 67).

Although the Ribeira Valley black communities had lived in the Atlantic Forest for centuries, environmental policy planners ignored the relationship between the inhabitants' land use management systems and preservation of the forest. The government's indifference to the interests and rights of these communities reflected a broad trend whereby the "peasant question," as an issue of access to land and citizenship, had lost resonance in Latin American politics as tropical environmental movements gained in strength (Hecht 2010; Thorkildsen 2014). The authorities agreed with conservationists that the Afro-descent communities and their practices were the greatest threat to the Atlantic Forest biomes, so they preferred "empty" landscapes – devoid of human occupation and with restricted access to resources.

The dominant environmental discourses dictated a new "rurality" (Hecht 2010) that favored the creation of large parks, even if it meant large-scale displacement of families and the destruction of their livelihoods. And yet, the so-called empty spaces were not entirely devoid of human occupation. The state of São Paulo was complicit in green-grabbing of land and resources for its own revenue-generating exploitation of parks and ecotourism enterprises. As the military dictatorship prepared to cede power to a democratic civilian government in the mid-1980s, the Ribeira Valley communities began to mobilize around land and environmental issues, supported by new social movements, NGOs, and the Catholic Church through the Pastoral Land Commission (CPT). Meanwhile, across Brazil politicized rural Afro-descendants joined urban black activists in the pre-constitutional discussions aimed at creating provisions to redress racial inequality and protect black land rights.