





Among the hinterlands of Porto da Folha/Sergipe, in the 17th - 19th centuries

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Since the 19th century, the Brazilian hinterland, the sertão, have been the subject of intense discussions in Brazilian sociographic thought, characterized as a “place of reproduction of a specific order” (Vidal; Souza, 2015, p. 56). Since then, discussions surrounding the hinterlands, whether as a spatial reference or sociocultural category, have sparked interest among scholars in Geography, History, Anthropology, Sociology, and other fields of knowledge (Neves, 2003). Apart from these theoretical analyses, the territory is recurrently described in travel itineraries, outlined in novels, songs, cinematographic works, and various artistic expressions, and cultural manifestations.

During the early years of the territorial formation of Portuguese America, the term ‘sertão’ was used to designate the frontier of colonization, the space where the *bandeirantes* carried out their activities, a place where ore was sought, and wild indigenous were fought, or simply the space opposite the coastline (Neves, 2003). Still in the 16th century, in addition to this notion of a space distant from the coastline, yet to be absorbed by Portuguese colonization, throughout the colonizing process, a “dichotomy between the space considered civilized and that considered wild” developed (Silva, 1997, p. 44). According to the colonizers, this inhospitable, void, lawless, “isolated, dangerous, dominated by wilderness, and inhabited by barbarians” (Amado, 1995, p. 149), urged to be dominated and civilized. It is observed that the notion of this socially constructed space intertwined two characteristics: spatial (interior) and social (desert and distant from civilization).

Throughout the colonial era, this notion of spatial production of the hinterlands continued deeply rooted in the social thought of metropolitan authorities and other inhabitants of Portuguese America. This association with the requirements of the colonization policy and the natural and geographical configurations of this space resulted in the development of a socially organized economy based on extensive livestock farming, with cattle ranches and their surroundings being the main stages of the experiences of men and women, reproducing a “private and family order, with a system of authoritarian and patrimonial domination system, whose basic instrument of exercising power is widespread violence” (Menezes, 2006, p. 170).

In this sense, we analyze the formation of the space of the Sertão do São Francisco in the State of Sergipe between the 17th and 19th centuries, considering the historical,

natural, and geographical conditions related to the actions of colonizers, indigenous peoples, and enslaved Africans. Thus, as claimed by Candice Vidal and Souza, we produced “the description of the sertão-geography inseparable from that of the sertão-society” (Vidal; Souza, 2015, p. 57).

The Formation of the Sertão of the Agrarian North

The territorial formation of Brazil during the 1st century of colonization was restricted to the occupation of the coastal strip. At that time, metropolitan actions were aimed at swiftly appropriating precious metals and highly valuable tropical products extracted from the colony to serve the process of primitive capital accumulation.

The reluctance of the Portuguese metropolis to encourage colonizing expeditions into the interior of Portuguese America limited the settlement of the new land. Even after the first century of the conquest of American lands, signs of colonial interventions were limited to the occupation of a narrow strip of land located on the coast, where sugarcane was grown, and cattle were raised to meet the needs of the sugarcane mills, as well as various food crops. By this time, the hinterlands had become the territory of indigenous peoples and enslaved individuals who had escaped the reach of Portuguese colonization.

To convert this empty and inhospitable space into a socio-economic territory attractive to settlers who were willing to venture into the unknown wilderness, the Portuguese Crown employed the strategy previously used on the coast: granting “vast stretches of recently conquered or yet-to-be-conquered lands, mainly as remuneration for military service rendered against the indigenous populations, granted with uncertain boundaries and extent” (Silva, 1997, p. 119). By around 1552, Tomé de Sousa, the first Governor-General of Brazil, granted his protégé, Garcia D’Ávila (the potentate of Casa da Torre, in Tatuapara), an immense expanse of land to raise his cattle. These lands began in the vicinity of what was then the city of Salvador, extended into the hinterlands of Bahia, crossed the São Francisco River, and reached the captaincy of Piauí (Abreu, 2000). Without the real capacity to colonize all this vastness of land, Garcia d’Ávila began leasing smallholdings with dimensions of one league to individuals from the region committed to populating these lands, making them productive, and willing to fight against indigenous resistance.

Meanwhile, the Portuguese Crown took advantage of the extensive cattle drives that, raised freely, followed the courses of rivers and thus ventured into the hinterlands,

to encourage the expansion of extensive cattle ranching in these territories. This was because:

Cattle did not require proximity to the beach [...]; they did well in regions unsuitable for sugarcane cultivation, either due to the unproductive soil or the poor forests without which the sugarcane mills could not operate; they required a small, non-specialized workforce, which was highly valuable in a sparsely populated country; they almost abolished capital, both fixed and circulating, multiplying without interruption; they provided a constant source of food, superior to seafood, fish, and other land and water animals used in the navy. Everything was paid for only in salt; the numerous clay pits in the hinterlands supplied sufficient salt (Abreu, 2000, p. 151).

Livestock farming was the solution to the problem of populating the hinterlands, as it not only ensured tenure of the colony's interior lands but also promoted: the conquest of new territories, such as Sergipe, and the acquisition of indigenous laborers converted into prisoners of war, the expansion of agricultural frontiers westward, which made a better supply of foodstuffs possible, and the opening of other routes along rivers.

In the early 17th century, thanks to the efforts of major cattle ranchers Garcia D'Ávila and Antônio Guedes de Brito (a pioneer in the Bahia hinterlands), the prosperity of cattle ranching in the northern hinterlands of the colony was evident, especially along the São Francisco River. This extensive livestock farming began to supply the two economic centers of Portuguese America—Bahia and Pernambuco—with food, leather, and driving force for sugarcane mills and emergent urban centers. Notably, it was in this scenario that the colonization of the Sergipe territory—penetrating the hinterlands and reaching the São Francisco River—proved fundamental to metropolitan interests, as it connected these two economic centers by land, and its territory was gradually occupied by cattle, as noted by Sergeant-Major Diogo Campos Moreno, who stated that “from the Itapicuru and Vasa-Barris inlets to the tip of the São Francisco River, it is all cattle ranches and plantations” (Moreno, 1612, p. 143).

However, in the last decades of the 16th century, the coexistence of freely raised cattle in the prime agricultural areas of the northern colony, alongside the area reserved for sugar cane plantation, began to elicit complaints from sugar cane plantation owners, as the animals would constantly break fences, invade planting areas and destroy crops. Because of these disputes, the sugar cane plantation owners began to demand that metropolitan authorities permanently removed the herds to the hinterlands, away from the agricultural areas. As a result, cattle ranchers were pushed away from the vicinity of sugar cane-growing regions.

Removed from the best lands, those located in the coastal areas, the cattle ranching activity effectively led to the occupation of the interior of the colony. The pioneers of the hinterlands faced several adversities, including low and irregular rainfall (Prado Júnior, 1986), and organized resistance from indigenous peoples and former enslaved Africans who had escaped into the Quilombo communities. However, these same natural conditions, apparently less attractive than those on the coast, also offered some advantages: the vegetation, predominantly composed of scattered cacti on the ground, reduced the need for exhaustive labor to penetrate this territory; the semi-arid climate hindered the spread of verminosis and epizootic diseases; the presence of saline outcrops served as salt licks for the cattle; the existence of natural pastures provided adequate food for the cattle; there were humid areas along the riverbanks and in the mountains where animals could be taken during the harsh dry periods (Andrade, 2002).

In the early 17th century, numerous sesmarias (a specific sort of land grant) located in the interior regions of the colony had already been granted with the purpose of establishing cattle ranches. This rapid proliferation of cattle ranches in the hinterlands can be explained by the growing consumer market in urban centers and sugar cane areas, which demanded increasingly more meat, leather, and animals for labor. Additionally, there was relative ease in setting up a ranch: “a house was built, usually covered with straw—the leaves of the abundant carnauba palm—then rough cattle pens were constructed, and cattle (a few hundred head) were introduced” (Prado Júnior, 1986, p. 40).

These endeavors were managed by the vaqueiro (cattle herder), who was assisted by 10 or 12 men¹ recruited from among indigenous peoples, mestizos, escaped enslaved individuals, troublemakers, and fugitives from justice.² The activities carried out in livestock farming demanded a great deal of physical availability from the vaqueiro. After setting up the ranch, this small workforce was responsible for acclimating the animals to the new pasture, “taming and branding the calves, treating them from worm infestations, burning the fields alternately at the appropriate season, eliminating jaguars, snakes, and bats, knowing the spots chosen by the cattle to ruminate [...] digging wells and watering holes” (Abreu, 2000, p. 153). At the beginning of their work, these workers faced hardship

¹ According to Silva (2000), the vaqueiro is a prestigious free man with a unique position on the farm or cattle ranch and should not be confused with his assistants, the camaradas (helpers), cabras (henchmen), or fábricas (farmhands), who occupied a subordinate position and did not deal directly with the owner.

² The incentive for the displacement of poor and stray people from the sugar cane urban centers to the hinterland, a useful exile, was a strategy adopted to reduce the high rates of assaults, begging and disorder that occurred in these urban centers, as these undesirables could not fit into the current economic system. Initially, they were recruited to fight against the indigenous people and later received small plots of land and job offers on cattle ranches (Silva, 2010).

and food shortage, as climatic and soil conditions limited the possibilities of growing foodstuffs. Thus, these pioneers relied only on cattle byproducts and the few fruits found in the region.

For these colonists, who lacked material resources and were socially marginalized, livestock farming became more attractive than the activities offered in the sugar cane economy (Furtado, 2000). This is because after four or five years of service, they would start to receive payment for the natural growth of the herd, with “one calf out of every four belonging to them” (Abreu, 2000, p. 154). Therefore, at the end of a certain period, they would already have their own herd that could be accommodated on owned or leased land from large landowners of the *sesmarias* in the hinterlands. These landowners usually lived on the coast, and the only form of contact they had with these properties was to receive the income (Prado Júnior, 2000).

Given the set of circumstances: the availability of land away from the coastal region of the colony, the low investment required for setting up cattle ranches, the method of livestock farming, the ease of employing labor, and the domestic market demand for driving force and cattle byproducts, which gradually grew alongside the sugar cane economy, pastoral activity solidified and became a determining factor in shaping the colonial hinterlands.

By the end of the 18th century, the natural landscape of the northern colonial hinterlands had been transformed into vast pastures. This was because the *sesmarias* located there, in addition to being larger and paying lower fees compared to those on the coast, were often divided into several cattle pens or designated for leasing (Silva, 2002).

The large cattle ranches or smallholdings (the usual term for leased lands in the hinterlands) were not the only forms of land occupation. The existence of unoccupied or simply abandoned lands favored the appropriation by a sort of tenure in common, known as ‘*terras em heréus*’ (lands in hereus), where poor free men who migrated from the coast to the hinterlands, as well as freed black individuals or indigenous people, for the most part, who were connected to the estates and prevented from building their small houses on the owners’ lands, began to let their animals roam freely, and took up residence. Another form of communal appropriation in the hinterlands was the ‘*terras indivisas*’ (undivided lands), where poor peasants and wealthy landowners used these lands to let their cattle roam freely, with no fences or any other boundaries. According to Silva (2002, p. 135), there were four forms of land tenure and use in areas where livestock farming predominated in the hinterlands:

- a) large estates, originally from the sesmarias, with direct exploitation led by the vaqueiros, and slave labor;
- b) smallholdings and situations, lands leased via contract, managed by a leaseholder, and slave labor;
- c) undivided or communal lands, collectively owned—which were not remaining lands that had not been granted via the sesmarias, nor were they property of the Crown—directly exploited, characterized by small-scale slave or family production, and dedicated to small-scale cattle ranching; and
- d) areas for collective use, such as communal resting areas and pastures, used by large cattle ranchers and rural communities.

The dispute over natural resources helped shape the occupation of the hinterlands, as the scarcity of these resources, especially water and pastures, drove demands for larger plots of land that took these elements into account. Thus, in the early land grants (sesmarias), located in the interior of Portuguese America, to attest to the potential of the lands for livestock farming and to attract colonizers, in addition to the vast extensions, mentions were made to the existence of fields abundant in cacti, which could serve as reserve pastures during long droughts, as well as to the existence of sources of water, rivers, perennial lagoons, wells, watering holes, springs, or salt licks. Indeed, the scarcity of natural resources demanded the expansion of the dimensions occupied by extensive cattle ranching, as during severe droughts, herds were driven for several leagues in search of pasture and some water source.

The combination of the Portuguese encouragement of large estates with the dependence on natural resources contributed to an irregular population distribution in the colonial northern hinterlands. The primary population centers were the estates, which, due to cattle ranching, employed approximately 15 workers, including vaqueiros, breeders, herders, cattle drivers, guides, slaves, and those responsible for taking the cattle to the fairs. The distance between one estate and another also made it difficult to form more integrated population clusters, with riverbanks, watering holes, and springs being the places with higher concentrations, giving rise to some urban centers. Around the *invernadas* (fattening farms)³ and fairs, usually located in the *agreste* (a transition zone

³ The long road travelled by the cattle, between the country estates and the marketing centers (fairs), favored their exhaustion and consequently a relative weight loss, so it was essential to recover them. Thus, in the

between the coastal forest and the semiarid sertão), population centers also emerged, originated from interactions with the inhabitants of the hinterlands. According to Silva (2002, p. 146), “[...] ecological constraints early on determined the founding characteristics of the hinterland landscape. In a way, the vast hinterland domains resembled deserts dotted with oases of high population concentration, whether human or not”.

The prosperity of cattle ranching led to the effective occupation of the hinterlands of Portuguese America, especially along the banks of the São Francisco River. It transformed these territories, once the domain of resistance from indigenous peoples and escaped enslaved individuals, into territories integrated into the metropolitan mercantile logic. In addition to supplying live cattle to coastal cities, especially Salvador and Recife, and to the interior of Maranhão and Minas Gerais, cattle ranching provided draft animals for coastal sugar mills, and leather both to wrap the tobacco rolls exported and as an exporting good for use in making footwear. As Capistrano de Abreu pointed out, cattle-derived products, especially leather, were present in the daily lives of the hinterlands inhabitants, in doors, beds, huts, waterskins, saddlebags for the food, armor for riding through thickets, and many other items that could be made from tanned leather, composing the material repertoire of that leather era.

Livestock farming not only shaped the occupation of space and the hinterland economy but also defined the social relations between the cattle barons⁴ and the other inhabitants of this region, which unveiled throughout the formation of this territory. The prominence of the properties obtained via the sesmarias, either due to their size or their possession of natural resources, provided the sesmeiros (the owners of sesmarial properties) with great power over the other occupants of the hinterlands. They were able to impose a regime of dependence, submission, and tyranny, not only on the poor and destitute farm workers but also on all the others. Thus, owners of vast land holdings wielded more unrestricted power than the sugar cane plantation owners wield and began to exert violence in all spheres of their lives. According to Stuart Schwartz (2011, p. 209), “the threat of violence, kinship ties, and the deference owed to people of higher social

vicinity of the fairs, fattening farms were established, which were locations with planted pastures where the cattle would remain for a variable period until they regained their weight and could be sold at a price that justified the journey and the investment (Silva, 2002).

⁴ Term used by Boxer (1969) to designate the powerful lords of the hinterlands who acted with truculence in this region to impose their will, even in defiance of the law.

standing allowed these hinterland powerbrokers to favor allies, destroy opponents, and escape any legal punishment”.

Being further away from the centers of metropolitan government and favored by the slow spread of administrative and judicial institutions into these regions, they were less repressed by institutions and therefore more certain of impunity. The large cattle ranchers were not the only ones to disregard the law. Poor free men, farmhands, escaped enslaved individuals, and tramps took advantage of this atmosphere of lawlessness and committed all sorts of crimes in this region where they lived freely. Other troublemakers chose the hinterlands to evade the law, so this territory became synonymous with hiding from justice according to some authorities.

Thus, the formation of the ‘Leather Civilization’, as Capistrano de Abreu described it, unfolded accordingly. The gradual occupation of the hinterlands served the mercantilist interests of the metropolis and, immediately, the two economic centers of the colony: Salvador and Recife. Additionally, it ensured the conquest of this territory and the submission of resistant indigenous peoples and escaped enslaved individuals. The paths carved out by cattle herds, especially along the banks of the São Francisco River, were essential for the conquest of the interior of the territory of Sergipe. The cattle pens set in the hinterlands of Sergipe shaped the formation of its land occupation.

The formation of the land occupation of Porto da Folha

The conquest of the territory of Sergipe in 1590 was an offshoot of the colonization of Bahia, resulting from an alliance between the metropolitan government and the cattle baron Garcia d’Ávila, who was interested in expanding his numerous cattle herds to the lands between the Real and São Francisco Rivers. Therefore, Sergipe was incorporated into the dictates of the metropolitan mercantilist policy, with the coastal strip (right after the victory of Cristóvão de Barros’ troops) generously distributed in the form of sesmarias (land grants) and divided amongst the combatants and other prosperous settlers living in Bahia. These lands were intended for cultivating food crops, sugar cane, and livestock farming, and the interior was transformed into vast pastures.

In the initial years after the conquest, the metropolitan colonization efforts in the sertão of the Sergipe territory, similar to those in other northern captaincies of Portuguese America, were restricted to sesmarial land grants. In his analysis of the settlements in the interior of colonial Brazil, Capistrano de Abreu, in his work *Caminhos antigos e*

povoamentos do Brasil (1930), discussed the peculiarities of the conquest of the northern hinterlands of the colony and the implications of the physical environment, especially the caatinga (a type of semi-arid tropical vegetation). His analysis aligns with the notion proposed by Teodoro Sampaio: “The conquest appears to happen in a flanking movement, proceeding along the beaches. Sergipe is reached to then ascend the São Francisco River, where there are sesmarias after sesmarias, farm after farm, before later attempting to return to the central radiating point by the shortest path” (Abreu, 1930, p. 78).

Therefore, the process of land allotment and distribution in the hinterlands of Sergipe occurred almost simultaneously with the initial sesmarial grants along the coastal strip. This was due to the main reason of the enterprise led by the landowner Garcia D’Ávila: to transform the vacant lands into pastures. By 1606, Portuguese colonization had reached the banks of the São Francisco River on the Sergipe side through the donation of ten leagues of land to Tomé da Rocha Malheiros, extending from the hill of Tabanga to that of Jaseoba (Freire, 1995). Following the guidelines of colonial policy, after the granting of this sesmaria, other stretches of land located near the São Francisco River were distributed amongst settlers who participated in the expedition led by Cristóvão de Barros and those from the Captaincy of Bahia who were eager to expand their productive activities. Still in the early decades of the 17th century, besides these metropolitan efforts for the occupation of the sertão via sesmarial land grants, adventurers were drawn to the hinterlands by the fanciful reports of the existence of silver and saltpeter mines (Nunes, 1996).

As in other parts of Portuguese America, the pace of Portuguese colonization in the Sergipe territory was temporarily interrupted due to the Dutch Invasions. However, this episode once again attested to the importance of the Sergipe territory for the consolidation of the projects of the Portuguese Crown. During the Dutch Invasions, the lands of the Sergipe hinterlands began to be sporadically visited by Portuguese and Dutch belligerents who intended to subtract the necessary cattle for food and riding. During this period, the lands of the Sergipe hinterlands also served as a refuge for the cattle of some wealthy landowners from Salvador who sought to safeguard their wealth amid this intense conflict. Additionally, indigenous people and escaped enslaved individuals took advantage of this moment in which the coercive and vigilant system predominant in colonial production units was weakened and fled to the hinterlands, where they established mocambo communities.

After the expulsion of the Dutch from the sugar-producing region in the north

(1645), the colonizing efforts in the Sergipe hinterlands were resumed. The goal was (via the sesmarial land grants) to occupy the empty spaces that had facilitated the Dutch invasion and intensify the fight against the mocambo communities, i.e., the settlements of indigenous peoples and escaped enslaved individuals. Guided by the longstanding Portuguese practice of rewarding war veterans with land grants, the metropolitan administration distributed the lands of the Sergipe hinterlands, which had not been donated to members of the Casa da Torre, for settlers to establish their herds alongside the veterans who had fought against the invaders and those responsible for hunting down indigenous people. Thus, in 1653, Manoel Velho de Miranda, an aide, obtained a land grant as payment for his good service to the Crown. His sesmaria “extended from where the sesmaria of Antônio Cardoso de Barros ended (from Japarutuba to the São Francisco River) and went up the river to Ilha do Ouro” (Freire, 1995, p. 38).

Also as a reward for his services to the Portuguese Crown during the expulsion of the Dutch from the region around the mouth of the São Francisco River, the fieldmaster Pedro Gomes received approximately 30 leagues of land as a morgado (entailed lands) to establish his cattle along the São Francisco River, originating the impressive entailed estate of Porto da Folha. The success of the troops of Pedro Gomes against the Dutch forces was possibly due to his ability to enlist the Oramurus indigenous people in the region to assist him in combat. Therefore, in recognition of their valuable contribution, upon receiving his lands, Pedro Gomes allowed these indigenous people to settle on this property, sustain themselves from it, and build a church.

In this new granting of the hinterland lands, the descendants of the Casa da Torre were given larger territorial extensions. Thus, in 1655, Father Antônio Pereira, an uncle of Captain Garcia d’Ávila, received an immense land grant⁵ on the outskirts of the São Francisco River from Captain-Major João Ribeiro Vila França. This land was intended

⁵ “From the Bar of the Salitre River, where it meets the São Francisco River, which the Petitioners considers as the pivot point of this Sesmaria, descending always along the aforementioned São Francisco River until it meets the land given to him by the Captain-Major Balthazar de Queirós, in which the Supplicant has settled. Similarly, from the same Bar of the Salitre River, 20 leagues of land along the same São Francisco River upwards in a straight line, except for tips, coves, and islands above and below. Additionally, the Petitioner requests that, from the aforementioned São Francisco River towards the south, the width of this land shall be as far as the jurisdiction of this Captaincy extends, until it meets that of Bahia in an east-west direction, dividing one from the other from the source of the Real River to the hinterlands with as much length above and below as it has by the São Francisco River. This shall also include as part of this land, the source of the Itapecuru River, the Mountain Chains of Tigipilha and Jacobina, and all other areas within this grant. Considering that the majority of this land consists of dry caatinga without water or pasture, and it is only possible to settle on a land that has pastures and waters that allow for cattle ranching, the Petitioner requests this land along with any adjoining areas and annexes found within this grant” (Register of a Sesmaria Letter - Historical Documents, 1930, p. 444-445).

for cattle ranching. According to the sesmarial landowner, settling on these lands would be very costly because it was inhabited only by indigenous people of various nations and languages who had never had any contact with Europeans. However, despite these challenges, in the following year, Father Antônio, along with other members of the Ávila family (including Captain Garcia d'Ávila, Francisco Dias d'Ávila, Catharina Fogaça, and Bernardo Pereira), each received 10 leagues of continuous land adjacent to the grant previously given to⁶ Father Antônio Pereira to expand their herds.⁷

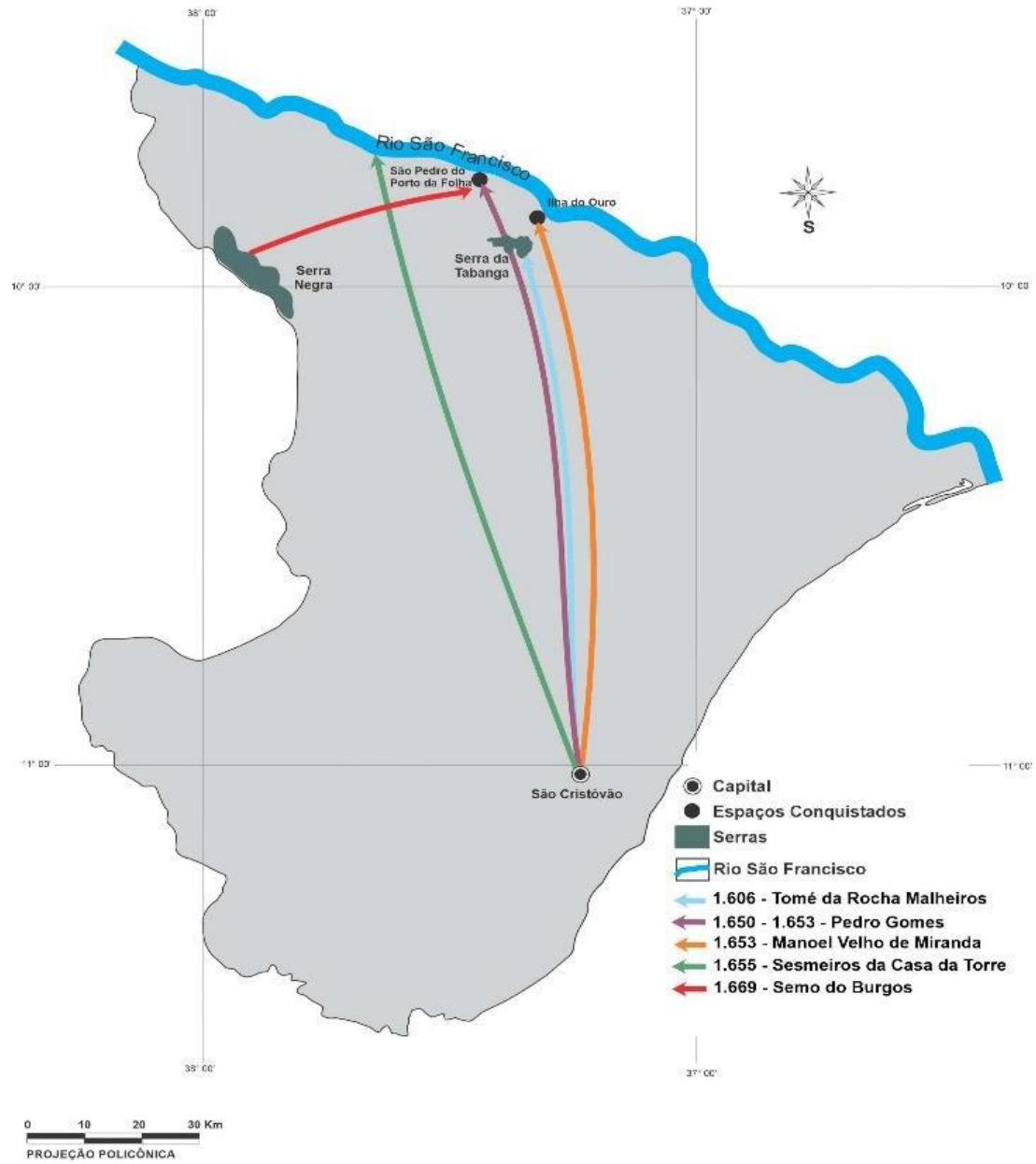
Still in the second half of the 17th century, the colonial policy in the Sergipe hinterlands advanced to Ilha do Ouro, crossed the Serra Negra, and followed along the Tabanga, reaching the source of the Sergipe River (near Japaratuba). In 1660, Captain Francisco Rabelo de Macedo and Antônio Gomes Leitão received 10 leagues of land that extended from the Tabanga to the headwaters of the Japaratuba (Freire, 1995). In 1665, Pedro d'Abreu de Lima, who was already living in the lands of his father-in-law, Antônio Cardoso de Barros, received six leagues of land near Tabanga to graze his cattle and cultivate some crops for the sustenance of the cattle pen.⁸

⁶ REGISTER OF ANOTHER SESMARIA for Father Antônio Pereira and others - HISTORICAL DOCUMENTS, 1930, p. 450-456.

⁷ The set of sesmarial land grants allocated to the Ávila family extended through the western hinterlands of São Francisco until it reached the lands of the Porto da Folha entailed estate (Nunes, 1996).

⁸ Permit of 20 March 1665, granting Pedro d'Abreu de Lima six leagues of land on the São Francisco River at Tabanga (Historical Documents, 1932, p. 67-71).

Map – Occupation of the Sertão of the São Francisco in Sergipe (17th century)



Software de Cartomática: PHICARTO
 Elaboração: José Hunaldo Lima
 Fonte: ALMEIDA, 1868, NUNES, 1996.
 Organização: Sheila Farias Silva.

In 1669, the metropolitan authorities established a new front of actions to promote the effective occupation of the Sergipe hinterlands. One of these actions was the granting of 30 leagues of land to potentates residing in Portuguese America who possessed large herds.⁹ After the donation of this sesmaria, the goal was to reinforce the penetration towards the interior of the captaincy, starting from areas surrounding the Vaza-Barris River, passing through the sources of the Sergipe River in the Serra Negra, and reaching the vicinity of the São Francisco River, where it met the sesmaria of Pedro Gomes in Porto da Folha. Among these sesmarial owners was Hieronimo da Costa Taborda, who had established a smallholding on Ilha do Ouro since 1662. However, around 1682, he left the place, citing that black people gathered in mocambo communities had killed the cattle and destroyed the plantations. According to Felisbelo Freire (1977), in 1698, new expeditions were conducted in the region, and the Roumiri indigenous people destroyed the mocambo community, continuing the colonization project. Gradually, these lands were incorporated into the domains of Pedro Gomes' heirs.

The extensive division of the territory of the hinterlands of the São Franciscano in Sergipe was carried out not only to promote land occupation but also primarily to facilitate the formation of rural dynasties. Several contiguous sesmarias were granted to members of the same family, forming an extensive latifundium. Therefore, the Ávila Pereira, Burgos, and Teixeira Rocha families established a vast and prosperous family latifundium in the Sergipe hinterlands, just as imposing as the morgado of the Castelo Branco family (heirs of Pedro Gomes).

Thus, during the 17th century, the metropolitan policy of settlement and exploitation of the São Francisco hinterlands of Sergipe thrived, especially after the expulsion of the Dutch from Portuguese America, as a strategy to prevent further foreign invasions, dismantle the mocambo communities, capture indigenous and black people to use them for labor on the estates, and strengthen alliances between the family dynasties and the metropolis. During this time, with the goal of fully incorporating the lands of Sergipe into the Portuguese empire, colonial authorities adopted the tactic of granting sesmarias from two fronts: a) from the coast inland, and b) from the São Francisco River towards the coast. Thus, the sesmarial land grants extended from several points along the São Francisco River, reaching the Ilha do Ouro, crossing the Serra Negra, heading

⁹ This sesmaria grant was given to the magistrate Cristóvão de Burgos, Pedro Garcia Pimentel, Captain Manuel do Couto Dessa, Hieronimo da Costa Taborda, and Antônio Rodrigues (Sesmaria Letter for 30 leagues - 29 November 1669 - Freire, 1977, p. 413-414).

towards Tabanga, and reaching the Japaratuba River and the source of the Sergipe River.

It would be misleading to claim that the conquest and colonization of the hinterlands territory of Sergipe, especially the areas along the São Francisco River, occurred in an orderly and peaceful manner. The resistance of indigenous people and the black inhabitants of the Mocambos (the communities created by the escaped enslaved people) were not the only conflicts that challenged the colonial order.¹⁰ The distribution and occupation of the land grants, as the boundaries between them, were among the main reasons for quarrels among the colonizers. Despite the division of the hinterland territory, some sesmarial lands were not always occupied within a reasonable timeframe, which opened up the possibility of them being redistributed to other interested parties. Being a landowner was the dream of countless inhabitants of Portuguese America, and given the desirability of the lands along the banks of the São Francisco River, and these factors led to legal battles over land tenure among colonizers in the first century of the hinterlands conquest.

One such conflict, narrated by Felisbello Freire (1995, p. 65-66), involved the fieldmaster João de Araújo on one side and Gaspar da Cruz Porto Carreiro, Pedro de Figueiredo and Domingos da Cruz Porto Carreiro on the other. This dispute concerned the six leagues of land located in the southern part of the São Francisco River, starting at the tip of the Tabanga in Porto da Folha. In the lawsuit filed with the metropolitan authorities in Bahia (1646), the plaintiff, fieldmaster João de Araújo, argued that the disputed sesmaria belonged to him. However, he was not enjoying the property because upon returning from his military duties in the fight against the Dutch, the lands were being occupied by the defendants. He further claimed that they were illegally given to Gaspar da Cruz Porto Carreiro, at the time when the man's father was Captain-Major of Sergipe. Despite this litigation, the lands were only effectively occupied by Tomás Bernardes, who established a cattle ranch and maintained friendly relations with the local indigenous people.

¹⁰ After the resumption of colonization in this region, especially between the 17th and 18th centuries, intense clashes were recorded between the projects of the Capuchin missionaries and the landowners. The former advocated for the settlement of indigenous people around the missions for the purpose of catechism, while the latter resorted to violence to enslave the natives. However, both seemingly antagonistic projects diverged in form but converged towards one end: using the indigenous people for labor. The efforts made to achieve the goal had as their most emblematic consequence the enslavement of the indigenous people, who were converted into *vaqueiros*, herdsmen, or *cabras do sertão* (a term for people from the hinterlands), working on cattle ranches. On the other hand, the organization of the Mission of São Pedro de Porto da Folha can be seen as a mark of the passage of the Capuchins; the French remained there until 1709, being replaced by the Italians, who were supported by Casa da Torre (Nunes, 1996).

While the policy of land allotment and distribution in the end of the 18th century was well established, the effective colonization of many sesmarial lands was not carried out by several landowners, leaving numerous areas uninhabited. As noted by the chronicler Luís dos Santos Vilhena (1969, p. 573), who lived in Bahia, in 1802:

Despite the many cattle ranches in the hinterlands of this Captaincy, they are found to be quite sparsely populated in many parts, with many areas suitable for farming being left to be inhabited only by wild animals. This happens because many sesmarias have been given to those who cannot or do not want to settle in them when, from a well-thought-out policy perspective, they should have been returned to those who would do so.

Just like in other inland regions of northern Portuguese America, in the São Francisco hinterlands in Sergipe, some landowners did not take possession of their properties. Among the main factors contributing to this lack of settlement were: a) The possession of other properties in the coastal zone; b) Climatic conditions, as this region was subject to frequent droughts, which led to a shortage of adaptable food crops, making the land primarily suitable for pastures; c) High financial risks, as setting up a cattle ranch required significant financial investment; d) Fears about the loss of life, as according to some Sesmaria Letters, this region was occupied by fierce indigenous peoples and mocambo communities set by escaped enslaved black people. These concerns were evident among the members of the Casa da Torre when they received the 50 leagues of land between the Salitre River and the entailed estate of Porto da Folha, as can be observed in the sesmaria letter issued in 1657:

Captain Garcia de Ávila, Father Antônio Pereira, Caterina Fogaça, Francisco Dias de Ávila, and Bernardo Pereira state that along the São Francisco River, above the hinterlands of the southern band, there are lands that have never been occupied by white people. This region is inhabited only by indigenous people from different nations who speak various languages who had never traded with white people. Due to this, no one has dared to discover and populate this area, as a large amount of financial resources would be needed to required to establish friendly relations and trade with the so-called gentile population as the Petitioners have done with other indigenous villages further down set in the lands given to them from sesmarial land grants by the Captain-Majors predecessors of your Grace. They made peace with those peoples at great risk to their lives, and used up a lot of financial resources, and cattle that was given to said indigenous peoples to raise, to have them allow the Petitioners to settle in said lands, as in fact they soon did with many cattle pens [...] they do a great service in settling in a land so far away and inhabited by savages (Historical Documents, 1930, p. 451-451).

This letter also informs us about a practice by some landowners: granting cattle to the indigenous people in exchange for the effective occupation of the lands. In this way,

settlers established friendly relations with the indigenous population, and the indigenous people, by taking care of animals, initiated a settlement in said lands. Such a practice was not limited to indigenous people, as many poor free men were attracted to this region with promises of receiving cattle and land for farming, securing their livelihoods. The failure of some landowners to occupy these lands effectively also favored the proliferation of squatters, who, upon settling in these lands, began to encroach upon vacant lands, becoming, as Felte Bezerra (1952, p. 66) described them, ‘the true pioneers and settlers’.

Despite the prosperity of Portuguese colonization in the territory of Sergipe, at the end of the 18th century, evidenced by the development of the sugar, cotton, and tobacco economies, linked to the pace of the export market, the pace of settlement in the hinterlands territory of the São Francisco River remained discontinuous. According to Luiz Mott (1986), the period of economic prominence for this territory was limited to the 17th century when numerous cattle ranches were established. On the other hand, Presbyter Dom Marcos de Souza, in the early 19th century, argued that the establishment of the morgado of Porto da Folha was “a great obstacle to the propagation of the human race” (1942, p. 43) in this territory, given that the 30 leagues granted to Pedro Gomes could not be sold or even divided amongst different heirs, remaining in the hands of a single owner.

Considering this remarkable development and following the guidelines regarding administrative and ecclesiastical divisions in Portuguese America, in the 17th century, the captaincy of Sergipe requested the colonial administration to establish towns and parishes. As a result, the morgado of Porto da Folha was politically subordinated to Vila Nova do Rio São Francisco until 1801, when it was incorporated into the domain of the emerging town of Propriá. With the extinction of the morgado in 1815, the settlement of Porto da Folha, which had finally achieved autonomy in 1835, was elevated to the status of a town.¹¹ When creating the town of Porto da Folha, the General Council of the Province established that the territory of the town would correspond to that of the parish of São Pedro de Porto da Folha, although it did not provide any details about the area or its boundaries.¹²

¹¹ SERGIPE. Law of 19 February 1835, Article 4. *Compilação das Leis Provinciais de Sergipe (1835-1880)*. Aracaju: Typografia F. Chagas Lima, n.d., p. 980.

¹² The intense disputes among local groups resulted in the transfer of the headquarters of the Vila de São Pedro de Porto da Folha to the settlement of Buraco, within the same town, which was then renamed Vila de Nossa Senhora da Conceição do Porto da Folha (Decree dated 23 February 1836). Throughout the 19th century, the town’s headquarters underwent several more transfers: In 1857, the headquarters was moved to the settlement of Curral das Pedras (Resolution No. 478 of 23 March 1857); In 1864, the headquarters were restored to the town of Nossa Senhora da Conceição do Porto da Folha (Resolution No. 664 of 11

It was only in 1847, through Resolution No. 188, of 13 July, that the boundaries between this town and the town of Propriá were defined as follows:

Article 1 The division of the town of Porto da Folha and that of Propriá shall be along the peak of Serra Tabanga in a straight line to the estate of Captain João Correa Falcão, which shall belong to Porto da Folha, and from there, following the car road to Japarutuba, where it meets the limits of the Chapel (Sergipe, n.d., p. 612).

In the mid-19th century, the area of the extinct morgado of Porto da Folha corresponded to the current municipalities of Porto da Folha, Canindé do São Francisco, Poço Redondo, Gararu, and Itabi,¹³ with the territory of the town being delimited as follows (Silva, 1981, p. 26):

To the North – with the parish of Pambu, along to the Xingó creek, 30 leagues from the seat of Porto da Folha.

To the West – with the parish of Jeremoabo, along the Serra Negra, 16 leagues from the seat of Porto da Folha.

To the South – with the parish of Capela, which is divided by the Japarutuba stream, 10 or 11 leagues from the town seat.

To the East – with the parish of Propriá, at the peak of Serra da Tabanga.

Despite its vast territorial extension, the term of Porto da Folha, as presented in the report of the president of the province, Dr. Amâncio João Pereira de Andrade (1850), had only 3,840 free inhabitants in 1849,¹⁴ distributed across 44 blocks and 810 fires (residential units). In the 1872 census, the free population was made up of 7,654 inhabitants, with 832 enslaved residents in the parish of Nossa Senhora de Conceição da

May 1864); In 1870, the headquarters of the town and the parish of Nossa Senhora da Conceição do Porto da Folha were relocated to the settlement of Boa Vista, on the banks of the São Francisco River, with the name of “Freguesia e vila Nossa Senhora da Conceição da Ilha do Ouro” (Resolution No. 841 of 23 March 1870); Finally, in 1880, the headquarters of the town and the parish of Ilha do Ouro were moved to the settlement of Porto da Folha (Resolution No. 1153 of 28 April 1880). SERGIPE. *Compilação das Leis Provinciais de Sergipe (1835-1880)*. Aracaju: Typografia F. Chagas Lima, n.d., p. 612-614.

¹³ The area, which had as its last administrator Dona Maria Joaquina Gomes Castelo Branco, mother of the Baron of Cajaíba, had “22 leagues of shoreline, with a depth of 12 leagues in the widest places and half a league in the narrowest ones, yielding from \$600 to \$700” (Silva, 1859, p. 248).

¹⁴ In this population survey, enslaved individuals were not counted. Among the 1,797 men, there were 762 whites, 909 mixed-race, 90 blacks, and 36 indigenous individuals. Among the 2,043 women, there were 939 whites, 959 mixed-race, 98 blacks, and 47 indigenous individuals. SERGIPE. A speech addressed to the Legislative Assembly of the Province of Sergipe at the opening of the ordinary session on the 1st of March 1850 by the esteemed President Dr. Amâncio João Pereira de Andrade. *Província de Sergipe, Tipografia Provincial, 1850*. Available at: <http://www.crl.edu/brazil/provincial/sergipe>. Accessed on: 20 June 2017.

Ilha do Ouro, confirming the trend of low population density in the town.¹⁵

As we have listed previously, the occupation of this territory took place through the distribution of larger land grants than those established on the coast, which were mostly intended for the implementation of cattle ranches. Early in the colonization, 30 leagues of land were transformed into a morgado, meaning that it could not be sold upon the death of the patriarch or even divided amongst his heirs, being administered hereditarily by the firstborn. The combination of these two metropolitan measures, together with the geographical conditions, may explain the low population density of this territory, as the economic activity developed there did not require the employment of abundant labor.

Among the scarce records of the inhabitants who lived in the hinterlands of the São Francisco River in Sergipe in the 19th century, there is the Lista Geral de Qualificação de Votantes da freguesia de Porto da Folha (General List of Voter Qualification of the Parish of Porto da Folha) (1859).¹⁶ Using the data provided by this document, we can roughly outline how these 1,153 men appropriated these spaces, used the natural resources offered, implemented economic activities, and shared this territory in blocks. Still in possession of these data, we can observe, in addition to the low population density: a) The formation of incipient urban areas in the town of Buraco (with two blocks), in the settlements of Curral das Pedras and Ilha do Ouro,¹⁷ evidenced by the concentration of liberal, mechanical, and mercantile economic activities; b) The depopulation of the oldest colonization nuclei of São Pedro and Mucambo, historically constituted as territories of resistance by indigenous peoples and quilombo peoples, which may be a reflection of the successive pressures they faced to abandon their lands; c) The significant enlistment of men who declared themselves as landowners but were, in reality, possessors of several cattle ranches; d) The absence of records that account for some socio-professional categories, such as fishermen, boatmen, ship carpenters, or other nautical professions, despite the presence of the hydrographic network, especially the São Francisco River, and saddlers and merchants, trades linked to livestock farming.

It can also be deduced from this data that, in the mid-19th century, this territory was still mostly occupied by cattle ranching activities, as evidenced by the significant

¹⁵ According to Francisco Carlos Teixeira da Silva, the area of the hinterlands of the São Francisco River corresponded to 4,887 km², with the following figures: less than 1 inhabitant per km² in 1849, and 1.2 inhabitants per km² in 1854, reaching the mark of 1.8 inhabitants per km² in 1872 (1981, p. 121).

¹⁶ AGJSE - Listas nº 01 caixa 01/3015 – Cartório de Porto da Folha – 1859.

¹⁷ These localities disputed, throughout the 19th century, the status of being the seat of the town and the parish.

presence of ranchers and cattle herders recorded in all blocks, as well as large landowners (the proprietors) with pastoral establishments scattered throughout the territory. Among the other socio-professional categories related to livestock farming that stood out in this scenario were: a) The breeders, small rural landowners who possessed large herds, which were allowed to graze freely on communal lands and concentrated in the settlements of Itans, Mucambo, and Canabrava; b) The tanners, specialized workers who processed animal hides into leather to be used for manufacturing utensils, which were concentrated in the settlements of Mucumbo and Curralinho, with five tanners settled in the new expansion area of the town, the settlement of Canindé; one tanner in the town of Buraco, and another in the settlement of Ilha do Ferro.

Despite the large number of voters listed as farmers¹⁸ in this parish, there was a meager production of foodstuffs, mainly for the subsistence of the inhabitants, with the most prominent crops being corn, beans, cassava, and rice (cultivated in large quantities in the lowlands near the rivers). According to Silva, the town of Porto da Folha harvested, in 1858, only “1,000 liters of corn, with approximately 6,000 heads of cattle and horses, and having produced 2,000 hides” (Silva, 1981, p. 43).

In the 1860s, due to the cotton boom in the Agrarian North, cotton cultivation began to be encouraged by the provincial government of Sergipe, which provided Georgia cottonseeds to landowners interested in investing in the cultivation of this crop. In the hinterlands of the São Francisco River in Sergipe, five wealthy landowners, Ensign Bento Vieira de Brito (Coronhas), Manoel Antônio de Albuquerque (Curral das Pedras), Manoel de Jesus do Bomfim (Curral das Pedras), Manuel de Melo Albuquerque (Janipatuba), and Lieutenant Justino Salazar de Resende (Gararu),¹⁹ who were already prominent cattle ranchers, agreed to set aside a part of their land for the cultivation of this highly tradable crop. Such behavior attests to the commitment of the productive sector to external demands and capital accumulation at the expense of food production.

Throughout the 19th century, fields and cattle pens disputed the same space in the town of Porto da Folha, with cattle ranching continuing to shape the occupation of the productive space in the town. The predominance of cattle ranching over other economic

¹⁸ Based on the analysis of post-mortem inventories from the District of Porto da Folha, the majority of farmers owned small plots of land where they cultivated foodstuffs and raised small herds of livestock freely.

¹⁹ SERGIPE. Report presented to the Legislative Assembly of the Province of Sergipe by the Vice-President, Commander Antônio Dias Coelho e Mello, on the 3rd of May 1864, S1-22. *Província de Sergipe, Tipografia Provincial, 1864*. Available at: <http://www.crl.edu/brazil/provincial/sergipe>. Accessed on: 20 June 2017.

activities in this space was latent in the discussions about land registration in the parish of Porto da Folha, in compliance with the Land Law and its respective Regulations, as well as in the effective registration of these lands. In 1854, when the president of the province, Dr. Inácio Joaquim Barbosa Júnior, requested information about the existence of vacant lands in the town of Porto da Folha, the councilors stated that there was no vacant land in that town, and all the lands in the municipality were *pro indiviso* (co-owned).²⁰ All of it was used communally by both landowners and other squatters for ‘grazing cattle freely’, pastures, and reserves (Silva, 1981).

In 1856, following the guidelines of the Imperial Government, the president of the province of Sergipe, Dr. Salvador Correia Benevides, ordered that all lands in the province be registered. Thus, 267 land occupants in the parish of Porto da Folha submitted, according to the model designated in the Land Law Regulation (1854), two copies of their land declarations to the Vicar Doroteu de Loreto.²¹ These declarations included the name of the possessor, the type of property, the specific name of the property and its location, the designation of the parish in which it was located, its extension, if known, and its boundaries. After the deadline for submitting the declarations had passed, the Vicar Dorotheus of Loreto transcribed, in the Land Registration Book of the Parish of Porto da Folha (1856),²² 355 land entries, corresponding to 441 land properties.

Upon analyzing these 355 land entries, it was found that 83.2% of the registered properties were located on “lands whose extent and boundaries are *pro indiviso* with other co-owners”, meaning they were being appropriated communally and without having a strictly delimited extension. In a way, the long period of existence of the morgado in the hinterlands of the São Francisco River in Sergipe contributed to the occupation of these lands in a communal manner, as the administrators of this entailed estate showed a lot of interest in organizing the space, except for the payment of rents.²³

²⁰ According to Elione Guimarães (2011), properties used in common by several owners, whether related or not, and without a clearly defined judicial demarcation of boundaries, were considered *pro indiviso* (co-owned). These properties were mostly the result of inheritances, exchanges and partitions, and eventually came to have multiple owners and over time lost their original borders, thereby acquiring new boundaries.

²¹ This Capuchin Friar arrived in the Parish of Nossa Senhora da Conceição do Porto da Folha in 1849, assuming the role of both the parish vicar and the spiritual assistant to the indigenous people who lived on the Island of São Pedro. In 1857, following the death of the director of the indigenous people of this Indigenous Village, Lieutenant Colonel João Fernandes da Silva Tavares, owner of Fazenda Ariticum, the then vicar took over as the Director of the indigenous people of the Indigenous Village of São Pedro until 1878, the year of his death (Dantas; Dallari, 1980).

²² APES - Livro de Registro de Terras da Freguesia de Porto da Folha (1856). Coleção Sebrão Sobrinho. Doc. 02/v. 58 /current notation 1688.

²³ At the time of the abolition of morgados in Brazil (1835), the morgado of Porto da Folha was administered by Maria Joaquina Gomes Ferrão Castelo Branco (1756 - ?), and it was inherited by her son, Alexandre Gomes de Argolo Ferrão, the Baron of Cajaíba (1801-1870). In 1864, when the Baron of Cajaíba decided

We also noted that, despite these declarations of communal land use in Porto da Folha, some properties were purchased (5); others indicated the names of individuals who shared those lands (8), and they were not always related; some provided information regarding the extension (2) and boundaries (4) of the land. As for the types of properties, it was found that communal lands were not restricted to just lots, possessions, or shares of land shared with common heirs; 11 farms were declared as being established on *pro indiviso* (co-owned) lands.

On the other hand, amongst the 74 land units not declared as located on *pro indiviso* (co-owned) lands, there were farms, smallholdings, cattle ranches, land grants, shares, portions, and possessions. Of this total, seven were inherited; four properties were declared as being purchased; three were located on ‘own land’; two were land grants, and one was a donation.

The lands held in Porto da Folha were registered by the declarants as farms, smallholdings, pieces of land, land possessions, land portions, land shares, and land lots, with their purposes aligned with the socioeconomic interests of rural landowners. Based on this information, the land structure of Porto da Folha, in terms of property type, was as follows:

Table 1 – Porto da Folha, Sergipe – types of land properties – 1854.

Property types	Number of properties	%
Farm	28	6.4
Portion	81	18.4
Possession	170	38.6
Share	49	11.1
Torn/damaged/illegible ²⁴	23	5.2
Smallholdings	20	4.5
Lot	8	1.8
Land	62	14
Total	441	100

Source: APES – Livro de Registro de Terras da Freguesia de Porto da Folha, 1856. Prepared by the author.

to sell all the lands of the extinct morgado of Porto da Folha to Captain Luiz da Silva Tavares, there were approximately 400 tenants occupying these lands (Gazeta do Aracaju, 1882, p. 1).

²⁴ Due to the conservation conditions of the Porto da Folha Land Registry Book, 23 records were not identified and were labeled as torn/damaged/illegible.

Despite the limited information contained in these parish land records regarding the use, extension, and boundaries of these properties, we noted that the expression “for raising cattle” was recurrently used not only in the declarations of the 28 farms, but also in the description of other 70 properties, including possessions, portions, lots, and smallholdings, confirming the premise that the economic and social life of the men and women living in these hinterlands revolved around the cattle ranching, thus shaping this space accordingly.

According to Silva (1990), the term *posse* (possession) indicated the legal status of the lands. However, when we analyze the records made in Porto da Folha, we can see that the use of this term was not restricted to this understanding and it was used in a generic way to any piece of land without a title, with a size smaller than one *sítio* (smallholding) and larger than *porções* (portions) and *sortes* (lots). These possessions could be established on *pro indiviso* (co-owned) lands or not, or acquired via direct appropriation, purchase, or inheritance, and they were also used for cattle ranching.

Similar to what was recorded in other regions of the country,²⁵ appropriation was the predominant type of land tenure in the town of Porto da Folha. Therefore, 170 seventy possessions were declared, which accounted for 38.6% of the properties registered in 1856. Amongst the 135 owners of possessions in the hinterlands of Porto da Folha were both the less fortunate individuals and moderately well-off cattle ranchers, such as, for example, Antônio Bernardo de Mello, listed as a landowner living in Genipatuba,²⁶ who declared his lands as follows:

No. 50: I, Antônio Bernardo de Mello, am the possessor in this parish of Nossa Senhora da Conceição do Porto da Folha of six land possessions, five purchased and one inherited, known by the name of Genipatuba, which has an extension consisting of *pro indiviso* (co-owned) inherited lands²⁷

Similar to Antônio Bernardo de Mello, other large cattle ranchers took advantage of the inefficient inspection network of the Imperial State related to land access policies and, over the years, expanded their land holdings. Among the lands registered as

²⁵ In addition to the study conducted by Silva (2008), which pointed to the prevalence of appropriation in Brazil, especially among the less fortunate, since colonial times, we have, for example, research for the Province of Goiás (Aguiar, 2003), for the high hinterlands of Bahia in the 18th and 19th centuries (Neves, 2005), and for the Province of Rio Grande do Sul (Christilino, 2010), which arrived at similar findings, adding that even the more affluent resorted to this practice throughout the 19th century, sometimes promoting intense disputes over the territorial appropriation of unclaimed lands.

²⁶ AGJSE – Lista Geral de Qualificação de Votantes da Freguesia de Porto da Folha. Lista de nº 01 caixa 01/3015 – Cartório de Porto da Folha – 1859, p. 15.

²⁷ APES – Livro de Registro de Terras da Freguesia de Porto da Folha, 1856, p. 18.

possessions, 21 were described as being used for ‘raising cattle’, and they mainly belonged to large cattle ranchers, who already owned other farms.

Following the possessions, the porções (portions) were the second largest type of land tenure declared in Porto da Folha, and they were almost entirely used in *pro indiviso* (co-owned) with other possessors. These small land units usually originated from successive divisions of inheritances, which were often located within other land properties and had little use value. An example is the case of the portions of land registered by Maria da Assunção Lima, widow of the cattle herder Luís Alves de Lima, who declared that she owned five portions of land in the farms Travessia (where she raised four oxen), Junco (where she raised two heifers), Lagoa Grande, and Cachoeira, and in the Capivara lands.²⁸

The quinhões (shares), which were parts received as inheritance after the division of the assets of the parents or spouse, had larger areas than the porções (portions) and sortes (lots) of land and accounted for 11.1% of the lands registered in the Parish Book of Porto da Folha. An example was the case of Manoel Francisco de Sá, a cattle herder married to Maria da Conceição and living in the first block of Buraco,²⁹ who, on the occasion of the land registration, declared that he owned two possessions in Buraco and two shares of land in Buraco and Covões,³⁰ inherited from his parents: Maria Josefa do Sacramento³¹ and João de Sá Souto Maior.³²

In the São Francisco hinterlands in Sergipe, where the prominence of cattle ranching had been evident since the time of conquest, the space reserved for food production was always restricted. Therefore, the number of smallholdings, land units, with their production focused on foodstuffs, corresponded to 4.5% of the declared land. In some of these smallholdings, in addition to food cultivation, there was also cattle ranching, as declared by Maria de Natividade de Nossa Senhora:

66 I am the owner of a piece of land called Pouço Verde, in this Parish of Porto da Folha, where I have a cattle ranch, and it borders with other *pro indiviso* (co-owned) inherited lands.³³

72 I am the owner of a piece of land called Cachoerinha, in this Parish of Nossa Senhora da Conceição do Porto da Folha, where I have a cattle ranch with the same name, which is *pro*

²⁸ APES – Livro de Registro de Terras da Freguesia de Porto da Folha, 1856, p. 37.

²⁹ AGJSE – Lista Geral de Qualificação de Votantes da Freguesia de Porto da Folha. Lista de nº 01 caixa 01/3015 – Cartório de Porto da Folha – 1859, p. 04.

³⁰ APES – Livro de Registro de Terras da Freguesia de Porto da Folha, 1856, pp. 36 and 43.

³¹ AGJSE – Inventário nº 16 caixa 10/2963 – Cartório de Porto da Folha – 1850.

³² AGJSE – Inventário nº 09 caixa 12/2965 – Cartório de Porto da Folha – 1856.

³³ APES – Livro de Registro de Terras da Freguesia de Porto da Folha, 1856, p. 23.

indiviso (co-owned) with other possessors and borders with several inherited lands.³⁴

In much smaller numbers, the *sortes* (lots), inherited land strips, accounted for 1.8% of the properties declared in Porto da Folha. All of them were on *pro indiviso* (co-owned) lands, intended for small-scale cattle ranching due to their limited size. Among these lots, two were listed as belonging to Manuel Zuarte Feitosa, a cattle herder living in the Capivara lands:³⁵ one located in the Gaspar smallholding, acquired through purchase for cattle ranching, and another located in the Curralinho smallholding, obtained through inheritance, both of which were shared *pro indiviso* (co-owned) with other individuals.³⁶

When appearing before the Vicar Doroteu de Loreto to list the lands they possessed in the Parish of Nossa Senhora da Conceição de Porto da Folha, a group of 35 landowners, predominantly landowners with large estates, declared that they held land units generically referred to as ‘Terras’ (Lands), which were not classified as farms, smallholdings, shares, possessions, portions, or lots of land. This type of property accounted for 14% of the registered lands, which could be landlocked within *sesmarias*, farms, or even in the lands of the extinct *morgado* of Porto da Folha, and could be used *pro indiviso* (co-owned). It was with this typology that the large landowner Miguel Gonçalves Lima e Silva, who lived in a luxurious mansion next to the Parish of Nossa Senhora da Conceição, declared his ownership of lands in the farms Travessia, Cágado, Lagoa Grande, and Capivara, in addition to two lands in the town of Buraco.³⁷ In the *post-mortem* inventory of his wife, Luiza Alves Lima,³⁸ we can extrapolate the extension of some of these lands, as the Travessia farm comprised a *casa-grande*, another building, and a cattle pen for raising 40 head of cattle and 39 head of horses, while the Cágado farm had houses, cattle pens, and a watering trough for raising 139 head of cattle.

It seems that the existence of unappropriated lands in the hinterlands of the São Francisco, combined with the chaotic control of access to these lands, was an enticing prospect for residents, that is, both for sugar cane plantation owners in the Zona da Mata of Sergipe³⁹ and for the less affluent to migrate from other parts of the province of Sergipe

³⁴ APES – Livro de Registro de Terras da Freguesia de Porto da Folha, 1856, p. 27.

³⁵ AGJSE – Lista Geral de Qualificação de Votantes da Freguesia de Porto da Folha. Lista de nº 01 caixa 01/3015 – Cartório de Porto da Folha – 1859, p. 09.

³⁶ APES – Livro de Registro de Terras da Freguesia de Porto da Folha, 1856, p. 22.

³⁷ APES – Livro de Registro de Terras da Freguesia de Porto da Folha, 1856, pp. 39 and 47.

³⁸ AGJSE – Inventário nº 21 caixa 20/2973 – Cartório de Porto da Folha – 1874.

³⁹ According to Andrade (1973), since colonial times, the Zona de Mata, located in the coastal area, was

to this territory. As they saw cattle ranching as an opportunity to build a more autonomous material life, far from the pressures imposed by sugar cane cultivation. In the parish land registration book of Porto da Folha, 11 landowners who lived in other municipalities in the province presented their land declarations directly to the vicar or sent them through proxies. Let us look at the list of these landowners in Table 1:

Table 1 – Landowners in the town of Porto da Folha who resided in other municipalities.

Entry N°.	Owner	Municipality/ Residence	Property	Source
64	Antônio Pereira de Azevedo	Capela	1 share in the Poço dos Mandiz	-
64	Antônio Pereira de Azevedo	Capela	1 share in João Pereira	-
70	Marcos José Correia de Mendonça	Divina Pastora	2 shares	Purchase
191	Manoel José de Melo	Capela	70\$000 in lands at Poço da Roma	-
192	Antônio Prudente de Araújo Quaresma	Laranjeiras	2 portions in Tapera	Inheritance
193	Eugênio José Teles	Itabaiana	3 shares at Fazenda Quixadá	Purchase
193	Eugênio José Teles	Itabaiana	1 share at Fazenda Quixadá	Inheritance
194	Eugênio José Teles	Itabaiana	1 portion in Lagoa do Boi	-
195	Inácia Francisca de Gois	Itabaiana	1 share at Fazenda Batatal	-
196	Manoel Carregosa	Itabaiana	2 shares at Fazenda Quixadá	Inheritance
294	Illegible	Capela	1 share in Belos Montes	-
335	José Bernardino Dias Coelho e Melo	Rosário do Catete	Fazenda Campos Novos	Inheritance
344	Gabriel Tavares de Couto	Itabaiana	1 possession in Fazenda Quixadá	-

Source: APES – Livro de Registro de Terras da Freguesia de Porto da Folha, 1856. Prepared by the author.

distinguished from the Sertão by climatic, hydrographic, vegetation, and settlement conditions. The Zona da Mata in Sergipe was divided into two areas: a) Zona da Cotinguiba, which comprises the municipalities intersected by the hydrographic basins of the Sergipe and Japarutuba Rivers, standing out in sugar cane production, and b) Zona da Mata Sul, which includes the municipalities bathed by the rivers of the hydrographic basins of the Real, Piauí and Vaza-Barris Rivers (Passos Subrinho, 2000, p. 57).

We notice two common characteristics amongst all these properties listed in Table 1: they were intended for cattle ranching, and were used as farms, cattle pens, or pastures, and were shared with other individuals. Among the land declarants in the hinterlands of the São Francisco, there were six landowners who lived in the Zona do Cotinguiba, including three aristocracy members: Antônio Prudente de Araújo Quaresma,⁴⁰ José Bernardino Dias Coelho e Melo,⁴¹ and Manoel José de Melo.⁴² According to the declaration submitted by José Bernardino Dias Coelho e Melo, the Campos Novos cattle ranch came into his possession after successive divisions, as it was originally granted as a sesmaria to Brigadier Pedro Vieira de Mello⁴³ and was inherited by Captain José Agostinho da Silva Daltro.

As for the Quixadá farm, encompassing shares and portions, it comprised a total of four land registrations. It seems to have been shared *pro indiviso* (co-owned) by individuals with family ties who had moved to Itabaiana. We can mention, for example, the brothers Eugênio José Teles and Manoel Carregosa, sons of Joana Francisca da Piedade and Francisco José Teles, who received shares from the said property from them. Another resident of Itabaiana who declared ownership of lands in Porto da Folha was Inácia Francisca de Gois, mother-in-law of Eugênio José Teles, who received a share in the Batatal farm, from the division of her husband's property.

The data revealed by the entries contained in the Land Registration Book of the Parish of Porto da Folha (1856) demonstrate that only a small portion of the occupants, a mere 267 landowners, including men and women in this territory, complied with the provisions of the Land Law and its regulations regarding the mandatory registration of the lands they owned. We reached this conclusion when comparing this information with those presented in the Lista Geral de Qualificação de Votantes da freguesia de Porto da Folha (General List of Voter Qualification of the Parish of Porto da Folha) (1859), which included 1,114 men on the voter rolls. Furthermore, there is a lack of land records for

⁴⁰ Grandson of the Portuguese Lieutenant José Alves Quaresma who was involved in the movement against the Emancipation of Sergipe in 1820 (Freire, 1977).

⁴¹ Owner of the Engenho Floresta (Divina Pastora) and a prominent figure in provincial politics during the Second Empire. I assume, based on his surname, that he is related to Domingos Dias Coelho e Melo, the Baron of Itaporanga, and Antônio Dias Coelho e Melo, the Baron of Estância. For further information about the political experiences in Sergipe in the 19th century, I recommend consulting DANTAS, Ibarê. Leandro Ribeiro de Siqueira Maciel (1825/1909). *O patriarca do Serra Negra e a política oitocentista em Sergipe*. Aracaju: Criação, 2009.

⁴² Owner of Engenho Araçá (Guaraná, 1925, p. 313).

⁴³ A member of the Sergipe sugar cane aristocracy, he showed support for the constitutional proposal of the Portuguese Cortes in 1820. In the context of the emancipation of Sergipe (1820), he was a staunch advocate for the annexation of Sergipe to Bahia, becoming governor of the Captaincy of Sergipe after the arrest of Carlos César Burlamaque by troops from Bahia in 1821 (Freire, 1977).

locations such as Mucambo, Ilha do Ferro, Ilha do Ouro, Canindé, Canabrava, Serra Negra, and Itans. Possibly, the landowners who did not go to the Vicar to declare their lands did not believe that they would actually have to face the sanctions resulting from disobedience.

Like all landowners in the Empire, whether sesmeiros or landholders, the indigenous villagers were also required to comply with the provisions of the Land Law and its regulations, especially Articles 72, 75 and 91, as per the indigenous policy of the 19th century. Thus, the indigenous villagers in the São Pedro mission, represented by the director of the mission, presented themselves before Friar Doroteu to register the lands they had occupied since the 17th century.

Final remarks

The distribution of sesmarias (land grants) to the pioneers of the Sertão (hinterlands) of the São Francisco in Sergipe aimed to reward the landowners from Bahia for their services to the Portuguese Crown. Thus, a policy was implemented to grant several continuous land grants to members of the same family. These granted lands were larger in comparison with those granted in the coastal zone, which favored the establishment of rural dynasties, such as the Ávila Pereira, Burgos, Teixeira Rocha, and Castelo Branco families.

Amongst the recipients of the land grants was the fieldmaster Pedro Gomes (from the Castelo Branco family), who received approximately 30 leagues of land as a morgado (entailed estate) for his services to the Portuguese Crown during the expulsion of the Dutch from the region near the mouth of the São Francisco River. He received these lands and used it to graze his cattle on the banks of the São Francisco River, giving rise to the imposing entailed estate of Porto da Folha. With the institution of the Morgado until 1815, these 30 leagues of land, which correspond to the areas of the current towns of Porto da Folha, Canindé do São Francisco, Poço Redondo, Gararu, and Itabi, could not be sold or divided amongst different heirs and were restricted to a single owner.

We found that the implementation of the land distribution policy, in addition to benefitting existing landowners who used these lands to graze their numerous herds, also facilitated the occupation of these inhospitable spaces, inhabited previously solely by indigenous peoples and escaped enslaved individuals. Therefore, at the same time that the mocambos were dismantled and the indigenous and black people were being captured and used for labor at the farms, alliances between the family potentates and the metropolis were strengthened.

However, the natural and geographical specificities of this region, especially the climatic conditions and the distance from the coast, combined with the requirements of the colonization policy and the availability of vast expanses of land, resulted in the development of a social organization economically based on extensive livestock farming. This differed from the colonization model implemented in coastal areas, where the cultivation of highly valued crops for the external market prevailed. In this context, cattle farms became the main productive units and were responsible for promoting the colonization of the area since the low investment required for their establishment, the way the animals were raised freely, the ease in which labor could be employed, and the

domestic demand for driving force and cattle by-products facilitated the consolidation of these units as focal points of the colonization project.

However, even with this metropolitan policy of land allotment and the distribution of lands in the hinterlands, some sesmeiros (land grant recipients) did not take possession of their properties, leaving several lands uninhabited. Other sesmeiros, afraid of losing their lands, offered indigenous people and poor free men cattle and small strips of land in exchange for the effective occupation of the land. This was how many poor free men were attracted to this region with the promise of receiving cattle and land for cultivation, which would ensure their subsistence and synchronously contribute to the reconfiguration of land distribution in the area by means of small properties, where livestock farming and crop cultivation happened, usually in a communal way.

Certainly, the cattle pens set in the vast hinterlands of the São Francisco in Sergipe shaped the land arrangement of the area, as the prominence of livestock farming has been evident since the time of conquest, with very limited space reserved for food production. At the time the registration of the lands owned in the parish of Porto da Folha (1856) happened, this dispute between spaces occupied by cattle ranches and crops became evident since even in the registers of smallholdings, the expression “lands for raising cattle” was frequently used. In Porto da Folha, 355 land entries were registered, and of these, 98 (including farms, possessions, portions, lots, and smallholdings) mentioned livestock farming, while the land units dedicated to the production of foodstuffs accounted for 4.5% of the declared lands.

The majority of landowners in Porto da Folha who registered their land units declared that they had acquired land through inheritance (7.4%), while 3.3% acquired it through purchase, 0.5% originated from sesmarias, and 0.2% were received as donations. Furthermore, based on the data extracted from the parish land records, we discovered that appropriation was the predominant type of land tenure in this town, with 170 possessions declared, accounting for 38.6% of the registered properties. This can be explained by the nature of the main economic activity in this territory, extensive livestock farming.

The livestock farming that was carried out in these lands, where both poor farmers and small ranchers, as well as wealthy landowners, used the land to graze their cattle freely without fences or other boundaries, influenced the way the land was used. Thus, we noted in the records of the lands owned that 83.2% of the landowners declared having “lands whose extent and boundaries are pro indiviso with other co-owners”. That is, some smallholdings, farms, lots, possessions, or shares of land were shared amongst several

owners, who could be related or not, and could have originated from purchases, sales, inheritances, exchanges, or partitions, and which had no strictly delimited extension.

In view of the above, we can see that the formation of this land arrangement evidenced in the Livro Paroquial de Terras (1856) was a vestige of the land arrangement established at the beginning of colonization, based on the granting of large tracts of land for the cattle ranching. We emphasize that this socio-economic structure was based on a unique set of physical, geographical, and historical conditions that favored the dominance of large cattle ranchers. In addition to being granted generous sesmarias, they controlled access to natural resources. Moreover, taking advantage of the geographical distances from the provincial administrative center, they imposed a regime of dependency, submission, and tyranny on poor free men, indigenous people and escaped enslaved individuals from the quilombos.

Thus, livestock farming not only shaped the occupation of this region and its economy but also influenced the social relations established between the large cattle ranchers and the other inhabitants of this region. Consequently, livestock farming allowed these ranchers to accumulate wealth—land, vast herds, some enslaved Africans, covered wagons, and canoes—at the expense of the low wealth distribution rates and, therefore, increased poverty among the population, especially the indigenous people expropriated from the town of São Pedro and former enslaved individuals.

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