

*Migrações ao sul**Memories of Land and Work in Brazil's Slaveholding Southeast*

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Less than a month after the abolition of slavery on May 13, 1888, Councilor João José de Andrade Pinto – of Brazil's Supremo Tribunal de Justiça (Supreme Court) – received a writ of habeas corpus filed by the attorney Ernesto Ferreira França. He had compiled a vast documentary record of investigations conducted under the direction “of the judges, magistrates and Police Chief of the Municipality of Cantagalo.”¹ Their main complaint was as follows: “The former slaves of Fazenda Socorro, in the town of Carmo de Cantagalo . . . which belongs to Captain Manoel Pereira Torres, want to leave that plantation; but they are held in unlawful restraint by said Captain.” One of the main victims was Sebastião Rufino dos Santos Maranhão, a freedman “to whom the Supreme Court granted habeas corpus, along with his companions,” because he had been “persecuted, threatened with death and [forced to become a] fugitive.”

The counterattack, less than a month later, came from the pen of Jeronymo Mizisur Nogueira Pavido, the planters' lawyer. He had marshalled battalions of arguments. On June 9, he told the judge: “I am unaware of the facts that are the subject of said habeas corpus; given that the authorities of the town of Carmo . . . will tell me nothing about it, just as the freedmen in question have not made any sort of petition to this tribunal.”

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¹ National Archives (Rio de Janeiro), Supremo Tribunal de Justiça, Habeas Corpus, Cantagalo, 1888, Sebastião Rufino dos Santos, HCD, folder 1772, number 2.713.

The crossfire of justifications was just beginning. Witness statements had to be gathered. An immediate decision was made “to hear the former slaveholder; as this is a matter of freedom, he should be summoned to appear in person in order to provide clarifications.” However, the first impressions came from the police inquiry. Under the court’s order, the local police commissioner of the town of Carmo conducted an investigation. In the following days, he rejected the charges: based on his “reading of the documents” that had been sent, he could “certify that there was no evidence of the violence that those ex-slaves claimed to suffer or the forced constraint that they claimed to be persecuted with.” On the orders of police headquarters, a police officer – Lieutenant Francisco da Cunha Telles – was sent out to “visit all the areas where there are large numbers of *fazendas* [coffee plantations] and examine who was doing the work in each place, and also obtain information about how the interests of the freedmen who work on those *fazendas* are being served, and instruct the respective detachments about how to proceed with local authorities in repressing vagrancy and vagabondage, prohibiting illegal procedures with regard to any arrests they might have to make.” Various plantations in the municipalities of Sumidouro, Miracema, Muriaé, and Carmo received visits. The result: “it is affirmed that there is nothing new among the freedmen, even on the plantation of Captain Manoel Pereira Torres, they are not constrained, and I inquired in great detail about them.”

Interested parties were present at the interrogations of the planter and later of the freedmen. In his statement, Captain Manoel Pereira Torres reportedly said

that after the enactment of the May 13 Law this year, he gathered his former slaves together and declared to them that they were in full enjoyment of their freedom, and that only those who prefer to remain in the *fazenda* [would] stay on, in exchange for their services. And, in effect, none of them is under constraint and they can all go wherever they please at any time.

Most of the freedpersons underwent a group interrogation, though some were dispensed from the summons “to appear at this police station . . . because they were ill”:

The police commissioner posed the following questions to the formerly enslaved people, in the presence of recognized witnesses:

Asked if they were aware of their natural status? They responded yes, they know they are free, due to a Law, from the Princess, which they say dates from May 13.

Asked if, on the Fazenda Socorro, where they were still employed, they were illegally constrained, that is, if they were still treated like slaves and held to be such, thus being prevented, by seigneurial force, from seeking better conditions on other *fazendas*? They replied that since Captain Manoel José Pereira Torres, their former master, declared them free, which took place this past May, they have never found themselves illegally constrained and that if they have not yet left their current employer to this day it is because they are well treated, as the free men they recognize themselves to be, and are paid for their field work, with both men and women receiving a certain amount per month, as well as a housing and sustenance; that they feel themselves to be contracted under such good conditions that they have no wish to leave the house where they work.

Asked whether Sebastião Maranhão, had been denied his *amásia* [concubine] [and] their natural children when he went to fetch them from the Fazenda Socorro? They responded that Torres did not deny Sebastião his *amásia* when he appeared at Fazenda Socorro to take her away, but that they do not know why it was that she did not accompany him. At that moment, one of Sebastião Maranhão's children spoke up and made the following statement: "I, my siblings and my mother, who is not married to my father Sebastião, did not want to accompany our father because we committed ourselves to bringing in the harvest this year and if we entered into those contracts it was because we did not want to leave the *fazenda*, nor did we know where our father was, because he left us two years ago." This is verbatim, and the declarant's name is Ignacio Maranhão.

Asked if they had full liberty to come and go whenever they wanted? They answered that yes, they always went out and if they did not do so more often it was because they did not want to. Asked whether their companions who did not appear at the police station fully enjoyed their rights as the free persons they presently are? They answered yes, that like the respondents they enjoyed their freedom and that they were also content in that house. And since no more questions were asked of them, the police commissioner had this report drafted and after it was read to them and they found it to be accurate, the same police commissioner signed it on their behalf because they could not read or write.

The document described here sheds light on some of the meanings of freedom in the coffee plantation areas in southeastern Brazil during the period immediately after slavery's abolition. Could the freedmen choose where they wanted to live and work? Did they have the autonomy to move freely? What were the expectations of behavior attributed to former masters and former slaves?

These are some of the themes that, in recent decades, have been consolidated in Brazil around the question of post-emancipation. Although the idea is not always stressed, the concept of post emancipation posits that it makes sense to think about Brazil's end of slavery in a plural way. The post-emancipation period – its timelines, periodization, meanings, symbols, issues, theoretical and methodological foundations – is complex. When did it begin? The day after May 13, 1888? When did it end? During

the Vargas era in the 1940s, when laws that gave some support to rural workers reverberated with memories of the possibility of true abolition? The concept of post-emancipation demands broader periodization, one that would lead historians to make less use of the idea of “post-abolition” (which refers almost exclusively to the chronological period immediately following the “Golden Law”). This is important because many histories of post-emancipation can be reconstructed from the experiences of thousands of men and women who achieved legal freedom and lived autonomous lives before final abolition, in a nineteenth-century society that was still besieged by slavery. It is thus possible to think of a broadened chronology of post-emancipation – say from 1830 to 1950 – that articulates dimensions of Brazil’s rural, urban, and labor history along with aspects of its nation-building projects and social thought. Such a history would place post-emancipation at the very center of contemporary Brazil’s historical formation. Researchers from the most varied fields would be challenged to expand the possibilities of addressing Brazil’s contemporary history, and especially its labor history, as additional chapters of post-emancipation.

With regard to the histories of slavery and freedom, Brazil went through a long historiographic movement of erasure. We are now assembling another movement, focused on the meaning, resignification, and use of memories and histories of slavery and post-emancipation. In this chapter, we join empirical research with theoretical reflections in order to explore the formation of post-emancipation narratives and memories in Brazil’s slaveholding Southeast. It is possible, in that region, to reintegrate the histories of freedom, control, and autonomy in the first decades of the twentieth century. In various archives and other historical sources, we can find inscribed – albeit in multivocal form – important intersections in the histories of land, labor, mobility, migration, control, and power.

ACCESS TO LAND IN THE SHADOW OF SLAVERY

In an original study that combines oral histories and documentary sources, Ana Maria Lugão Rios has demonstrated how an itinerant peasantry was formed in Brazil, particularly in the late nineteenth century and the first decades of the twentieth.² This process was grounded in the dynamics of land access: in property that was bequeathed to slaves and freedpersons so that they could engage in subsistence agriculture, in

² A. M. Lugão Rios, “Família e transição.”

occupations opened up by the displacement of Black peasant families in the decades prior to abolition, and even in the formation of Black peasant towns, some of them remnants of *quilombos* (maroon settlements) or linked to them. Rios took an interesting analytical approach in order to deal with the multiplicity of rural universes in which diverse peasant communities – and especially those made up of Black descendants of the enslaved – came into contact. In different regions there were myriad situations. Some areas had open economic frontiers, in others the frontiers had already closed; some had vacant public land, others very little. Some regions were undergoing rapid economic expansion, while others were in decline. Many zones combined plantation agriculture with peasant production, while others were dominated by one or the other. Considering all this diversity, it would be nearly impossible to depict a single reality for the first decades after abolition. The matter would become even more complex if we also considered the earlier period when slavery was still legal and abolitionism was in full ferment.

A national approach to the study of slavery, abolition, and post-abolition – and of post-emancipation in the broader sense – is rife with traps, leading often to overgeneralization, the reinforcement of stigmas, and the silencing of diverse historical experiences. Research is still scarce about the formation of a Black peasantry during slavery and its iterations in widely varying rural settings. In diverse regions, slaves, immigrants, and free workers (many of whom were freedpersons) came together, reproduced, and organized themselves into peasant communities that were rooted in family, territory, or ethnicity and were constantly on the move.

While this movement is difficult to capture in methodological terms, it is not impossible. The flow of land grants to freedpersons in slaveholders' wills does not necessarily have to be quantified or measured by the benchmarks of agricultural production to convey meaning: even singular situations can help explain the expectations of land and work that expanded the meanings of freedom during the last quarter of the nineteenth century and the first decades of the twentieth.

In the slaveholding Southeast – and especially in Rio de Janeiro and Espírito Santo – new rural ventures arose from north to south, often creating tension between coffee, sugar, and food production and the economic frontiers of migration and mobility. For the area of São João da Barra in northern Rio de Janeiro province, for example, several wills reveal narratives containing intersecting sentiments of generosity, expectation, rights, and custom among enslaved people, freedpersons, slaveholders, planters, and heirs.

In 1872, Candido Alves de Azevedo expressly stated in his will: “I hereby leave over one hundred *braças* [fathoms, equivalent to about 6 feet] of land . . . including half of the improvements thereon, to Hortência Mariana da Conceição (free) and Prudêncio (baptized as a slave with specific conditions that would lead to his liberty), land that they will enjoy . . . after my death and that of my wife.” Besides the land, the couple would inherit three slaves. In addition, he left “over one hundred *braças* of land from the same plot as that of the couple, with any improvements thereon, to my slaves Claudino, Felismindo, and Custódio, who will enjoy this bequest after my death and that of my wife.” Prudêncio would have to be freed in order to inherit the land, and some other slaves – Norberta, Ana, and Bernarda – would simply be “freed, as if they were born from a free womb.”³

Domingas Maria de Azevedo’s 1873 will was even more detailed. In it, she spelled out the possession, property, and later freedom of “the slave woman named Theodora, who has borne children named Albino, Luiza, Maria, Justina, the first aged sixteen, the second twelve, the third eight, the last three.” “To these children,” she wrote, “because of the love I came to feel when raising them: I grant Albino his freedom from this date forward, as if he were born from a free womb. To Luiza, Maria and Justina I also grant freedom, but on the condition that they attend to my husband Lúcio Antonio de Azevedo; upon his death they will enjoy full freedom as if born from a free womb.” Regarding land, she continued: “I furthermore declare that I leave the said *crias* [children raised in her home] lands 350 *braças* deep, bordering on the front with Dominicano de tal, in the back with José Vieira, on one side with me, and on the other side with Lauriano de tal. I leave these lands to the four aforementioned *crias* and to one more who was born after the Free Womb Law and to any other siblings who might be born in the future.”⁴

In 1882, Izabel da Silva Rangel endorsed the manumission of several slaves after her death. We understand more, however, from the words that follow: “I leave half of the lower part of my land to my slave Camilo and his family, because he deserves it by virtue of the good services he has rendered me.”⁵ In 1883, Domingos Gonçalves da Costa ordered in his will

³ National Archives (Rio de Janeiro), will of Candido Alves de Azevedo, São João da Barra, Box 700, 1872.

⁴ Judiciary Archives (Rio de Janeiro), will of Domingas Maria de Azevedo, São João da Barra, Box 680, 1873.

⁵ Judiciary Archives (Rio de Janeiro), will of Izabel da Silva Rangel, São João da Barra, box 695, 1882.

that a house be purchased and granted to some of his slaves, who should also be freed: “Purchase from my assets a house worth up to about four hundred mil reis, for Joana to live in, and for Joaquim, Benedito and Felisminda to live in as long as they are alive, and when they are dead, it should pass to the Santa Casa de Misericórdia [a charity hospital] in this city. I want fifty mil reis given to the Black woman Joana and fifty mil reis given to Felisminda.”⁶

The following passage from Antonio Ribeiro de Campos’s 1886 will gives us a good idea of the horizon of expectations that slaves might have held when their masters died and their wills and bequests were made public:

I hereby grant unconditional freedom to my slave Maria. I also set free my slaves Geraldo and Rita Ribeira, who are over fifty years of age. I declare that my slave Felipe is obliged to work for two years under the direction of my first executor or either of [his] other two siblings and at the end of said period will be freed. I declare that the Black man Tibúrcio must hire out his services for the time stipulated in the contract he agreed to, the product . . . going to benefit my heirs and legatees and those named below.⁷ I declare that the slaves Balthasar and Amaro, who belong to Francisco de Sá Junior, find themselves in my service due to a loan I made to the latter, whose slaves will continue to provide services for the benefit of my said legatees until their master’s debt is paid unless he pays compensation for the remainder of their services with interest of one percent per month corresponding to the remaining [contract] time.

Regarding land, de Campos mentioned that he was leaving “the small-holding that belonged to Araujo’s sons and later to João Brinco to my slave Felipe, and to the freedman Geraldo, with Felipe enjoying in the usufruct of said small holding only after fulfilling the two years of work to which he is obliged, and with both men having only the usufruct of the small holding, usufruct which will pass upon the death of either man to the surviving one, upon whose death it will revert to my heirs and legatees.” He left to his slave Rita “a tiny small-holding annexed to the lands of Antonio de Souza de tal, which last belonged to Sebastião Brinco; she may dispose of that land as she wishes.” He left other freedpersons farm animals as an inheritance: Rita herself received “an old beast named Maquitola”; “the freedman Geraldo, a dark donkey with damaged

⁶ Judiciary Archives (Rio de Janeiro), will of Domingos Gonçalves da Costa, São João da Barra, box 717, 1883.

⁷ This type of contract – referred to in the document as a *contrato de locação de servir* – was common in late-nineteenth-century Brazil. It generally required enslaved people to hire out their labor and pay a set portion of their earnings to their owners.

hooves formerly owned by the Tram company”; and finally “to the slave Felipe the donkey Quero-Quero, which he can claim in two years.”⁸

ITINERANT PEASANTRIES AND ECONOMIC PRACTICES

What did it mean for slaves and freedpersons to sometimes have access to land, by virtue of these kinds of conditional concessions and conquests? In various regions – each with its own sociodemographic specificities – slaves and freedpersons constructed economic practices that gave rise to close interaction among them. In many places, they attended local fairs and markets on Saturdays and Sundays – their customary “free days” – where they would set up *quitandas* (stalls) and sell products from their small farms or gardens. Debate about the meaning of these practices gained strength in Brazilian historiography in 1979 with the publication of a chapter by Ciro Flamarion Cardoso, “The Peasant Breach in the Slaveholding System.”⁹ Building on the work of Sidney Mintz and Tadeusz Lepkowski (who coined the expression “peasant breach”), Cardoso considered the nature of Brazilian slavocracy, noting the presence of peasant economic activity. He summarized part of the intellectual debate about the Caribbean and elsewhere, stressing the “modalities of the peasant phenomenon under a colonial slaveholding regime.” In this conception there were “non-proprietary peasants,” “peasant proprietors,” “peasant activities of the *quilombolas* [maroons],” and the “slave proto-peasantry.” At that time, the debate was fundamentally ideological.¹⁰ The crux of the matter was to find a way to recognize the economic congruity of slaves and peasants without compromising the concept of the “colonial slave mode of production,” which was their proposed interpretive foundation.

In 1987, Cardoso would return to the issue, incorporating evidence from new secondary sources and ongoing research and also responding to criticism from Jacob Gorender and Antônio Barros de Castro.¹¹ He

⁸ Judiciary Archives (Rio de Janeiro), will of Antonio Ribeiro de Campos, São João da Barra, box 717, 1886.

⁹ C. Cardoso, “A brecha camponesa.” This article was later published in English as “The Peasant Breach in the Slaveholding System,” *Luso-Brazilian Review* 25:1 (1988): 49–57.

¹⁰ Cardoso observes that the first version of this article was written as a presentation for the Second Conference of Historians of Latin America and the Antilles in March 1977 in Caracas. See C. Cardoso, “A brecha camponesa.”

¹¹ C. Cardoso, *Escravo ou campones?* See also A. B. de Castro, “A economia política, o capitalismo e a escravidão,” and J. Gorender, “Questionamentos sobre a teoria econômica do escravismo colonial.”

emphasized a wide array of evidence about the practice of granting slaves parcels of land to farm for their own subsistence. This was customary among the Portuguese on the island of São Tomé even before the colonization of Brazil; the practice would eventually become known in many slave regions as the “Brazilian system.” There is evidence of it in the Captaincy of Pernambuco as early as 1663. Royal orders and permits from the last decades of the seventeenth century instructed subjects about “rights” to time and land, established so that slaves could provide their own subsistence. In 1701, the well-known chronicler André João Antonil praised the “custom practiced by some masters in Brazil,” by which “they give [slaves] a day every week when they can plant and prepare their provisions.”¹²

Despite seigneurial prohibitions and complaints, enslaved people sought to build their own economies and thus attain autonomy. In the Caribbean, there are many suggestive examples of slaves who sold produce from their small-holdings and supplied local markets. The Sunday markets that they frequented became spaces for socialization, attracting slaves and freedpersons from multiple plantations, many of whom travelled for miles to get there. The economic circuits created by those who managed to take their produce for sale in nearby towns and cities also allowed information and culture to circulate among slaves in urban and rural areas.¹³ Enslaved people’s mercantile exchanges with maroons and closer relations with the free poor and freedpersons could also – though not necessarily – lay the ground for indirect attacks on slavery. The actions the maroons took to preserve their communities – veritable Black peasant villages – and the confrontational strategies employed by free people in their struggles for land use and possession helped change the world of those who were still enslaved.¹⁴

What was going on with the free poor populations who lived on the margins of areas experiencing economic growth or who focused their production on the domestic market? In many parts of the Caribbean, the free Black population enjoyed a reasonable amount of economic autonomy, even during slavery.¹⁵ There are still few studies in Brazil

¹² C. Cardoso, *Escravo ou campones?*, pp. 119–120.

¹³ D. B. Gaspar, “Slavery, Amelioration and Sunday Markets,” and B. Wood, “White Society.” See also I. Berlin and P. Morgan, eds., *The Slaves’ Economy*, “Introduction,” pp. 1–27.

¹⁴ On conflicts in the post-emancipation period, see H. Beckles and K. Watson, “Social Protest,” and M. Craton, “Continuity not Change.”

¹⁵ Regarding land and expectations during the post-emancipation period in the Caribbean, see J. Besson, “Land Tenure”; H. Johnson, “The Emergence of a Peasantry”; R. Scott and M. Zeuske, “Property in Writing.”

that accompany the experiences of freedpersons, documenting their expectations vis-à-vis land during slavery and post-emancipation.¹⁶ A great many small-holdings may have been passed down through generations of families that were enslaved and later freed, resulting after 1888 in conflicts with their former masters.¹⁷ Yet beyond this, studies of Brazilian slave economies have made little progress in empirically demonstrating the circulation of peasant agricultural production among slaves and sectors of the surrounding Black peasantry, including communities of freedpersons and even *quilombolas*.

One archival path that has not been explored is local legislation – which abounded after the mid-nineteenth century – that banned the purchase of products from slaves, as well as the functioning of taverns and like activities. When one accompanies recurrent municipal regulations for the province of Rio de Janeiro, there is a notable concern with commodities, mercantile exchanges, and even the circulation of money involving slaves or the Black population. In the municipality of Rio Bonito in 1876, for example, article 67 of Municipal Regulatory Decree no. 40 imposed fines on those who bought “any object from slaves unless the slaves present written permission from their masters to sell it.”¹⁸ Interestingly, an annotation detailed exceptions to this law: “slaves who sell foodstuffs on Sundays and holidays in the streets *quitanda*-style.” Even so, it was forbidden for “sellers of beverages to sell spirits to slaves” or even to “open a business after the doors close to buy or sell goods from slaves.”

In 1859, the Municipal Regulations for Pirai contained more details along these same lines, imposing a fine or fifteen days in jail on any “person who buys coffee, corn or other agricultural product from slaves if those slaves do not present written permission from their masters or overseers.”¹⁹ That same year, the municipality of Paraíba do Sul issued decree no. 1.167 which imposed fines on anyone who “allows slaves to linger in commercial establishments for more time than is reasonably necessary for them to make purchases” or who “negotiate[s] with slaves,

¹⁶ H. Mattos and A. M. Lugão Rios, *Memórias* and “O pós-abolição”; H. Mattos, *Ao sul da história*, “Remanescentes,” and “Políticas de reparação.”

¹⁷ Regarding slave small-holdings and economies, see B. J. Barickman, “Persistence and Decline”; J. Fragoso and M. G. Florentino, “Marcelino”; M. H. Machado, “Em torno da autonomia escrava,” “Vivendo na mais perfeita desordem,” and *O plano e o pânico*; and J. Reis and E. Silva, *Negociação e conflito*.

¹⁸ Posturas Municipais do Município de Rio Bonito (1871–1877), *Anais da Assembleia Legislativa Provincial do Rio de Janeiro*, Biblioteca Nacional (RJ).

¹⁹ Posturas Municipais do Município de Pirai (1859), *Anais da Assembleia Legislativa Provincial do Rio de Janeiro*, Biblioteca Nacional (RJ).

buying from them or exchanging any object with them.”²⁰ For the municipality of Barra Mansa, Title IX of the Municipal Regulations established penalties for “any person, whether or not they are a merchant, who buys items of gold or silver, or goods of any other kind (clothes, fabric, tools, coffee, or foodstuffs) from slaves without note or authorization from their masters.” Here again, “the provisions of this article do not apply to slaves who might sell foodstuffs on Sundays and holidays in the streets *quitanda*-style.” In the municipality of Santa Maria Madalena, the regulations were attentive to weights and measures, stating that that anyone who “buys food from slaves with a value that exceeds 2\$ by weight, or 4\$ by measure, or any object worth more than 2\$, without written permission from those slaves’ masters, managers or overseers, will pay a 20\$ fine.”²¹ For the municipality of Capivari, the novelty was a ban on “buying any kind of agricultural products, dead or living animals, birds, or other objects from slaves, without written permission from their masters.” Beyond this, in “villages and hamlets” on “festive occasions” it was forbidden to “set up stalls without license from the municipal council to sell goods of any kind.” The penalties were “a fine of 20\$ for free people, and for slaves eight days in jail.”²² For Itaguaí the prohibitions applied to any “person who buys gold, jewels, fabric, coffee, foodstuffs, or any other objects from slaves without the permission of their masters.” In the 1880s in Campos dos Goitacazes the regulations stated that “only *roceiros* [small-holders] and their representatives were permitted to set up market stalls or sell food, crops . . . or animal products in the streets, squares or beaches of the city or municipality; they must prove their status as a small-holder to the municipal council with a note from their local justice of the peace.” Such attempts to control circulation of goods through municipal regulations open a methodological window through which we can begin to understand the commercial circuits of Rio’s Black peasantry.

MOBILITY AND THE “SPECTER OF DISORDER”

Another issue still calls out for further research. Displacement and collective migrations happened before 1888 and were already characteristic

²⁰ Posturas Municipais do Município de Paraíba do Sul (1859), *Anais da Assembleia Legislativa Provincial do Rio de Janeiro*, Biblioteca Nacional (RJ).

²¹ Posturas Municipais do Município de Santa Maria Madalena (1881), *Anais da Assembleia Legislativa Provincial do Rio de Janeiro*, Biblioteca Nacional (RJ).

²² Posturas Municipais do Município de Capivari (1883), *Anais da Assembleia Legislativa Provincial do Rio de Janeiro*, Biblioteca Nacional (RJ).

experiences among Brazil's itinerant peasantry. The phenomenon was not tardy or isolated, nor was it simply an offshoot of radical abolitionism. What's more, in the last decade before abolition, so-called *retirantes* – freedpeople who had been emancipated collectively – also entered the scene.²³ Meanwhile, in various regions, governmental authorities, planters, and even abolitionists were trying to maintain control over the process of abolition.

In 1887 and 1890, Brazilian newspapers published numerous articles complaining about the abandonment of coffee *fazendas* by fugitive slaves, by freedpeople collectively manumitted before May 13, or by families freed by the Golden Law. After 1888, those complaints appeared in dialogue with others that discussed re-enslavement, vagrancy, and migration. In northern Rio de Janeiro province and the areas bordering on Espírito Santo, local papers were no different. In their very titles, many pieces – published in the crime section, as editorials, and even as letters to the editor – said a great deal about disputed imaginaries involving labor, social control, and conflicting expectations across all sectors of society regarding the immediate post-abolition period. The editors of the *Jornal de Campos* and the *Diário da Manhã* received copious correspondence about these issues as early as 1889. One series, entitled “Collaboration – Letters from an Agriculturalist,” published a number of complaints about the supposed difficulties in which planters found themselves due to the impact of the May 13 law. One writer, who signed himself J. H., discussed “the adherence of agricultural laborers to new ideas,” calling on “companions of class and misfortune . . . [who were experiencing] the harshest privations.”²⁴ Under the title “Gold Fever,” the following day's column mentioned that “the nation” was “exhausted and disheartened” after May 13.²⁵

Complaints, rumors, and expectations reverberated everywhere. Planters and urban residents from northern Rio de Janeiro province, southern Espírito Santo, and the Mata Mineira (a forested zone of Minas Gerais) connected with one another amidst the hopes and misgiving of the freed communities, *quilombos*, and enslaved people that surrounded them.

²³ The term *retirantes* is also used in Brazil to refer to refugees from devastating droughts that periodically afflicted Brazilian Northeast; the usage here, although contemporaneous, was distinct.

²⁴ *Jornal de Campos*, October 20, 1889, p. 1.

²⁵ *Jornal de Campos*, October 21, 1889, p. 1.

One day later during that same October, also in the *Jornal de Campos*, an article entitled “Assault – Says a Telegram from Leopoldina” reported:

The city was assaulted last night by the freedmen. The City Council was attacked to destroy the [slave] registration records. There was shooting all night long. Families are terrified. There is no public [police] force. The assailants promised to return in greater numbers. It was calculated that there were two hundred of them, all well-armed. We have no protection whatsoever. We ask that measures be taken.²⁶

The watchwords in such articles were indemnization, vagrants, vagabondage, collective flights, and ruined and abandoned plantations. There was even talk of the need for agricultural aid (both direct investments and loans), and the shortage of “laborers” was a constant motto:

Agriculturalist, we do not perceive the advantages that can come from borrowed money, even at low interest, when we have no workforce to till the land or harvest the crops We do not accept the idea that such loans are a favor granted to us by the State, as we were stripped of our legal property by an unpatriotic and violent law Where is the person with a keen enough eye to find in this government any indication of good intentions or any proof of patriotism? The chain of emigration has been cut off once and for all! Every day, freedmen are allowed to offer us the most embarrassing examples of vagrancy, drunkenness and theft!²⁷

Commenting on what was interpreted as utter ruin for agriculture, a report mentioned recent large-scale global economic transformations, which were supposedly characterized “by a fabulous movement of capital” and could result in prosperity. However, in the face of the traumatic experience of abolition, this transformation could actually impede such progress and prosperity in Brazil, causing “backwardness in its industries, vacillation in its commerce, impoverishment in its artisanal activities, and the weakening of agriculture, which will require enormous work to recover from the hard and violent blow it has received from the loss of manpower.”²⁸ Such critiques of the state in which agriculture had been left by the supposed lack of workers were accompanied by proposed solutions: “Without coercive labor laws and the constraint of rigorous penalties for the vagrancy – which is developing among us on a broad and terrifying scale, effectively aided by the goodwill of the laborious population – nothing can be achieved, and agriculture cannot count on those elements of production.”²⁹

²⁶ *Jornal de Campos*, October 27, 1889, p. 2.

²⁷ *Jornal de Campos*, October 30, 1889, p. 3.

²⁸ *Jornal de Campos*, November 1, 1889, p. 1.

²⁹ *Jornal de Campos*, October 11, 1889, p. 1.

Debates about abolition's ramifications would become entwined with the polemics and expectations of Brazil's republican transformation in 1889. On November 25, ten days after the military coup that "proclaimed" the Republic, the *Jornal de Campos* published an essay by Oliveira Machado in which he expressed serious concerns about debates conducted in such an atmosphere because he figured that most republicans were agriculturalists harmed by the law of May 13 and was very afraid of them.³⁰ That same day, an essay by Manoel de Paula was also published, glossing the context of debates "about political ideas and institutional reforms":

On the question of the servile element, I was always on the side of those who demanded full, unconditional and immediate liberty for slaves.

Every day for about six long months, I battled in the press, defending the rights of the oppressed, the wretched ones devoid of fortune, without expecting any reward other than the fulfillment of a duty.

At the height of abolitionism, along with the slaves, I had to defend the oppressed who were scattered across the streets and squares of the city.

But it must be said that I have never advised enslaved people to threaten their masters' lives; I never condoned violence or assaults on other people's property, nor did I derive benefit from those unfortunate people's savings with false promises of liberty.³¹

Fears of re-enslavement had even greater repercussions. We still lack studies of the ways in which the political context of the late 1880s and early 1890s created divergent scenarios for different social sectors. Fear of re-enslavement was not just a fiction produced by the monarchists to pit freedpersons against the republicans. The matter took on real and symbolic dimensions, which require further study. In late 1889, several newspapers published a circular that had been issued by Rio de Janeiro's secretary of police on November 27. It read:

As malicious spirits are spreading rumors that the new regime could prejudice the freedom of individuals who acquired it through law no. 3353 of May 13 of last year, I recommend that you make it clear – by posting edicts in all the parishes of your district and by way of the respective police commissioners – that freedmen will continue to enjoy the rights conferred on them by said law, and that in this regard there is no doubt in the intentions of the provisional government of the Republic and of this state.³²

³⁰ *Jornal de Campos*, November 25, 1889, p. 1.

³¹ *Jornal de Campos*, November 25, 1889, p. 3.

³² *Jornal de Campos*, December 1, 1889, p. 3.

More than just fear and trepidation, there was a real sense that free-people might perceive the change in political regime as an attack on the end of slavery. An article entitled “A Republica e os libertos” (The Republic and the Freedmen) reported that a military detachment had been sent to Cantagalo and Valença, where there had been “significant uprisings of freedmen opposed to the new regime.”³³ In July 1890, with the headline “Reescravização” (Re-enslavement), the *Gazeta do Povo* in Campos charged that Alexandre Corrêa, the owner of a small-holding in Vargem Grande, São Fidelis, was privately imprisoning three black freed-women on his property.³⁴

The “specter of disorder” – a hyperbolic and often politically instrumentalized fear of free labor and the transformations it entailed – reared its head in diverse narratives and arguments during the inevitable but at the same time unpredictable end of slavery.³⁵ Lana Lage’s studies of abolitionism in northern Rio de Janeiro were pioneering on this topic, as was Hebe Mattos’ research comparing the political and social dynamics of that same region with Minas Gerais. Mattos’ work, based in part on local periodicals, also focused on the local repercussions of events in São Paulo, which were often covered in the region’s papers. In general, however, Brazilian historiography has analyzed the events of these years through the lens of disputes over the memory of abolition and post-abolition.³⁶ It is possible to propose an interpretation that goes further, connecting mass desertions, mobile *quilombos*, and especially the movements of newly emancipated slaves to create a history that can supplant the elitist memory of abolition that was constructed in the local press right into the first decades of the twentieth century. Although it was loudly proclaimed by the press, perhaps definitive and unconditional abolition and the transformations of the post-abolition period were not so much *faits accomplis* as they were experiences that converged or diverged across Brazil’s heterogeneous regions.

Beyond this, there might have been a dialogic relationship between these happenings and a series of episodes that happened in Western São Paulo, which were widely reported in Rio de Janeiro and may have had an impact in the open borderlands of Rio and Espírito Santo. It is worth emphasizing a series of reports by Arrigo de Zetirry published in the *Jornal do Commercio* in the second half of 1894, which Sheila Faria and

³³ *Jornal de Campos*, December 3, 1889, p. 3. ³⁴ *Gazeta do Povo*, July 2, 1890, p. 2.

³⁵ M. H. Machado and F. Gomes, “Eles ficaram ‘embatucados.’”

³⁶ L. da Gama Lima, *Rebeldia Negra e Abolicionismo*; H. Mattos, *Das cores do silêncio*.

Hebe Mattos have already used extensively, regarding “Lavoura no Estado do Rio de Janeiro” (Agriculture in the State of Rio de Janeiro).³⁷ In addition to Campos, these reports describe several municipalities with open borders in northern Rio de Janeiro state, such as Itaperuna, São João da Barra, and the villages of Carangola and Muriaé. The author, writing both as an observer and analyst, noted that, in “reporting on the current state of work and workers, agricultural labor and its products,” he would stress how the freedmen had abandoned the slave quarters and were seeking to negotiate new forms of labor, which included removing their wives and children from the agricultural workforce.³⁸

Comparing working conditions in this region with those in São Paulo, where planters made use of an Italian immigrant workforce, Zetirry criticized the freedmen for refusing “family work,” predicting that “we will find Black men’s wives sitting in the doorway with their hands in their laps, women who are as strong as the men, completely inert.” Furthermore, the author added, “It seems that [Brazilian] nationals, especially freedmen, are unaware that the human heart can nurture a desire to change one’s life, to improve one’s social status.”³⁹ The chronicler also touched on the abandonment of the plantations, the freedmen’s lack of ambition, their rejection of plantation labor in favor of their subsistence plots, and the ways in which labor regimes in this region compared with those involving contracted Chinese labor and with those in other parts of northern Rio de Janeiro state. Speaking of the region’s Black population, Zetirry observed that “the ranks of freedmen, who are still Itaperuna’s main source of labor, have been decimated, whether because other municipalities are attracting them by paying more, or because of high mortality and women’s complete abandonment of agricultural toil.” Noting that “freedmen generally have a major flaw,” he then listed several, among them the supposed fact that “they are content to enjoy the freedom to work or not as they please.”⁴⁰

Zetirry also commented on agricultural conditions in the borderlands of northern Rio de Janeiro and southern Espírito Santo, where there was a “relative agricultural expansion” but “in small-holdings rather than large-scale production.” In terms of the general panorama, the “large properties that existed during slavery have been completely abandoned for years, or are tended by an extremely limited number of freed laborers,

³⁷ S. de Castro Faria, “Terra e trabalho”; H. Mattos, *Das cores do silêncio*.

³⁸ *Jornal do Commercio*, June 20, 1894. ³⁹ *Jornal do Commercio*, July 28, 1894.

⁴⁰ *Jornal do Commercio*, June 20, 1894.

who produce a small amount of sugarcane and some grains and also exploit the excellent hardwoods that the remaining forests still possess.”⁴¹ Regarding post-emancipation economic landscapes, Zetirry stressed that in northern Rio de Janeiro state, especially in Campos, “despite the lack of hands to cultivate sugarcane and exploit all the land suitable for it – and even though at least half the plantations in the municipality of Campos are completely abandoned and only one-third of the total are being tended with care – despite all of this, the municipality of Campos is not yet one of those in Rio de Janeiro state that has suffered the worst consequences of the law of May 13.” According to him, “fortunately those freedmen who are used to working on the sugar plantations have remained loyal.”⁴²

The chronicler concludes by suggesting the following disheartening situation for large properties and sugar mills: on one hand there were freedpersons, individuals or families, who were either absent or scarce because they were being recruited by other municipalities offering better pay; on the other, there were colonies of freedpersons who entered into partnerships or sharecropping arrangements in order to devote themselves to family farming, thus ruining the sugar economy and nearby sugar mills. Regarding workers on a plantation linked to the Dores Sugar Mill, Zetirry observed: “The freedmen there, like most in this municipality, work as much as is necessary for their subsistence, showing neither interest in improving their status nor any love for saving.”⁴³

We contend that part of this shortage of freedmen willing to work in regimented and iron-fisted disciplinary regimes – similar to slavery – was either motivated by or emerged from the unfolding of mass flights and the large-scale movement, displacement, and migration of slaves, *retirantes*, and *quilombo* members during the decade of abolition. This would lead to ever-denser migrations and dislocations during the post-abolition period. The Black peasant micro-communities that spread across the region, constantly migrating in search of work and land, were formed through a complex process about which we still know very little.

MEMORY, AUTONOMY, AND MOBILITY

Even beyond expectations regarding land, questions of labor, autonomy, and spatial circulation mobilized the Black population in many parts of

⁴¹ *Jornal do Commercio*, October 21, 1894. ⁴² *Jornal do Commercio*, July 14, 1894.

⁴³ *Jornal do Commercio*, August 4, 1894.

Brazil's slaveowning Southeast. These issues could involve widely varying landscapes, characters, and settings. In less than a year, transformations in the worlds of work could bring about profound changes in people's lives and everyday routines. One example – recorded in generational memories – comes from the municipality of Cachoeiro de Itapemirim, in the south of Espírito Santo. Cachoeiro was the area's largest coffee producer, and in the decade of abolition it contained over 50 percent of the region's enslaved workforce, according to registries from 1887.⁴⁴ Yet in this period images emerge of plantations deserted both by their owners – many of whom migrated to other towns closer to the center of the province or its capital city Vitória, handing over the management of their property to sharecroppers or managers – and by a portion of the Black population, mostly families of freedpersons who took off in search of land, work, and liberty. Phenomena that some newspaper reports characterized as evidence of vagrancy, disorder, laziness, and ingratitude in fact signified chapters in long-standing, multigenerational processes of family migration. For many, running away or abandoning plantations en masse signified total rejection of inadequate wages, limited access to land, lack of autonomy, and subjugation to working conditions analogous to slavery. These were rendered even less tolerable because they were imposed in spaces – real and symbolic – where such families had been enslaved for two or more generations.

These narratives emerge clearly in the memories of descendants of the first generations of Black families that migrated within the region between the end of the nineteenth century and the first decades of the twentieth. Amélia Gonçalves, a granddaughter of former slaves from southern Espírito Santo, described in detail some of the expectations held by her family, the first generation of freedpersons, immediately after May 13, 1888:

[My grandfather] was a slave over there in Ouro Preto [Minas Gerais]. From there he was bought to come here to the Fazenda do Castelo [in the present-day municipality of Guaçuí, former parish of São Miguel do Veado, in the municipality of Cachoeiro de Itapemirim, on Espírito Santo's southern border with Minas Gerais]. He lived on that plantation for many years and . . . when slavery was over, everyone had the "free womb" after that, you know . . . Well, he was freed there . . . So then senhor Roberto [the planter] gave 30,000 reis to my grandfather, 30 *patacas* to my grandfather, and told him, now that slavery is over, no one is

⁴⁴ According to a report published on April 17, 1887, in *O Cachoeirano*, a newspaper that circulated in southern Espírito Santo, we have found that, of the 12,402 slaves registered with the province by March 30 of that year, 8,043 were working on plantations in two southern municipalities: Cachoeiro de Itapemirim and Itapemirim.

a slave, you will have your children and they will be yours. Then my grandfather bought a piece of land and moved to Guaçuí, to a place called Monte Vidéo, and set up his farm. He lived there for many years until he died, my father's father He lived there with the family; my grandfather had a vast amount of land and lived there with his children. It was there that I was born in 1914. My father lived there. He was Evancio Moisés Gonçalves. My uncle Faustino, my uncle Firmino lived there. Aunt Rita. They all lived in that place Ah! We used to plant plant cassava, beans, corn, and coffee there – the driving force was coffee.⁴⁵

The wealth of detail in Amélia's statement provides evidence that freedpersons were seeking autonomy – this can be seen in the ways that they exercised family control and spatial mobility to seek better working conditions and access to land. There is also another significant point: Amélia points to the existence of a community of freedpersons made up of members of the same family. Coffee was the only product that the community sold. The other crops they planted – “corn, beans, rice” – “were for our household, for the family itself.” She also added:

In the old days, we didn't have this business we have today, people selling everything they harvest. In the old days we stored [enough] beans for the whole year, corn for the whole year. We raised pigs, we raised chickens. My grandfather had grazing land. He had a broodmare, he had a horse, an immense number of streams.

Autonomy over land – a legacy of land access gained through enslaved people's own savings – went hand in hand with the availability of labor and inputs necessary for agricultural work. It seems probable that the owner who acquired that original slave – Amélia's grandfather – also secured other family members, following in the generational logic of an imperfect labor market that was based on the Black family. Desire for family time, land access, and the chance to construct their own economies pervaded the age of emancipation and shaped expectations of freedom from the 1880s to the first decades of the twentieth century. In local memory, there are also indications that freedpersons left the *fazendas* but did not leave the region; this revelation sheds a different light on the images of decadence that are always reproduced in histories of the years immediately after abolition in Brazil's slaveholding Southeast. Local journalistic agendas – which constantly emphasized disorder, desertion, and chaos – greatly influenced historiographical narratives, overshadowing local memory and hiding more complex historical experiences. Images

⁴⁵ Interview conducted in Alegre in October 1992 with Amélia Gonçalves, born in 1914 in Guaçuí, ES. She died in 1996.

of the “ruin” that set in months before abolition hid ideologies that sought to control both collective and family-based labor.

Based on a careful dialogic reading of narratives constructed from very different sources and archives – including juridical and print sources, but also local generational memory transmitted through oral history – we have argued here that the characterization of the post-emancipation period as a landscape of catastrophe and total disorganization functioned as part of a dialogue about normative expectations and policies. Euphoria – if it occurred at all – was localized and was the exception rather than the rule; after the celebrations of May 13 were over, at least in the south of Espírito Santo province,⁴⁶ freedpeople attempted to reorganize their lives and return to the routine of hard work in the countryside.⁴⁷ There, through disputes with a small local agrarian elite, they demarcated their space of autonomy in this new conjuncture. Unlike São Paulo, this was a region where former slaveowners did not have access to a sufficient number of European workers. Beginning 1887, immigrants did arrive to work on the large southern plantations. But they were soon lured by the former province’s vast unoccupied territories, either laying direct claim to them or moving to the settlement colonies created by the Espírito Santo government in the center-west. In southern Espírito Santo, the task of reorganizing labor relations in the countryside fell to Brazilian workers, many of whom were freedpersons.

For planters with little capital, or those unwilling to use their capital to pay their workers’ salaries, coffee growing through *parceria* (partnership) or *meação* (sharecropping) developed as a feasible way to organize work in rural areas post-abolition.⁴⁸ Paulo Vicente Machado, born in 1910 on Fazenda da Presa in the municipality of Alegre (southern Espírito Santo), gives an interesting description of rural arrangements in that context:

And after captivity ended, he [Vicente, Paulo Vicente’s father] started farming, that’s right . . . farming, man.

The plantation was on a mountain. He [the planter] divided up the plantation; there were thousands of *alqueires* of land So he divided it up for all those folks

⁴⁶ On this subject, see R. Martins, *Os caminhos da liberdade*.

⁴⁷ For some decades now, social historians have been conceptualizing methodologies that seek to reconstruct the past from the stories of ordinary people, who have been “margin-alized” in complex social processes such as those experienced in Brazil by the massive number freed from forced labor in the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries. F. Krantz, *History from Below*; J. Sharpe, “History from Below.”

⁴⁸ H. Mattos, *Das cores do silêncio*; R. Mourão Gontijo, “Parceria e o café”; A. Lugão Rios, *Família e transição*; S de Castro Faria, “Terra e trabalho.”

[former slaves], coffee farming. Planting coffee by sharecropping . . . each of them got a piece of land to farm.⁴⁹

In fact, the crop was not entirely the worker's, because he had to share half the coffee produced with the landowner. But the fact that the freedman could work by his own rules seems to have been interpreted as an achievement. In the Mata Mineira zone, in Minas Gerais on the border with southern Espírito Santo, almost all of the municipalities adopted the partnership system after abolition. This labor relationship was attractive to landowners because it kept workers on the property, and it also served as a mechanism to reduce cash payments to the workforce. According to Ana Lúcia Duarte Lanna, the reorganization of work in the Mata Mineira after abolition also depended mainly on Brazilian workers, "a broad category that in our view includes former slaves, who were the workforce that was key to the formation of a free labor market in that region."⁵⁰ We suggest that same hypothesis for southern Espírito Santo. In another statement from a descendant of freedpersons, born in 1928 in Córrego do Moinho), we have unearthed some details that suggest that partnership was also the predominant form of labor relations in southern Espírito Santo after captivity's end:

In those days, it was like this: you were a *colono*, you lived on the *fazenda*, the planter gave you the land to farm, and what you planted was yours, you see The food crops were ours; we ate them and sold them. We only gave [the planter] half the coffee, not the rest of the crops.⁵¹

Just as Lanna found in the Mata Mineira, fixed workers, whom the planter called *colonos* (settlers), lived on the plantation and tended the crops. In most cases, they could plant grains between the rows of coffee bushes or on land set aside for that purpose, which in general had already been abandoned by large-scale planters. In local memory passed down by freedpersons or their children (first generation), the idea of planting grain is associated with so-called *lavoura branca* ("white farming"), which, in addition to ensuring the worker's subsistence, may even have rendered them better returns, since investment in coffee could take a very long time to produce a profit.

⁴⁹ Interview conducted in October 1992, in São Gonçalo, RJ, with Paulo Vicente Machado, born on Fazenda da Presa, in the municipality of Alegre, ES, in 1910. An *alqueire* in this region was equivalent to a little more than an acre.

⁵⁰ A. L. Lanna, *A transformação*, p. 77.

⁵¹ Interview conducted in October 1994, in Alegre, Espírito Santo, Geraldo Nicomédio dos Santos.

In the Mata Mineira, and quite likely in southern Espírito Santo as well, the big problem that landowners saw in the partnership arrangement was that the colono was more interested in planting grain than coffee.⁵² Thus, in addition to the “partners” – who were generally permanent workers, fixed in place – there was also another category of *fazenda* workers: temporary, seasonal migrants who helped to harvest crops the partners had planted and tended. In other words:

the need for temporary workers is imperative because the “partner” guarantees the cultivation of coffee, but not its harvest, which requires more workers. It is also impossible to establish a salaried relationship to carry out all the tasks distributed throughout the year, either because it is impossible to control and regulate the supply of workers, or because the planters lack ready money. Seasonal migration is the option that makes it possible to complete the harvest and carry out production in general Another advantage of this system is the fact that migrant workers have no other interests except harvesting coffee beans or whatever other specific task might be assigned them. This is not the case with the “colono,” who sees the cultivation of grains as yielding the most benefits.⁵³

Yet the possibility of migrant labor could cut both ways, especially in less prosperous regions. Analyzing the narratives constructed in Minas Gerais newspapers in the 1890s, Lanna touched on the open appeals of local farmers, who felt disadvantaged by the flow of workers headed to more dynamic coffee-producing municipalities at harvest time:

This emigration of our workforce towards the municipalities of the South, which is reducing our planters almost to despair, still continues at an ever-accelerating rate.

Not a week goes by without seeing large levies leaving us to lend a hand to those who have more resources than we do.⁵⁴

Still little studied, these seasonal migrations flowed toward the coffee-growing regions, in Minas and elsewhere, during harvest season (three or four months in the year). These movements and migrations occurred beyond the boundaries of the coffee-growing municipalities, and they may have had broad and intersecting significance. This was apparent in 1893 in responses given to a questionnaire in the district of São Sebastião do Rio Preto in Minas Gerais. The planters complained that “workers from Minas Novas were going to Espírito Santo.”⁵⁵ The interesting thing

⁵² A. L. Lanna, *A transformação*, p. 88. ⁵³ A. L. Lanna, *A transformação*, pp. 95–96.

⁵⁴ O *Serro*, *Serro*, May 7, 1893, p. 1. In A. L. Lanna, *A transformação*, p. 94.

⁵⁵ Responses to the 1893 questionnaire in the district of S. Sebastião do Rio Preto, Conceição municipality, in which there is also the complaint that “the production of food crops has not increased, and prices have increased for about three years, which seems to be caused

about this movement is that it indicates that by this point the coffee economy of southern Espírito Santo was already attracting workers from a neighboring state. This shows that some sectors of the population in parts of Minas Gerais behaved in the same way as their counterparts elsewhere, migrating during harvest season in response to demand for field labor or in order to escape the control, domination, and power of former plantation masters after 1888. This suggests that such movement on the part of freedpeople and Black families can be characterized as a facet of post-abolition.

We wandered and wandered and wandered and finally ended up in Vala de Souza . . . yes, in Concórdia, we were there for a long time. But I was born in São Pedro de Itabapoana, in Alcebiádes [Espírito Santo] . . . I remember, it was on the Fazenda Concórdia, a huge plantation, where dad was a coffee sharecropper and planted *lavoura branca*. Near a coffee plantation that went on as far as the eye could see . . . It belonged to the planter, and he [her father] planted it and gave half to the planter. He kept half, and there they had coffee, they had rice, corn . . . They had everything there . . . There were a lot of Black people there, yes, still from the time of captivity.⁵⁶

This recollection reveals that – just as we have seen in Minas Gerais – the southern region of Espírito Santo saw a process of generational migration and displacement, an intense mobility practiced by a labor force made up of freedpeople and Black agricultural workers descended from the rural free poor. This is also what emerges from the account of Ana Cândida, the daughter of Gabriel Monteiro dos Santos, a small-holder and seasonal coffee worker. “O Velho” Gabriel managed to buy an *alqueire* of land (a little more than an acre) in Vala de Souza, where the freed family of the formerly enslaved Vicente also owned property; this is where Vicente’s son Paulo Vicente Machado and Gabriel’s daughter Ana Cândida met and married in 1925.⁵⁷ In southern Espírito Santo – an example drawn from oral history accounts – there really was a large concentration of *colonos* who began to cultivate *lavoura branca* for subsistence after slavery. This seems to have occurred in the former district of Vala de Souza, in the municipality of Alegre, and in the present-day municipality of Jerônimo Monteiro; various accounts refer to areas, places, villages, or small-holdings that were *só de pretos* (only Black). To

by the emigration of workers to farms in the riverside forest, other municipalities and districts.” In A. L. Lanna, *A transformação*, note 46, p. 95.

⁵⁶ Interview with Ana Cândida Vicente Machado, 87.

⁵⁷ Paulo Vicente Machado and Ana Cândida Vicente Machado were Robson Martins’ maternal grandparents.

this day, there is a Black community there called Sítio dos Crioulos (the farm of the creoles). “O Velho” Gabriel spent a short time in Vala de Souza, where he farmed subsistence crops, which Ana identified as *lavoura branca*. Gabriel later sold the property and got a job as a sharecropper on a plantation in São João do Muqui, also in the south of the state.

CONCLUSION

Mobility and autonomy allowed rural Afro-descendant people to produce intersecting significations from complex experiences of freedom, work, and access to land. Land grants in wills, villages of free Black peasants, and even itinerant *quilombos* created new rural configurations even during slave times, and these took on new and different meanings in the post-abolition era. For many freedpersons – as was true for a subset of dispossessed free men prior to 1888 – mobility was a facet of their expectations of autonomy, which was also based on family labor and mediated by preexisting or developing personal and family relationships.⁵⁸

More fine-tuned analyses may offer comparisons – or even direct historical connections – with peasant migrations and settlements elsewhere; with Jamaican maroon villages, for example, or with the intense migration of Black communities in Colombia, who eventually reached free areas on the Pacific coast. In other contexts, such as South Carolina, freedpeople organized themselves as communities after emancipation, planning their work with the aim of gaining more control over various forms of agricultural labor. They wanted to guarantee the benefits they had already acquired as slaves, such the right to plant crops for sale and their own subsistence on Sundays and holidays. In that same region, agrarian movements organized by former slaves began to fight for changes in daily work routines, because in their view labor conditions there were a legalized continuation of slavery.⁵⁹ They fully understood the meaning of freedom and the entitlements it sanctioned, and they fought to claim their rights.

The same happened in the Brazilian coffee plantation areas we analyzed in this chapter. Even though planters themselves sought to

⁵⁸ H. Mattos, *Das cores do silêncio*, p. 361.

⁵⁹ J. Saville, “Grassroots Reconstruction”; A. L. Pires et al., *Territórios de gente negra*; J. Besson, *Transformations of Freedom*.

maintain freedpeople on the plantations where they had long worked as slaves, freedpersons' pursuit of autonomy, in the form of control over the rhythms of work and access to land, eventually changed the geography of labor in those areas. In that sense, their experience was common to many societies across the Americas after abolition.

