

“TO THE NORTH, THE HEIRS...”: UNDIVIDED LANDS, SOCIAL NETWORKS, AND THE TRANSMISSION OF SUGAR MILLS IN THE VAZA-BARRIS RIVER BASIN (SÃO CRISTÓVÃO, SERGIPE, NINETEENTH CENTURY)

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ABSTRACT:

This article examines the use, ownership, and transfer of land in an undivided legal context in Ribeira do Vaza-Barris, a district of São Cristóvão, the former capital of Sergipe d’El Rei, during the mid-19th century. Drawing on insights from the Social History of Property, it argues that property is shaped by social relationships among individuals and groups in various contexts. The study highlights how sugar mill ownership in the 19th century underwent a process of "realization," influenced by the strategies of families who owned these mills. These strategies created a complex dynamic of land use, acquisition, and transfer. Using probate records, parish land documents, public deeds, and legal proceedings, along with Social Network Analysis, the article visually maps the connections of neighborhood, kinship, and relationships among sugar mill owners. It finds that the acquisition and transfer of undivided land were closely tied to the cohesion within family units, which either prevented property fragmentation or allowed external individuals access to the land.

Keywords: undivided lands; property rights; agrarian history; Sergipe.

RESUMO

Este artigo versa sobre o uso, posse e transmissão de terras em situação jurídica pro-indivisa na Ribeira do Vaza-Barris, Termo da Cidade de São Cristóvão, antiga capital da Província de Sergipe d’El Rei, em meados do século XIX. A partir das perspectivas introduzidas pela História Social da Propriedade, problematiza-se que a propriedade é fruto das relações sociais desempenhadas entre indivíduos e grupos sociais nas mais diversas condições. Assim, compreende-se que a propriedade canavieira do século XIX passou por um processo de “realização” envolvendo diferentes fatores, dentre os quais destacamos a atuação das famílias possuidoras de engenhos, cujas estratégias senhoriais resultaram numa intrincada dinâmica de uso, aquisição e transmissão da propriedade. Por meio de inventários *post-mortem*, registros paroquiais de terras, escrituras públicas e processos judiciais, além do emprego da Análise de Redes Sociais, foi possível visualizar graficamente as conexões de vizinhança, parentesco e vínculos entre os senhores de engenho. Ao considerarmos o conjunto de atores conectados às propriedades, observou-se que a aquisição e transmissão de terrenos indivisos dependia do grau de coesão em um núcleo familiar ao impedir (ou não) que a propriedade fosse fragmentada e acessada por indivíduos externos à parentela.

Palavras-chave: pró-indiviso; direitos de posse; história agrária; Sergipe.

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Initial Considerations

This article aims to analyze the disposition of land held in *pro indiviso* legal status on sugar mills located in the Ribeira do Vaza-Barris region, in the District of the City of São Cristóvão, in the mid-nineteenth century. Since the mid-eighteenth century, the region had taken part in the expansion of sugarcane cultivation, within the broader movement referred to by historiography as the Agricultural Renaissance (Passos Sobrinho, 1992; Almeida, 1993). For Bert Barickman (2003), Pombaline economic policy and, above all, the crisis of Caribbean sugar resulting from political disputes in the Antilles contributed to the renewal of sugarcane cultivation in Brazil. To supply the Atlantic demand for sugar, older sugar-producing regions such as the Recôncavo of Bahia, the Zona da Mata of Pernambuco, and certain areas of Rio de Janeiro reactivated their mills, while other localities—whose primary economic activity had been subsistence-oriented agriculture—saw the introduction of cane fields and a growing expansion in the number of mills (Malaquias *et al.*, 2018).

Occupied by colonial agents since the late sixteenth century, the Captaincy of Sergipe del Rey was integrated into the Atlantic provisioning system, with its principal objective being to meet Salvador's demand for food. As Siqueira (2016) highlights, with the reconstruction of the Captaincy after the expulsion of the Dutch in the seventeenth century, among the justifications presented in petitions for land grants (*sesmarias*), the development of “cultivations” and cattle raising stood out.

Located along one of the tributaries of the Vaza-Barris River, the City of São Cristóvão had, since its foundation, borne responsibilities essential to colonial administration, serving as the political-administrative center of the Captaincy (Siqueira, 2016). Not far from the river's mouth, the city also functioned as an Atlantic entrepôt for production originating in the interior. As historiography has emphasized, in order to supply Salvador's food needs, metropolitan policy imposed strong rigor in the construction of territories capable of provisioning the main population centers (Fragoso, 1998). Although manioc occupied a significant place within the agrarian system of the City and its District, the eighteenth century also witnessed salt production on the coastal salt pans, considerable cattle raising both in the Vaza-Barris floodplains and along the beaches, an incipient number of mills and small-scale *engenhocas* that supplied the demand for *aguardente* [sugarcane spirit], as well as tobacco cultivation (Siqueira, 2016;

Santos, 2017; Santos, 2021). Both tobacco and cachaça were directed toward the Atlantic slave trade, serving as commodities in exchanges on the African coast.

With the Agricultural Renaissance, the expansion of sugarcane fields in Sergipe—and consequently in São Cristóvão—took shape in different ways. According to Maria da Glória Santana de Almeida (1993), the growing establishment of mills in the late eighteenth century and the early decades of the nineteenth can be explained by three factors: the fragmentation of large landholdings, the purchase of plots from neighboring smallholders—above all farmers—and the equipping of a new unit in order to increase family income. The author emphasizes that, at first, the floodplains of the various rivers crossing the province’s territory, such as the Cotinguiba and the Vaza-Barris, were prioritized. At the same time, cattle ranches located near the coast were transferred to the hinterland, and forested areas began to be cleared for the introduction of cane. Based on *post-mortem* inventories, Carlos de Oliveira Malaquias et al. (2018) indicate that the development of sugarcane cultivation occurred alongside preexisting agrarian systems—namely subsistence agriculture—with mill owners cultivating foodstuffs such as manioc or allowing smallholders [*sitiantes*] to enter their lands. In this way, a relationship of power was constructed between mill owners and the smallholders who bordered or were aggregated to their estates.

Despite these increasing numbers, Maria da Glória Almeida (1993) notes that in the second half of the 1850s, coastal mills in Sergipe experienced a dramatic decline in productivity due to pressure for arable land suitable for cane cultivation, prolonged droughts, the spread of the cholera morbus epidemic, and the growing subdivision of land among the heirs of the first mill owners. Regarding this last aspect, Almeida stresses that the fragmentation of Sergipe’s mills compromised the production of each unit, since dividing the estate among heirs jeopardized its operation when placed under *pro indiviso* legal status.

Drawing on this broader overview of sugarcane cultivation in Sergipe during the first half of the nineteenth century, the present study seeks to test these propositions by analyzing the realization of sugar-producing property through the collective trajectories of the mills located in the Ribeira do Vaza-Barris. Considering the importance of these

units within the family assets of the senhorial elite of the capital, we ask: in what ways does a mill become indivisible? As historiography has emphasized, within a society inherited from the Ancien Régime, in which the establishment and maintenance of solid social hierarchies shaped individual actions, *senhorial* [seigneurial] elites/families, since the colonial period, were concerned with ensuring their social reproduction (Ribeiro, 2009; Pedroza, 2011; Almeida, 2015). Among the various terminologies employed to understand the mechanisms of social reproduction, we highlight the concept of “familistic logistics.” According to Mateus Andrade and Gusthavo Lemos (2013), family logistics comprise a set of actions, mechanisms, and interventions undertaken by family members in order to guarantee the group’s “success.” Within this scheme, emphasis is placed on the entire internal articulation performed within a family group whose objective was to reach a collective decision regarding the future transmission of family assets, in light of the duality of Portuguese legislation: while it mandated the equal partition of goods, it nonetheless enabled the rearrangement, endowment, and entailing of property. Within these possibilities, various actors devised unequal forms of transmission, fostering distinctions and internal hierarchies within the family (Pedroza, 2011).

Thus, what becomes evident is that landholding was permeated by different social relationships, “constructed” and realized in the course of daily life. In this sense, we draw upon the theoretical perspective of the Social History of Property. Within this framework, the concept of “property” underwent a normalization of its usage that does not correspond to the contemporary definition of “private property,” defined and defended by liberal articulations that, since the nineteenth century, have characterized it as “full, absolute, and individual” (Congost, 2007; Pedroza, 2020). By demonstrating that landholding undergoes a process of realization based on interactions, relationships, and engagements among individuals, this approach broadens the possibilities for studying the rural world. Among the concepts proposed, the notion of “property rights” is especially useful to us. In understanding that land held in *pro indiviso* legal status is not considered private property, we observe that such holdings are grounded in multifaceted modes of transmission and in the exercise of individual rights over collective areas, in which social relations among numerous individuals become all the more complex.

To grasp these complex relations in the use and transmission of land, this article draws on a substantial corpus of documents composed of post-mortem inventories,

parochial land registers from the parishes of Nossa Senhora da Vitória in the City of São Cristóvão and Nossa Senhora d’Ajuda in the Town of Itaporanga; judicial proceedings—such as injunctions, civil complaints, *força nova*, among others—filed in the District of the City of São Cristóvão; and notarial deeds contained in the books of the notary of the former capital.

To better represent the assemblage of information provided by these sources, we rely on the methodological possibilities offered by Social Network Analysis (SNA). Dating from the mid-twentieth century, Social Network Analysis comprises two intersecting branches of investigation: the Social Sciences branch known as Sociometry, and the mathematical field known as Graph Theory. Sociometry is based, in brief, on understanding individuals (social actors) as embedded within a social structure and connected through different relationships to the people around them (Botelho; Andrade; Lemos, 2013; Recuero, 2017; Cabreira, 2022). From Graph Theory, this “network” of interactions is represented through graphs—visual representations capable of foregrounding the totality of relationships that occur in real space. Through the elements composing Social Networks, relationships among individuals are displayed via visual components, distinguishing nodes (social actors) and edges (relationships) with different attributes. In historical studies, Israel Cabreira (2022) notes that social networks contribute to the representation of credit networks, neighborhood networks, *compadrio* ties, and family arrangements. Regarding land, Mateus Andrade (2024) has proposed a methodology for analyzing neighborhood networks based on boundary descriptions provided in parochial land registers. In understanding property as the result of social relations, Social Network Analysis emerges as a particularly useful tool for representation.

Having established the object, the documentary corpus, and the theoretical-methodological apparatus, the presentation proceeds with the analysis of four distinct social networks, displayed below:

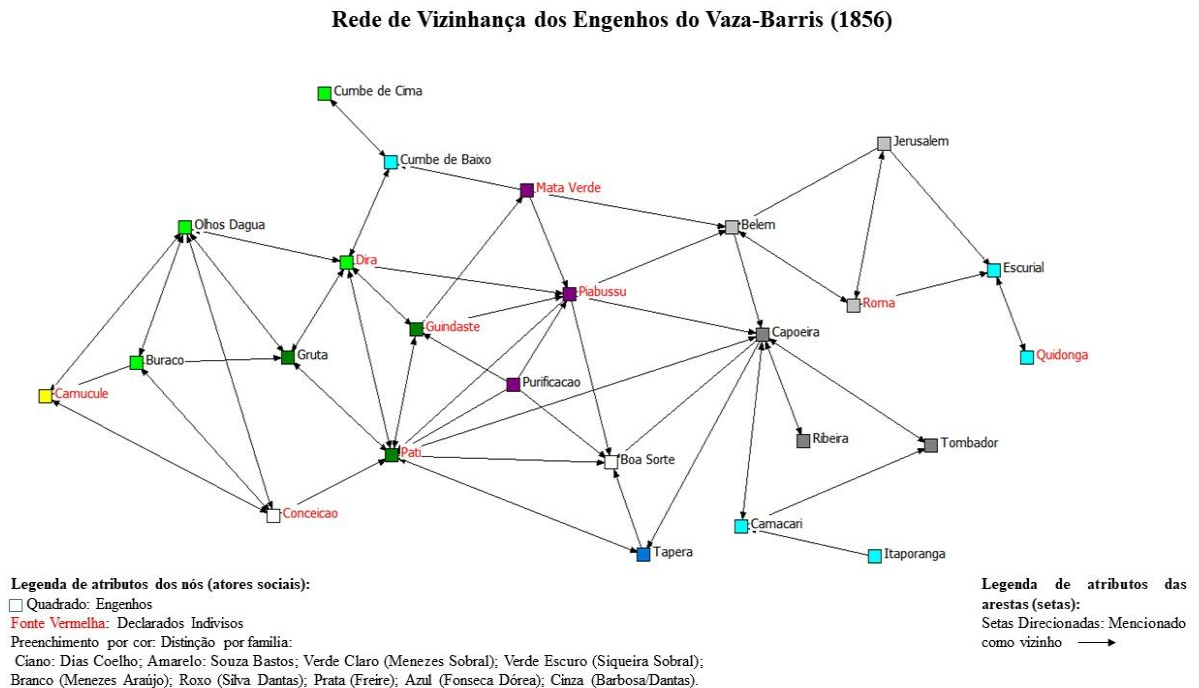


Figure 01: A network of neighbors: the Ribeira do Vaza-Barris as represented in 1856.

Figure 01 depicts, through a neighborhood network, the sugar mills of the Parish of Nossa Senhora d’Ajuda in the Town of Itaporanga as declared in the parochial land registers. In accordance with Decree No. 1,138 of 1854, which regulated the Land Law of 1850, landholders across the Empire were required to present to parish priests the boundaries of their holdings, detailing their neighbors and demarcation markers when known.³ Historiography has emphasized that maintaining imprecise boundaries was a strategy employed by landholders—particularly large *posseiros* [possession-based landholders]—whose aim was to expand their domains over areas considered public land (*devolutas*), spaces with vague definitions, or zones under dispute between neighbors (Motta, 1998; Christillino, 2019). In other words, at a time when various agrarian conflicts were emerging throughout the country, imprecise boundaries operated as an expedient for the imposition of local potentates (Garcia, 2006; Paes, 2019; Alvarenga, 2021; Monteiro, 2023). From another perspective, historiography has also underscored that naming neighbors in the parochial land registers was a political act (Christillino, 2019), as Márcia Motta (1998) argues regarding the significance of acknowledging neighborhood ties in

³ Decree 1,318 of 1854, Article 100. See: DIM 1318 (planalto.gov.br). Last accessed: July 8, 2024.

land declarations. Through the citation of boundaries, it becomes possible to map the relationships of proximity between mill owners and other landholders, as demonstrated by the methodology employed by Mateus Andrade (2024).

The Parish of Nossa Senhora d’Ajuda in the Town of Itaporanga comprised the greater part of the locality known as the Ribeira do Vaza-Barris, within the District of the City of São Cristóvão. With the exponential increase in the number of mills during the early decades of the nineteenth century, the Settlement of Itaporanga acquired economic importance precisely because it lay on the banks of the Ribeira and was therefore much closer to the sugar-producing units than the capital, São Cristóvão. The chapel of Nossa Senhora d’Ajuda, around which the settlement took shape, originated from the ermida erected by the former lords of the Itaporanga Mill. In 1845, the chapel was elevated to the status of parish, detached from the Mother Church of Nossa Senhora da Vitória in the City of São Cristóvão, and in 1854 Itaporanga was established as a town (Mecenas; Santos; Carvalho, 2023). With the creation of the municipal chamber, the territory of the municipality of Itaporanga came to encompass most of the mills that had previously belonged to the municipality of the capital—above all those in the Ribeira do Vaza-Barris—covering the entire stretch of land from the mouth of the Vaza-Barris River to the boundary with the City of Estância to the south, including the former lands of the Jesuit College (Ibidem). The transformations resulting from the separation can be seen in the data concerning the number of mills in each municipality, tabulated by Maria da Glória Santana de Almeida (1993). According to the author, in 1838 the City of São Cristóvão had 43 units operating within its territory, whereas in 1856, two years after the detachment of Itaporanga, that number had fallen to 4, while in Itaporanga it exceeded thirty.

By the end of the deadlines established by the Provincial President, 358 land registers had been submitted to Vicar Campos, containing a total of 372 declared holdings in the parish of Itaporanga. Of this number, slightly more than 84% represented *quinhões* [inheritance shares], portions, and pieces of land. All three categories demonstrate the consequences of long-term occupation in the territory, given that many of the individuals residing in the parish possessed only rights of access to plots and situations inherited from their ancestors or acquired over time through inheritance, exchange, or debt—

demonstrating the constant transmissions and forms of access to land in a region occupied since the colonial period (Santos; Jesus; Malaquias, 2023).

Another important feature of the Itaporanga registers is the frequency of land in *pro indiviso* legal status: slightly more than 81% of the holdings were indicated as indivisible. In other words, most of the registers consisted of *quinhões* of land in sites lacking defined demarcations. Based on this information, it became clear that the holders of *quinhões*, when grouped, represented the “unit” of a situation in which several people held rights of access. We thus identified 70 locales that served as the basis for the declarations of sites and mills.

Because the purpose of our analysis is to understand the relationship between indivisible lands and the transmission of mills, Figure 01 seeks to depict the productive units existing in the parish of Itaporanga and their neighborhood network. It bears recalling that for this network, data regarding the proximity between mills, sites, and other locales were extracted. In total, 25 mills were identified, represented by the nodes of the network in a square shape. As a one-mode network, all social actors belong to the same category—in this case, mills. Regarding the edges, these represent, in terms of Social Network Analysis, the type of relationship, which in our case corresponds to citation as a boundary neighbor. For example, the Purificação Mill cited the Boa Sorte Mill, though it was not acknowledged in return.

We identified nine senhorial families that held possession of the mills along the Ribeira do Vaza-Barris, distinguished in the network by the “color” attribute, with each family cluster represented by a different color. The purpose of this attribute was to display the social actors and how they were grouped around certain families. As for the attribute “*Pro indiviso*,” we created two categories of distinction in order to represent the mills that were in this legal condition in 1856. Among the 25 social actors depicted, nine have their text labels highlighted in red, indicating that they were registered as indivisible. A significant difference between the two categories lies in the manner in which they were recorded: the mills not described as indivisible were declared by a single person in a single register, whereas the “indivisible” mills were declared “share by share” by several individuals possessing parts.

Considering both attributes, it becomes evident that of the nine senhorial families residing in the parish of Itaporanga, seven had mills in *pro indiviso* legal status—

demonstrating that the possession of indivisible mills was a recurrent possibility within the familial logic of the region’s potentates. Historiography has approached this situation from various perspectives. Some authors argue that maintaining lands undivided after the death of the original owner posed a threat to the productive performance of the mill (Schwartz, 1988; Almeida, 1993; Motta, 1998; Bacellar, 2023). Another perspective seeks to understand *pro indiviso* status as an expression of a particular configuration of social relations among individuals with access rights, with the success or difficulties of shared use being assessed in light of the family’s internal cohesion and the modes through which *pro indiviso* status was established (Garcia, 2006; Ferreira, 2008; Guimarães, 2008; Pedroza, 2011; Santos; Jesus; Malaquias, 2023).

Common Holders: The Network of Mill Possession in the Vaza-Barris in 1856

To better understand the logistics and complexity of possessing indivisible mills, Figure 02 depicts the Network of Mill Holders in the Parish of Itaporanga. This second network may be considered a two-mode network, insofar as the social actors—the nodes—are divided into two categories: the mills, that is, the property itself, and the holders, that is, the individuals. In this way, the network displays the relationship of possession exercised by persons over the land. To make visible the complexity involved in holding parts of a mill, we distinguished the relationships—the edges or directed arrows—through three attributes: pink, representing the possession of a *quinhão* in lands belonging to the family; blue, representing co-possession by an individual external to the kin group; and black, representing sole possession. These attributes demonstrate three possible arrangements employed by senhorial families to maintain possession of mills.

In this sense, the purpose of Figure 02 is to show the internal cohesion of senhorial families in maintaining the unity of the family patrimony. As observed, some families managed to keep ownership of their mills within the kin group, without sharing access rights with persons external to the lineage. With the exception of Gonçalo Vieira, who declared himself lord of three mills—Capoeira, Tombador, and Ribeira—and José Fonseca, lord of the Santa Cruz da Tapera Mill, all other families dealt with indivisible lands in some of their mills. This demonstrates that the day-to-day operation of

patrimonial policies and the familistic logics of the elite of the Ribeira do Vaza-Barris included co-possession among their concerns and strategies. Despite the mechanisms of inheritance advancement, forced sales, and other expedients, the elite also had to contend with the egalitarian inheritance mandated by Portuguese legislation still in effect.

As historiography on inheritance and the transmission of land among the agrarian elite has emphasized, upon the death of a mill owner, the productive unit became a matter of concern among the heirs, with the kin group's capacity for cohesion and unity being fundamental for the family's perpetuation (Pedroza, 2011; Andrade; Lemos, 2013; Ferreira, 2017; Bacellar, 2024). In the case of the Parish of Itaporanga, during the execution of the parochial registers in 1856, the sudden death of mill owners—both men and women—produced a period of uncertainty regarding the definition of possession rights and succession. In many of the records, several holders refer to the deceased owners as neighbors, whose mills were then held in common by their heirs.

After the death of Major Delfino Sobral, his wife and children arranged the division of the inheritance among themselves. Represented in the network in dark green, the Siqueira Sobral family devised a strategy for the transmission of their three mills: one, São José da Gruta, remained with the widow, D. Anna Joaquina de São José [Siqueira], while Guindaste and Patti were redistributed equally among the couple's several children. Similarly, the heirs of Lieutenant Colonel Luís Freire (in grey) divided the mills Belém, Jerusalém, and Roma among themselves, the last of which remained *pro indiviso* between the young Áurea and Carolina. The Dias Coelho siblings (in cyan), Anna and Antônio, shared the Quidongá Mill, which they had inherited from their mother, D. Maria Micaella. It is worth noting that the same Antônio Dias Coelho was lord of the Escurial Mill through purchase, and that the two mills were neighbors.

When the information from both networks is combined, we observe that some lords of mills held rights of access not only to family lands inherited by succession, but also to neighboring mills acquired through purchase or other forms of negotiation. This perspective reveals another dimension of land use under *pro indiviso* legal status: dispersion. In the absence of familial organization, heirs could disperse their rights and distribute them among neighboring lords.

Rede de Possuidores de Engenhos do Vaza-Barris (1856)

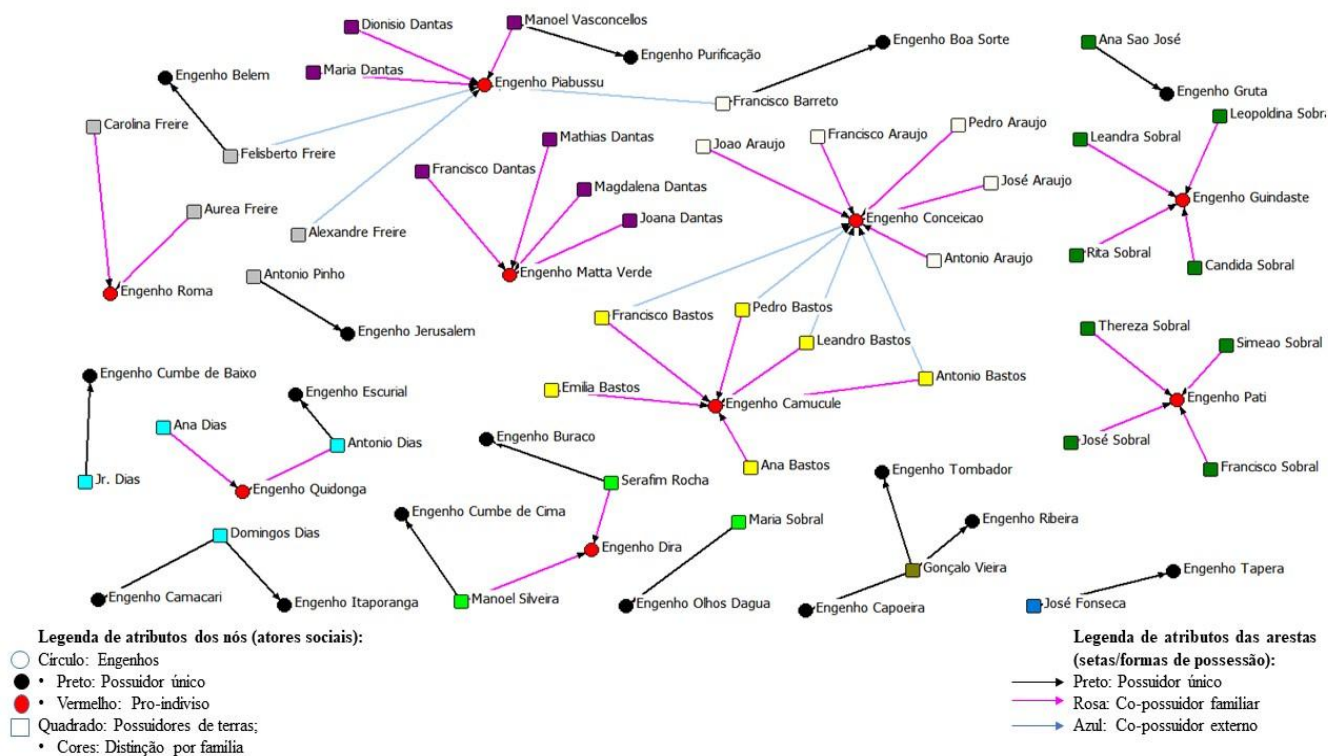


Figure 02: A network of sugar mill owners in the Vaza-Barris (1856).

Undivided Lands and Trajectories: The Cases of the Conceição and Camuculé Mills

In order to investigate family cohesion and the sharing of rights of access to the mills, we constructed a specific type of network designed to render visible the trajectory of land transmission. The objective is to highlight the path of possession across generations and among different social actors, distinguishing them within the system of land transmission. In terms of Social Network Analysis, the first holder is the social actor whose in-degree is zero, while the final holder—or holders—are those whose out-degree is zero.⁴ Thus, the former receives no “arrows,” and the latter distribute none. Of the 24 mills for which we possess information, we selected those that, in 1856, during the

⁴ Ingree and Outgree are variables of the Centrality Degree of a Network. Both values correspond to the number of connections a node receives (Ingree), and the number of connections it sends to other nodes (Outgree), cf. Cabreira, 2022.

production of the parochial land registers, appeared as indivisible: namely, the mills Camuculé and Conceição.

Working with the notion of “trajectory,” we opted for an analysis that reveals the realization of indivisible lands in different contexts. As Jacques Revel (1998) emphasizes concerning the concept of strategy within micro-historical methodology, tracing the trajectory of several cases enables us to conceive of the actions of individuals who confronted, in different ways, the issues of their time. In the terms of Giovanni Levi (2000), it allows us to observe the choices, uncertainties, and pluralities faced by social actors in the past, though always within a framework of “limited rationality.” Along similar lines, Mônica Ribeiro de Oliveira (2009) underscores that tracing the trajectories of social actors in an Ancien Régime context requires consideration of the strongly entrenched social hierarchies and the manipulable mechanisms of social reproduction.

Figure 03 depicts the Transmission Network of the Camuculé Mill, with Captain Leandro Siqueira as the initial point, the primary distributor. In 1819, during the inventory conducted for the said lord, the estate of Camuculé was transmitted by inheritance—indicated by the pink arrow—to his youngest daughter, D. Joaquina Perpétua.⁵ She, in turn, transferred the right to the Camuculé estate to her husband, Captain Francisco Manoel de Souza Bastos, who transformed it from a holding whose principal production was manioc into a mill equipped for sugarcane grinding. As noted earlier, in the early decades of the nineteenth century, certain landholdings were converted into mills by members of senhorial families.

During the period in which Captain Souza Bastos and D. Joaquina Perpétua held the Camuculé Mill, the family became involved in two litigious proceedings. The first concerned the arbitrary encroachments committed by the mill owner against the smallholders who were his neighbors. For more than twelve years, Souza Bastos and the smallholder Pedro Alexandrino de Jesus disputed a parcel of land known as Crumatá, located along the banks of the Vaza-Barris River, between Itaporanga and Itabaiana. After

⁵ AGJSE, São Cristóvão, Inventories, General No. 159, document 20, 1819, Post-mortem inventory of Leandro Ribeiro de Siqueira e Mello.

the resolution of the conflict in the first half of the 1850s, the Camuculé Mill expanded over the lands newly acquired by Captain Souza Bastos in the Crumatá area.⁶

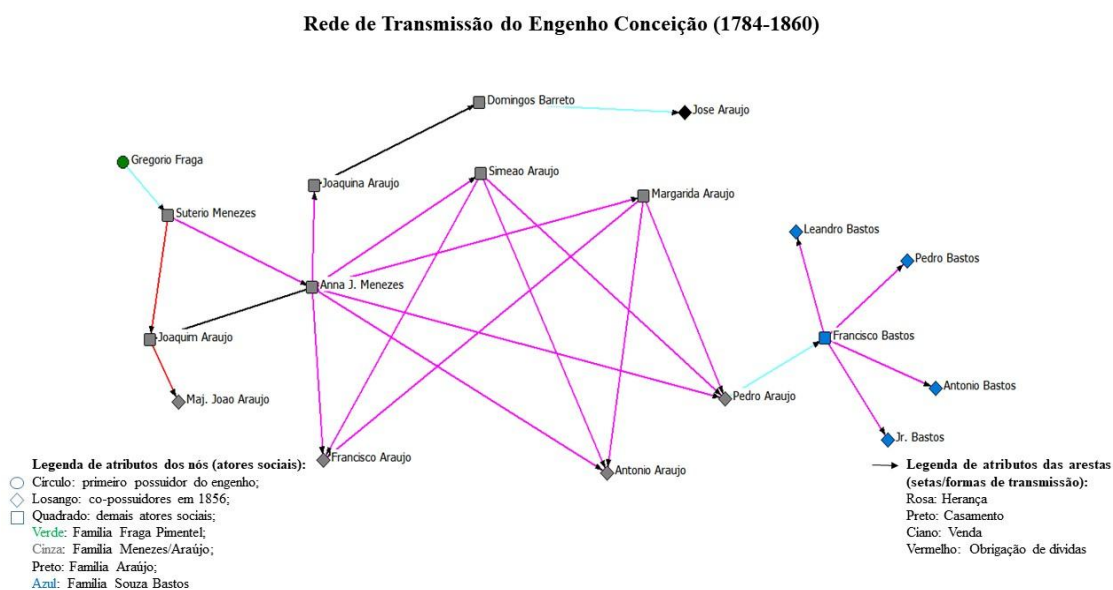


Figure 03: Transmission network of the Camaculé sugar mill.

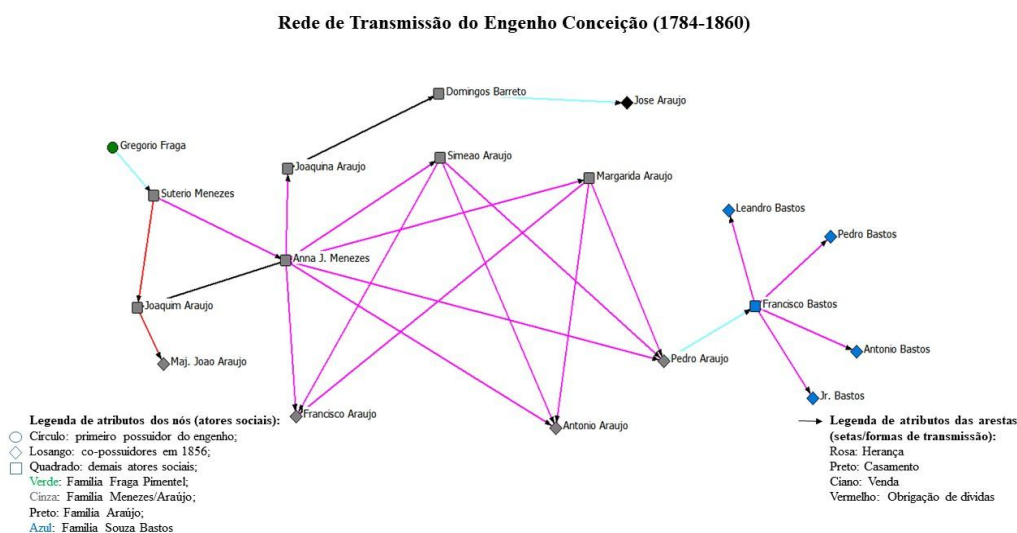


Figure 04: Transmission network of the Conceição sugar mill. Source: AGJSE, São Cristóvão, Libelo Cível, No. G. 45, 1859, plaintiff: Major Serafim Álvares d’Almeida Rocha; defendant: Major João

⁶ AGJSE, São Cristóvão, Civil Libel, General No. 39, 1839, Plaintiff: Pedro Alexandrino de Jesus; Defendant: Francisco Manoel de Souza Bastos; AGJSE, São Cristóvão, Civil Libel, General No. 41, 1848, Plaintiff: Pedro Alexandrino de Jesus; Defendant: Captain Francisco Manoel de Souza Bastos and his wife.

Manoel de Menezes e Araújo; AGJSE, São Cristóvão, Inventories, General No. 19, doc. 15, 1824, Inventory of Captain José Sutério de Menezes; APES, Col. SS, Vol. 56, doc. 02, pp. 2–3v, 10–11, 20, 43, 43v, 45, 45v, 71.

After the conflict had concluded, the mill owner sought to obtain credit in the mercantile markets of São Cristóvão and Salvador, with the aim of erecting a new unit on his newly acquired lands—an undertaking suspended after his sudden death in 1855. At that moment, the young co-lords and heirs of Camuculé were already motherless, their mother having died years earlier. With the partition of the mill, the administration of the Casa passed to the eldest son, Francisco Bastos Jr., who immediately became responsible for the care of his still-minor siblings.

In 1856, during the production of the parochial land registers, all the heirs registered themselves as legitimate holders of their respective *quinhões* in the mill left by their parents. At the time, they all resided at Camuculé, and because some were minors, the eldest brother registered on their behalf. Some months prior to the land registrations, all the heirs had been summoned as defendants before the Municipal Judge of São Cristóvão, in order to settle the debt of more than eleven *contos de réis* owed to the Bahian commercial firm Espinheira & Cia.—a debt arising from loans previously contracted by the deceased mill owner, as well as from sums borrowed by Francisco Jr. to meet both family and mill-related needs.

The trajectory of Camuculé demonstrates that, despite being indivisible among the heirs of the deceased owner, the family remained cohesive and united around the figure of the co-heir administrator. Responsible for the maintenance and tutelage of his younger siblings, Francisco Bastos Jr. sought to continue the family’s business, taking out loans and negotiating debts with his father’s former creditors so that the mill would not fall into decline. His initiatives were visible not only to his creditors but also to the surrounding population, as attested by the witnesses in the debt-payment proceedings. Although not the sole proprietor of the unit, his authority at the head of the Casa afforded him recognition as its “administrator.” Thus, we observe that, within the familial logistics of the Souza Bastos, keeping the mill lands indivisible constituted a strategy for maintaining the family patrimony.

In addition to Camuculé, the Souza Bastos family also held rights of access in indivisible lands at the Conceição Mill, as shown in Figure 02. Unlike the former, the

Conceição Mill was a unit dating from at least the mid-eighteenth century⁷. To represent the trajectory of the transmission of this property, Figure 04 begins with the original mill owner, Gregório da Fraga. Rather than transmitting it to his kin, the owner sold the Conceição Mill to Sotério de Menezes in the first decade of the nineteenth century. Following the trajectory, the path of transmission bifurcates in two directions, involving two distinct social actors. Both paths represent two perspectives that would be retold during the production of the parochial land registers in 1856.

As seen in Figure 02, the brothers Menezes Araújo decided to register the lands they possessed in the Conceição Mill⁸. From their declarations, however, it is possible to identify two distinct narratives concerning who in fact possessed the mill. Major João Araújo declared that he held the Conceição Mill as a gift made by his late father, Joaquim Araújo, after the latter had undertaken to pay off his own father's debts. Cross-checking other documents, we found that this was precisely how Joaquim Araújo had received the mill from his wife's family. Indebted, Sotério de Menezes died in 1824, owing money to various individuals in the region and to merchants in Bahia⁹. As permitted by legislation of the period, the debts contracted could be paid with the sugar produced by the mill (Santos, 2023). Married to D. Anna Josepha de Menezes, Joaquim de Araújo—son of a sugarcane farmer—rose socially to become lord of the Conceição Mill after undertaking the debts left by his deceased father-in-law¹⁰. Almost thirty years later, he transferred the domain of the mill, in the same manner, to his youngest son, Major João Manoel Araújo.

As his father's preferential heir¹¹ during the land registrations Major Araújo did not even mention that, upon his mother's death in 1826, he had received a portion of the mill by inheritance. By contrast, the other siblings—Antônio, Francisco, and Manoel

⁷ Information extracted from the Civil Libel process between Engenho Conceição and Engenho do Buraco, dated 1859, source AGJSE, São Cristóvão, Civil Libel, N. G. 45, 1859, Plaintiff: Major Serafim Álvares d'Almeida Rocha; Defendant: Major João Manoel de Menezes e Araújo.

⁸ Historiography has discussed how social memory has been a determining factor in land conflicts, in which various versions are established in the reconstruction and recognition of the right to property of others, cf. Lima, 2016; Alvarenga, 2021..

⁹ AGJSE, São Cristóvão, Inventories, General No. 19, document 15, 1824, Inventory of Captain José Sotério de Menezes.

¹⁰ AGJSE, São Cristóvão, Inventories, General No. 162, document 10, 1826, Inventory of Dona Anna Josepha de Menezes.

¹¹ Regarding the terminology of "preferred heir," see Pedroza, 2011.

Pedro Araújo—wrote identical land declarations. Each produced three statements: first, that one part of Conceição had been acquired by inheritance from their deceased sister, Margarida; second, another *quinhão* inherited from their deceased brother, Simeão; and third, a *quinhão* left by their mother, D. Anna Josepha¹². These declarations, when represented in a social network in Figure 04, form a cluster. In terms of Social Network Analysis, this term characterizes dense relations among three or more nodes that share closer ties with one another than with the rest of the network.

What becomes evident is the presence of a “structural hole” among the Menezes Araújo siblings. In SNA terms, this concept refers to an absence of relations such that social actors possess little to no interaction. Thus, it is clear that registering indivisible lands by the heirs of the Conceição Mill constituted a strategy to reaffirm their rights over the family holding. Along the same lines, Major Araújo likewise used the registration as a means of asserting authority and precedence over his siblings by claiming that the mill belonged solely to him.

The lack of cohesion among the siblings can also be observed in the transmission of one of the *quinhões* of the Conceição Mill, sold by Manoel Pedro to Captain Francisco Bastos. Lord of the neighboring mill, Bastos took advantage of the lack of unity in the adjacent family and acquired rights of access to lands that had previously been restricted. This negotiation illustrates another dimension of the use of indivisible lands: the acquisition of neighboring indivisible lands. Likewise, the negotiation of indivisible lands—that is, lands lacking formally defined written boundaries—suggests a response to the pressure for land in Itaporanga, an area fully occupied since the early eighteenth century.

Final Considerations

The transformation of the Ribeira do Vaza-Barris into a sugar-producing region, beginning in the mid-eighteenth century, unfolded alongside other preexisting agrarian systems. Fully occupied and with lands distributed through sesmarias during the early centuries of colonization, the senhorial families, throughout the first half of the nineteenth

¹² APES, Col. SS, Vol. 56, doc. 02, p. 2-3v, 10-11v.

century, devised a variety of familial strategies to ensure the preservation of their patrimony. Through inheritance advancements, the designation of preferential heirs, dowries, donations, and the purchase of neighboring land parcels, *pro indiviso* legal status was mobilized by these families within the system of land transmission. By acquiring lands without defined demarcations, mill owners sought to expand their sphere of power over areas once restricted.

Through the social networks, we observe that the acknowledgment of neighborhood among the mills of the Vaza-Barris was a political decision, and that co-possession of mills was a practice widespread among nearly all senhorial families. Analyzing the trajectories of the Camuculé and Conceição mills, we see that intrafamilial cohesion was a decisive element for the unity and maintenance of the inherited patrimony. As demonstrated, internal family hierarchies shaped the way *pro indiviso* status was employed. In the case of Camuculé, cohesion was maintained through the recognition—by neighboring actors—of one heir as responsible for the management of the Casa. In the case of Conceição, the power struggle among the heirs and the assertion of one of them as “lord” split the family into two factions. The resulting tension and lack of cohesion led to the dispersion of access rights to individuals external to the original family. In other words, beyond the material “loss” caused by *pro indiviso* status, any analysis of the functioning of the productive unit must take into account the internal negotiations among heirs as they sought to assert their individual rights over goods that were, in principle, collective.

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