Mais Bonito Da Região: the Cacao-Producing Region of Cachoeira Alta, Bahia, and the Transition From Wage Labor to Small Farming

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“MAIS BONITO DA REGIÃO”: THE CACAO-PRODUCING REGION OF CACHOEIRA ALTA, BAHIA, AND THE TRANSITION FROM WAGE LABOR TO SMALL FARMING

A Thesis
presented in partial fulfillment of requirements
for the degree of Master of Arts
in the Department of Sociology and Anthropology
The University of Mississippi

by

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ABSTRACT

The support needed for upward social mobility within the field of agriculture, from a laborer to a self-sufficient, small farmer, requires an agricultural and market-based knowledge to which few wage laborers are privy. Small-scale farmers suffer shortcomings within regional and global markets because of their inability to respond to increased demand due to a lack of access to assets and capital. Despite such difficulties, in some agricultural sectors wage laborers have successfully made the transition to small landholders. In this thesis I seek to answer what factors led to the emergence of a smallholding cacao-producing population from a wage-laboring class within Cachoeira Alta, a small village in southeastern Bahia, Brazil.

I wanted to document the transition from wage laboring to smallholding from the perspective of the participants themselves, which requires ethnographical research. Such qualitative research can give a detailed account of life as a farmer, something that policy and management issues utilizing quantitative data cannot convey. I also wanted to identify what it meant for the farmer and their family to move from working on a plantation as a wage laborer to having their independence and owning their own farms to cultivate. In addition, successfully transitioning into smallholding from the life of wage laboring is predicated on a variety factors. Some factors are internal, such as a laborer wanting to escape the restrictive labor system on the plantations in order to enhance the lives of themselves and their families, and some factors are external such as friend and family encouragement as well as support from cooperatives and state
agricultural organizations. In this thesis, I attempt to identify some of the mechanisms by which a wage laborer could become a small holding farmer as well as to understand what this transition means to the community and the families involved.
DEDICATION

I would like to dedicate this document to all those in the agrarian community of Cachoeira Alta and adjacent villages. You are very much appreciated. Also to my lovely wife, none of this would have been possible without your assistance and encouragement. Muito Obrigado!!
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Chapter 1: Introduction

The support needed for upward social mobility within the field of agriculture, from a laborer to a self-sufficient, small farmer, requires an agricultural and market-based knowledge to which few wage laborers are privy. Studies within Central and South America in recent years have provided overwhelming evidence that “smallholders are just as productive, just as innovative, and just as competitive as large plantations” (Pingali 2010). Still, smallholding agriculturalists suffer shortcomings within regional and global markets because of their inability to respond to increased demand due to a lack of access to assets and capital. Despite such difficulties, in some agricultural sectors wage laborers have successfully made the transition to small landholders. In this thesis I seek to answer what factors led to the emergence of a smallholding cacao-producing population from a wage-labor class within Cachoeira Alta, a small village in southeastern Bahia, Brazil (Figure 1-1).

I wanted to document the transition from wage laboring to smallholder from the perspective of the participants themselves, which requires ethnographical research. Such qualitative research can give a detailed account of life as a farmer, something that policy and management issues utilizing quantitative data cannot convey. I also wanted to identify what it meant for the farmer and their family to move from working on a plantation as a wage laborer to having their independence and owning their own farms to cultivate. In addition, successfully transitioning into smallholding from the life of wage laboring is predicated on a variety factors. Some factors are internal, such as a laborer wanting to escape the restrictive labor system on the
plantations in order to enhance the lives of themselves and their families, and some factors are external such as friend and family encouragement as well as support from cooperatives and state agricultural organizations. In this thesis, I attempt to identify some of the mechanisms by which a wage laborer could become a small holding farmer as well as to understand the meaning of such to the people and families involved.

Figure 1. Map of the main cacao growing area in southern Bahia (from Patricia, L., C. Morellato and Celio F.B. Haddad. Introduction : The Brazilian Atlantic Forest. *Biotropica* 32.4b (2000), p. 788, figure 2).
My wife and her family are from the cacao-growing district of eastern Bahia, Brazil, in a tropical region known as Mata Atlantica. My first visit to the area was in June of 2010. Numerous people from my wife’s community of origin were once wage laborers on large plantation-style cacao farms in the area. Many also made the transition from being wage laborers to becoming independent smallholders. Many of my wife family members were informants for this thesis. All of them were members of the regions agricultural cooperative and have favorable opinions on how the cooperative helped make the transition from wage labor to smallholding. In fact, some of my informants, Senhor for example, are large stakeholders in the cooperative. Even though I interviewed some non-cooperative members, most of this thesis pertains to smallholding cooperative members. Today, the small farmers in this community are involved in the production of high-value commodities cultivated for global consumption, in particular, cacao. These smallholders then are able to participate in a comfortable lifestyle as well as in social mobility, which is seldom seen within this region of Bahia, Brazil.

Cacao agriculture is the main source of revenue for this particular region of southeastern Bahia. The cacao farmsteads can be classified into three types, the large plantations, the mid-sized farmsteads, and the small farmsteads. The large plantations consist of large portions of arable land and a sizeable labor class, with living quarters located on the farmstead. These plantations also have numerous cacao-processing sites, like the fermentation boxes and estufas (or cacao bean drying areas) located on the plantation. The plantation landowner seldom deals with laboring issues, the farm manager usually runs the daily business and acts as the facilitator between the wage laborers and the landowner. The plantations' laboring force is highly specialized, and often times whole families work on the plantation. The mid-size farmsteads' labor force usually consists of the farmer's family members, wage laborers, or partners (laborers
who work a portion of the land and upon harvest they divide the yield with the landowner). The
mid-sized farmer may have a few small homes sprawled out on the farmstead where some of the
permanent wage laboring families may reside. Mid-size cacao farmsteads sometimes contain a
fermenting facility and estufa, or they may use the more natural and cost-efficient process of sun-
drying the beans on palm leaves. The small landholders' laborers mirrors that of the mid-size
farmer, with the small farmer also employing seasonal laborers, who only work during the high
harvest periods. Since there are less workers on these the small-to mid-sized farmsteads, all
laborers need to be proficient in all aspect of cacao production, so one does not see the whole
family working on these landholding like the plantations. In addition, the small to mid-sized
landowners have access to resources that ensure that they are able to compete on the same stage
as the plantations with the global markets. Support, in the form of loans, access to technological
advancements such as modern agricultural equipment, and educational assistance come from
agricultural cooperatives.

Land ownership in rural communities is the central component ensuring the well-being
and longevity of families. The uneven proportion of landholders to the landless is a problem
throughout the world. My case study of a smallholding community in Bahia, Brazil, reflects
some general patterns, but also some patterns specific to Bahia and cacao production. This thesis
focuses on these smallholding members of agrarian societies that have been able to emerge from
the bondage of rural labor on large plantations and apply their skills to create a farmstead of their
own. The smallholding populations in question are those who cultivate and harvest raw goods for
regional and global markets, not the smallholders who farm for subsistence and only sell their
surplus at the local market. More often than not, those who were wage laborers made the
transition to commercial smallholder because they took a different approach than subsistence
farmers to acquire land and consciously sought to enter regional and global markets. A smallholder in a developing country’s rural region trying to access world markets must have a catalyst that gives them the best opportunity to reach those markets. These smallholders also need access to suitable farm equipment, knowledge of any technological advancement within their agricultural sphere, and the ability to get fair pricing for the goods they produce. To meet these goals, many smallholders are part of an agricultural cooperative, an organization composed of smallholders with similar needs and which helps facilitate farming activities (Matchaya 2010: 397).

The people with whom I worked also had the opportunity to learn from previous generations of laborers who had acquired land to produce autonomously, whether from family members or unrelated members of the community. They observed the struggle and sacrifice which ensued as these people became self-sustaining farmers. The lesson was clear--the only way to achieve upward mobility as a wage laborer was to obtain arable farmland and cultivate one's own crops. Working as a farm wage laborer, many of my informants already had the vision and experience necessary, but their foremost goal was acquiring farmland. They also needed to acquire the necessary tools to perform the numerous tasks on their farms, whether it be planting, cultivating, or harvesting the cacao. In addition, the aspiring small landholders needed to make sure that their products would retain a certain quality which could compete on the global market with the goods harvested on the larger plantations. In response to this desire to compete for global markets business, many smallholders within Cachoeira Alta choose to join agricultural cooperatives. Through these cooperatives and other agricultural organizations, farmers receive technical training in the production of cacao, access to the global market through buyers, loans, tools, and other necessities for successful production of cacao.
Cooperatives link the small farmer to the global market by helping facilitate in any interactions between the farmer and the chocolate producer in the global market chain. The driving force in cacao production is the consumption of luxury good in developed countries. By producing these high-value goods, the farmer is actively participating in global market chains that deliver luxury goods to the consumer. Global market chains involve numerous parties such as farmers, exporters, processors, chocolatiers, and distributors. Cooperatives link farmer to the market chain and also ensure that the farmers are receiving fair value for their goods. Members of agricultural cooperatives are able to receive fair trade prices for their goods, as opposed to those farmers geographically marginalized or those who are not members of the cooperative. Wage laborers which have transitioned into independent small farmers initially lack access to assets and capital, which the cooperative can provide. Through these and other organizations, smallholders are able to compete in similar markets with large plantations that have both financial resources and manpower. Smallholders in Cachoeira Alt have chosen to no longer rely on intermediaries who prey on smallholder’s inability to transport commodities and their unawareness of current market prices to market their produce. They have organized with cooperatives that help facilitate linkages between farmers and exporters of agricultural commodities markets.

A unified, encouraging, community is just as important as the instillation of agricultural cooperatives in supporting the wage laborer transition into small farming. My research shows that for members of this smallholding community, sharing agricultural practices and knowledge enhances the newly emerging smallholder’s chances to have a successful operation. Small holders exchange information with laborers on more effective and efficient agricultural techniques, how to acquire larger yields of a higher quality product, all of which inevitably
means high revenue for the farm. The community of Cachoeira Alta is tight-knit, and a smallholder’s ability to encourage a wage laborer to become an independent small farmer can strengthen these social bonds.

I choose to perform this ethnographic analysis in this region because I was fairly knowledgeable of the small farming practices within Cachoeira Alta. More importantly, though, wage laborers in Cachoeira Alta are now seeing this transition as financially feasible, there is a movement as laborers on large estates as well as those on small- to-midsized landholdings move into smallholder status. Living a self-sustaining life of independence where one is able to determine one’s success is a goal for many within agrarian populations, specifically those who toil in the soil of large plantations. They persevere with the hope that one day they will purchase their own land to produce goods to sell to an awaiting market. For many new smallholding farmers in Bahia, Brazil, these dreams have become reality. An important goal of this project is to reveal how the smallholders were once treated as wage laborers and how they choose to change the landowner-laborer dynamic. By examining the small farmer’s family unit, I examine how the family is impacted and assists in the transition of becoming a smallholder. This small farming population has been able to attain an amount of income that is rarely seen by small farmers who cater to local and regional markets by producing a high-value commodity such as cacao beans and unifying their knowledge and resources within the cooperative and within the community. This income would have not been amassed if it were not for agricultural advancements implemented by the cooperatives and other government organizations. The cooperatives as well as family and community support has led to small farmers having the capability to produce and transport commodities more efficiently, thus harvesting higher yields and making larger profits.
Smallholding farmers have always fulfilled the needs of local markets, while large plantation estates traditionally cater to the global exportation of goods. The ability of a smallholding farmer to convert their market to a wider consuming population within the developed world has meant higher productivity and higher income. By commercializing an agricultural system that was once subsistence and catered to local markets, smallholders are active participants in the development of their rural regions. This paradigm has shifted due to the ability of smallholders to unify and gain more control over their raw good.

This literature review will look at smallholders, with an emphasis on those who were once laborers. Within Brazil there has been a considerable amount of literature dedicated to the landless movements of the last century. In order to further understand the contemporary cases of small-scale commercial farmers who were once landless wage laborers, it is important to lay a foundation regarding the historical background of this situation in Brazil.

There is no universally accepted definition of smallholders. Generally, farm classes are defined in terms of the amount of land or livestock a household possesses. In addition, the cut-off point for categorizing a farm household varies depending on the scarcity or abundance of land and livestock. Some organizations, such as the International Federation of Organic Agriculture Movement (IFOAM), the worldwide umbrella organization for the organic movement, omit land size when defining a smallholder because farmers (or their families) often have potentially large tracts of land of which only a small part is cultivated and land size varies by region. For example,
in Mexico a smallholder is defined as having less than 20 acres while in Haiti it is considered less than 2.5 acres (van Elzakker and Rieks 2003). In India, on the other hand, farm classification is based on landholding size, and a household possessing less than two hectares of land is classified as a smallholder (Government of India 2006). Due to the large plantations that exist within the Bahia region and the various amounts of land one can own, I have decided to deviate from acreage to define smallholder. Because manpower is the only way in which one can harvest crops within this community, it is best to gauge a smallholder by the amount of laborers employed. I have determined to consider any farmer who employs five laborers or less a smallholding farmer.

Many smallholding farmers throughout the world are challenged by participating in global, organized market chains, and in many regions it is difficult to participate in any market chain at all. Market chains can be defined as a system of organizations, people, technology, activities, information, and resources involved in moving a product or service from supplier to customer. Participation in world market chains requires a set of skills that are not usually utilized in subsistence agriculture and providing for local markets. The smallholding farmer’s ability to participate in global market chains can be improved by organizing through cooperatives which invest in market and transportation infrastructure and keeping high standards of quality products through technological and horticultural advancements. Small-scale farmers do not always have access to timely knowledge about market prices for high-value commodities such as coffee. For example, in Rosário da Limeira, Brazil, there exists a community of farmers that choose to take their goods to the farming cooperatives in Minas Gerais in order to get fair trade value for their coffee beans, as opposed to dealing with local traders who pay farmers well below market value. These farmers, through the local cooperatives, have access to coffee-processing equipment,
something these small-scale farmers would not be able to afford on their own (Watson and Achinelli 2008: 231).

Improving smallholders’ access to markets also requires close linkages between farmers, processors, traders, and retailers to coordinate supply and demand. In an effort to reduce transaction costs (any cost incurred in making an economic exchange), international agricultural firms tend to contract with a few large producers instead of a large number of small producers. The cooperatives, though, display their organizational prowess and assert that their ventures can be just as lucrative as the large plantation holders (Harper and Roy 2000: 26). By unification through cooperatives, organized smallholders open avenues of communication that would never be open to non-cooperative-based, isolated smallholders. Smallholders also supply relatively reasonable means of providing income and food directly to their rural communities, thus reducing poverty. For example, “high productivity growth of Chinese smallholder agriculture, following the phased introduction of market incentives, has been at the root of China’s impressive record in poverty reduction” (Kydd 2002: 1).

A market chain is used to describe the numerous links that connect all the actors and transactions involved in the movement of agricultural goods from the farm to the consumer (Lundy et al 2004: 15). In The Transformation of Agri-Food Systems, McCullough et al. (2008:4) outline the three types of market chains, in regards to food, that exist

“The first is a traditional food system, characterized by a dominance of traditional, unorganized supply chains and limited market infrastructure. The second is a structured food system, still characterized by traditional actors but with more rules and regulations applied to marketplaces and more market infrastructure …The third type is an industrialized food system, as observed through the developed world, with strong
perceptions on safety, a high degree of coordination, a large and consolidated processing sector and organized retailers.”

Consumption of high-value products, such as high quality coffee and chocolate, is on the rise in developed countries, and the global market supply chains for such are ready to meet the demands of the consumers. But which chains will reach consumer segments in developed countries, and which farmers will supply these chains? From farms to retail, technology and “globalization” are the most important drivers of reorganization of the chains linking producers and consumers. Large multinational, agribusiness firms are directly working with farmers in developing countries to provide quality raw materials to the processors. Innovations in information and communications technology have allowed supply chains to become more responsive to consumers, while innovations in processing and transport have made products more suitable for global distribution (Kumar 2006: 5367).

Transitions from Laborer to Smallholder in Brazil

From the onset of the Brazilian colony there also existed a poor, free population of smallholders that consisted of European men of minimal means who were seeking adventure and possible monetary gain within the tropical colonial territory. Urged by the Portuguese Crown to stimulate settlement by presenting opportunities to potential colonists, these early small-scale farmers received small-parcel land grants as early as the mid-sixteenth century (Schwartz 2004: 183). Many of these men were involved in the early sugar plantations of Brazil and were independent cane planters. Fausto (1999: 38) argues that they “were humble individuals cultivating small plots of land with two or three slaves.” These cane farmers, lavadores de cana, played an integral role in the sugar economy by supplying cane to the large mill owners. By
aligning themselves with the more affluent mill owners, they were able to use the equipment and in return for the access to these mills they aided the larger plantation in manufacturing their sugar product.

Within the “slave economies” of Brazil, there existed a subcategory of workers on these plantations which were freedmen working for wages who were positioned between the slave class and the positions of management, technical skill and artisan craft. The rural poor populations working on the plantations within colonial Bahia usually received the lowest pay of any occupational group on the plantation. Schwartz argues that “this element on the work force seems to have been present since the beginning of the sugar plantation industry” (Schwartz 1985: 317). Since they were of free status, many worked small parcels of land for themselves, producing subsistence crops or commodities such as yucca for local markets (Schwartz 1985: 435).

For Brazilian agriculture, specifically within Bahia, a free population of those who had access to land was not a reliable supply of voluntary wage labor. Although these populations were not considered smallholders, because of their inability to hold legal titles to the land, they were still considered farmers because they independently tended to these small agricultural plots. Large populations of the free poor class were able to work their own plots as opposed to finding permanent and full-time employment as a field laborer due to Bahia’s large segments of vacant and uncultivated land. Most of these farmers produced subsistence agriculture and lived minimally. They had few household goods and built small palm-thatched huts. They planted their small subsistence plots, or roça, in cassava, beans, and maize. Adjacent to the plots they might have had a small banana grove, a few jaca, or jackfruit trees, and a dendezeiro, or dende
palm from which they made oil. Some also catered to local markets by cultivating small patches of tobacco and even a few coffee trees (Barickman 1998: 132-133).

Although these populations were self-sufficient as subsistence farmers at the end of the nineteenth and into the twentieth century, there were times when they would work for wages on neighboring plantations. The agricultural calendars for small property owners on the periphery of the plantations alternated with the rhythm of the family plot of the plantation laborers. This meant that the peak times of the commercial harvest, cane harvesting and coffee picking, there was little to do on family plots, thus those that were small subsistence farmers were available to work on larger plantations when they were needed most (Sachs et al. 2009: 29). However, this posed a problem for small holders hoping to enter the global markets. For example, Watson and Achinelli (2008: 231) discuss the situation for smallholding coffee producers in Rosário da Limeira in the Minas Gerais region of Brazil. Many farmers shared time between work on their own land and wage-earning work on plantations. The large landowners paid at the same or just above Brazilian minimum wage and, in some cases, this “extra” work would bring in more income than the farmers’ own farms. Unfortunately, this actually worked against the smallholder because they were not able to dedicate the necessary time needed to manage their farms.

In the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, advancements in the form of agrarian and land reform aided the landless in attaining property. The agrarian debate in the early twentieth century was regarding capitalism’s movement into agricultural production. Two stances emerged, one idealized that the small-scale farmer was a transitioning stage, in transition to the large-farm capitalist, and the other saw the smallholding farmer as a necessary actor in the rural economy which maintained stability within the rural class structure (Rosset et al. 2006: 5).
Through agrarian reform we see land occupation transformations such as those in Redenção, located in the state of Pará, an Amazonian region. This was an area dominated by medium- and large-scale cattle ranchers, but recently some smallholder settlements have been established facilitated by a process of agrarian reform (Pacheco 2009: 30). There are now thousands of small agriculturalists in the eastern Amazon, and their presence is no accident. The majority of these farmers, in fact, hail from other regions of Brazil, largely from the impoverished states of Maranhão, Piauí, and Bahía of Brazil’s northeast region. Many of the poor from this area moved to Pará as part of a governmental resettlement project. They were encouraged to migrate to the Amazonian frontier under the promise of “land without people for people without land” (Murray 2010: 2). The settlers within this Amazonian region were landless wage laborers attempting to establish themselves as farmers. Many of these new small-scale farmers were given opportunities to attain land through aiding in the construction of the Transamazionian Highway (Figure 2-1). The local farmer population was low, and this land was largely untouched rainforest up until the second half of the twentieth century.

Figure 2-1. Map of the Transamazon Highway stretching across Brazil.
In the mid-to late-twentieth century the Brazilian government established the *Plano de Integração Nacional*, (PIN) or the Plan of National Integration. This plan aided in the construction of the Transamazon highway in the early 1970’s and assisted in settling migrant farmers along the new highways. This government assistance program for the northeastern region of Brazil put 500,000 people to work building roads (Pacheco 2009: 30).

Brazil’s land reform movements helped create opportunities for its landless population, by redistributing unutilized land and promoting agribusiness and by encouraging market-oriented farming, but there are still many things to be desired. *O Movimento do Trabalhadores Rurais Sem-Terra* (MST) or The Landless Workers Movement, has worked endlessly since the mid 1980’s organizing peaceful protests that have forced the Brazilian government to redistribute twenty million acres of land to 350,000 landless families. This movement aided in establishing many of the landless, specifically in Bahia, by redistributing many of the barren sugar plantations in the region. Many of these families inevitably became small-scale cacao farmers. One of the organization’s missions was to carve out lands that were not so marginalized for the landless (Wright and Wolford 2003:xiii-xvi). The MST also insists that the redistribution of land must take place through the expropriation of large landholding that do not fulfill a social function or are considered unproductive. This process was set into action by the *Instituto Nacional de Colonização e Reforma Agrária* (INCRA) or the National Settlement and Agrarian Reform Institute. INCRA provides access to services that many of the rural impoverished had never received, such as healthcare, access to good education, and other social services (Wright and Wolford 2003:205).

Despite the efforts of MST, in Brazil, arable land is still concentrated in a few large *latifundio*-style (estate-based) agriculture and land tenure systems, although land ownership on
the whole has increased. To give you an idea of the disparity, “According to the 1996 Brazilian census data there were a total of 4.8 million farms in the country, covering 353.6 million hectares. Of the total number of farms, 89.1 percent were *minifundia* (smaller than one fiscal module, the minimum deemed necessary to support a family) and farms less than 100 hectares, yet these only accounted for 20 percent of the land area” (Rosset et al. 2006: 178). This situation has continued to persist, despite the reform policies introduced in the 1960s and 1970s.

Within Bahia, many of the large plantation landholdings had been evaporated and were owned by the state government, so the MST fought to redistribute the land to landless families. The production of sugar had migrated to the southern states of Brazil in the 1970’s (Shuring 2008:6), opening up large pieces of land in the northeast, specifically within Bahia, for occupation.

The social base of many of these land reform movements of the late twentieth century in southern Brazil consisted of mainly *colonos*, often people of Italian, German, or Polish descent, whose families did not own enough farmland to share between all offspring. Another social category, specifically within the northeastern portions of Brazil, in the land reform movements is referred to as *caboclos*, people of African, Native American, and European-mixed descent who were poor and had no prior history of landowning. My discussion will be concentrated on the members of the groups who worked as tenant farmers, sharecroppers, or agricultural wage laborers before becoming small holders (Ondetti 2008: 71).

The number of landless laborers has been recently exacerbated by a drop in the number of workers needed for farming due to the replacement of labor-driven commodities like coffee plantations with orange groves and soy farms in the south. In the north, labor-intensive sugar plantations have been replaced with cacao plantations, so the need for manual labor has
decreased. Also, due to technological advancements in agriculture, farms are able to produce good more efficiently and a year-round labor class has become less necessary. The lack of these steady jobs have given way to a group of laborers known as *boias frias*, or cold grub (named after their lunches) who are only hired during specific seasons. These workers are not fully incorporated into rural life and usually live in shantytowns within smaller cities closes to the farms (Fausto 1999: 324 & 325). Unfortunately for the boias frias, owning their own land has become a dream at best, and the squatting by boias frias has become a real concern for many large landowners throughout Brazil.

The Unification of Smallholders

The unification of smallholding farmers through cooperatives has provided education in regards to crop cultivation and has helped instill a sense of responsibility and community in the smallholder (Striffler 2002: 131). These farmers’ cooperatives empower the smallholder as a group to act on their own and achieve defined goals. The goals of cooperatives are to unite multiple individual smallholders into a single representative organization, acting as a single unit to compete with large-estate landholders.

Smallholding farmers, individually, have not been able to respond to increased market demands because they lack access to assets and capital. These smallholders also face higher transaction costs (costs other than the prices that are incurred in trading goods or services), which makes it difficult for them to adapt and respond quickly to market developments. Smallholder farmers, by themselves, do not compete on equitable terms with plantation estates in regional or global markets. Often smallholders have difficulty entering regional and global markets because roads are poor and transportation is too expensive. And higher food prices do not always filter
down to the local market, where smallholding farmers often have to sell their produce. These issues display a need for smallholders to counteract the hegemonic grasp large plantations have on regional and global market access, they do so by forming cooperatives to help establish connections within international markets (Bacon 2010: 51).

The export of raw goods by smallholding farmers can offer some possibility for rural poverty alleviation as it provides market access for small farmers (Mannon 2005: 16). In the process of getting raw goods from the farm to the developed world’s supermarkets, one overarching challenge for smallholders is the need for coordination. Coordination helps to ensure that information about a product’s origin travels downstream with the product. It also helps to ensure that information regarding consumer demand and product supply is transferred upstream more efficiently to producers (King and Phumpiu 1996: 1182). According to McCullough et al., “Organization and cooperation seem to be natural responses to deducing transaction costs arising from the scale mismatch between individual farmers and those procuring from them. Local organizations are essential for the scaling up function, linking small-scale producers with large-scale buyers” (McCullough et al. 2008: 37). Individual small-scale farmers would not be able to access these larger markets without the assistance of some organized, local programs, such as a cooperative. In response to conditions such as thin markets, missing markets, and asymmetric information between buyers and seller, institutions among smallholders around the world have developed to help overcome many of these weaknesses. In Malawi, for example, the National Smallholders Farmers’ Association of Malawi (NASFAM) emerged as a farmers’ cooperative to help facilitate farming activities. One of the first projects initiated by this smallholders association was to disseminate information on new technologies through demonstrations and training (Matchaya 2010: 397).
So how have these co-operatives emerged? Many are implemented from a need to attain a foothold in a market that is full of large-estate holders. Group-owned enterprises emerged as an alternative to the exploitative behavior of large-estate landholder in impoverished rural areas. They also materialized as a way to unite resources in order to have a chance to be a future player in global markets and to combat marginalization. Then, small farmers “used their affiliation with cooperatives’ unions to obtain credit, receive training and increase their assets” (Bacon 2010: 58).

Changes in market conditions, reflected in price fluctuations, also can lead to groups of farmers organizing and influencing the development of innovative processes. In 1999 for example, coffee producers, faced with falling prices, started looking for alternative markets. Farmers started to unify and alter their techniques to meet organic market requirements, which positioned them in a growing market demand. Coffee producers organized in order to have the required volumes of product that would attract the certification company to the region, to negotiate their coffee production in the export market, and to fulfill the requirements of the fair trade market (Gottret 2007: 254).

In Brazil, cooperatives have taken a vital role in the country’s economy. Since 1906, rural collectives have been formed in Brazil, mostly originating from European farming immigrants, and inevitably the techniques were imparted to the indigenous and African populations who brought their cultural background and experience in laboring as communal units from their countries of origin. During the period of the military regime in Brazil in the early 1960s, there were two entities representing the cooperative movement Aliança Brasileira de Cooperativismo (ABCOOP) or the Brazilian Cooperative Alliance and União Nacional das Associações de Cooperativas (UNASCO) or the National Union of Cooperative Associations.
Understanding the support needed to advance economic policies for agriculture, Brazil choose to unify the organizations into one body. In Brazil, the first nationally-recognized cooperative was formed, the *Organização das Cooperativas Brasileiras* (OCB) or the Organization of Brazilian Cooperatives, in 1969, in the Fourth Brazilian Cooperatives Congress in the city of Belo Horizonte – Minas Gerais (OCB 2009). The OCB was formed as a nonpartisan entity that focused on workers gaining autonomy and reclaiming agriculturalists’ self-sufficiency through enterprise. These Brazilian cooperatives, which are member-owned and –operated organizations, empower smallholding producers by providing training and other forms of technical assistance. After many who were active in the landless movements of Brazil during the mid-twentieth century, had acquired their land, the attention shifted on how to go about farming. They decided to also adopt the small-collective farming cooperative model (Branford and Rocha 2002: 92)

Currently in Brazil, 40 percent of agricultural output for export is produced by its 1,406 agricultural cooperatives. Brazil’s Cooperative Development Program (CDP) “helps local producers develop sustainable farming and business practices.” Cooperatives assist in giving power to small and medium-sized farmers by providing educational training while introducing self-governing principles through democratic elections. In sum, “small farmers rely heavily on their cooperatives to supply farm inputs and to market their products” (ACDI/VOCA 2007).

**Technological and Conservation Advancements**

Being able to reduce poverty and hunger while preserving the environment continues to be a major unresolved challenge for humanity. Since the late 1980s there has been a surge in public opinion that “external intervention can be an instrument of social change for creating
ideas, facilitating organization processes and enhancing innovation capabilities for development, instead of merely diffusing technology” (Gottret 2007: 3). The investment in agricultural research and development aimed at improving agricultural knowledge and technology has led to small farmers working closely with scientists, usually tied to agribusiness firms. These scientists have implemented horticulture and conservation techniques which involve farmers as partners and clients of agricultural research.

Due to conscientious consumers and a “Green Revolution” taking place across the globe, smallholders have incentive to cultivate organic or naturally grown products. Many smallholders have traditionally used these techniques, mainly because of the expensive nature of pesticides and fertilizers. Organic agriculture is predicated on the idea that farmer skill, rather than chemicals, should be the main resource for addressing two basic issues: the maintenance of crop health and nutrient management. In Bahia, Brazil, cacao farmers have used a crop diversity method to help replenish nutrients taken from the soil, while still producing a bountiful harvest (Bright and Sarin 2003: 36).

Smallholding farmers also have begun to utilize low-cost technologies to restore degraded lands and produce higher yields in marginalized areas. This process, called “agroecology” (which enables small farmers to grow sustainable crops through agricultural diversification) has encouraged small-scale farmers to increase production in rural agrarian areas (Amekawa et al. 2010: 203). This interdisciplinary practice emphasizes sustainable agriculture through reevaluating the role of small family farms in relation to the rural society at large, especially in regard to food safety and protection of the environment (van Huylenbroeck and Durand 2004: 35). Many of the techniques incorporated by smallholders have increased their yields and improved the ecological sustainability of their environment.
Still, small farmers can face challenges not experienced by large agribusiness, such as lack of access to technology to improve farming efficiency and maximize production (Jaspersen 2010: 4). In Bahia, sustainability of the environment is becoming a concern for many Bahian small farmers and international exporters purchasing their products. By turning cacao-growing into an “eco-business” and producing crops which are environmentally friendly, present day farmers are helping sustain the Brazilian Atlantic Forest, implementing strategies for conservation (Bright and Sarin 2003: 6). Large landholding plantations can out-compete smallholding farmers when the smallholder is not capable of complying with international food-quality standards (Pinstrop-Andersen and Cheng 2009: 58). Smallholders, however, have the ability to cultivate their crops in a more sustainable context due to the fact that they are usually growing permanent crops such as coffee and cacao, as opposed to other large land holdings where crops are rotated and there is a heavier emphasis on fertilization (Hellin and Higman 2003: 4).

Conservation and environmental preservation goals can also be met through unification of smallholders with similar aspirations. The *Movimento para a Sobrevivência da Transamazônica* (MPST) or the Movement for the Survival of the Transamazon, for example, are a group of environmentally conscientious smallholders and landless workers who decided that environmental conservation and rural development could simultaneously be achieved in the eastern Amazon region. The organization, “which today encompasses 20,000 farm families and more than 110 grassroots organizations, launched a regional planning initiative in the late 1990s that included two giant forest reserves” (Campos and Nepstad 2006: 1553). Conservation initiatives can also emerge from a growing consumer’s awareness for eco-friendly products. In response to the coffee crisis of 2001, and the “Green Revolution” trending
in developed countries, small farmers were urged by coffee companies to introduce organic and fair trade coffees into the market. Small-scale farmers strengthened their agriculture cooperatives by ensuring buyers that their coffee was sustainably certified and selling their organic products to specialty coffee companies (Bacon 2010: 51).

This concept of sustainable agriculture is fairly recent, emerging in the early 1980’s in response to modern industrial agriculture. Within developing countries sustainable agriculture emphasizes the producer’s economic self-sufficiency, health, and cultural livelihoods. Proper horticulture techniques and diversification of crops can help strengthen a farmer’s economic situation by alleviating a surplus of supply, which any smallholder within a developing society may face. According to Amekawa et al. (2010: 207), “An integrated farming system based on multiple types of produce also potentially leads to benefits from economics of scope such as increased varieties of available food, nutritional diversity, and self-sufficient resource use.” While sustainable agriculture is the focal point of many smallholding conservation efforts, deforestation is an imminent threat to the vast amount of biodiversity within these smallholding farmers’ rural communities.

In order to invest in economic growth and food security, scientist and researchers, usually with ties to agribusiness, have given aid to smallholding farmers in the hope that these farmers will be able to produce crops that support sustainable agrarian economic development. Researchers have found that smallholding farming operations within tropical environments contain some of the most easily degradable soils. While conducting research on agricultural techniques within these regions, scientists have “revealed limitations of slash and burn agricultural techniques that has given rise to a growing concern for agro forestry and other
innovative cropping models that seek to work with, rather than against, the soil properties and productive characteristics within tropical environments” (Collins 1986: 1).

Although scientists and researchers strive to achieve a beneficial relationship with smallholders, sometimes unforeseen differences can arise. For example, complications occurring between farmer and researcher led to the “farmer systems research” approach which sought to, “develop more appropriate and sustainable technology packages to overcome the local constraints faced by smallholders and resource-poor farmers adopting new technologies” (Gottret 2007: 7). Scientists are criticized for ignoring relationships with their agricultural counterparts and concocting ready-made solutions, produced in a laboratory, instead of utilizing their counterparts’ knowledge to generate new technologies to answer the small farmer’s specific needs. Treating farmers as only the providers of land and labor without considering their needs demonstrate that many scientists are only seeking to perpetuate research agendas. (Ashby et al. 2000: 122).

Technological advancements have also harmed the smallholding farmer. An example occurred in Ecuador in the 1960s, when the country was being pushed out of banana markets. During this period a new strain of banana emerged that could produce a higher yield on lesser land as well as being resistant to the harmful Panama Disease that was depleting the smallholders’ yields. In addition, the introduction of the new banana strain involved more technology that not all smallholders possessed, such as careful and quick harvesting from the tree, immediate refrigeration, and gentle transportation from the farm to export ships because of the fragile nature of the new bananas. Few smallholders held on, and most were now forced to sell through a maze of middlemen, and they found it increasingly difficult to gain a secure and
profitable access to the market (Striffler 2002: 117). This allowed large fruit plantations to look for labor within the smallholder communities, further undermining the smallholder.

Sound infrastructure, such as installations to improve communication and the improvement of roads in rural regions, are essential to expansion of a consumer market. The ability for technological advancements to occur within any given population is directly predicated upon the infrastructure of the region. Modern transportation and communication lines can directly influence the capacity for a smallholder to be successful. This issue is magnified when they are members of a global market and the consumers are thousands of miles away. (McCollough et al. 2008: 9).

Poor infrastructure for transport raises the price of inputs (anything a farmer needs to purchase to produce crops) while lowering the costs of outputs (any sale of produced harvested) (Heisey and Mwangi 1998). Post-harvest infrastructure for storage will decrease the burden of spoilage while enhancing marketing flexibility. On the whole, investments in infrastructure help expand the range of consumers that small-scale farmers can reach while increasing the prices they can earn, lowering marketing risks (the potential for a farmers to experience loses due to economic changes) while raising incomes (McCullough et al. 2008: 40). For example, the government of Ghana has made special efforts to develop successful means of farming and commerce for smallholders, through modernizing infrastructure in the northern rural regions. This has undoubtedly assisted investment in the cotton sector and supported the creation of cotton companies within these north regions (Dorward et al. 1998: 67).
Chapter 3: History of Agriculture in Bahia

The agricultural development of Bahia, Brazil, according to Barickman (1998: 4), “reveals an agrarian economy where, relying on slave labor, large planters and small farmers adapted land use and agriculture practices not only to specific crop requirements but also to the pull of an emerging world economy as well as to local conditions and local markets.” There was no single plantation formula within this region; rather there were various types of monocultural landholdings. Sugar and tobacco plantations, for example, displayed stark differences in land-use patterns, use of labor force, and field techniques. Because Bahia was the chief port district for the exportation and import of resources during the colonial period, one must start the history of agriculture in this region at the inception of Brazil’s colonization and with the fact that Bahia was one of the earliest and most substantial slave-based economies in the New World. One should also note the heterogeneity of the region, and the physical, economic and social diversity.

The state of Bahia is located in the northeastern part of Brazil, along the Atlantic coast (Figure 3-1). The state is also the fifth largest in size and the fourth most populated. The establishment of agriculture in this region has always been rooted in commercial export. This region cultivated its main crops of sugar, tobacco, cacao, and cassava, all of which were introduced by the Portuguese during colonial times and grown by large landowners with African slave labor for centuries. For roughly 300 years this system predominated, especially in northeastern Brazil (Maia 1991: 195).
Figure 3-1. The Cacao Coast of Bahia. This area produced 95% of the cacao crop of Bahia, and some 90% of that of Brazil (Stevens and Brandao 1961: 232, Figure 1).

The abolition of slavery in 1888 by the country of Brazil marked an end to involuntary labor on all plantations, which altered the production of raw commodities and impacted markets both countryside and abroad. The end of slavery marked the beginning of a freed labor class that had every right to believe that their lives would improve after emancipation, and they did
everything in their power to ensure this. Many of the recently freed had vast knowledge of cultivating and harvesting many of the commercial crops they had been growing as slaves, so upon liberation many continued to toil in the fields through working voluntarily as tenant farmers, sometimes through coercion such as forced labor, and, if fortunate enough, through working their own small portions of land.

The phenomenal growth of world trade between 1850 and 1930 stimulated the expansion of agricultural export sectors throughout the region. The largest, post-slavery agricultural exports in Bahia continued to be sugar and tobacco, and most of it was produced by the latifundios (large estate-based establishments), although there were regions of Bahia that had medium and small agricultural units dedicated to the production of cacao (Topik et al. 2006: 119).

Cacao production in Bahia began to replace sugar production and tobacco during the cacao boom at the turn of the twentieth century, and there was a transformation of these large latifundio estates where sugar and tobacco had been the prevailing commodity (Walker 2007: 80). Cacao was a less laborious crop to harvest, which meant that a smaller population of lavradores, or workers, could aid in the harvesting, as compared to the larger groups of hands needed for sugar. Many of the engenhos, or sugar mills, that had thrived in the past were dismantled and the land was turned over to cacao cultivation. Tobacco continued to be a regional export, although cacao would eventually become the primary export in Bahia. The collapse of the sugar plantations and the diminishment of tobacco farms decimated plantation owners, requiring many to sell their land off in small plots. A majority of the buyers were those laborers who once worked the land and who had saved enough money to purchase small plots of five to ten hectares. This new group of smallholders began to make a living by cultivating cacao for larger markets or by manufacturing farinha, flour made from cassava, for sale to local markets.
“Thus the mode of production was transformed and the peasants who were before mostly sharecroppers and tenants, became predominantly smallholders” (Maia 1991: 198).

Cacao

Cacao is among the oldest of the commodities in the Atlantic trade, although Bahian planters only began producing and selling large amounts of it in the mid-to late-nineteenth century (Mahony 1996: 30). Once the seeds are fermented and dried, cacao beans are the key ingredient in chocolate. Cacao trees can grow to roughly thirty feet, and they produce oblong fruits which are typically one pound in weight. In the 1890s, Brazil, specifically the Bahia region, experienced its first cacao boom. Eighty percent of the total cacao output in Brazil was grown near, and or normally shipped from, Bahia (Bright and Sarin 2003: 11). During the last decades of the nineteenth century, Bahia saw a sharp increase in annual shipments of cacao, from 1,000 tons in 1880, to over 13,000 tons by 1900. Cacao doubled again to 25,000 tons in 1906, surpassing tobacco as the region’s chief agricultural staple. After 1906, Brazilian cacao, mostly from Bahia, was third in raw commodities being exported from Brazil, and Brazil was able to claim the world’s highest cacao production for a short time (Clarence-Smith 1996: 86).

How did the sharp increase in this exportation come about? The growth was triggered by extraordinary changes in the methods of making chocolate resulting from the industrial revolution and advancements in machine-based manufacturing (Mahony 1996: 142). Prior to the nineteenth century, because cocoa took time and energy to produce it was expensive and considered the drink of the affluent and aristocratic. However, the process to produce cocoa was streamlined by technological advancements which made it easier to manufacture larger quantities
of cocoa in shorter periods during the Industrial Revolution of the nineteenth century. A larger population was now able to afford a more nutritional alternative to coffee or tea. Although it was initially utilized in drinking form, like a coffee or tea, powdered cocoa enjoyed wider appeal by being an ingredient in deserts. The demand for cocoa was increased worldwide during the late nineteenth century and into the twentieth century by social advancements such as gains in wages of the working class. (Topik et al. 2006: 187, 190). Cacao exports continued to expand exponentially, and by 1920 cacao became Bahia’s most important crop, surpassing tobacco (Mahony 1998: 415). The graph below shows the increase of cacao production from 1850 to 1920 within Bahia (Figure 3-2).

![Figure 3-2. The amount of cacao, in arrobas, exported from Bahia, to chocolate manufacturing countries throughout world from 1850 to 1920. (Arrobas are an old Portuguese unit of weight equal to about 32 pounds; Mahony 1998: 416).](image)
The ability for Bahia, Brazil, to be one of the few regions on earth that could, from the eighteenth century onward, simultaneously supply large quantities of the two essential ingredients, sugar and cacao, that fueled the burgeoning chocolate industry, would vastly increase the international market for Bahia-grown products. Cacao was well suited for the state of Bahia because of its environmental factors (climate, rich soil, and abundant rainfall), proximity to the ocean and waterborne transportation networks, and the earlier influx of colonists and enslaved Africans through which an agricultural base had been installed in earlier centuries. Commodities exporters in Salvador, the port capital city of Bahia, benefited profoundly from this fortunate agricultural circumstance; they grew wealthy by sending enormous shipments of sugar and dried cacao beans to supply foreign chocolate manufacturers (Walker 2007: 85, 89).

Cacao trees did not grow indigenously in Bahia; they are native to the Amazon River basin. During the eighteenth century, in addition to sugar, timber was an early export. But due to regulations on the timber industry by the Portuguese government and other factions, sugar and coffee became the preferred export commodities for Bahia (Barickman 1998: 102). Sugar and coffee however, are arduous to harvest, package, and export, requiring much labor. With the end of slavery in Brazil in the late 1880’s, there was a labor shortage within Bahia, making sugar and coffee production difficult and less profitable. With the industrialization of chocolate production, farmers in Bahia turned exclusively to cacao production as a profitable alternative to sugar and coffee (Topik et al. 2006: 175).

Most link the boom in cacao in Bahia with the end of the Portuguese imperialistic monarchy in 1889 and the beginning of a new regime that created a more settled business environment (Clarence-Smith 1996: 87). As stated earlier, cacao was seen as a likely alternative to coffee and sugar production. Cacao, from a labor perspective, was the obvious solution.
because the least amount of workers could cultivate and harvest the largest amount of farmland. Cacao allowed farmers to cultivate with minimal labor, usually coming in the form of families working on a plot or a few laborers on large plantations or a handful of small and mid-sized farms. In order to have a successful sugar cane plantation, the land needed to be replanted every two years, as well as to be constantly weeded. Cacao trees, on the other hand, need about five years to mature, but after that they constantly produce fruit. Sugar cane also requires very able-bodied workers, preferably young males, to cut cane at the root then quickly transport it to the sugar mills, where it is processed. These rigorous jobs could only be allocated to a very small population of workers; the elderly, women and children usually did not have active roles in sugar cane cultivation (Walker 2007: 92). With cacao production, though, labor could be performed by a range of people.

Coffee cultivation in Bahia was equally as rigorous. In the southern portions of Brazil, such as São Paulo, where coffee was more widely produced, there was a more defined harvesting season during the year. In Bahia, the warm and rainy environment allowed coffee to ripen throughout the year, so there was no distinct harvest season. Collecting and picking coffee meant that the small ripe berries had to be extracted from the branches, while the immature ones remained on the coffee tree. Older workers on the coffee plantation who had difficulty distinguishing between ripe and unripe berries could potentially impact the quality of the harvest, ultimately interfering with plantation revenue (Topik et al. 2006: 185). Like sugar, coffee also required a large labor force, something that was in short supply in a post-slavery Bahia.

Alternatively, cacao needs minimal laborers, and older workers as well as woman and children can assist in the cultivating and harvesting process. The ripe fruit are easily identifiable, having a bright yellow color, and can simply be cut from the branch or collected on the ground
by any aged worker. Even the drying process requires minimal work that could be done by a fairly small child (Mahony 2008: 639). As we will see, the minimal and flexible labor requirements of cacao production also meant that it could be grown by smallholders with only family labor or by hiring a few laborers. In many of these new cacao-producing areas there was an influx of migrants, specifically to Bahia. Most of the cacao regions within Bahia also produced the “lower quality” *foresten*o* cacao*, a type of cacao which was used in mass-produced chocolate and powdered cocoa of inexpensive cacaos and chocolates. As cacao production expanded and became incorporated fully into the world market, many of these agrarian rural societies were now directly influenced by capitalism, “eradicating most pre-capitalist forms of exchange, labor, and social relations” (Mahony 1996: 143).

Brazil continued to increase production into 1980s, producing about fifteen percent of world production, at roughly 400,000 tons per year. In the mid 80s, the fungus *vassoura-de-bruxa*, or witches broom (named for the bushy growths that form on the branches of infected trees), infected cacao trees and led to a decline in productivity that caused Brazil to fall from second to fifth largest cacao producer in the world. The result was widespread economic and social disturbances, and a large rural exodus and the abandonment of countless farms (Medeiros et al. 2010: 704). Afterwards a new growing procedure was implemented to withstand the effects of the witches broom epidemic. Broom-resistant cacao varieties are now available, and resurgence in cacao prices has encouraged more and more farmers to graft those new varieties onto their old rootstocks (Bright and Sarin 2003: 11).

The twenty-first century continues to see Bahia excel in the production of cacao. It ranks number four in the world and first in American export production. Bahia has seen an increase in market demand due to its high quality cacao and the consumers increased interest in fair trade
goods. In Bahia today, cacao is largely grown on small farms (typically less than five hectares), which accounts for more than ninety percent of all production (Jaspersen 2010: 4). The future looks very promising for cacao growth in Bahia.

Cassava

In the nineteenth century, the production of agricultural exports could not solely sustain the Bahian population. The slaves, planters, and farmers, and all the merchants in the cities had to eat, and they obtained sustenance through farinha de mandioca (flour made from the root of the cassava or manioc plant); (Barickman 1998: 44). Although Bahia had a wide variety of fruits and vegetables available year round, the common diet was centered on a few mainstays. The sources of calories, specifically high calories foodstuffs such as cassava, were a necessity to labor-intensive societies such as that in Bahia during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Recognizing the importance of farinha during the first half of the eighteenth century, the Portuguese Crown demanded that the agrarian sectors produce farinha as a foodstuff in order to supply a source of calories for both Bahia’s booming population as well as its enslaved populations on plantations (Ebert 2011: 121). Much land was subsequently put into cultivation for these crops and processing facilities were built on plantations (Figure 3-3).

Cassava could be cheaply grown on marginal lands, and the labor inputs for its cultivation were tiny compared to the cultivation of sugar and tobacco. During the first half of the eighteenth century, there were some areas within the periphery of Salvador (which was not only the capital port city of Bahia, but also the capital city of the whole of Brazil until 1763) that
could not produce their most profitable crop, sugar, due to soil limitations. Fortunately these lands could sustain cassava monoculture (Barickman 1998: 46).

Figure 3-3. Cassava (manioc) Processing, Bahia, 1840’s. Daniel P. Kidder, Sketches of Residence and Travels in Brazil (Philadelphia and London, 1845, 2 vols.), vol. 1, p. 242.

We can see the importance farinha played in the diet as a staple starch of Bahians by looking at the records of Salvador’s Public Granary (Celeiro Público). The public granary was created in response to the extreme lack of cassava flour throughout the city in the latter part of the eighteenth century. From the period 1785 to 1851, rice, maize, and beans collectively only represented 12 percent of all grains and cereals that entered the granary; farinha accounted for the other 88 percent (Barickman 1998: 71; Lisboa 1910: 503). The importance of cassava was not concentrated in the metropolitan areas; cassava was also in demand on the southern Brazilian
Cassava made up an even larger percentage of the rural diet. The rural populations and the plantation labor force depended upon the same calorie and carbohydrate source as the city dwellers- farinha de mandioca. Consuming a high amount of calories was directly correlated with the productivity and life expectancy of slaves and laborers.

Consequently, there was a large demand for cassava flour both internally and externally in Bahia. However, by the late nineteenth century, the growth of the export economy within Bahia prompted cassava growers who produced for local and regional markets to turn to export crops such as sugarcane, coffee and tobacco. This left only the poorest small-scale farmers to plant cassava for local markets, and they were the growers least capable of meeting the greater demand for farinha. This led to severe shortages and higher prices for farinha because of a growing labor force and less farmers growing cassava (Barickman 1998: 79). Stuart Schwartz (1985: 240) argues that cassava growers, attracted by high prices for sugar and tobacco, were abandoning food production for local markets to take advantage of the recovery in the export economy. There was a direct correlation between the prices of sugar and declining farinha production (Figure 3-4). The increase in the price of sugar tended to incite a consequent upward adjustment in farinha prices.

Cassava continues to be a staple for the population of Bahia. Rural populations continue to eat it more often than the metropolitans because the urban areas today have a more diverse choice of starches. Farinha mills are still prevalent throughout the countryside and usually smallholding producers of cassava cater to local markets. Large monoculture production of cassava also occurs within parts of Bahia. As of 2005, Brazil ranks third in the world in exported
cassava and first in Latin America (Parker 2004: 27). The majority of its cassava is exported to other South American countries as well as to parts of Africa.

Figure 3-4. Price of one alqueire (an old Portuguese measure of capacity which varied between 13 and 22 liters) of farinha and price of one arroba of white sugar, 1770-1865 (annual averages in current mil-réis). Solid line=price of sugar; dotted line=price of farinha (Barickman 1998: 80).

Sugar

From the sixteenth century onward, the most important agricultural commodity produced and exported from Latin America and Brazil, in particular, was cane sugar. The Brazilian Atlantic coast, specifically the Bahia region, presented excellent conditions for the production of sugar. This area had both the appropriate soils, a heavy clay known as massapé, and the advantages of rivers and tributaries to supply the mills with waterpower and transportation to the
ports. The northeastern Atlantic region, in particular, had perfect conditions for cane cultivation because of rainfall, no frost, and the close proximity to forests for firewood needed for processing (Miller 2000: 35). In addition, the Portuguese slave trade and the large port cities in Bahia provided cheap African slave labor.

Life for the enslaved was particularly hard on the sugar plantations. Upon visiting a Jesuit-own sugar plantation in Bahia in the 1630’s, Jesuit Father Antonio Vieira, stated, “People the color of the very night, working briskly and moaning at the same time without a moment of peace, whoever sees all the confused and noisy machinery and apparatus of this Babylon…will say that this is indeed the image of Hell” (Schwartz 2004: 3). The priest’s metaphor is a vivid reminder of the atrocious conditions that persisted on Bahia’s sugar plantations.

The self-sustained sugar plantations (or engenhos) produced sugar from planting to milling. There were the cane fields, the mill, the equipment to process the cane, and the tools necessary for the transportation of goods to port (Fausto 1999: 38). They also typically had a chapel, a schoolhouse, a priest, a barber, a smith, a shoemaker, a tailor, and any other craftsmen necessary for the sustainability of the free and enslaved population (Schwartz 1985: 313). These engenhos also consisted of lavradores de cana (or simply lavradores)—that is, sharecropping cane farmers. Lavradores sometimes owned their own farms, but more often they cultivated cane on land rented from a senhor de engenho (sugar mill owner). According to Barickman, “they surrendered a portion of their crop (generally at least one-half) to a nearby senhor de engenho in exchange for having their cane milled and manufactured into sugar” (Barickman 2004: 7).

As the sixteenth century came to a close there was a continuing increase in the amount of engenhos within Bahia. This expansion was driven by a growing consumer demand for sugar
throughout Europe, good harvest throughout Bahia, and peace within the Atlantic. Technological advancements, such as the invention of the vertical three-roller mill (Figure 3-5), also aided in the thriving sugar exportation economy in Bahia. This apparatus allowed for a more efficient extraction of the juice from the cane than the large milling stones and single vertical roller that predated it (Schwartz 2004: 163). This advancement also made the cost of manufacturing cane less costly and it also allowed smaller millers to enter sugar manufacturing in Bahia. The opening of mill ownership to a wider and less affluent range of colonists led to a rapid growth of cane cultivators throughout Bahia, Brazil.

Figure 3-5. Image of vertical three roller mill. (Jean Baptiste Debret, Voyage Pittoresque et Historique au Bresil, Paris, 1834-39, vol. 2, plate 27).

The Thirty Years War in 1618 influenced the Brazilian sugar economy for almost a decade. Salvador, the capital port city of Bahia, was captured and taken by the Dutch in 1624,
until Iberian forces helped to reclaim it a year later (Schwartz 1985: 173). Not only did the Dutch seize merchant ships leaving out of Salvador harbor, but they also destroyed a number of mills and harvests between 1624 and 1626. By 1630, the disruption in exportation had lowered profits for Bahian planters from 30 to 50 percent of the 1612 level. Not until roughly a decade after Dutch occupancy in Bahia did sugar prices begin to recover, but the relationship between Brazilian sugar producers and its markets diminished somewhat because of the rise of many new sugar economies, especially those within the Caribbean. Even though Brazil lost its foothold as the foremost sugar producer in the western hemisphere, “sugar remained regionally important in the coastal northeast and it continued to comprise a large proportion of Brazil’s export value throughout the seventeenth and into the eighteenth century” (Schwartz 2004: 172).

By the beginning of the nineteenth century, sugar and tobacco accounted for at least two-thirds of all earnings; sugar’s share was approximately fifty percent (Barickman 1998: 22). At one point in the nineteenth century, in the 1830s-1840s, Bahia came close to having a solely monoculture export economy in sugar. After the enslaved of Brazil were emancipated in 1888, there were still signs of forced labor in the northeast of Brazil. Sugar mill owners employed various forms of labor to ensure that they retained the manpower needed to fulfill the arduous tasks of sugar production. They coerced many former slaves into tenant farming, and forced many of the recently freed into coerced labor through dishonest contracts. At the close of the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth century, land and social power were concentrated in the hands of the owners of large plantations devoted to sugar crops bound for international markets, specifically Europe and the United States. However, the sugar producers of Bahia simply could not keep up with the loss of their core labor class. Due to the liberation of slave labor and the subsequent population migrations from rural to metropolitan regions, sugar slowly
shifted its production center, from northeast to southeast Brazil (Schuring 2008: 6).

Simultaneously, cacao production increased.

Through the twentieth century and into the twenty-first century, Brazil continues as a world leader in the production of sugarcane, sugar, and ethanol (fuel alcohol). In addition, it is among the most efficient of all major sugar producers. Since Brazil can produce either sugar or ethanol from sugarcane, it is one of the few countries that can adjust sugar production rapidly to potential world sugar shortfalls and high international prices. In 2000, less than half of its sugarcane was processed into sugar (Bolling and Suarez 2001: 15). The country also produces and exports a diverse number of sugar products. Though production of cane has migrated out of Bahia, a few sites still exist in the state (Figure 3-6).

Figure 3-6. Contemporary sugar cane production areas in eastern Brazil. Note the minimal growing areas in the state of Bahia.

Tobacco
The demand for luxuries—all stimulants—expanded worldwide during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, and tobacco topped the list of these. Consumers in Europe, Africa, and Asia consistently bought as much of Bahian plantation tobacco as the region could produce (Walker 2007: 81). Bahia was able to monopolize the Brazilian tobacco trade due to the region's ability to produce large amounts of high-quality tobacco. During the mid-seventeenth century, tobacco production was centered along the lands of the Paraguaçu River, which flows from central Bahia into the Atlantic. Production along the river allowed for easy transportation to the port city of Salvador for exportation. When sugar production increased in other parts of the New World in the seventeenth century, tobacco became an increasingly important export crop in Brazil, and in Bahia, particularly. By the last decade of the seventeenth century, Bahia came to produce 90 percent of Brazil’s tobacco crop (Wood 1955: 72). The figure below demonstrates the growth of Bahia’s tobacco exports to the Portuguese capital and to the West African coast (Figure 3-7).

Figure 3-7. Bahian sugar and tobacco exports, 1698-1765, based on five year averages (Schwartz 1985: 186).
Tobacco became an even more important product in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, when it became closely linked to the slave trade. Along the West African coast, tobacco was utilized, in the form of rolls of sweet pressed or twisted tobacco (fumo de corda), to pay for African slaves (Baud and Koonings 1999: 288). Scholars have widely recognized the importance of tobacco for the colonial economy of Bahia, but many overlook the fact that tobacco continued to be an important export commodity into the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries. After a relatively short period of stagnation, from the 1840s onward, tobacco once again became an important export commodity, although with the outlawing of slavery in 1888, it was no longer used solely for the purpose of trading for slaves in Africa. Tobacco leaves (fumo em folha) were now being exported to European markets (Barickman 1998: 31).

In the 1840’s, Bahian tobacco farmers transformed their agricultural procedures to supply what a European market demanded; they shifted from twist tobacco to leaf tobacco. This change led to a resurgence in Bahian tobacco exports and to a developing cigar-making industry that developed in many parts of the Recôncavo region of Bahia (Barickman 1998: 33). Into the twentieth century internal consumption of tobacco led to European-owned cigar shops emerging in Bahia that were directly linked to European markets (Baud and Koonings 1999: 308).

Throughout the period 1780 to 1860, the Bahian region produced large quantities of sugar and tobacco for the world market, and nearly all Brazilian tobacco sold to Europe came from Bahia. There was a stark contrast in the production of tobacco and sugar on the plantations of Bahia (Barickman 1998: 179). Although both were sold for consumption in global markets, tobacco farming in Bahia demonstrated that there were institutional alternatives to the plantation system of slave-based export agriculture. While the sugar planters and tobacco planters both utilized the work of slaves, the enslaved population demographics were quite different. For
example, the slave populations on many tobacco plantations was largely self sustaining, which suggests that the tobacco work regiment was not as physically and mentally demanding as the one for cane manufacturing (Barickman 1998: 157). In addition, census records show that Bahian tobacco farmers, unlike their sugar-producing counterparts, did not depend primarily on the slave trade to guarantee a large workforce. Along with slave labor, there was also a large amount of “free labor” working on these tobacco plantations, such as tenant farmers and freed people of color. Due to the decline of the sugar producing sector at the end of the nineteenth century, many of these landless laborers chose to rent land or purchased arable plots that had been parceled-out by unproductive plantations. Many became small landowners and produced tobacco and subsistence crops. Tobacco was generally known in Bahia as the *lavoura dos pobres*, the agriculture of the poor, because families were able to supplement their subsistence agriculture with tobacco production for the market. By the first decade of the twentieth century, tobacco cultivation gradually expanded to become the most important export product in Bahia, second only to cacao (Baud and Koonings 1999: 296, 298).

Rather than producing high-quality tobacco which was more difficult to cultivate, Bahian producers chose to cultivate local and more easily cultivated types of black tobacco, which produced high yields. This low-quality Bahian tobacco was exported to Europe to be used in low-grade cigars. Many of Bahia’s small scale farmers were able to produce this variety of tobacco along with other crops which they produced for local markets. For the small-scale farmers, tobacco was part of a subsistence economy. According to Baud and Koonings, “The peasant producers favoured tobacco cultivation because of its ready market, but above all because it left enough time for other agricultural activities, especially growing food crops” (Baud
Tobacco was also the choice of small-scale farmers because it grew rapidly and a large labor force was not needed to harvest the small parcels of land.

Into the twenty-first century, Brazil continues to manufacture and export high-quality tobacco and tobacco products. Although the Brazilian tobacco market has, in common with most tobacco markets around the world, reduced in volume, the value of the market continues to increase. This indicates a rise in tobacco prices. These price rises are predicted to continue for the foreseeable future (Datamonitor 2006: 13).

One can conclude from this brief history in the agricultural production of Bahia that from the onset, its agrarian success was seeded in catering to markets outside of Brazil. The labor class was imported, as well as many of the planter aristocracy. In the first centuries of colonialism, it is also obvious that there were variables when determining what agricultural systems were to be utilized. Some crops were more labor intensive, giving way to large scale monoculture, while others required less labor and allowed for a more diverse cultivation of crops. One thing is for certain, and that is that Bahia had ample arable soil and Brazilians were willing to cultivate, harvest, and export whatever crop could be grown and sold, whether it was for local, regional, or global markets. The same continues today.

As opposed to the other exported goods such as sugar, coffee or tobacco, cacao production was the obvious choice for small farmers to cultivate within Cachoeira Alta. Cacao has a different labor requirement as opposed to many of the other consumer goods grown within the region. There was no need for a very intensive labor force and a wide range of ages could perform the tasks, it was also fairly simple to teach someone the repetitive tasks of harvesting the fruits from the cacao tree. Farming this crop did not take a large invest to start a cacao, other than purchasing the land itself. Cacao also grows fairly easily within the Mata Atlantica region, it
being the only export consumer good to be native to Brazil. Once planted cacao required minimal attention, in comparison with sugar of tobacco, and required minimal attention, as the tree takes three to five years to mature and produce fruit. Once the harvest has been performed, cacao also takes minimal post production, as compared with the production of sugar from sugarcane. All of the above combined with the market for cacao as a luxury/boutique item keeps cacao a high value commodity within global markets.
Chapter 4: Methods

The target population of this research was smallholding farmers who were once wage laborers. I chose these smallholders as my informants in order to examine what it takes to achieve a level of agricultural independence and freedom. The informants were found through telephone calls to my wife’s family asking if they knew subjects that fit the criteria and through word of mouth. The informants utilized in this research represent a very diverse group of smallholding men ranging in age from their early thirties to late sixties. Their ethnicities consist of any admixture of European, Indigenous Indian, and African descent. All of the participating smallholders are at different stages in their agricultural careers. Three of the eight informants were not yet members of the local cooperative, but were leaning toward becoming members. Some bought their land to become smallholders, some had inherited their property. All of the informants were married or were once married. Not all of those interviewed had children. Of those with children their ages varied from 2 to 41 years old.

Before beginning the interviews I completed the Collaborative Institutional Training Initiative Examination on basic ethics on Human Research as stipulated by the University of Mississippi and completed an application for the Internal Review Board on Human Research. Once the Internal Review Board deemed my project acceptable, I was able to travel into the field and conduct my research.
The data collected for this thesis is derived from semi-structured interviews and participant observation. I used an interview guide that I prepared before departing for the field (Appendix 1). The farmers spoke on topics such as the challenges they faced working as wage laborers, how they attained their own land, and their relationship to the agricultural cooperatives. The interview guide begins with generalized questions and also allows the interviewer and interviewees flexibility to discuss issues pertinent to the topic. Semi-structured interviews are formally bracketed and structured more than usual social interaction between ethnographer and informant, or unstructured interviews, which are often seen as just happening (Davies 1999:96). According to Bernard (2002), semi-structured interviews are best used when you will not get more than one chance to interview someone. By using an interview guide, the interviewer is able to provide a clear set of instructions for interviewers and can provide reliable, comparable qualitative data.

The majority of the interviews took place at each of the informants’ homes, except for two which took place at the home of family friends. Interviews were conducted during the second phase of fieldwork. We used a translator, my wife, for all the field interviews except one smallholder, who persisted that he uses English. For interview documentation purposes we set up a video camera and an audio recording device.

The interviews were supplemented by participant observation in the form of working as a laborer on a cacao plantation owned by a smallholder and traveling with my informants as they went to their cooperatives. Participant observation enables a certain amount of intimacy between the fieldworker and informants, which make both parties feel comfortable with the presence of an anthropologist (Bernard 2002:322). These methods of data collection help one attain some experiential knowledge that lets one talk to their informants more convincingly about how it
feels, for example, to work as a wage laborer or smallholder on a Bahian cacao farmstead. Some of this participant observation also consisted of conducting informal conversations with both the smallholders and the laborers regarding topics such as division of labor and work conditions. These informal interviews were conducted while on site and occurred within the work environment. I also used a video camera to document the daily routine of several small farmers and their interaction with their laborers. While filming with the camera I tried to remain as unobtrusive as possible. I also took photographs to visually capture the daily routine of the smallholder and the wage laborer and to document the geographic setting. Both participant observation and informal conversations involve immersing oneself within a culture in order to get the informants’ personal experiences as well as aiding the ethnographer to peek into a normal daily routine. As a complete participant I worked with the laborers as we cut the cacao fruits from the trees, collected them in sacks, then preceded to put the seeds and pulp that we extracted from the fruit into boxes to ferment.

The data collected from both the semi-structured interviews and the participant observation is qualitative, and the data accumulated can be categorized so that patterns can be discerned. By seeking to create a space for the voices of those studied, qualitative researchers attempt to capture and re-present, through transcribed interviews, photographs, and audio/visual aids, the authentic, original voices heard, seen, and felt in the field setting (Denzin 1999:32).

I understand that my familial ties to those I interviewed as well as my non-Brazilian citizenship could impact the information I was privy to. It is important to be knowledgeable of any biases prevalent. In addition, some of my original informants were unavailable due to transportation issues and inclement weather. My brother in law was able to find substitute informants, who may have been picked for various reasons. Most of the smallholders I viewed
were living comfortable lives, with reliable transportation and amenities such as cell phones and television. There were other populations of small farmers in Cachoeira Alta who were subsistence farmers, producing for local markets in times of surplus. Their lives differed juristically from many of my small farming informants. The researcher must understand the inherent biases faced before beginning a project and that the sample group is usually a small microcosm of a considerably larger population. For instance, as discussed earlier, my family relationships to my informants, and their relationship to the local cooperative, undoubtedly influenced the perspective I had access to on the cooperatives. As we will see the cooperative members were favorably disposed toward the cooperative. And although I interviewed non-cooperative members, my family ties to cooperative members may have influenced their responses to questions in regard to cooperatives. This thesis is mostly in regards to wage laborers turned small holding cooperative members. Therefore, generalizations are not necessarily reflective of the whole population of smallholding farmers. Still, one can attempt to discuss patterns across one’s group of informants to say something about life in general.

My research was conducted in two phases. The first phase of the research occurred July to August in 2010. During this phase I mostly observed activities on the farms and focused on creating a rapport with many of the smallholders. This initial phase evolved from traveling down to Bahia, Brazil, to visit family members. During this time, I became acquainted with smallholding farmers and soon understood that they have become financially affluent at a quicker rate than ever in the region. I was also informed that a vast majority of the smallholding members of the community were once wage laborers working for large plantations. Many of the conversations and interviews conducted in the first phase consisted of background questions and describing the process of cultivating and harvesting cacao. My location and time which I visited
should also be considered. I expressed to my informants that I was genuinely interested in their lives, and that the relationships we create would continue to flourish after any academic papers are turned in and diplomas are handed out.

For this first phase I prepared a very general and non-specific interview guide and I interviewed anyone who was willing to talk with me. Since I am moderately adept in Portuguese I choose not to use a translator. Being that it was my first time holding interviewing in Portuguese, things would need to be repeated and I utilized body language such as points or other gestures. The informants usually took me outside to walk the farm so that they could demonstrate a process that they were trying to convey to me in the interview. Since many members of the community did not speak English, and I spoke fair Portuguese, much of my time was spent talking to the youth of the community, since many of them were learning English in school. They conveyed to me something about growing up in this region. My speaking with the students was also informal and impromptu. Many of their questions to me were cultural related, mostly concerned with sports and entertainment. My questions were regarding education and how the community viewed it. After returning back to Oxford in August of 2010, I sat down with my advisor, Dr. Robbie Ethridge, and hashed out my plan of action. It was clear that my first phase of fieldwork did not generate enough qualitative data to construct a sizable body of work. After focusing in on a specific topic – the transition from wage laborer to smallholder—we then constructed an interview guide for use when I returned to the field for phase two of my fieldwork. The interview guide was specific to the topic at hand, but also allowed for expansion (see Appendix A).

With the interview guide and documentation equipment in hand, I traveled back to Bahia, Brazil, in April 2011, for the second phase of my fieldwork. I planned to stay on a family
farmstead for three weeks and travel from there to conduct my interviews and participant observations. Within these three weeks I was able to interview eight smallholding farmers and conduct participant observation at two farmsteads. I was also able to conduct informal interviews with the wife of a smallholder, as well as with a young male child of a smallholder.

Prior to departing for Brazil I contacted eight informants to set up the interviews. I located the eight informants through the assistance of my wife’s family. Of the eight interviewees, two were related to my wife as father and brother. Out of the eight original informants, three of them were inaccessible when I arrived in Bahia, due to transportation issues. But with the help of some familial connections we were able to find three other smallholders willing to participate. All of the interviews took place in an informal setting usually at the home of the smallholder. There is camaraderie among these smallholders because many had worked for the same large plantation owner in the past. Many of these smallholders were not just friends, but also relatives, through descent or marriage. Their bonds were also strengthened by being members of the same cooperative, Cooperativa Agrícola de Gandu (COOPAG), as well as being members of the same Evangelical church in Cachoeira Alta.

Initially I called my informants “roçheiro,” a term I found while searching through academic documents. But when I called the first informant by this term he quickly informed me that this was a derogatory term similar to “redneck or hick.” He then corrected my mistake by calling himself an agricultor, someone that has acquired land and tends to it independently. While discussing terminology I also asked if the term trabalhador, or an agricultural wage laborer, was acceptable. For this term specifically I was also informed that trabalhador rural, or rural worker, was a more frequently used term within these agrarian regions.
Any study on human culture would be inadequate if not for the personal narrative of the researcher and more importantly, the informant. It is important that the anthropologist put himself or herself within any ethnographic framework, while trying to attain the emic perspective, or native perspective, on reality (Fetterman 2009:22). I was entering an environment where I was a person of prestige. I was married to a woman that was from this community, and she was the only person from there who is now living out of the region. So she has experienced things of which many in her region can only dream. Then she brings in her husband, who is an anthropology student, interested in collecting ethnographic data from the region. Bahianos, known for their openess and easy going nature, embraced my studies and did whatever they could to make sure the project went smoothly. I was introduced to officials within the municipalities that I visited, as well as the area’s best English speakers (many did not pass up an opportunity to try out English to a living, breathing American). Also important to note is that upon traveling to Brazil we always take many gifts for family and friends. Many of the locals, then, see us as having access to resources that most in the region do not have. Upon interviewing all of my informants I gave them small gifts to let them know that I appreciated them taking time out of their day to converse.

Below are descriptions of my informants and the interviews I had with them. To protect the confidentiality of the interviewees I have assigned pseudonyms to all of them.

_Senhor_. Senhor was once a very active smallholder, but he is now retired. He was once a laborer and accumulated enough capital to purchase his own land. Over the period of his life he has gained a considerable amount of land for a smallholder and produced both cacao and plantains. He is the father of fifteen children, all of whom have worked on his farm, and he has put them in situations where they, too, have become successful smallholders. We conducted the
interview on the front porch of his large six-bedroom home. His wife also sat within close proximity to answer any questions that he stumbled on or if we needed clarification. While conducting the interview many of his children, grandchildren, and family friends were entering the house and Senhor was the first person they greeted. This was a testament to the respect and admiration he had accumulated within his family and community.

_Pai._ Pai was also a laborer for a larger plantation in the earlier stages of his life. After working for many years as a chief laborer on the estate, he was able to attain land in order to work independently as a smallholder. He is an older gentleman who still works on his farm, but is not as active as he once was. I interviewed Pai inside of his home on a Saturday afternoon. He made sure there were no distractions within the timeframe of this interview. His wife was directly behind the video camera and she thought it was funny that anyone would want to interview Pai. He gave very thoughtful answers and he would take long pauses between questions asked and the answer given. All in all I think it was a very enjoyable moment for Pai.

_Pai Filho._ This is the oldest son of Pai, and he has recently started working fulltime as a smallholder. When his father left his chief position as laborer on the large estate, Pai Filho assumed that position. His wife owned land that he worked on for many years, but it was not productive enough to make a living. After acquiring his own land, he stopped working as a laborer and started farming his own plots fulltime. Pai Filho is very passionate about what he does, he is very jovial, and a hardworking person. The same soft-spoken and diligent attitude he has on the farm is also displayed in his interview. The interview took place in the evening, in the spacious living room of his home, after I had worked with him for the extent of the day on the cacao farmstead.
Nilton. Nilton married into Senhor’s large family, and he has been actively working on ensuring a comfortable lifestyle for his family. He has two young boys, and his wife was a teacher, but is now a housewife. Since his wife had farmland when they married, Nilton stop working as a laborer and devoted his time to cultivating the family land. He was building a home and working on harvesting his crop when I conducted the interview with him. The interview took place at his sister’s home, and we were the only ones in the house.

Santos. Santos, a smallholding farmer, was an informant that was not a member of a cooperative. An older gentleman, he lived with his wife and four older children. I asked Santos to conduct the interview on very short notice, as another informant was not available, and he graciously accepted. The interview was conducted in the living room of his humble dwelling around dusk. Due to inadequate lighting conditions in the house I was not able to videotape the interview, but an audio recording was sufficient.

Oleo. Oleo’s whole family is involved in the process of growing crops. He also is not a member of the cooperative. He has three daughters, ages 13, 14, and 15, all of whom work on the farm in the mornings, then travel to school in the afternoons in nearby Gandu. We planned to conduct the interview at his home around dusk so that his children would not be at home. As the interview progressed, we were joined by his wife who always worked with him on the farm.

João. João was born in the area but did not grow up there as most of my informants had. He grew up in the metropolitan city of São Paulo. As finding work started to get difficult in the major city he decided to return to his region of birth to pursue a career as a farmer. Currently he is a smallholding farmer living very comfortably with his youngest son who aids him on the
farm. The interview was conducted at his recently constructed home. He currently lives with his wife, who is a retired teacher, and his youngest son and his wife and small child.

Paulinho. Paulinho is in his late thirties. This smallholder has struggled and faced insurmountable odds to try to succeed in life. Currently he tends to a very small piece of land and makes enough revenue to sustain himself. He is a member of the local cooperative. I interviewed Paul at the home of a mutual acquaintance due to the inaccessibility of his home. Having studied English for the past twenty years, he insisted on conducting the interview totally in English.

All of the interviews were audio recorded using a RCA digital voice recorder and all except one, due to bad lighting, were video recorded using a Kodak Playsport ZX3. The format of the interviews were as follows: I asked the question in English, the translator asked the same question in Portuguese, the informant answered the question in Portuguese, then the translator gave a short synopsis of the answer. After each interview I allotted about one hour to write down anything that seemed noteworthy about the interview. These were descriptions produced away from the observations and interaction with my informants. Most of these notes were reflections and initial interpretations of what was said in the interviews. This was usually done in the bedroom of the home we were staying in or outside on the porch. The interviews were later manually transcribed. Due to the difficulty in finding voice recognition software that could translate both English and Portuguese simultaneously, I transcribed each interview myself. The translations for these interviews were performed by my wife, as well as a Brazilian-American student who was aiding in the process.

Full transcription is a very laborious and time-intensive endeavor, but it yields a level of detail that permits close and repeated analysis of the data (Schensul et al 1999:17). I utilized my
wife as the primary translator, being both fluent in English as well as Portuguese, and I also used
the assistance of a professor’s son, who is also of Brazilian descent. While conducting the
transcriptions it is important to emphasize that I used both audio and video. Not only is it
important to capture and transcribe the verbal aspect of communication, but with videos one is
also able to look at the non-verbal communications, such as smiles or hand gestures. All these
resources give me a solid base for interpreting how and what my informants spoke about.
Chapter 5: The Transition from Wage Laborer to Smallholder

Life as a Wage Laborer

The ability to provide food, clothing, shelter, and other necessities to the family unit is the aspiration of any hardworking person. The reality is that working for someone and earning nominal wages and performing arduous tasks daily, with no real possibility of upward mobility, restrains a wage laborer’s ability to provide his family with the type of lifestyle he or she finds acceptable. In Bahia, Brazil, those within these situations are oftentimes faced with a choice: continue to be a wage laborer and accept meager earnings or sacrifice and save enough money to purchase a plot of land to become a smallholder.

Several members of the smallholder farming community of Cachoeira Alta, located in the interior region of the state of Bahia, Brazil, have decided to shape their own destiny and choose the freedom of smallholder farming over the constraints of being a wage laborer. All of the informants interviewed were once wage laborers and all attest to the harsh conditions they faced. All smallholders interviewed agreed on the difficulty faced in working as a wage laborer at a young age. They also lamented that there were no alternative occupations from which young people could choose within the region. In addition, most got into wage laboring because their parents and siblings performed the same work.

The jobs that laborers perform on the cacao plantations are varied. Some consist of cutting ripe cacao pods from the trees and collecting the pods from bundles on the jungle floor
(Figure 5-1). Then the beans are extracted using large knives and placed into boxes for transport to the fermentation and roasting areas, usually by donkey (Figure 5-2). Due to the repetitive and specialized nature of the jobs, laborers are trained in only one or two tasks. The positions are fairly effortless to train. Oleo, for example, had no idea how to perform processes such as *podar*, or trimming the cacao, because that was not his job on the plantation; he was employed performing other activities. In addition, children and adolescents can perform some of the more menial tasks.

Figure 5-1. A wage laborer collects cacao pods from the jungle floor.

Figure 5-2. After the beans are removed from the pods, they are carried by donkey to the fermentation and roasting locales.
One of my first formal interviews conducted on my second stint of fieldwork was with Nilton, a 36-year-old smallholder from Cachoeira Alta (Figure 5-3). He spoke about his past lifestyle and his experiences laboring on large plantations at the age of ten alongside his father and two brothers. Nilton gave accounts of sleeping out in the cold at night because he and his siblings had no choice and they needed to “get bread.” I originally understood this to mean waking up for work in order to receive bread, but I later found out that “making the bread each day” *fazendo o pão-de-cada-dia*, is a colloquial saying similar to “making ends meet” in English. Pai Filho, a 37-year-old smallholder also from Cachoeira Alta, also recalled laboring with his father, Pai, on the same plantation as soon as he was old enough to work. Pai Filho spent his early years working with his father, until he took Pai’s position as farm manager.

Figure 5-3. Photo of semi structured interview with Nilton.

The youth of Cachoeira Alta are exposed to cacao cultivation at a very young age. Children are brought out onto the cacao groves by their laborer parents, usually mothers.
Toddlers sit and eat pulp from the cacao pod or play with other children, never venturing far from their mother’s sight. The children eat the pulp from the pod and play, but they are cognizant of the importance of saving the beans, which will be fermented and roasted, after the children have eaten the pulp inside the cacao pods.

In addition, children learn of the importance of cacao as a means of livelihood for the community. All of my informants remember doing some menial jobs on the plantations during the early years of their lives. As they became adolescents, they were employed by the plantation and performed jobs such as carrying water to the workers in the field or cleaning the estufa, or areas where the cacao beans are dried. While conducting a weekly visit to the home of Senhor, I observed his youngest child, eleven years old, and Senhor’s grandchildren collecting cacao pods and extracting the beans and sweet white pulp in order to make a rich delicacy called mel de cacao or cacao honey. Unlike in past times, these children were doing this at their own leisure since today children are not obligated to labor on the plantations.

According to my informants, as laborers mature they received more responsibility from the farm manager. These duties usually consist of placing the cacao beans in the fermentation boxes and drying of the cacao beans. At the estufa, or roasting houses, the beans are stored to ferment for anywhere from three to six days, depending on the frequency of transportation to market. After the fermentation process the beans are placed on drying racks to be sun-dried or slightly roasted above the furnace. The sun drying process is substantially longer, but one gets a higher quality bean. Due to the cacao trees being harvested year-round, most farmers in the region decide to use the furnace roasting technique.
Laboring on the larger and more established cacao plantations, wage laborers toil in an environment that is strict and ordered, with no room for irregularity or confusion. One of the biggest impacts for Pai Filho after becoming a smallholder was that he and his family did not feel controlled anymore. On the other hand, those informants who work for small to mid-sized landholders have a more varied and less regimented work routine depending on what duties need to be performed. They also have a more flexible work schedule on these farms. This flexibility allows wage laborers to work for more than one landholder. For example, João, a 56-year-old smallholder from the municipality of Pirai do Norte, recalled when he originally started working as a hired farmhand (Figure 5-4). In 1978, the recently married João, who returned to his native region after years of working in construction in São Paulo, began working for several neighboring landowners, moving between farms, depending on which landholders needed laborers. From the diversity of tasks he performed for his different landholding neighbors he was able to educate himself on the various processes in cacao production needed to be a successful smallholder.

Figure 5-4. João discussing life as a wage laborer.
The numbers of laborers employed on these small- to mid-sized landholding were considerably smaller than on the large plantations due to limited arable land and a low quantity yields. Less manpower meant less specialization of tasks, unlike the defined labor roles observable on the large plantation. The ability for these laborers to gain knowledge on all aspects of the cacao cultivating and harvesting process proved beneficial when they sought to acquire their own farm plots to cultivate.

For those working on the large plantation, a laborer’s day begins in the early morning when he or she migrates to the few large landholding plantations within the community, disappearing into the jungle. The methods of transportation vary from walking, riding a moto, or taking a kombi (a transport van) from an adjacent village (Figure 5-5). Wage laborers do not come empty-handed; they bring their lunches which usually consist of cold dried meat, beans, and rice with farinha. These laborers actually get their name from the types of lunch they consume. When Senhor was recalling his previous conditions he highlighted that laborers who work daily for others and eat cold beans with farinha for lunch are cold boa-fria, translated to mean “cold grub,” referring to the cold meals they eat while in the cacao forests. Somewhere within these thick forests are usually mango, orange, or banana d’água trees, where the laborers will gather round to pick fruit which they also consume for lunch.

During the work week, it is common in Cachoeira Alta to observe a smallholder and wage laborer having bread and coffee together in the morning discussing last night’s soccer match or chatting about the incoming crop harvest. Depending on the schedule of tasks, they may even come back to the smallholder’s home to enjoy the afternoon lunch together. This relationship is in stark contrast to the relationship between the wage laborer and large plantation owner. Throughout the community rumors circulated of large plantation owner’s abusive and
unequal treatment of laborers. At the home of my sister-in-law, who also lives in Cachoeira Alta, I listened in on a conversation between her and my wife regarding some antics of a local plantation owner and his mistreatment of his workers, even blaming him for the poisoning of a local fishing hole. These reports ranged from plantation owners poisoning and chopping down the fruit trees from which laborers ate the fruit during work hours, to poisoning laborers who were retiring in order to avoid paying them retirement. Harsh treatment on the large plantations is possible due to the isolation, the minimal regulation enforcement, and a labor pool willing to fill the void of any rebellious laborer. As these stories are retold, one wonders what affect these tales have on the laborers within the region. For fear of these stories actually unfolding, did these stories aid in making wage laborers more docile? Or did they add fuel to the fire of wage laborers wanting to avoid this unsympathetic lifestyle at all costs?

![Laborer driving his moto to work.](image)

For wage laborers throughout Cachoeira Alta, their harsh treatment while toiling in the cacao forests is just one aspect of the callousness of this profession. On minimal wages, laborers
need to provide for spouses and offspring. The wages are usually just enough to purchase necessities from the local village store. Some informants were fortunate enough to have gardens where they could supplement their purchased foodstuffs. While walking to the home of an informant for an interview, my wife showed me the plantation where she, along with her mother and father, Pai, and her eldest brother, Pai Filho, and her four other brothers and sisters lived until she was twelve years old (Figure 5-6). The wage laborer quarters were positioned along the border of the plantation, within close proximity to the road which traversed Cachoeira Alta. The sets of waterfalls, where Cachoeira Alta gets its name, are roughly 0.5 km (.3 miles) from the laborers’ living quarters and the waterfalls feed into a small pool where many of the laborers fish. The plantation owner’s sizeable homestead had a road leading up to the entrance, located on the side of a large hill, engulfed by cacao and banana trees. She directed my attention to the area where they kept a small garden, which was stationed within close proximity to where the livestock was kept. Some of the crops grown within the garden included green onions, cilantro, chayote, eggplant, and okra. These gardens were accessible only to those wage laboring families who helped cultivate and maintain the garden.

In some cases, laborers supplement their food through what they cultivate while working on the plantation. For instance, Senhor worked for a landowner that cultivated cassava and produced farinha. The owner allowed Senhor to manufacture extra cassava through working extra hours for no extra pay so that he could provide farinha for his family. This staple not only benefited the health of his family, but it also allowed Senhor to save some of his wages. Another staple, plantains, grow naturally in the region and are easily cultivated as a supplemental crop on large plantations. Every meal is served with plantains- boiled, mashed, or fried. Since the wage laborer has no title to the land they could not take the plantains home with them, even if they did
cultivate them. Inevitably it was the decision of the landholder to let the laborers partake of surplus crops. Smallholders, on the other hand, were not growing plantains in large enough numbers to make them viable to sell; they instead used the trees to give shade to the cacao.

Still, laborers on small- to mid-sized landholdings had closer relationships with the landowners which could ultimately give them easier access to resources that wage laborers on large plantations would have had difficulty in obtaining. For example, after traveling to the city of Gandu on Saturday to purchase goods and groceries, the smallholder Pai Filho returned to Cachoeira Alta and drove to the home of one of his laborers. Pai Filho’s reason for driving past his laborer’s home was because he had some goods that his laborer asked him to purchase. Pai Filho relayed that when he goes shopping outside of the village his laborer gives him a small list of goods he needs and the funds to purchase them. Due to the remote location of the village of Cachoeira Alta, there is only one small store that sells household items and groceries such as
beans, rice, and canned goods. Therefore, people are constantly trying to attain goods and materials from outside of the village. Vehicle ownership is a rarity in Cachoeira Alta, so any excursion is heavily planned for. Most people travel during the weekend to the feira, or fair. The fair is an outdoor market that occurs on Saturday where all manner of people sell goods. On Saturday mornings those that choose to sell goods arrive from adjacent towns and villages and set up booths. Items for sale range from clothing to fruit, vegetables, and meat products. For those without their own transportation, a covered truck traverses the countryside picking people up to take to the fair and dropping them off in the evenings (Figure 5-7).

Figure 5-7. Covered truck taking people home from the feira.

Wage laborers working for small-to mid-sized landholders have a higher chance of attaining goods from the cities and fairs because of the amicable relationships shaped between laborer and owner. I choose not to discuss the salary that the plantation vs small and mid-sized
wage laborers receive with my informants. After conversing with someone who worked as a wage laborer on a plantation and has a close relationship with many smallholders, I learned that they both laboring groups make the same among, but the access to goods and relationships created act as incentive to become a laborer on small to mid-sized farm. Landholders conducting business frequent the nearby cities and towns and are asked by wage laborers to purchase certain goods for them that are not available at the community market. On these farms the laborer has close daily interaction with the landowner, thus the laborer has ample opportunities to communicate and interact with the landowners, making for better relations than those between the large plantation owners and their laborers. This relationship is also beneficial in regard to the necessary skills that a laborer hoping to make the transition to a smallholder needs. Because they are small operations, on a smallholder’s farm, the wage laborer must be versatile enough to see to all the daily tasks. These laborers not only have to know the cultivation and harvesting process, but also something about commerce in the event that the smallholder is not on the farmstead. In fact, the smallholder Nilton regards his bond with his wage laborer as more of a partnership instead of a boss and employer relationship. Nilton is confident in his wage laborers’ capabilities and feels comfortable that even if he is not at work, his laborer will still work just as hard.

Being a wage laborer, especially on the larger landholding plantation, is truly a family affair. Often wage laborers meet their wives on the very plantations they work. Finding marriage partners under the circumstances make sense because of the isolation of the large plantations, the large number of workers on them, and their close living arrangements. After marriage they continue to work alongside their wives and children among the cacao forests. The family acts as a source of encouragement juxtaposed to the harsh reality of wage laboring. Wives, sons,
daughters, mothers, fathers, sisters, and brothers are all affected by wage laboring in Cachoeira Alta. And those who aspire to become smallholders utilize their family members as a resource. For example, Oleo, a 40-year-old smallholder, originally from the city of Gandu, recalls his family life as a laborer. He recollects meeting his wife-to-be on the plantation when they were working for the “Doctor” (the title “Doctor” in Brazil does not necessarily relate to education. Rather it refers to social position, such as a wealthy landowner). After marrying, Oleo and his wife lived on the plantation together in the laborer’s quarters.

The cohesion of the family also extends to the worksite. When Pai was a laborer, he and his six children, who resided in the living quarters on the plantation, all worked on some aspect of cultivating or harvesting the cacao on the same plantation. His wife worked in the farinha mill as well as performing tasks on the cacao plantation. While interviewing Nilton, a husband and father of two young boys, he discussed his early introduction into wage laboring on a cacao plantation. Nilton recounts working at the age of ten on the large estate with his father and two older brothers. He also remembered his mother, who had eight children, working in their home performing domestic tasks with his sisters.

In contrast, none of the informants who had worked on the smaller estates recalled working closely with their spouses or children. This familial-bond at the worksite was not experienced by those working for small to mid-sized landholders because children and adolescents were not hired by these landholders since these jobs required mastery in all aspects of cacao production. In addition, the laborers who worked for the smaller farmstead are more reasonably paid because of the job requirements and responsibilities. This means that the spouse not working on the farm could manage the homestead and perform tasks such as tending to the
small garden, domestic duties, and taking care of the children. In these cases, the children also had an opportunity to pursue education by attending school.

Twenty-five years ago, there was not an emphasis on education in Cachoeira Alta, thus there were higher rates of children working on the plantations at that time. Today families and children give greater merit to pursuing an education. In addition, governmental programs have been established to enable low-income families to afford to take their children out of the workforce and allow their children to attend school. Bolsa Família is one such program. One of the most effective social protection programs in the world, Bolsa Família was created by the then-president of Brazil, Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva or simply Lula, in 2003. This program lends support to those families in need of aid. This federal assistance has enabled children and teens to have access to proper healthcare and to go to school as opposed to working for low wages on the plantation. It has also given families the ability to purchase supplies and to afford necessities like electricity.

The Decision to Become a Smallholder

There is a ceiling to the position and wages a wage laborer can attain, even if one is a farm manager in a supervisory position, as Pai and Pai Filho were. Pai’s father was a smallholder and as a child Pai envisioned himself also working as an independent small farmer. However, he had to work as a wage laborer when older. As with most wage laborers, a majority of the time toiling in the field was spent envisioning one day growing crops on your own land. As Pai declared, “I never got accustomed working for someone.”
The quote above captures the sentiment of all the smallholders who I interviewed. A pursuit of freedom drove these smallholders out of their previous lives of working as wage laborers. In fact, for wage laborers in Cachoeria Alta, they saw no other job prospects to increase their standards of living other than becoming smallholders. There are next to no job opportunities in Cachoeria Alta besides agricultural work either as a laborer or a smallholder. One can make a decent living driving goods to and from the city, but one would have to be able to afford the large truck and have the ability to maintain the vehicle (Figure 5-8). This can be very costly due to the poor and hazardous roads of Cachoeira Alta.

Figure 5-8. A Truck ready to load goods for transport to the city.

The determining factors for wage laborers to venture into smallholding can come in the form of encouragement from family and friends as well as inspiration from observing others’ progress and achieving similar goals. For instance, some of my informants married into families
that were already actively participating in smallholding agriculture. Nilton, for example, remembers observing and being motivated by smallholders among his in-laws. Watching those members of his family becoming prosperous was the encouragement he needed. After marrying, he worked a year as a laborer before working fulltime as a smallholder. The transition was relatively easy because Nilton’s wife was already a land holder as well as a teacher at the local village school; therefore, he did not have to wait years to save enough money to purchase some land like most smallholders. Nilton had a supportive network of family and friends who instilled in him the necessary self-confidence to be able to make the transition into smallholding. He was also fortunate enough to have more than one person making an income in the home.

Regarding the way in which money was saved, I preferred to not go into detail with my informants about how much land cost or how they got the funds to purchase it. I did not feel comfortable discussing such financial situations. This transition from laborer to independent farmer can be financially draining on a family, which is why most acquire a small plot and either plant or cultivate the cacao trees while still laboring. Cacao trees take approximately three to five years to mature and produce fruit. In this rural environment where there are no alternative occupations, no harvest means no income. For laborers who are developing themselves into landholders, patience and a sound understanding of this transitioning phase are vital. All of my smallholding informants experienced a period in which they were still working as a laborer although they had acquired the farm plot for cultivating.

Santos, a 47-year-old gentleman from Cachoeria Alta, began working as a laborer for other smallholders in the vicinity. Santos discussed how much he saved and sacrificed in order to become a smallholder. The land Santos acquired was inherited from his farther, but in order to be fully autonomous Santos needed to work as a laborer until the cacaos first harvest was fruitful.
enough so that it was financial viable to no longer work as a laborer. He recalled working during
the holidays and even ignoring hunger pangs and going without lunch in order to make sure the
farm was properly tended while maintaining his wage labor job.

This transition period can last from a few years to a few dozen years. Pai’s family tells of
him purchasing a small plot to farm while he was still the manager on a large plantation. His
transition period would last seventeen years before he would become a full-time smallholder.
Sitting down with some of Pai’s children, they recalled him leaving Cachoeira Alta for his
farmstead on a Friday night and not returning until Sunday night. Occasionally, when automobile
transportation was available, he would take his wife and his children with him. Likewise, when
Senhor attained land, he had to spend equal time working on his plot and continue his duties as a
laborer. For every four days he worked on the plantation, he worked his farmstead three days.
Senhor declared “I made all the days of the week count, Saturday and Sunday rest did not exist
for me.”

The consensus throughout all the interviews and observations is that a desire for
advancement drove all of my informants from wage laborer to smallholder. To be the direct
beneficiary of whatever one plants was the objective. The life of a wage laborer barely making
enough to feed their children was reason enough for Senhor. He informed me, while sitting on
his large front porch (Figure 5-9), that the suffering was too much. He then proceeded to go into
detail, accounting his trials and tribulation as a wage laborer, specifically regarding his minimal
and ghastly food rations. He stated that he and his children ate unripe fruit and he even resorted
to eating cooked vermin in his most dismal hour. After begging God to let him own a piece of
land and saving what little he could, he was able to acquire a portion to call his own. During our
interview Senhor animatedly commented on how easily complacency can come over a wage
laborer. He said that many feel as if being a laborer is their lot in life and that they should simply accept what they are given, Senhor declared, “You will continue to eat dry yucca with cold water and have no hope for a better future.” In other words, for Senhor, those who succumb to feelings of hopelessness are destined for the monotony of eating from the same cold bowl daily, without ever receiving true fulfillment.

Figure 5-9. Interviewing Senhor on his front porch.

Family encouragement can be a valuable aid for escaping the confines of wage labor, but unforeseen situations can also force people into the position, as was the case with João. João was living in São Paulo when his father, a smallholding farmer, died, leaving his mother alone at the homestead. He decided to return back to Cachoeira Alta to take care of his mother. He arrived back in the region during the period when cacao started to become a sought after raw good and was being widely produced in the area. João returned and became a wage laborer. Those who grew cacao during the boom period of the 1960’s and 1970’s could afford to pay laborers well to
cultivate the crop, and with this money João was able to carry on his father’s farmstead, which he runs today.

Obviously land is the most vital asset of any farmer and the methods by which these smallholders have acquired parcels of land vary. Generally, my informants acquired their land through marriage, inheritance, or through the purchase of farm plots. Initially, information on plots available for sale has to be dispersed within the community, ultimately reaching the wage laborer. As a laborer, specifically on a plantation, laborers are bombarded with news regarding sellers and locations of parcels of land up for sale. Both Pai and Pai Filho utilized these networks to investigate available land. Both were farm managers at the time of purchase and therefore had the time and resources to look into these offers. Pai informed people that he was interested in purchasing, so if anyone had knowledge on a plot for sale they would relay the message back to him. To make sure he was considering the best offers available, Pai contracted a land broker from an adjacent municipality to show him many portions of land for sale in the area. The broker acted as a mediator to make sure both the seller and the buyer were clear on the terms of the sale. He was able to find a parcel that Pai found favorable and the broker closed the deal. This is the same farmstead that Pai currently cultivates.

His son, Pai Filho, learned from experience and from observing those that had transitioned to smallholding in the past. As the farm manager on a large plantation, he gained the necessary skills and knowledge that would prepare him for life as a smallholder. He was also financially savvy and managed to save funds and was able to purchase a vehicle. As he envisioned his next milestone, Pai Filho understood that certain sacrifices would have to be made in order to achieve his goals. When the time came, he sold the car so that he had the necessary funds to acquire a portion of land. He would still need a considerable amount more in order to
purchase enough land that would enable him to work as a smallholder permanently. Fortunately members of the community witnessed Pai Filho’s dedication to becoming an independent farm owner and someone, an established smallholder, offered to loan Pai Filho the funds in order to obtain the farmland. Although the interview did not detail who the financier was, this person was most likely once a wage laborer who had successfully transitioned into a smallholding lifestyle. As a result of the encouragement from his peers and the financial support, Pai Filho decided that it was the right time to purchase a plot of land, and he did so.

Senhor, who originally worked as a laborer on a cassava farmstead, considered his situation a blessing in disguise. Laboring on a cassava plantation and producing more farinha than the plantation could sell, Senhor was able to make farinha for his family to consume, thus saving money. Senhor tells of having to work extra hours in addition to his regular work schedule so that he could produce enough farinha at the mill that the landowner could sell to market and enough to feed his family (Figure 5-10). Working seven days a week to provide and save what he could for his family, Senhor had little to show for his hard work on the farm. He had lost his left thumb in a farinha mill accident that would have severely disabled anyone. But not Senhor; he quickly returned back to work a few days later. The owner of the farinha farm saw in Senhor a worker who had an eye for details and a worker who believed that he was destined to be a successful landholder. The owner of the farinha farmstead, where Senhor worked as a wage laborer, had come under hard times. He was also living in poverty and dwelling in a similar mud-walled home as Senhor and his family. He offered to sell his farm to Senhor. Senhor informed the landowner that he did not have the necessary funds to purchase the land outright. Fortunately the owner accepted half of the payment, and Senhor was able to pay the remaining amount owed the following year.
Many of the more recent smallholding farmers obtained their land through purchases as well as inheritances. In an act of approval and hoping for prosperity for a newlywed couple, the father of a bride oftentimes will bestow upon the couple a portion of land. For example, when Oleo married his wife, the father of the bride presented the pair with a small farm plot. Although this plot of arable land would act as the beginning of Oleo establishing his farmstead, he was not able to quit wage laboring. Oleo continued to work as wage laborers, and all other remaining time and resources went into maintaining the family plot.

Santos received his portion of land from his father, but he was also not able to shun the restraints of wage laboring until he purchased more portions of land in order to have enough to make a living. His wife was able to assist him on their farmstead when not busy with pursuing her education. Santos was able to use the money that he made from cultivating the small portion

Figure 5-10. Photo of the farinha mill where Senhor worked as a wage laborer. This structure is now on Senhor’s property.
given to him by his father to purchase other plots. Nilton, too, cultivates lands bestowed to him by his father as well as land acquired from his wife when they got married. Nilton says his parents are proud of him because they watched him start out with nothing and today he can provide for himself as well as his wife and children. Nilton is proud to be cultivating the land of his father but the joy is bittersweet because he feels unhappy to know that his father is no longer able to provide for himself and his mother, settling instead for monthly retirement stipends. These emotions capture the region’s emphasis on work ethic and how much joy smallholders can get from achieving financial independence. Those who transition from wage laborer to smallholder know the reality of being underpaid for their labor as well as the physical and mental strain of wage laboring in such isolated areas. When questioned about his present life as a smallholder, Nilton’s facial expression conveyed a sense of fulfillment and gratefulness.

João’s land was inherited from his father upon his passing. As mentioned earlier, after the death of his father, João’s elderly mother was living alone in Cachoeira Alta. Wanting to take care of his mother, he traveled back home from São Paulo with his wife and young children. He initially worked as a wage laborer, cultivating his own land on the weekends. A few years later, at 35-years-of-age, João was able to stop laboring for other landowners and concentrate on the family farmstead. Sacrifices are a common theme throughout the life stories of my informants. João, like other informants, sacrificed his health, pushing his body to the limit performing arduous tasks seven days a week for twelve-plus hours a day. They also sacrificed time. A few of the smallholders were recently married and had small children when they began their switch into smallholding. Time and health are both irreplaceable possessions, but after conversing with these men and hearing the sincerity in their voices discussing the benefits to being a smallholder, I can
say with confidence that they would go through the struggle again if it meant attaining the satisfaction of living as they currently do.

Making the transition to successful smallholding requires a wide ranging skill-set related to farming as well as to understanding the marketplace. Few wage laborers are fortunate enough to observe what happens once the raw goods leave the plantation. It is imperative that smallholders become knowledgeable about the entire process and understand that growing the crop is only one step. In addition, in order to make a full transition into smallholding smallholders must also familiarize themselves with new farming techniques. Advancements in horticulture practices, which can help the smallholder grow their crops more effectively and efficiently, are also necessary pieces of information. For example, Nilton, working as a laborer on a large plantation, had never learned to prune the cacao tree because he was never ordered to perform this task working on the plantation. Although he had learned how to properly remove the cacao pod from the tree, as a laborer Nilton, had little regard for the techniques that could potentially maximize harvest, due to the year round harvesting of cacao. Now as a smallholder on a modest farm plot, his livelihood is dependent upon each cacao tree reaching it maximum capacity each season. Through his experiences as a smallholding farmer, Nilton saw that some of the techniques he employed as a wage laborer were actually detrimental to the health of the cacao trees. For example, ripping the cacao pods from the tree may harm the tree, instead of slicing the pods off, with the use of a sharp knife. Once he became a smallholder, Nilton also observed friends and family administering insecticides to their cacao trees (Figure 5-11). Nilton had no previous experience with insecticides, either because the plantation Nilton worked on did not use insecticides or the plantation’s labor was so specialized that he never had the opportunity to use it. After inquiring about its benefits, Nilton learned how to apply the solution to his trees.
Friends and family, specifically those who are smallholding farmers, can be a source of knowledge as someone embarks on small farming. I visited Oleo’s home the evening of a Brazilian holiday in the hopes that he would be available for an interview. When most smallholders took the day off and ventured to the city, Oleo was at a friend’s farmstead learning how to maintain a *sementeira*, an enclosure used to cultivate cacao saplings (Figure 5-12). Oleo wanted to integrate this system into his own farmstead in the hope of maximizing profit by planting more cacao trees and selling saplings to other small farmers. Before becoming a smallholder, Oleo had no previous experience in the planting of cacao trees. Since cacao trees can produce fruit for the longevity of the tree’s existence, many laborers have never witnessed a tree being planted, especially those working on a large, established plantation. Oleo, like Nilton,
also had no prior knowledge of how to prune cacao trees. Pruning allows for new branches to emerge, thus increasing the yield. The wage laborers I interviewed were never taught how to prune. Plantation owners may have thought that the time taken to teach pruning to all laborers could be better directed to more pertinent jobs on the plantation. Nilton learned pruning from a group of his brother-in-laws. He expressed in his interview how fortunate he was to have such an experienced family.

![Small farmer holding cacao sapling from *sementeira.*](image)

One of those brother-in-laws was Pai Filho. Throughout the two phases of fieldwork conducted in Cachoeira Alta, Pai Filho always seemed to be a leader in the community, not by professing the position, but through his actions. He is the consummate observer and listener, yet very inquisitive. Any new skills he gained came by observing others and asking questions.
During my field visits and interviews with Pai Filho I quickly learned that if I did not understand an idea or technique that it was best to ask because there would, indeed, be a test. Usually the quiz took place in the evenings, after dinner and around the table. Pai Filho would ask me what I did that day; he also insisted on a demonstration. This was usually followed by him asking me to say a word that I had recently learned or one that I unknowingly was mispronouncing. Pai Filho made it clear that he is grateful for the knowledge that was passed onto him by other agriculturalists, and he conveys this knowledge to his laborers during work.

Senhor, like Pai Filho, also observed the practices of others and was able to apply those techniques and share them with his fifteen children, most of whom are currently also smallholders (Figure 5-13). As a wage laborer, Senhor never learned how to plant the crop. So once he began farming his own lands, he had to ask for instructions from other smallholders. He also had to educate himself on the economic aspect of farming. As his yields increased, the money he earned also increased. This was very different from wage laboring, where one earned a predetermined rate weekly, and Senhor had to learn new ways of managing his income. Wage laborers fortunate enough to work for small-to mid-sized farm holders had a different experience from those working for large landholders. In these cases, the land owners showed much patience with their workers and understood the value of employing a laborer with a diverse skill set. On the smallholder farms, the worker has to know the whole process of farming, hence the landowner teaches the laborer as much as possible about the cacao producing process. As discussed earlier, laborers who are employed by small- to mid-sized landowners are usually more capable of performing any task required on the farm. For João, for instance, the only difference in laboring and smallholding was that he possessed the land. Sitting on his front porch at night with the television blaring soccer in the background, João seemed very confident in his abilities
as a smallholder. João, while living in São Paulo, was employed in construction. When he returned home, he worked for just two years as wage laborer for neighbors and cultivated his own land in his spare time before he was able to start working on his farmstead fulltime. Obviously, João, with no intensive agricultural background, was a quick study and learned within two years the skills and knowledge he needed to become a smallholder.

![Image of a group of people](image.jpg)

**Figure 5-13.** Senhor, along with his wife and offspring.

Those facing challenges is not uncommon when embarking on any career. But within Cachoeira Alta, the lack of infrastructure can turn problems from minute ones to substantial ones. Getting access to Cachoeira Alta can be a very daunting task, with only one road that traverses the community. The unpaved roads in the rural countryside make it cumbersome for farmers trying to get their products to the larger city of Gandu (Figure 5-14). Using tire chains on vehicles has little impact if the roads are saturated. The malleable wet clay forms around the
vehicle and makes it nearly impossible to drive without having to get out of the car and push. Living on a hilltop has its advantages, but not when it takes six men and women to push a vehicle fifty meters up the hill. Anyone living outside of Cachoeira Alta finds adventure in performing the task initially, but after almost a dozen times one learns to loathe traveling anywhere for fear of the rain. Swerving back and forth with tires sliding and mud flopping on flat terrain will get one’s heart racing, but executing these same maneuvers on hillsides with shear drops is nerve-wracking to say the least.

Figure 5-14. Portion of unpaved road traversing Cachoeira Alta.

The first incident I had with the poor infrastructure was with Pai Filho upon my initial arrival into Cachoeira Alta. His experience navigating this treacherous terrain was evident from the beginning. It was raining as we pulled off Brazilian Interstate 101. We were welcomed by
jungle and clay roads. It was evident we were in for a memorable ride as the car started to slide even on flat terrain. About three-fourths of a mile into the adventure it was time to push, and I jumped out of the car ready and eager to start displaying that I could perform whatever task was asked. We were in the valley portion of these undulating hills so after about ten minutes of trying to push this vehicle up a hill, Pai Filho decided to get a running start by putting the car in reverse then trying to hit the hill at top speed. He was successful and we were able to continue the journey, although I had mud up to my kneecaps.

This scene is not uncommon in Cachoeira Alta and it exemplifies what transpires often within this community. When Senhor purchased his land, there were no roads that were within proximity to his farmstead. He also did not have materials to build a home, because there was no reliable transportation for transporting building materials. He remembered constructing a hut of coconut palms and mud for his wife and young children to live in. Senhor’s wife added that they came in contact with many forms of formidable wildlife, such as jaguars and venomous snakes, during that period.

For many laborers the roads were not a major hindrance simply because they possessed no vehicles. Horseback was the transportation of choice for many laborers of the previous generation. Today’s generation of laborers prefer motos, a hybrid between motorcycles and dirt bikes. This method of transportation means it is easier to handle rough terrain, plus the motos get good gas mileage. With motos, traveling to nearby cities is realistic, although the transport of goods from the cities can be a dilemma, especially since one usually is shopping for many. When Nilton was a laborer he remembers his family placing orders for good with those who were able to get to the cities of Gandu or Pirai do Norte. Families would alternate in making the trip, depending on who had access to transportation. Usually a friend had a vehicle or they would
hitch a ride with the school van, one of the more dependable means of transportation between the city and the countryside. These vans traverse the clay roads during the weekdays. For a few reais, the Brazilian currency, one can get a ride if one is lucky to find a van headed to your destination with enough room for passengers in addition to the school children. Along with inaccessible roads and no transportation, Paulinho, a 48-year-old smallholder/wage laborer from Ibicari, recalls not having such amenities as electricity (Figure 5-15).

Figure 5-15. Paulinho comparing life being both a laborer and small farmer.

The introduction of the agricultural cooperatives within the region greatly benefited smallholders. Cooperatives help the smallholder access the tools and lines of credit needed to be successful agriculturalists. For example, Paulinho worked as both a smallholder and wage laborer simultaneously. In his interview, Paulinho emphasized that joining the cooperative aided him immensely as far as creating lines of credit in order to purchase materials like insecticide.
The regional cooperative, Cooperativa Agrícola de Gandu (COOPAG) or the Agricultural Cooperative of Gandu, is located in the city of Gandu, has directly and indirectly affected all of the informants I interviewed (Figure 5-16). This cooperative is located approximately 24 km or 15 miles from Cachoeira Alta. Many of the techniques to improve the quality of the crop and to increase the yields of the product were originally taught to farmers by the cooperatives in the hopes that the farmers would then share the information with the rest of the community. This educational outreach reassures exporters that there is a quality product being grown in Cachoeira Alta and that this level of quality will not fluctuate. In order to get a high-quality product, the cooperative needs to make sure that their standards are being upheld by all their members. The Comissão Executiva de Planejamento da Lavoura Cacaueira (Executive Committee of the Plan of Cacao Farming) (CEPLAC), another agricultural-related institution of Brazil specifically dedicated to cacao, also aids the rural farmer with technical training. CEPLAC’s mission is to promote the competitiveness and sustainability within the cacao growing sectors of Brazil. Senhor claims that CEPLAC came to the region and gave the farmers instructions on how to unify and begin a cooperative. CEPLAC was also beneficial to cacao farmers during the efforts to eradicate "witch's broom," the disease that decimated cacao plantations in the 1970’s and 1980’s and left many unemployed.

These organizations also instill confidence in wage laborers that the move into landholding is feasible. Of utmost importance is that the cooperatives grant lines of credit that smallholders can utilize to purchase necessary agriculture materials or funds in low season. With the wage laborers wanting to improve their current situations, the support of family and friends, and organizations willing to provide much needed assistance, the transition into independent
smallholding offers an exit from a harsh labor system. Through smallholding, laborers are able to empower themselves and their families by illustrating that there are choices in every situation.

Figure 5-16. The Entrance to the COOPAG cooperative located in Gandu, Bahia.
Chapter 6: Life as a Smallholder

The workday in Cachoeira Alta starts and ends with a cup of coffee. Coffee sits in a thermos all day and night in the middle of the table and is continuously emptied and refilled. In the morning coffee is accompanied with pão francês, or French bread, and fried plantains. The plantain or banana-da-terra tree is a subsistence crop grown by all the smallholders in the region due to its low maintenance and rapid growth. In the morning the boisterous roosters notify all that the sun is arising and everybody in the house seems to take heed of the natural alarm, except the children who spend most mornings pleading with the parents to let them sleep a little longer.

At the home of Pai Filho the smell of strong coffee and the loud sound of rain hitting the clay tile roofing gathers everyone in the kitchen. Pai Filho’s wife is ordering their two children to put on their school uniforms while Pai Filho is outside sharpening his machete and other farm implements on his whetstone. During this time he also does some landscaping, pruning bush and vines from around the homestead. This is a constant battle in Cachoeira Alta due to foliages’ rapid rate of growth.

To understand the daily life of a smallholder, one must first know something about the process of planting, cultivating and harvesting cacao. Initially the arable land is burnt and all of the excess foliage it cut, to make way for the planting of young cacao trees. Once planted it takes about three to five years before the plants are able to yield a high percentage of fruit (also called a pod). On mature trees, once the fruits of the tree turn a ripe yellow-greenish hue, this means that the cacao is ready to be harvested. Workers use a tool that has a long handle and a sharp
scythe on the end of it that reaches the highest fruits on the tree. This utilitarian farm implement is also used for getting coconuts from the palms and accessing bananas in the trees. Once the cacao fruits are cut from the trees they are then piled in groups so that they are easily accessible for whoever will extract the seeds from the cacao fruit. The terrain can be an issue because a vast majority of the land is on slopes, making it very difficult for the fruits to remain in one place and to not roll down the hillside. The solution is to make a rudimentary holding pen with a few large wooden logs. A large wooden crate with handles is brought around, and the seeds are extracted from the cacao and put into these large boxes. Occasionally farmers make *mel de cacau*, which are syrupy juices taken from the white pulp of the pod. This is done by utilizing gravity and creating a funnel, called *cama de cacau*, which extracts the sweet pulp from the cacao beans and creating a reservoir to trap the “honey” (Figure 6-1). If the farmstead is accessible by a beast of burden, farmers utilize the animals to transport the seeds to the drying area. If the grove is inaccessible to animals or it is not worth the trouble of bringing an animal to it, the workers will simply carry the seeds, in the wooden crate to the fermenting area.

![Image](image.png)

Figure 6-1. View of the *cama de cacau* or cacao bed, where cacao honey is made.
The fermenting area consists of even larger wooden boxes which will house the seeds for approximately four to three days until fermented. Following the fermentation process the seeds are then moved to the estufa where they will be sun-dried as well as lightly roasted. The sun drying is done first and involves little labor other than evenly dispersing the seeds and letting Mother Nature take her course. Since precipitation is a constant threat to the drying seeds, a retractable roof is usually built over the top of the drying racks. On the bottom of the drying racks is a large brick stove, which is constantly kept at 40 to 50 degrees hotter than the natural temperature. On the drying racks the seeds have to be constantly turned so that they can get dry roasted evenly. After three days of the slow roasting stage, the seeds are then bagged up, and put into sacks which weigh four arrobas, or about 60 kilos. Once the seeds are placed in bags, they are then transported by truck to the cooperative or the deposito, or crop holding center, where they will be sold to exporters on the coast.

I performed participant observation one week, which consisted of following Pai Filho as he performed his daily routine and participating in many of the tasks of a smallholding farmer in Cachoeira Alta. My plan was to work on the farmstead collecting cacao pods, while the workers extracted the beans, travel to the estufa, where the beans are fermented and roasted, and drive with Pai Filho to the cooperative, COOPAG, in the city of Gandu. My wife traveled with us as we went to the farmstead. She has very fond memories of working among the cacao trees as an adolescent, and she is knowledgeable on the proper techniques used in harvesting cacao. She also served as a translator, but most importantly she just wanted to get back into the jungles of Cachoeira Alta.

While breakfast was being served, a family member, one of Pai Filho’s in-laws, arrived for some morning breakfast. Pai Filho’s wife, one of Senhor’s fifteen children, is surrounded by
the homes of her brothers and sisters on this hilltop, among the lush rolling hills of the Bahia interior forest (Figure 6-2). The population in this region of Cachoeira Alta consists of smallholding families; most have their farm plots in the lower portion of the village. Because of heavy rains throughout most of the year and the underdeveloped roadways in the community, most choose to live on terraces along the hillside or on the apex of hills, as opposed to in the valley.

Figure 6-2. Homes of Senhor’s children in Cachoeira Alta.

All of the young children, from age’s three to eleven, who live on the hilltop and the hillsides, attend the same school. On days of inclement weather a family member will offer to take the younger children to school. Since it was raining moderately on the morning I began my participant observation, Pai Filho volunteered to take the children to school. While they were
eating their breakfast of fried plantains and bread and drinking their milk-laden coffee, their mother was making their lunches. The children usually arrived back home from school by about one o’clock in the afternoon, so the bags consisted of no more than a buttered piece of bread. Pai Filho’s family often had visitors as everyone prepared for the morning’s tasks. The leisurely pace was warranted because everyone was waiting for the rain to subside. Such mornings are in stark contrast with my informants’ previous laboring lifestyles. Unlike as a laborer, in inclement weather small farmers have the flexibility to cancel or postpone work until they determine.

Nilton discussed this vast difference, saying, “Today if it’s raining I can say ‘tomorrow I will not go work.’ In those days I could not say that as a laborer.” This statement signifies the independent and autonomous character of small farmers.

The early morning routine has its small variables, but essentially it is similar for all of my informants. It involves leaving the homestead around six or seven in the morning, or sometimes earlier. When Senhor was an active smallholder he traveled to work at four o’clock in the morning in order to arrive at his farming site by five am. When Senhor said this, I looked toward his wife and she nodded her head in agreement. When Senhor initially started smallholding he only received help from his wife, or as Senhor put it “God and my wife was the helpers.” Although Senhor was concentrated on growing and producing a quality crop, a considerable part of his time on his farmstead was dedicated to finding food to eat. Much of the land that he originally purchased was still in its natural, uncultivated setting. In fact, his first harvest only produced two arrobas (approximately 50 lbs) of cacao in a whole year. But Senhor’s uncultivated lands had the potential to provide his family with much needed nourishment. When he had food he took it to work with him for lunch, but when he did not he was able to find fruit-bearing trees in the jungle and was able to hunt wild animals. Without the weekly wage of a laborer, Senhor
credited his living standards as he became a landowner to his ability to hunt game and forage in the jungle which aided him in his early years as a smallholder to keep food on the table.

Out of all my informants, Paulinho’s morning preparation varied the most. While sitting at the home of my sister-in-law, I had the opportunity to discuss morning routines with Paulinho. His morning consists of collecting wood from the forest, which can be a very strenuous process in a region which rains so frequently. After collecting dry firewood he makes a fire in order to cook his breakfast, which is usually boiled plantains, and he heats water for coffee. Paulinho also tends to his small garden and his donkey. Due to the location of his residence in the forest, he does not have access to electricity which inhibits his ability to be as productive as he would like since he has to spend time gathering wood for fire. Not having a wife, Paulinho has had to balance his domestic tasks with his agricultural duties. After he finishes his household chores, he ventures out to the farmstead.

On the morning I began my participant-observation, Pai Filho’s household included the family as well as their international visitors (myself and my wife), and the neighbors having breakfast at his home. Pai Filho’s two wage laborers also arrived to partake of coffee and bread before going to work. They arrived to help take tools like machetes, the podão or pruner, a caxa or box, and saca or bags for the day to the farmstead. After a quick bite and some small conversation they jumped on their motos with the materials and sped off down the hill. The laborers reached the farm site and began work before we arrived; we joined them after Pai Filho took the young children to school. By this time the rain had subsided, and Pai Filho and I drove approximately three miles to the estufa or furnace house, where we unpacked the car of the remaining material, and we trekked to the area where his laborers were already working.
The distance between the farmstead and the homestead varies depending on how the farmland was acquired and the location of the homestead. Senhor bestowed to Pai Filho, after he married Senhor’s daughter, a small portion of land suitable for building a home. However, optimal cacao farmland was further away along the hillsides, because the soils need to be well drained. This made it difficult to construct a home directly adjacent to his farmstead. Oleo has one parcel of land that he farms which is within close proximity to his home, and he has another portion which is approximately three kilometers away. I did not inquire about the way in which he gets to the more distant farmstead, but I suspect that he drives a moto because I did not see an automobile in his driveway. During my second field visit, Nilton was constructing his home on a terrace he had clear cut approximately one-quarter mile from his farm plot. The distance between the farmstead and the home puts a strain on the smallholders who do not have a suitable mode of transportation.

As Pai Filho, my wife, and I marched uphill to this particular day’s work zone, with machetes and lunches in hand, we passed a group gathering cacao pods. Pleasantries were exchanged, and I was formally introduced to an older group of workers who my wife knew, and we continued until we reached Pai Filho’s property line. He showed me the difference between his neighboring farm holder’s cacao and his by explaining his usage of a horticulture technique called “cloning.” This method consists of taking a young, thin branch of a successful cacao tree and inserting it into an older pruned branch (Figure 6-3). The result is more cacao pods produced per tree. This technique, taught to him by COOPAG, takes a lot of added time and energy, which is why many smallholders decide not to participate, but Pai Filho is determined to develop his farmstead by reaping higher yields of fruit per tree. One can see that Pai Filho truly enjoys working as a smallholder. Walking with his head held high, singing a song from the church
service the night before, it is evident that he receives a sense of fulfillment. He also realizes that part of his fulfillment is because he is aiding nature to produce a product.

Figure 6-3. Pai Filho performing the cloning process on cacao trees.

The workday can fluctuate considerably depending on many factors, such as the diversity of crops and the distance to the farmstead, both of which Pai attested to (Figure 6-4). Pai lives approximately thirty-two kilometers from his farm. Typically, his mornings involve waking up, quickly eating breakfast, and traveling by car to his farmstead. It takes him just about fifty minutes to go and to return home daily. Currently he has a vehicle, but in the past he had to take a form of public transportation and stay more than one day at the farmstead. Pai also currently supplements his cacao farm with growing other fruits such as guarana, graviola and cupuacu, and rubber trees. Each is cultivated and transported differently. The cacao and guarana he takes to the
deposito, to be sold to exporters. The graviola and cupuacu he sells to the same buyers, and the rubber is sold to a regional factory that makes latex.

![Figure 6-4. Pai discussing his daily routine on the farmstead.](image)

The majority of the smallholders I interviewed left their homestead anywhere from six am to eight am, and worked until lunch. As wage laborers, they had packed lunches and took them to the farm site, but as smallholders, they travel home to consume their midday meals. Even as smallholders, they may occasionally pack their lunches during the busy harvest season. Going to the homestead for lunch divides the day, which helps with moral because sometimes farm work can be quite grueling. The lunch breaks range from one to two hours depending on the daily priorities. If it is low harvest season, there is less urgency to cut the pods from the trees. My field visits to Cachoeira Alta were conducted during the winter months. In this case Pai Filho
decided that we should take our lunches to the farm site because we would finish around two to three pm. So quite often I was able to conduct the interviews on the rainy and humid afternoons. On rainy days, smallholders return home early from the farmstead and they feel comfortable with making it a short day.

Usually the wife prepares a fairly hardy lunch, which does not deviate from what one might consume at dinner. After lunch the smallholders then travel back to work, and the remaining time spent at the farmstead depends on what work needs to be done such as fermenting the beans and drying the cacao. The only smallholder who possessed an estufa for drying the cacao beans was Senhor and at the time of the interview he was overseeing construction to expand the building (Figure 6-5). Because there are more small farmers than estufas in the region, smallholders without an estufa use those of a farmer who possesses one. Due to the constant rain that the region receives it can be very difficult to sun-dry the beans and the estufas are consistently in use. To save time, smallholders choose to use a drying technique that heats the beans evenly to leave as little moisture in the bean as possible. Smallholders need to schedule accordingly to make sure their product is on and off the drying racks in a timely fashion. Although I did not ask my informants, I presume that they rent time on the estufas. Obviously the workload per smallholding varies and is dependent upon the size of the parcel of land and the size of the labor force. Nilton and Oleo specifically said that they stay until four pm in the afternoon. As for the smallholders I observed, most usually returned back to the homestead before dusk.

Paulinho’s day, though, is a lot more hectic than the average smallholders. After finishing his activities on the farm for the day he then has to prepare for class which starts in the evenings. Paulinho stated that when most smallholders are eating their lunch and socializing with their
family, he is using that break time to sleep. He admitted that it is really difficult to attend class after working for most of the day, and he has much compassion for the wage laborers who attend class. Unlike the wage laborers, Paulinho has some flexibility in his schedule because he works his own land most of the time. He also has a real passion for knowledge and learning and hopes to complete his necessary courses this year and earn his diploma. The only person in Cachoeira Alta who was conversationally proficient in English, Paulinho instantly had an interest in me, and I in him because of his life story. He attends class daily except on weekends and holidays. Understanding the importance of education in the lives of people, specifically those from a rural population, Paulinho hopes to share his passion for learning with others and become a teacher.

Figure 6-5. Senhor overseeing the expansion of his estufa.
After getting a chance to document Pai Filho performing the cloning process on his trees, I ventured to where his wage laborers were located and observed their daily activities. I came in contact with one of his workers using a long stick with a sharp blade at the end, called a podão, in order to pick the higher cacao pods from the trees. He suggested I stay back, saying “cuidado,” or “be careful,” and urging me to watch out for falling cacao pods over head. The pods can be the size and shape of small footballs, and solid, surely causing injury if falling thirty feet from the tree onto one’s head. The sharp blade is also dangerous, as it can fall off while the laborer is maneuvering it past branches in order to access the ripe pods. At the rate in which the small farmers and laborers were working, one forgets that they are always on high alert for constant danger. One conversation in particular regarding the hazards that may await an unsuspecting cacao farmer was had with my wife while out on Pai Filho’s farm plot. We were gathering pods when she stopped me and asked if I saw the centipede, called lacraia by the locals, on a log near a pile of cacao pods. She informed me that centipedes as well as scorpions are more feared than snakes or larger predatory animals like the jaguar because they can be just as deadly, but are inconspicuous and can hide in small places. The hazards one may face while on the job amid the cacao forest are risks those within rural Cachoeira Alta are willing take in order to provide for their families.

Extra Labor on the Farm

The most important asset to the smallholding farm complex in Cachoeira Alta is the manual labor, and farmers realize that the cultivation and harvesting of any crop requires the support that wage laborers can provide. Laborers on the smallholder’s farm come in many forms; they can be hired labor or the farmer’s family aiding in the harvesting of the crop. The assistance
of labor on the farmstead, in the form of wage laborer or family aid, gives smallholders the opportunity to teach those that seek to attain similar positions, whether they are laborers within the community or family members. And, as we have seen, many smallholders get their start as laborers on mid- to small-sized farms.

Additional labor on the farmstead is mainly needed during the harvest period, or *safra*, at which time family aid in addition to any hired labor is used. Pai Filho’s wife, for example, aided him throughout this stage in extracting cacao beans. Upon my initial visit I had the opportunity to have a detailed recorded conversation with Pai Filho’s wife. We discussed how agricultural roles have changed for women over the past twenty years. She explained that twenty years ago women worked in every aspect of agriculture, whereas today they only work in gathering the pods and removing the beans. Pai Filho’s wife has extensive experience from working on her father’s, Senhor’s, farm. She also remembered maintaining the land and planting the cacao on the portion of land that was given to her by Senhor.

Some wives work more intensively than others because of the lack of hired labor on the farm. While conversing with Oleo, he revealed that his wife was the primary labor assistance on the farm. In comparison with other informants’ spouses, Oleo responded to the question regarding his wife’s support by answering “directo” (a colloquial way of saying “all the time”). When asked about his use of wage labor, Oleo replied that it was solely him and his family active on the land. In Oleo’s situation, family labor is the only form of viable employment due to their minimal financial gains and no economic allowance for additional overhead costs.

Likewise, when Senhor initially purchased his farm plot, his wife was the consummate partner and source of motivation. She understood what the transition from laborer to landholder would entail because she observed the trials of her father becoming a smallholder. Senhor’s wife
always traveled with him to the farmstead--he only traveled by himself when she pregnant. Even then at times she would trek through the cacao forests at night, fearing the worst after he had been gone for most of a day. After their eleventh child and when the farm was more economically stable, Senhor’s wife chose to stop working on the farm, instead choosing to stay closer to the homestead performing domestic activities and working in the garden.

Smallholders also have their children working on the farm. The ages of my informant’s children ranged widely. Some, like Nilton and Pai Filho, had children that they considered too young to assist on the farm. Although these children will not start to aid their families on the farmstead until they are in their teenage years, not all smallholders I interviewed have the same perspective on the situation. Senhor’s children started working on the farmstead around six-to eight-years of age. They performed tasks such as helping plant beans and keeping clean the areas where the cacao sapling were growing. The children that were too young to help were put in a tent nearby in order to keep an eye on them. Senhor recalled his children not having toys to play with but still enjoying themselves. He remembered his children playing inside the sacks they use to transport cacao, amusing themselves with the domestic animals, swimming in the waterfall, and exploring the jungle.

During this period Senhor could not hire laborers for financial reasons so his wife and children were essential to help the farm grow and be successful. Senhor gave his children duties at an early age to insure their proficiency in cultivating and harvest cacao and other subsistence crops. As they got older, he would progressively increase their tasks and responsibilities until he felt that they had the ability to maintain a small portion of land autonomously. At ages twelve to fifteen his children were given their own pieces of property to cultivate (Figure 6-6). In addition, once the children reached adolescence, the tasks were divided based on gender. Males worked
with Senhor collecting cacao pods and extracting the seeds while the females helped his wife collect food, herbs, and spices for meals and performed domestic chores. Due to the information that I received from Pai Filho’s wife, Senhor’s daughter, I assume that although the females took on more domestic tasks they still remained fairly active on the farmstead.

Figure 6-6. Senhor’s grandson collecting cacao pods on his small cacao plot.

Building a work ethic within his children was important for Senhor, but he also wanted to lay the proper educational foundation. The aid of spouses and offspring on a smallholding farm instills solidarity within the household because everyone feels that they play a role in the family’s welfare and ability to be successful. By observing and performing the agricultural and mercantile tasks on the farm and at the market, the family unit ensures financial continuity in the event that something happens to the head of the household. In addition, as Senhor made more money and was able to purchase other portions of land, he decided to build a school and paid a
teacher to conduct lessons there. Although they were still getting schooling, his children still remained active on the farmstead. As the children got older, they were able to teach the lessons themselves to their younger siblings. Even today, two of Senhor’s daughters are teachers and one is a former teacher.

Oftentimes, smallholders will form partnerships with family members or members of the community. Smallholders, who are not able to afford paying a wage laborer, get parceira, or partners, who perform a majority of the farming, and in return they divide the harvest accordingly. The partner receives a portion of whatever the harvest is, so there is an incentive for the partner to harvest as much as possible, because the partner’s income will fluctuate depending on their yield, unlike a wage laborer, who receives a fixed wage weekly. João, for example, admitted that he is fifty-six years old and tired. He prefers to use a partner instead of finding laborers because it is difficult to find dependable workers, and when one did find someone, they worked for one or two weeks then they would disappear. Therefore, he preferred partners. Partners have binding agreements with the farm owners that a certain portion of the crop that they cultivate and harvest will go directly to the partner, instead of receiving the same weekly salary regardless of workload as a wage laborer would. Currently, João is in a partnership with his youngest son, who is twenty-six. Pai also utilizes a form of partnership on his farm. The guarana (a natural extract found in energy drinks) and serinque (a rubber tree) are both under partnership on Pai’s farm. Since the guarana and the serinque requires such intensive work to cultivate and harvest, Pai can no longer afford to tend to those crops and prefers to partner with local laborers. He no longer has children that aid him on his farm so instead of paying someone he chooses to let his partners keep a portion of what they produce. The partners work the land
and the harvest is divided. In addition to the partners, Pai has someone who is a temporary worker to help him harvest the cacao.

Many smallholders though hire wage laborers when they can afford it. The relationship between wage laborer and smallholder is one of deep respect and admiration. The admiration comes from the wage laborer who hopes to make the transition to a smallholder. Respect also comes from the smallholder, especially those who led a life as a laborer in the past and therefore understands what the laborer is going through. Nilton, for example, recognizes the issues wage laborers face and makes a conscious effort to make the relationship based on honesty and communication. He prefers to look at their bond as a partnership, although they get paid a wage, and they do not receive a percentage of the harvest. If an issue comes up and they need to leave, Nilton says it is not a problem. Conversely, if Nilton leaves or just does not go to work for a day he is confident that in his absence, work will still be completed. Nilton recalls the plantation owner never talking to him when he was a wage laborer and sneaking around to see if the laborers were performing their jobs.

Pai Filho employs a permanent wage laborer and a temporary wage laborer. He utilizes the temporary laborer when the harvest is coming in or whenever he feels extra assistance is necessary. Pai Filho, too, feels that although they are called workers, his wage laborers are more like partners. This attitude is displayed on Pai Filho’s farmstead. The atmosphere is very light and jovial, with each member of the work group performing their allotted tasks. During my participant observation they seemed to enjoy my asking questions and trying to mimic them as they performed tasks such as removing the pods from the high branches of the trees.

Cooperatives
The weekend had arrived. Saturdays are usually dedicated to traveling to the city of Gandu in order to purchase goods. The smallholders, who have cars, take orders from others for necessities such as beans, rice, and bread from those who have no means of transportation and are not able to go to the market. Pai Filho offered to take my wife and I with him to the city so that we could use some of the luxuries, such as internet. As important as the trip was to purchase supplies and groceries for the household and neighbors, it was also imperative that we stopped by the cooperative. Pai Filho was going to receive his money earned by the previous harvest that had been picked up by the cooperative. Cooperative workers travel to Cachoeira Alta in large trucks to collect the cacao from cooperative members which they then sell to the export buyers for the farmers. Afterwards, the landholding member travels to the cooperative to receive their pay for the cacao. As we walked within COOPAG, I quickly realized that it houses anything imaginable for cacao agriculture and agriculture in general (Figure 6-7). Among other things, the cooperative sells fencing equipment, cattle feeding troughs, protective suits worn whiles spraying insecticide, and food for cats and dogs.

The cooperative empowers farmers, specifically small farmers, by giving them an opportunity to add value to their produce through access to agricultural advancements that few may have been able to access without the cooperative. These smallholders also are able to access credit through the cooperative, and act as a unified body when dealing with international export organizations. The cooperative also acts as a saving and loan association. It generates income by requiring each member to pay dues, or a small percentage of their harvests. This pays for the staff, transportation of goods, and other necessities. A vast majority of landowners in Cachoeira Alta, both large and small, are members of a cooperative. Nilton tried to put into perspective the influence that the cooperative has on Cachoeira Alta by stating, “Today many of its members are
from Cachoeira Alta. When it is not the husband it is the wife that is a member. If Cachoeira Alta decided that it does not want to be a member of the cooperative anymore, the cooperative would fail.” One can also observe the material mark that the cooperative is having on the region. Interacting with my informants and in-laws during my field trips to Cachoeira Alta and the city of Gandu, I noticed the shirts and hats people wore. The green Velcro-backed hats with “COOPAG” on the front seemed like the agricultural uniform. From people in the streets of the city of Gandu, to the laborers working on smallholder farmsteads, everyone wears these hats. The hat almost seems like a statement of solidarity. There were also white t-shirts with green stripes around the neck and arms that also signified COOPAG association. I was able to acquire both a hat and a shirt, and immediately started to wear my hat wherever I went in the hope of demonstrating a certain amount of solidarity regarding agriculture in the region.

Figure 6-7. View of the interior of the Cooperative of Gandu.
The oldest of my informants, Senhor, remembers COOPAG in its infancy. While interviewing Senhor’s son-in-law, Pai Filho, he gave a brief history on the Cooperative Agricola, stating that “it was started in England and from there expanded. It started small here and has continued to grow. Today it has 900 members and all have the same rights, the big to the smallest farmers.” Although I was not able to get the concise history of how the particular cooperative in Gandu, COOPAG, emerged, I was told by an informant that it was organized after the region suffered from the disastrous witches broom fungal outbreak of the 1970’s and 1980’s. Senhor said that it was the CEPLAC, the national initiative organization to aid cacao farmers impacted by the fungal infestation on their farms, who gave encouragement to farmers to join the cooperative. CEPLAC was visiting regions to educate rural populations on the cooperatives benefits. Before becoming a member of the cooperative, Senhor would sell his goods to CEPLAC. Sehnor was the first of my informants to join the cooperative, and receives many accolades regarding the successfullness of cacao within the Cachoeira Alta region. While at COOPAG, I had the opportunity to skim through some literature which was laying out for members. I picked up CEPLAC’s newsletter, aptly named “Journal do Cacau”, which is distributed through six states in northeastern Brazil, and I saw a sizeable article highlighting Senhor and his rise to agricultural success. There was also a photo hanging up on the billboard of Senhor’s eldest son posing beside a cacao tree shockingly full of cacao pods. The newsletter also gave updates on happenings within the chocolate industry. Both CEPLAC and COOPAG do a good job of disseminating information and keeping their members well informed of any new advancement in agriculture. COOPAG makes a conscious effort to inform the farmers not just of happening within the state of Bahia, or even Brazil, but globally. Members of the cooperative understand their position within the market chain, as a link within the production of what has
progressively became a luxury good, especially with the production of organic cacao. Since the COOPAG, farmers with the region are more informed on the processes that take place after their goods are transported to the city. By holding meetings with export representatives and even visiting chocolate factories, the COOPAG hopes to keep their stakeholders, the farmers, knowledgeable on whatever undertakings occurring that could impact the cacao farmers and the chocolate industry. They make sure the farmer knows where their product is heading, all the way to the manufacturing of the chocolate. When I sat down to interview Pai Filho, he was able to discuss the market chain from the farm to the chocolate company (Figure 6-8). He knew COOPAG’s cacao beans were being sold to Barry Callebaut, one of the world’s leading manufacturer of high-quality cocoa and chocolate products, and from there go on to supply chocolate makers within Europe’s food industry.

Figure 6-8. Pai Filho discussing the market chain of cacao beans.
After observing others become successful smallholders with the aid of the cooperative, Nilton choose to join COOPAG. Nilton remembered purchasing second-hand and passed-down farm products and his productivity suffered because of it. Today he says, “I can go to the cooperative and get exactly what I need.” João procrastinated on becoming a member for many years, but he joined three years ago. He observed that the cooperative gave opportunities to many of his friends whom were also smallholders. Pai Filho chose to join because of the honesty and respect he felt COOPAG gave the smallholder. He noted that the cooperative took the time out to educate the farmers on what exactly they were being charged. He was impressed with the documentation for all invoices and receipts, and that they also collected the necessary cooperative dues, which kept the cooperative afloat and pays for COOPAG vehicles, the utilities in COOPAG headquarters, and the cooperatives employees. Although there are other cooperatives within the region, Pai Filho said that COOPAG is the principal one.

Pai Filho introduced me to some of the members of COOPAG’s staff, and everyone was very polite. I scanned the many items they had available for sale; anything from seeds to saddles to dog food was sold there. However, only members are able to purchase materials there. Pai Filho informed me that one could only participate in the cooperative if one was a farm owner and had the proof of certificate of land ownership. By becoming a member one has access to high quality agricultural material that few within this rural isolated region would be able to acquire.

Nilton later commented on the previous state of his tools before he became a member of the cooperative. By traveling in and out of shops in the city of Gandu, I observed that the diversity of agriculture equipment within COOPAG was unequaled. Again, it is the cooperative’s goal to make sure that its members are able to produce the highest quality goods possible and be able to replicate that quality so that exporters are confident they are receiving a product of high value.
While we were at COOPAG, Pai Filho also received a vehicle part he had ordered in the mail. Since there are no mailboxes, or addresses for that matter in Cachoeira Alta, one of the many benefits of being a COOPAG member is that one can have mail sent to COOPAG, in the event that one needs to receive mail.

A few of my informants were not member of the cooperative, so I was curious what had prevented them from joining. All had neighbors or friends who were members. Pai stated that he was not a member of the cooperative because of the distance from his farmstead. He also acknowledged that several middlemen, or intermediários, are within close proximity to his farmstead and that they are more convenient to sell to. He is considering joining COOPAG, or another agricultural cooperative in the city of Itubera, Bahia, but both are still a considerable distance from him. Although Pai is not a member of COOPAG, it is telling that the place in which we formally met was at COOPAG. He was there waiting for his son, Pai Filho, to give him a ride home. It was obvious that even non-members kept abreast of the cooperative’s agenda. An alternative to being a member of a cooperative is to work with a deposito, a commercial establishment that purchases goods from farmers. Santos, who is not a member of the cooperative, said that at the deposito, one has to negotiate for a fair and reasonable price. The farmers have to haggle on prices because the market price for cacao and the quality of the product fluctuate depending on the farmer. Oleo said that he will decide this year whether or not he will become a member of the cooperative. All of the informants that are not members of the cooperative still had positive things to say about COOPAG and thought it was a benefit to the community. Still, they were on the fence about joining, but conveyed that they were considering it. I also found it interesting that of the informants that are not members, none commented that they were definitively not going to join the cooperative. However, they may have been feeling a
bit of pressure to say something positive because of my relationship to Pai Filho and other COOPAG members. Most of the smallholders that I interviewed were members, or were debating on becoming a member, so there might be smallholding populations within these isolated regions that disagree with the ideologies of an agriculture cooperative. My information is solely based on the populations with whom I came into contact.

Although Paulinho was a member of COOPAG, I could sense that he had some animosity towards the organization. He believes that becoming a member of the cooperative makes it more difficult to be a smallholding farmer because if they want to remain a member of the cooperative, the farmer has to pay their dues which are a percentage annually of their production. He also believes that the farmers who make the most revenue for the cooperative have the highest priority during low season, or paradiero, a time when the cooperative assists their members to get loans to help them until the next harvest season. Paulinho owns a small parcel of land and he finds it difficult to sustain a large harvest. The amount of loan that the farmer gets during the paradiero is predicated on their harvest, and unfortunately those who have small yields receive minimal loans from the cooperative. The cooperative acts as a mediator between the farmer and the agricultural credit union, Sistema de Cooperativas de Crédito do Brasil (System of Credit Unions in Brazil) (SICOOB), which lends money to farmers. Nilton claims that the members of COOPAG are also associated with SICOOB. If the members need some money they can finance it through the cooperative, and the cooperative acts as the guarantor. For many of the smallholders who I interviewed this was the most important benefit to becoming a member of COOPAG, the security of knowing that in the event of a prolonged low season, the cooperative would do what it could to assist.
The cooperative also encourages its members to take classes on certain agricultural techniques which emphasize high-quality uniformity among all the cacao their members produce (Figure 6-9). They also have meetings where they introduce new processes in cacao. One of the pressing issues is the way cacao is produced. Many smallholders are transitioning into a process called cacau-fino or fine cacao. This process takes longer than the present method, but it creates a higher quality bean. The main difference in the process is that no estufa is used in the drying process; instead they leave the beans in the sun to dry. This process requires that farmers construct drying houses because of the tropical and rainy climate. Pai Filho is currently learning this methodology in the hopes of reaping more monetary gains. In another example, the purchase of fertilizer and insecticides can be an expense that few smallholders can afford. COOPAG allows its members to have a payment plan so that they can pay when they receive their harvests. This, too, has enhanced the productivity of many of the smallholders. João, for example, stated that after he was a member for two years, he did things that he could not do in thirty years. For instance, João was able to finance agricultural equipment and purchase the fertilizer through the cooperative.

In addition to the technical and economical advantages that come with being a member of the cooperative, there are also social advantages. Paulinho spoke about the social aspects of the cooperative, by saying, “usually at the end of activities they promote a party or gathering and hold a raffle to give gifts among the members, maybe a motorcycle or television set.” The cooperative enables community fellowship by holding celebrations, especially when they are changing the president of the cooperative or introducing new employees. The ability to take family and friends to the events makes for a positive atmosphere. A few months before I arrived for my second field visit I was informed that many of the smallholders were able to take a bus
trip, sponsored by the cooperative, to visit a factory where fine chocolate is produced (Figure 6-10). Trips such as this as well as festivities strengthen the ties within the agricultural community of Cachoeira Alta.

Figure 6-9. Members of the Cooperative discussing the process of cacau fino at Bahia Cacau factory.

Figure 6-10. The site of COOPAG’s field trip, to observe the way in which fine chocolate is produced.
Chapter 7: Conclusion

In conclusion, through my ethnographic research, once can identify several mechanisms by which wage laborers have been able to make a successful transition into smallholding. For one cacao as a crop has specific labor requirements that allow a minimal amount of people to cultivate and harvest it. It requires very low initial interest, and as we can see many of my informants were able to plant the crop on parcels of land while still working as a laborer. It is a fairly easy crop to grow and maintain in comparison to its yields. Cacao agriculture also needs minimal equipment to harvest and process the beans. Cacao as a high value commodity on the global market keeps it a high value luxury good, consumed by the developed world.

We also see that the cohesiveness of the local community and sharing of agricultural knowledge and practices acts a mechanism to ensure solidarity between farmers. For my informants we see the advantages offered by the cooperatives have already been detailed throughout this document. Another mechanism which enables wage labor-turned smallholding populations to progress are the apprentice-like relationships between smallholder and their wage laborers.

This research derives from interviews and participant observation with community members of Cachoeira Alta with whom I have family ties. Most of my informants, as clearly discussed are stakeholders in the local cooperative. As such, this work reflects mostly on the transition from wage laborers to smallholders who are members of the cooperative. I interviewed non-cooperative members, but the information and opinions that they shared with
me in regard to the cooperatives and the benefits or costs of cooperatives may have been influenced by my family ties to cooperative stake-holder. So, there may be, in fact another side to this story by non-member to which I did not have access.

Throughout the process of creating this ethnographic document and establishing relationships with my informants, one cannot help but imagine what the future will entail for one’s informants. One observes the physical advancements, such as increase home sized and amenities that previous generations were not able to accumulate. But most of the concern is in making sure that the future generation still retained the work ethic and community cohesiveness that has endured within Cachoeira Alta.

Currently, children have different labor roles than they had decades ago in Cachoeira Alta. The main focus today is on education, as opposed to preparing children for a career in agriculture. All of the children and teenagers go to school, but they go in shifts. The oldest children go to school from mid afternoon to early evening, so that they are available to complete farming tasks in the morning. One morning I had the opportunity to aid one of Senhor’s grandchildren, a fourteen-year-old teenage boy, with extracting beans and pulp form the cacao pods on his small plot (Figure 7-1). Despite this emphasis many children do not complete high school. During my first visit to the region I conversed with a group of seven children that ranged from five to fifteen years old in lá em baixo, or the lowlands of Cachoeira Alta at the home of my sister-in-law, who had two children, thirteen and fifteen. There was a group of youths at the house, and I decided to ask them a few questions. They were initially very reticent, but after a few games of Uno, a simple card game, they opened up and were very receptive to my inquiries. I was curious about how many kids actually finished grade school. I had been told by other informants and family members that they had gone to school, but that few had finished. Most
begin working fulltime as teenagers, at which time they lose interest in finishing their education. At the outset I asked the group of kids how many out of a group of kids would go on to graduate from high school, or *colégio*. They said that approximately four of the ten students would graduate from high school.

![Figure 7-1. Senhor’s grandson extracting pulp and cacao beans from the cacao pods.](image)

Still, the emphasis on education has led youths to a interest outside the agrarian boundaries of Cachoeira Alta, and many adolescent youths foresee a future outside of agriculture. After a long day of work, Pai’s youngest son sat down with me to discuss the role cacao agriculture plays in his young life. Currently a wage laborer on a large plantation, this twenty-two-year old seeks a life other than that of farming. Making only one hundred reis a week (approximately sixty US dollars), he has enough to purchase some goods and pay off his moto. Most of his friends similar in age either work with him on the plantation of a wealthy landowner or work in the deposito. Pai’s son works during the day and travels to school three evenings a
week. Having worked in the metropolis of São Paulo for two years, he realizes that opportunities are abundant if one attains a diploma. Due to financial hardships he chose to return back to the region to live with his parents. Although he worked for his father in the past, he chose to work for the large planter because the pay was higher. His aspirations consist of graduating high school and becoming a teacher.

For smallholders, getting out of a wage laboring meant freedom from a very constrained and regimented lifestyle. These smallholders have also acquired a flexibility of work schedule and are able to control the quality of their products. By pursing an autonomous lifestyle and becoming a independent smallholder, many of my informants felt like they were positive influences on their children and others within the community. I asked Nilton how his transition into smallholding impacted his family, and he replied, “An impact might be for someone that was a laborer and tomorrow winning the lottery, that is an impact.” Nilton is expressing that this transition did not happen overnight. He understood my question differently and was careful to point out that he worked hard to achieve what he has. Nilton stated that people see that he has a car, but they do not see the hard work that he had to do to attain it. The freedom that smallholders experience is something that they never had as a wage laborer. As Nilton put it, as a laborer he had to “ask for permission from your boss first....today if we want to do something we ask for God’s permission.” To be able to actualize one’s dreams of gaining freedom from an authoritative labor system, as my informants described, not only benefited them, but created a lasting impact on those around them.

Nilton believed that setting a good example for his children is very important. He also hoped they understand the difficulties their father faced in ascertaining his position. Although Nilton hopes his children will stay in farming, he and his wife (who is a teacher) stress the
importance of remaining and finishing school. He wants his children to finish school and then begin their careers in agriculture.

Interestingly enough Nilton not only hopes that his children follow in his footsteps and become smallholders themselves, but he wants them to take a similar path to the one that he took to reach that goal. In the beginning of his interview he discussed at length the harsh treatment that he had as a wage laborer. When he said later that he wanted his children to start out as wage laborers, I found it difficult to understand why. I thought about the generation before Nilton and how his father was also a wage laborer, turned smallholder, and I realized that it was almost a rite of passage. To be able to successfully emerge from such a bleak situation as a wage laborer and become a smallholder takes a courage and resiliency that Nilton believed he would not have acquired if he had not gone through laboring on a large plantation. He wants his children to learn the same traits that made him an experienced smallholder, and he feels that the only way to impart these ideals is by starting as wage laborers. Nilton also commented that he would like to instill that love for producing good from nature by purchasing a small portion of land in the near future and encouraging his children to tend to it.

When I spoke with João, both his youngest son of twenty eight with whom he works in partnership, and his grandson, a toddler, sat in the background as João gave his outlook on his past life and what he hoped for his future. He grew very introspective. As João explained, I thought how those three generations will experience life in three different ways, yet they are all connected. While we were conducting the interview and discussing how João foresees the future for him and his offspring, I got the feeling that although he was talking to me, the message was for his son, and his grandson. João stated, “How I see it is that they need to think a little bit about their future. It will be difficult to find land to work, because all the land is occupied. The
preservation of land is high priority.” He commented on the current use of pesticides and insecticides inevitably making many people sick. João does not see his grandchildren wanting to be farmers, but instead he envisions them working as nurses or agronomist.

Farming is the backbone of this region, and all of my informants as well as their ancestors were active in agriculture. With a new generation emerges new opportunities that might veer away from the field of agriculture. When speaking of his children’s future, Pai Filho encourages them to go to school, then to do whatever they like. As Pai Filho said, “the future will be their choice.” Santos was impartial, although hoping that his young offspring will become farmers, he also added that they are in school and hence may choose to pursue a different career. He simply wants to convey to them that their destiny is up to them.

Having a few free minutes at the home of Pai Filho, I jotted down some notes from a day of interviewing. Seeing Pai Filho’s eldest child doing some doodling while waiting for dinner, I asked him if he could draw what he sees himself doing when he gets older. Without hesitation he says, “agricultor” and proceeded to draw a detailed description of what he imagined himself doing. You could see the pride within his eyes as he put the finishing touches on the drawing and held it up for the family to see (Figure 7-2). Clearly, the smallholders in Cachoeira Alta have been a positive influence on their youth through their actions and the sacrifices they were willing to make for the benefit of the whole. They also had a willingness to learn and unite their efforts for the greater good. As this drawing indicates for the children of Cachoeira Alta, even though their futures may not be on the farm, these attributes will resonate with them.
Figure 7-2. Drawing of Pai Filho’s son’s future aspirations.
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APPENDIX
Appendix A: Fieldwork Interview Guide

Background Information

How old are you and where are you from?

Are you married?

Do you have any children? If so, how many?

Who lives with you?

Are you a member of a cooperative, if so which one?

Transition from Wage Laborer to Smallholder

Can you share with me your life working as a laborer?
   How did you make ends meet?
   Can you tell me about your family life as a laborer?

What is your life like today as an Agricultor?
   How do you currently support yourself?
   How has becoming a smallholder impacted the lives of your family?

Why did you make a decision to become an Agricultor?
   How did this change your lifestyle?
   What did your family think about your decision?

What was it like to make the move from laborer to smallholder?
   How did you manage to purchase land?
   Did you have any challenges in making that transition? If so, how did you overcome?
   Did you have to learn any new skills?
   How did the workday change once you became an Agricultor?

Could you describe to me a regular day of work on the farm?
   How do women and children help on the farm?
   Do you have any wage laborers?
   What is your relationship with them?

Why did you choose to join the Cooperative?
   What were the benefits of joining?
   Does being a member make it easier to be a small farmer? How so?
Is the co-op important to your community? Why or why not?

As a smallholder, how do you see the future for yourself, your children, and grandchildren?

Do you think that they will be farmers too? If yes or no, what do you see them doing in the future?

How did you becoming a smallholder affect your children’s future?

How did you parents becoming small holders affect you life? How do you think if affected your future?
VITA

EDUCATION:
Bachelor of Arts Degree, History
Salisbury University 2006

PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE
U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Vicksburg District (July 2009-Present)
Archaeologist, GS-09

Engage in the preparation, administration, and inspection of archaeological surveys, testing, and excavation relating to the investigation and reporting of American Indian cultural sites and other historically significant cultural resources in areas of proposed construction activity. Serves as an archeologist on several civil works planning, construction and maintenance projects throughout the Vicksburg District. Also assists in creating Environmental Assessments for National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) compliance for large civil works and infrastructure projects. Serves as a technical resource, providing timely and accurate professional archeological and cultural resource advice and recommendations by applying in-depth knowledge of the National Historic Preservation Act and Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act to ensure historic properties are protected and managed in accordance with criteria and applicable standards of the acts. Coordinates Corps planning and construction activities with State Historic Preservation Officers and federally recognized American Indian tribes.

KEY PROJECTS
Conducted Phase I excavations to determine location of archaeological sites in the diverse environments of Mississippi, Louisiana, and Arkansas. Also evaluated archaeological sites for (NRHP) National Register of Historic Place eligibility and conducted Phase III large scale data recovery excavations on late 19th century riverfront sites to Mississippian Period Mound Complexes. Acted as Field Director and lead an interdisciplinary staff of biologist, foresters, and archaeologists to conduct Phase I archaeological fieldwork over large tracts of land, more than 600 acres, on a tight schedule, thus meeting deadlines and milestones.

Took the lead in producing a comprehensive cultural resources impact report as part of the MVD’s Environmental System Performance Evaluation Team. Collected, reviewed, and summarized complex and sensitive data from three separate Districts, involving impacts to dozens of archaeological sites, to produce a well-reviewed report before the assigned due date.

Consulted with the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation, a independent federal agency, regarding the Corps controversial undertakings on the Graft Barn, which will involve adversely affecting an historic property.
Reviewed the archeological reports associated with the SEIS for the Plaquemines Parish Levee Enlargement Project, a multi-District and multi-agency regional project with an aggressive schedule. When a change in the Scope of Work caused a potential adverse effect on a protected archeological site and threatened to impact the aggressive schedule of a high-profile museum construction project, I kept the schedule on tract by aiding in the formulation of a complex monitoring plan to allow archeological investigation to be conducted concurrently with construction. Performed archeological monitoring with contract archeological crews and acted as a liaison between Project Managers and cultural resource firm while onsite.

Made professional recommendations which determined National Register eligibility (or lack of eligibility) for archeological sites on Mississippi River Levees and Steele Bayou Phase VI projects. Utilized my expertise to suggest ways in which impacts to sites could be minimized. These recommendations saved MVK time and resources on several projects with very aggressive schedules.

Aided Corps archeologists and worked with Louisiana state archeologists on a USACE owned burial mound in immediate danger of being looted and damaged through erosion. Consulted with Tribal Historic Preservation Offer and other Tribal leaders to help formulate a cultural resource management plan for the long term management of the property.

Constructed exhibits and displays for the Lower Mississippi River Interpretive Museum and coordinated with consulting parties from an array of disciplines to create interactive exhibits and helped preserve a historic USACE vessel, which will be integrated into the museum. Acted as a regional cultural resource contact, assisted with creating a document detailing recreation sites and historic properties impacted by the Mississippi River Flood of 2011.

Independently created a historic preservation workshop for the students of Vicksburg High School and worked with teachers and staff to design a project which would emphasize historic records research and how to conduct and document oral histories. This project resulted in excellent media coverage for USACE, Vicksburg District.

University of Mississippi  
Graduate Assistant  
(Fall 2008-Spring 2010)  
Assisted anthropology lab in devising ways to modernize the University’s artifact repository. Co-taught introduction to anthropology classes, and Muslims in Europe classes. Member of Anthropology Department’s Selection Committee at the University of Mississippi for potential candidates. Excavated at Carson Mound Site, a Mississippian period ceremonial center, and aided in remote sensing using magnetometry and ground penetrating radar.

TRC Solutions, Inc. Ellicott City, MD  
Field Archaeologist  
(June 2007-August 2008)
Conducted shovel tests for field site to determine areas of interest. Prepared and excavated test units for Pre-Historic and Historical sites. Performed Phase I archaeological surveys on various types of terrain in the Blue Ridge Mountains of West Virginia, as well as Bedford and Mansfield Pennsylvania

**Applied Archaeology & History Associates, Inc. Annapolis, MD (March 2007-August 2008)**  
*Field Archaeologist/ Lab Assistant*

Excavated 18th century pit features and collected artifacts for laboratory analysis. Assisted Geophysicist in remote sensing to find African-American slave grave sites in Washington D.C. Metropolitan area. Cleaned, processed and cataloged Prehistoric/Historic artifacts from the Late Woodland Era to the mid 19th thru early 20th century. Aided colleagues in creating and preparing site reports and site summaries for Phase I and Phase II archaeological projects. Played a major role in creating an archaeological report database for background research and citation purposes

**Poplar Hill Historical Mansion, Salisbury, MD (September 2006-December 2006)**  
*Assistant Curator*

Assisted in development and design of the Mansion’s website. Aided curator in all aspects of historic preservation/ historic site management. Initiated ideas on how to change the demographic of the current visitors to create a more diverse audience. Participated in Executive Board Meetings of the Friends of Poplar Hill Society.

**Furnace Town Living Heritage Museum, Snow Hill, MD (September 2006-December 2006)**  
*Archaeologist Intern*

Performed archaeological investigations on previously unexcavated areas with the museum’s boundary. Accessioned and catalogued the whole artifact register. Educated the public, through archaeological artifacts, on early 19th century culture of Maryland’s Eastern Shore.

**Anne Arundel County Lost Town Project (July-August 2006)**  
*Archaeologist Intern*

Formally introduced to historical archaeology where I excavated colonial sites with professional archaeologists. Restored artifacts using the most modern technology to ensure preservation. Categorized artifacts and documented findings in the Archaeology Laboratory.

**Maryland Historical Trust, Vienne, MD; Chincoteague, VA (April 2006-July 2006)**  
*Maritime Archaeology Technician*

Participated in numerous maritime archeological expeditions. Utilized magnetometer instrument to examine Chesapeake Bay area. Determined ways in which archaeology contributes to commerce.

**Anne Arundel County Department of Recreation and Parks (June 1999-August 2001)**  
*Senior Camp Counselor*
Supervised numerous camp members and interacted with parents on a daily basis, making an environment conducive to fun and learning. Developed recreational activities for summer camp site. Organized ideas regarding summer curriculums for camp participants.

PROFESSIONAL REPORTS:

2012
“Pearlington Community, Section 592, Pearlington Water and Sewer District Well No. 2 Pearlington, Mississippi, Environmental Assessment”. Prepared by United States Army Corps of Engineers, Vicksburg District.

2011

2011

2011

2011

2010
“Deep Soil Coring at the Hollybrook Site (16EC85), East Carroll Parish, Louisiana”. Prepared by United States Army Corps of Engineers, Vicksburg District. On file at the Louisiana Division of Archaeology.

2010
“Phase I Cultural Resources Report for the Mississippi Delta Headwaters Bank Stabilization Project, BS-09-02, Holmes County, Mississippi”. Prepared by United States Army Corps of Engineers, Vicksburg District. On file at the Mississippi Department of Archives and History.

2010
“Phase I Cultural Resources Survey for a Yazoo Headwaters Project, Sardis Lower Drawdown Structure, Panola County, Mississippi”. Prepared by United States Army Corps of Engineers, Vicksburg District. On file at the Mississippi Department of Archives and History.

2010
“Phase I Cultural Resources Investigation of Mississippi Delta Headwaters Project, Box culvert BC-06-02 in Webster County, Mississippi”. Prepared by United States Army Corps of Engineers, Vicksburg District. On file at the Mississippi Department of Archives and History.

2009

2009
“Phase Reconnaissance Dredged Material Disposal Areas As Part of The Steele Bayou Project”. Prepared by United States Army Corps of Engineers, Vicksburg District. On file at the Mississippi Department of Archives and History.

2009
“Phase IA Cultural Resources Investigation for East and West Bank Mississippi River Levees, Items 290-L in Yazoo County, 365-R in Adams County, 468-L in Issaquena County, Mississippi, and 420-R along Bayou Vidal in Tensas Parish, Louisiana”. Prepared by the United States Army Corps of Engineers, Vicksburg District. On file at the Mississippi Department of Archives and History and Louisiana Division of Archaeology.

2009
“Cultural Resources Survey of an Access Road Easement Located In S34, T7South, R6West, Sardis Lake”. Prepared by United States Army Corps of Engineers, Vicksburg District. On file at the Mississippi Department of Archives and History.

2009
“Cultural Resources Investigation for Red River Basin, Red River Backwater Levee, New Drainage Structure Station 3525.00, Dunbarton to Lake St. John, Concordia and Tensas Parishes, Louisiana”. Prepared by United States Army Corps of Engineers, Vicksburg District. On file at the Louisiana Division of Archaeology.

COMMITIES & ORGANIZATIONS
Mississippi Archaeological Association (Fall 2011-Present)
Maryland Archeological Society (Winter 2006-Winter 2008)
Salisbury University Black Student Union (Fall 2002-Fall 2006)
Treasurer of the Salisbury University History Club (Fall 2002-Fall 2006)

QUALIFICATIONS/TRAININGS:
Participated in USACE Cultural Resources Training, 2011
Participated in USACE Environmental & Cultural Training, 2010
Participated in USACE Federal Fiscal Law Training, 2010
Participated in USACE Media Relations Training, 2009

EXPERIENCES/VOLUNTEER WORK
-Attended Salisbury University’s Roman-Germany Study Abroad Program, Summer of 2006
-Assisted in planning various Mississippi Archaeology Month Events, 2009-2011.
-Regularly presents to local Elementary, Middle, and High schools on the regional prehistory and history.
-Consulted with teachers, community activists, and local genealogical societies to help restore one of the oldest African American Cemeteries in Mississippi.
-Presented on Archaeology of the African Diaspora at Vicksburg’s Black History Month Event held at the Vicksburg Convention Center.
Serve as a judge in USACE sponsored Black History Month poster competitions and Warren and Lafayette County, MS Science Fairs. Mentored youth as a member of Big Brother, Big Sister in Lafayette County, MS.