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“Eles Deturpam o Que Tu És”:
Coloniality, Resistance, and the Reconfiguration of Colonial Power in
Quilombos of Amapá, Brazil

A thesis
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of the requirements for the degree
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ABSTRACT

This thesis examines the persistence and reconfiguration of colonial structures in Brazil's northern region, focusing on the state of Amapá – a critical borderland of Amazonian modernity. With a particular focus on Quilombos (formerly-enslaved Black settlements), it addresses the central argument that coloniality, understood as the enduring matrix of power, race, and knowledge established during the European conquest, continues to shape the present. While state and corporate narratives portray the Amazon region as a site of sustainable progress, this study aims to demonstrate how colonial logics of isolation, extractivism, and silencing persist under the banner of development and conservation. A decolonial and interpretive methodology combining qualitative semi-structured interviews was employed to answer three interrelated questions: (1) How have colonial structures of racial, spatial, and epistemic domination persisted and been reconfigured in Brazil's northern region, particularly in Amapá? (2) How do Quilombola women from Amapá experience and resist intersecting forms of racialized labor and territorial dispossession? (3) How do decolonial frameworks enhance our understanding of the relationship between racial capitalism, gendered violence, and the afterlives of slavery in northern Brazil? Participants' narratives, practices, and silences were analyzed as contributions to theorize coloniality, survival, and epistemic disobedience. The findings reveal that racial capitalism in Amapá operates not only through extractive economies but also through established colonial regimes that devalue subaltern knowledge while maintaining racial hierarchies. The legacies of historical servitude and land dispossession persist through bureaucratic omission and policy frameworks that privilege private and corporate interests over collective rights. In response, communities articulate diverse forms of resistance that merge political action, cultural continuity, and strategic silence. Ultimately, this thesis argues that decolonial practices are not abstract ideals but lived behaviors emerging from the endurance and creativity of those who continue to resist distortion and erasure. Research

findings contribute to decolonial theory by reterritorializing coloniality within the Amazonian frontier and advancing a decolonial research praxis grounded in ethical rigor, linguistic fidelity, and co-produced knowledge. Findings offer critical insight into how racial capitalism and epistemic domination are contested through localized acts of survival, reinterpretation, and creation.

Keywords: coloniality, racial capitalism, epistemic disobedience, Amapá, quilombola, territorial dispossession, Brazilian Amazon.

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Table of Contents

List of Tables	x
List of Figures	xi
Chapter 1. Introduction: Reframing Resistance in the North of Brazil	1
1.1. From Labor Extraction to Territorial Violence: Migration, Exploitation, and the Racial State.....	2
1.1.1. Resistance and the Rewriting of Territory	3
1.2. Research Problem and Questions.....	6
1.3. Research Objectives and Contributions	9
1.3.1. Positionality and Fieldwork	11
1.4. Theoretical and Conceptual Framework Overview	13
1.5. Methodological Overview	16
1.6. Structure of the Thesis	19
Chapter 2. Literature Review: Power, Resistance, and Racialized Territories in Brazil...	21
2.1. Introduction: Revisiting Race, Power, Territory, and Knowledge in Brazil	21
2.2. Coloniality and race: setting the stage to understand Brazil's history	24
2.2.1. Brazil's Internal Colonialism and the Spatial Politics of Development	27
2.3. Brazil and the Northeast as the first dominated territory	31
2.3.1. Colonization of Brazil: A Historical Overview	33
2.3.2. The Construction of Colonial Narratives	44
2.3.3. The Myth of the "Empty Land" (Terra Nullius) and the Justification of Colonization.....	56
2.3.4. Whiteness, land and the matrix of coloniality: racial identity in Brazil	59
2.3.5. From Empty Land to Exploitative Labor: The Birth of Capitalism in Colonial Brazil	66
2.3.6. The construction of Blackness and the transatlantic slave trade (16 th –18 th Century)	71
2.3.7. Black Bodies in the Gold Economy: Mining, Violence, and the Expansion of Colonial Exploitation.....	77
2.4. Quilombos.....	81
2.4.1. Cultural Resilience and Identity Formation in Quilombos	82
2.4.2. Quilombos as Decolonial Spaces: Challenging Coloniality of Power and Necropolitics.....	82
2.4.3. Quilombo dos Palmares: A Symbol of Enduring Resistance	84
2.4.4. Quilombola Communities in Contemporary Brazil	84

2.5.	The Creation of Favelas: Racialized Urban Exclusion, Epistemic Oppression, and Spaces of Resistance	92
2.5.1.	Persistence of Colonial Structures	95
2.5.2.	The Unfinished Colonial Project: Race, Space, and Power in Brazil	97
Chapter 3.	Methodology	99
3.1.	Research Questions and Methodological Implications.....	100
3.1.1.	Case Study Logic	102
3.2.	Methodological Orientation	103
3.2.1.	Interpretivism and Situated Knowledge.....	105
3.2.2.	The Role of Narrative and Storytelling.....	106
3.2.3.	Women’s Centrality in Community Knowledge	107
3.2.4.	Methodology as Political Practice	108
3.3.	Research Design.....	109
3.3.1.	Case study: Amapá - Territorial, Racial, and Economic Formation in Historical Perspective	110
3.3.1.	Stage One: Secondary data Analysis	121
3.3.2.	Stage Two: Semi-Structured Interviews	122
3.3.3.	Stage Three: Analysis and Discussion	123
3.3.4.	Data Sources and Collection	124
3.3.5.	Limitations	129
3.4.	Positionality, Ethics and Reflexivity.....	131
3.4.1.	Positionality	132
3.4.2.	Ethical Protocols	134
3.4.3.	Reflexivity.....	136
Chapter 4.	Results and Discussion: Amapá.....	139
4.1.	Introduction.....	139
4.2.	Secondary data results: Representations of Quilombola Communities in Amapá	142
4.2.1.	Recognition as Progress	147
4.2.2.	Justice, Climate, and Territorial Demands.....	149
4.2.3.	The Violence of Racial Invisibility.....	151
4.3.	Interview results: overview	155
4.3.1.	Colonial Governance, Bureaucratic Violence, and Environmental Exploitation	157
4.3.2.	Gendered Labor, Territorial Dispossession, and Embodied Violence.....	160
4.3.3.	Cultural Resistance, Activism, and Strategic Silences	162

4.4.	Discussion: Amapá – Coloniality, Racial Capitalism and Epistemic Disobedience	165
4.4.1.	Recognition, Bureaucratic Violence, and the Colonial State.....	166
4.4.2.	Epistemic Erasures and the Politics of Silence	168
4.4.3.	Reconfiguring Coloniality in the Present.....	170
4.4.4.	Decolonial Interpretations: Racial Capitalism, Gendered Violence, and the Afterlives of Slavery.....	173
4.4.5.	Epistemic Disobedience: Refusal and Decolonial Futures	178
4.5.	Considerations on The Decolonial Paradigm	181
Chapter 5.	Conclusion:	185
5.1.	Theoretical and Methodological Contributions	192
5.2.	Ethical and Reflexive Challenges	196
5.3.	Implications and Future Directions.....	198
5.4.	Final Reflection: Epistemic Disobedient Futures	203
References		205
Appendix A:	Codebook	223
Appendix B:	Ethics Approval.....	227

List of Tables

Table 1 Summary of Key Limitations on Field Research.....	129
Table 2 Key Themes and Sub-Themes identified in secondary data.....	146
Table 3 Key Themes and Sub-themes in the interviews.....	156

List of Figures

Figure 1 Routes of Women Trafficking in the Guyana Region.....	12
Figure 2 State of Amapá and Quilombola Communities.....	111

Chapter 1. Introduction: Reframing Resistance in the North of Brazil

In the northern Brazilian state of Amapá, *Quilombola* and Indigenous communities face overlapping systems of violence rooted in Brazil's colonial foundations. These systems manifest in persistent territorial expropriation and institutional neglect. Racialized women, particularly Black and Indigenous, bear the brunt of these overlapping pressures, enduring precarious labor, environmental degradation, and limited access to health, education, and land (Almeida et al., 2021; Dias & Aragão, 2025; Nunes de Lima, 2021). Despite Brazil's constitutional frameworks, including Article 68 of the 1988 Federal Constitution (Constituição Da República Federativa Do Brasil) and Convention 169 of the International Labor Organization, which formally recognize collective land rights for traditional communities, countless communities remain without formal titles due to bureaucratic inertia and political resistance (de Carvalho et al., 2021; Jorge, 2024; Perry, 2013). In Amapá, this legal precariousness has exacerbated the intensity of elite housing projects, extractive encroachments, illegal mining, and the aggressive expansion of agribusiness, all of which contribute to the racialized and gendered reproduction of dispossession (Malheiro, 2020; Rocha, 2018).

These dynamics are embedded in Brazil's historical model of development, which has always relied on the racialized displacement and exploitation of populations in the service of territorial expansion. From the colonial occupation of Indigenous land to contemporary infrastructure and mining projects, the State has consistently positioned the North, especially the Amazon, as a resource frontier, justified by logics of civilization and economic necessity (Faria et al., 2016; Patarra, 2003; Tourinho & Sotero, 2023). This framework has produced not only a geography of exploitation but also patterns of internal migration deeply marked by race, gender, and class.

1.1. From Labor Extraction to Territorial Violence: Migration, Exploitation, and the Racial State

Throughout the 20th century, internal migration patterns in Brazil were shaped by the needs of industrial and rural labor markets, often relocating marginalized populations into precarious and underregulated sectors (Graham & Buarque de Holanda, 1973; Justo & Silveira Neto, 2008; Lopes, 1981; Martine, 1990; Sachsida et al., 2009; Santos et al., 2003). During the mid-century industrial boom, rural-to-urban migration accelerated, while sparsely populated, resource-rich areas like Amapá became prime zones of extractive expansion. These movements followed the same racial logics that governed slavery and land conquest: subordinating Black and Indigenous labor to feed the national economy, while denying these groups full rights and recognition (Singer, 1973; Tourinho & Sotero, 2023).

Gendered dimensions of migration further reveal how colonial patterns of labor exploitation have been repurposed. As Marques and Góis (2012) observe, men are absorbed into construction and industrial labor, while women – especially from the North and Northeast – are channeled into domestic work and caregiving, often migrating under informal or exploitative conditions (Faria et al., 2016). In areas bordering Guyana and French Guiana, the migration of women for low-wage work and sexual economies continues to reflect historical scripts of racial and sexual exploitation (Farias da Silva, 2019; G. de V. Silva, 2017).

Today, these racialized migration flows intersect with the expansion of criminal activities in the Amazon. Amapá has seen a surge in environmental militias engaged in illegal deforestation, gold mining, and arms and narcotics trafficking (Fórum Brasileiro de Segurança Pública, 2022, 2024). These networks exploit not only natural resources but also human lives. Between 2008 and 2021, 333 workers were rescued from conditions akin to slavery in illegal mines, and cases of sexual exploitation of Indigenous girls have come to public attention (Angelo, 2021; V. Oliveira, 2023). As these criminal organizations expand, Indigenous tribes

who refuse to cooperate or cover up illegal mining operations become direct targets. For example, the Yanomami tribe endured approximately a month of attacks with bombs and shootings by miners in 2021 (Bachega, 2021). The violence extends to those who expose these illicit activities; in 2022, Bruno Pereira, a FUNAI (National Indigenous Foundation) employee, and Dom Phillips, a British journalist, were murdered by miners while conducting research in the region (BBC Brasil, 2022).

Despite this context, the exploitation of Black and Indigenous women in northern Brazil remains under-researched, obscured by legal recognition of sex work and the historical invisibility of the region (Farias da Silva, 2019; Furtado, 2009). Yet these patterns are not aberrations: they are the continuation of Brazil's colonial racial order, which renders racialized women as both laboring bodies and disposable lives.

1.1.1. Resistance and the Rewriting of Territory

Against this backdrop, *quilombola* (Black) women in Amapá have emerged as central actors in defending land, memory, and community autonomy. Their struggles challenge dominant narratives that frame the Amazon as either an ecological sanctuary or a site for extraction, revealing instead a terrain of Black and Indigenous re-existence (Almeida et al., 2021; M. das G. da Silva et al., 2022). These women organize community associations, preserve ancestral knowledge, and resist the erasure of their cosmologies in state planning and academic discourse (Almeida et al., 2021; Dias & Aragão, 2025; G. C. Santos et al., 2023).

This thesis begins with the assertion that what is often called “marginalization” is not accidental, it is structurally produced. The Northern region is not peripheral to the Brazilian nation-state, but foundational to its racial, economic, and epistemic order. Drawing on Aníbal Quijano's (2000) concept of coloniality of power, this research examines how racialized governance in Brazil operates through enduring colonial structures. The failure to guarantee

basic rights to Black women in the Northern region is not a policy gap but a product of a system that was never meant to serve them (Cesarino, 2018; Santos, 2023). It means that

All the civilizational ideal tied to a nationalist fiction that portrays the Amazon as a blind force of extraordinary fertility, in fact, translates into the urgent need, which, indeed, nothing can halt, to conquer and dominate for the nation this northern portion of what will come to be called Brazil. The modernity of disciplined energy, which civilizes and populates, would not exist if not for the invention of this absolute outside of the ideals of nationality. The play of polarizations and dichotomies is the tool devised to control the dangers of absolution and the greed of outsiders. The nation becomes the patchwork between the guarantee of sovereignty and the meanings of authority of a community imagined through an image, in which there is no room for the worlds, visions, figures, languages, spaces, territories, and existences of this so-called equatorial torrent. (Malheiro, 2020, p. 84, translated by author)

At the same time, this study foregrounds resistance. Drawing on Frantz Fanon's (1986) critique of ontological violence and Maldonado-Torres (2007) concept of coloniality of being, this thesis examines how subaltern women's practices – like territorial defense, oral history, spiritual practices – represent forms of epistemic and political survival. These are referred to by Boaventura de Sousa Santos (2015) as epistemologies of the South: knowledge developed through struggle that challenges Eurocentric ideas of modernity, citizenship, and development. To accomplish this, this thesis will also discuss the formation of *quilombos* and *favelas*.

Historically, *quilombos* emerged as paramount expressions of this resistance. These communities, formed by runaway enslaved Africans and, at times, allied Indigenous peoples, were far more than mere escape routes; they were autonomous societies that actively defied the logic of the colonial slave system. *Quilombos* represented radical ruptures from the plantation economy, serving as vital spaces of self-determination, cultural preservation, and the

continuous reimagining of freedom and community in the face of ontological violence (Conniff, 1999; Fanon, 1986). They maintained distinct forms of governance, economic organization, and spiritual practices, embodying Boaventura de Sousa Santos's epistemologies of the South long before the term existed.

The contemporary struggles of *favelados* are deeply connected to Brazil's colonial past. The urban peripheries are the modern *quilombos*: spaces of forced marginalization but also of cultural survival, political mobilization, and the continuous reimagining of Black and Indigenous futures. The lack of adequate housing and urban planning for the formerly enslaved after abolition directly led to the formation of these marginalized communities, mirroring the denial of land rights that fueled the creation of *quilombos*. Thus, the history of *favelas* is not simply a story of urban poverty; it is a history of coloniality, epistemic oppression, racialized spatial exclusion, and resistance. Understanding *favelas* as dynamic, historically rooted spaces of both oppression and resilience is essential to deconstructing the myths of racial democracy and urban modernity in Brazil. The narratives emerging from within *favelas*, the cultural expressions that thrive there, and the political organizing that takes place are all forms of epistemic resistance against the dominant narratives that seek to dehumanize and marginalize their residents.

Through this lens, Brazilian history is not viewed as a linear progression but as a continuous struggle between colonial structures and decolonial possibilities. The North, and Amapá in particular, stands as a critical site where the contradictions of racial capitalism – that argues that capitalism was born out of and fundamentally relies on, racial difference and violence (Robinson, 2000) –, gendered exploitation, and historical erasure converge, and where the seeds of resistance are continuously sown.

1.2. Research Problem and Questions

Brazil's national identity has long been shaped by the myth of racial democracy – a narrative that portrays the country as a racially harmonious society where inequality is circumstantial, rather than structural. Yet, this myth obscures the deep legacies of colonization, slavery, and state violence that continue to disproportionately affect Black and Indigenous populations. These legacies are especially visible in the Northern and Northeastern regions, where racialized women face intersecting forms of dispossession, precarious labor, epistemic silencing, and institutional neglect (Perry, 2004; White, 2017).

Mainstream academic and policy discourses often fail to account for the structural and historical nature of these inequalities. As Gabrielle Santos et al. (2023) and Vijaya Hogan et al. (2018) argue, racial and gender disparities in Brazil are frequently framed as isolated social problems rather than as systemic outcomes of enduring colonial logics. This reproduces coloniality in different levels, making the structures of society reproduce universalized Western epistemologies, while subaltern histories and cosmologies are erased (Mignolo, 2021)¹.

This thesis responds to these silences by interrogating how Brazil's racialized and gendered social order continues to be shaped by colonial forms of governance. It investigates how colonial-era practices – forced labor, spatial segregation, epistemic domination – have been reconfigured in contemporary political and economic regimes, especially in the Northern region. The state of Amapá, located in Brazil's northern frontier, offers a particularly revealing site. As both an extractive periphery and a geopolitical threshold to the Guyana region, Amapá

¹ This thesis does not use gender as one of its central frameworks of analysis, as it is my understanding that the gender debate is not an isolated category. My concern during the writing of the results was that specific focus on gender could put the participants' narratives at risk of being silenced and/or redirected to the discussion of gender only, with no regard to their lived experiences as a whole. It is important to note that mainstream discussions/frameworks of gender do not engage *quilombola*'s distinct experiences of slavery and rural geographic location, as Brazil's history of slavery is hardly foregrounded and the racial/Black identity is often flattened. Moreover, the erasure of *quilombola* is further exacerbated as gender scholarship is further seized by dominant Western feminist frameworks where Brazilian women are often exoticized.

embodies the contradictions of Brazil's racial capitalism: it is marginalized from development while simultaneously central to resource extraction, and labor exploitation (Mauriel, 2023; Souza, 2022).

In recent decades, Amapá and the broader Guyana Shield region (which includes French Guiana, Suriname, and Guyana) have experienced a surge in Brazilian internal and transborder migration. Men and women from northern and northeastern Brazil have increasingly moved into remote mining zones (both legal and illegal) in search of income. However, these migrations reproduce gendered and racialized vulnerabilities. While men are commonly employed in mining or construction, women, especially Black, are pushed into domestic labor, and, in many cases, informal or coercive forms of sex work (Farias da Silva, 2019; R. da S. Oliveira, 2013; B. T. F. da Silva, 2015; G. de V. Silva, 2018).

Despite their centrality to local economies and transnational labor circuits, the experiences of these women remain understudied. Few studies examine how colonial and racial structures operate across borders, or how Brazil's racialized labor history extends into the broader Amazon-Caribbean corridor. This thesis seeks to fill that gap by analyzing how racialized women from Amapá navigate the intersecting violence of extractive economies and regional underdevelopment, while also resisting through cultural, territorial, and political practices.

The research, therefore, aims to answer the questions: (1) How have colonial structures of racial, spatial, and epistemic domination persisted and been reconfigured in Brazil's northern region, particularly in Amapá? (2) How do Quilombola women from Amapá experience and resist intersecting forms of racialized labor and territorial dispossession? (3) How do decolonial frameworks enhance our understanding of the relationship between racial capitalism, gendered violence, and the afterlives of slavery in northern Brazil? These questions emerge from a politically urgent need to recenter racialized and gendered experiences in both academic

analysis and policy discourse. By focusing on the epistemologies, mobilities, and resistance practices of women in Amapá, this research contributes to a broader decolonial critique of Brazilian state formation.

As this thesis explores the different kinds of violence that racialized women from Amapá face, it must also critically engage with the dominant frameworks through which these women are seen and governed. It is also relevant to highlight that Amapá is a border state – sharing a border with France through French Guiana, which means that the mobilities of these women also navigate several border issues. The discourse surrounding human trafficking, for example, is often invoked by policymakers to justify greater border control, surveillance, and criminalization, especially of migrant women engaged in sex work or informal labor. Kamala Kempadoo (2016a) argues that the prevailing anti-trafficking agenda, while claiming to protect women, often reinforces carceral logics and border militarization. Carceral logic refers to the pervasive extension of surveillance, punishment, and control mechanisms – historically developed within prisons and slave regimes – into non-punitive social institutions like immigration services, aid organizations, and social policy (Martensen, 2020). These logics are fundamentally rooted in the embedded practices of surveillance and punishment inherited from slavery and colonial control, where certain racialized bodies were deemed inherently disposable or criminal. Embedded carceral logics thus tend to cast migrant women as either criminals or helpless victims, erasing their agency while exposing them to further violence, particularly at the hands of police and immigration officials. Embedded carceral logics tend to cast migrant women as either criminals or helpless victims, erasing their agency while exposing them to further violence, particularly at the hands of police and immigration officials. As Kempadoo (2016b) notes, U.S.A.-led anti-trafficking efforts have pressured governments in the Caribbean and Latin America to adopt punitive approaches that prioritize “rescue” operations over rights-based protections, resulting in deportation, incarceration, or forced

repatriation for many women. Similarly, the binary between “forced” and “voluntary” sex work often collapses under the weight of structural poverty, racial exclusion, and coercive migration regimes. As Annuska Derks (2000) shows, women in the sex industry (regardless of their initial motivations) face stigma, exploitation, and denial of labor rights.

By engaging with these critiques, the thesis foregrounds how colonial frameworks – racial capitalism and coloniality of power – converge in border regions like the Guiana Shield, turning Black women into targets of surveillance and control.

1.3. Research Objectives and Contributions

This research investigates the enduring legacies of colonial domination in Brazil, with particular attention to how historical processes such as enslavement, racial categorization, and land dispossession continue to shape contemporary forms of inequality, state neglect, and epistemic violence. It focuses especially on the lived experiences and resistance strategies of Quilombola women in the North of Brazil, particularly in the state of Amapá, who have historically been excluded from both political recognition and academic representation.

The central objective of this thesis is to understand how Brazil’s racial, spatial, and epistemic hierarchies are not remnants of a distant past but active configurations of what Quijano (2000) terms the coloniality of power. Drawing on decolonial theory (Maldonado-Torres, 2007; Mignolo, 2007b) and Fanon’s critique of colonial violence and ontological resistance (1968, 1986), this research traces the ways in which colonial structures of exploitation continue to manifest in the northern region of Brazil as territorial violence, and institutional abandonment. It also explores how these legacies are resisted through cultural preservation and territorial defense.

Through a grounded, regionally specific approach, the thesis examines how racialized women in Amapá navigate and resist structural violence, particularly as it intersects with land conflict, environmental degradation, and the erasure of Afro-Brazilian knowledge systems. By situating these experiences within broader frameworks of coloniality and racial capitalism, the thesis contributes to understanding the Brazilian state not as an inclusive democratic project, but as a racialized formation sustained by colonial logics of labor, space, and knowledge.

Therefore, this thesis aims to contribute to multiple academic fields by offering both theoretical insights and grounded empirical analysis. To political science, it offers a decolonial critique of state formation and racial governance in Brazil, moving beyond liberal paradigms of citizenship and rights to interrogate the structural roots of inequality and violence, particularly in underrepresented regions like Amapá. To decolonial studies, it provides a regional case study that illustrates the material, spatial, and epistemic dimensions of coloniality, adding specificity to frameworks often discussed abstractly. To Brazilian and Latin American studies, it challenges dominant historical and political narratives that neglect the North and the Amazon region, while also disrupting the myth of racial democracy by foregrounding Afro-Indigenous epistemologies and histories.

In addressing the enduring legacy of colonial power in Brazil, this thesis also confronts a critical epistemological gap: the historical invisibility of the North within national academic production and policy discourse. The state of Amapá, like much of northern Brazil, has been systematically excluded from research priorities and resource allocation, a marginalization that mirrors the very racial and territorial hierarchies under analysis. While the creation of undergraduate programs in International Relations in Amapá and Roraima in 2011 marked an important turning point, stimulating scholarship on the Guyana region and its geopolitical significance (see, C. P. Carneiro et al., 2020; Cavlak, 2016a, 2016b, 2017; Correa, 2015; Martins et al., 2015; R. da S. Oliveira, 2013; G. de V. Silva, 2013; Superti, 2011), much of this

research is in its infancy. This means that key dimensions of racialized violence, land dispossession, and epistemic erasure are still largely unexplored.

This study argues that these absences are not accidental. Public universities in the North, including the Federal University of Amapá (founded in 1990) and the Federal University of Roraima (1989), remain chronically underfunded and structurally disadvantaged compared to their southern counterparts. This disparity contributes to a broader centralization of knowledge production in the South and Southeast that reinforces the silences regarding northern territorial struggles. By centering Amapá, this thesis not only explores these gaps but also lays the groundwork for future scholarship that critically examines the entanglements of race, gender, and regional inequality in Brazil. It further interrogates how neocolonial discourses of development and modernity continue to shape embedded perceptions of the North as peripheral, backward, or merely strategic, rather than as a politically contested and epistemically rich territory in its own right.

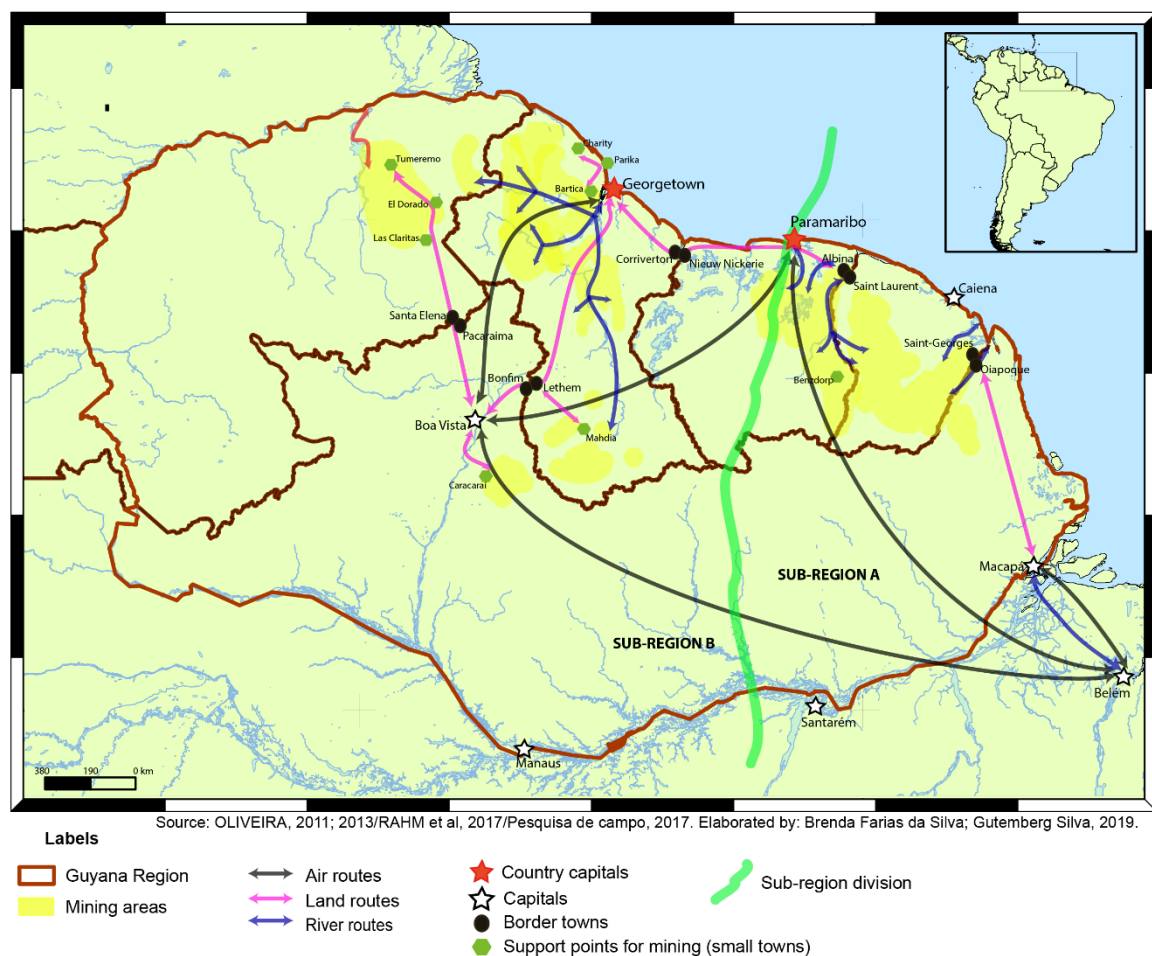
1.3.1. Positionality and Fieldwork

This research is also informed by my standpoint as a woman from the north (born in Belém – Pará and raised in Macapá – Amapá), which affords me access to the culture and an understanding of the social structures, language, and socio-political culture of the region. This research builds on my master's studies for which I conducted research in the region. Between the months of November and December 2017, I participated in the Guyana region expedition (accompanied by a colleague from the master's program, my supervisor, and a documentary filmmaker) where I was able to interview several Brazilians living in French Guiana, Suriname, and the Republic of Guyana. At the time of doing my master's research in Border Studies on the topic of women trafficking routes in the region, few studies explored broader factors influencing migration patterns among Brazilian women from the north and northeast. Often economic factors are advanced as the predominant cause with little consideration devoted to

historical, cultural and racial formations. Such limited focus does not provide insight into factors beyond economic, leading to gaps in the literature that need to be addressed (Bhavani et al., 2016).

Findings from my master's research revealed that illegal gold mining continues to play a central role in shaping routes of trafficking and exploitation in the Guyana region. For example, Brazil emerged as the major country of origin for trafficked women, while Suriname acts as the main convergence point, receiving victims who often pass through French Guiana, Guyana, and small border towns in Brazil before arriving in Suriname, as shown in Figure 1 (Farias da Silva, 2019). To date, this remains the only study that analyses the Guyana region in its entirety, considering its specific geographic, political, and socio-cultural dynamics.

Figure 1 Routes of Women Trafficking in the Guyana Region



Source: Adapted from Farias da Silva, 2019.

Through interviews with sex workers and trafficking survivors, my findings suggest that any serious inquiry into these realities must account for complexity rather than rely on binary frameworks of victimhood or agency. For example, interviews with women revealed many of them had been coerced or deceived into exploitative conditions, becoming trapped in a system of trafficking difficult to escape. A minority of women chose to engage in sex work and demanded recognition, safety, and rights on their own terms. These women represent the prevailing view of sex work in Brazil. The accounts of these women revealed important openings, both theoretical and empirical, for further research into the intersections of exploitation, cultural narratives, and racialized gendered labor in the region.

It is from this foundation that this present study expands upon the initial findings. This study seeks to deepen the understanding of the structural violence that racialized women face in Amapá and across the north of Brazil, particularly in relation to territorial exploitation, historical marginalization, and epistemic erasure. Many of these dynamics remain underexplored in both academic and policy spaces, and it is precisely these silences I aim to interrogate.

1.4. Theoretical and Conceptual Framework Overview

This thesis is grounded in decolonial theoretical perspectives that treat colonization as an ongoing structure that continues to shape global hierarchies and local inequalities. Drawing on the foundational works of Aníbal Quijano (1969, 2000, 2007), Walter D. Mignolo (2011; 2002, 2007, 2009, 2011a, 2011b, 2021), and Nelson Maldonado-Torres (2004, 2007, 2016), this research employs the concept of coloniality as its central analytic lens. Coloniality refers to the

enduring matrix of power that emerged from European colonialism and continues to organize systems of knowledge, labor, race, and space across the modern world.

As Quijano (2007) argues, Europeans established a relationship of direct control and dominance over the people they conquered on all continents, which is also referred to as Eurocentric colonialism. In Latin America, this control was obtained by the extermination of natives, cultural repression, and colonization of the imaginary, causing the destruction of societies and cultures throughout the continent. While colonization is often discussed within the context of a shadowed past, coloniality alerts us to its evolving and enduring nature wherein new forms of oppression/exploitation are reproduced. This means that Eurocentric colonialism, as a formal system of political control by Western European societies over others remains foundational to Western imperialism in Latin America. It is most observed in the alliances between dominant social groups (such as social classes or ethnic groups) in countries with different levels of power, rather than an outside imposition.

Mignolo's (2021) seminal works extend the discussion of coloniality by stating that even the knowledge (scientific, artistic, etc.) is dictated by the western civilization, which uses the coloniality to keep dominance in other civilizations, even without being physically present in their territories. Nevertheless, Quijano (2007) also points out that this structure of power created social inequities (racial, ethnic, anthropological, and national) that can be connected to time, agents, and/or populations engaged. These social constructions were the result of Eurocentric colonial domination and were often believed to be objective and scientific categories, rather than products of historical circumstances and power relations. These power structures continue to exist and serve as the framework for other social relationships between classes and groups of people. Understanding how coloniality unfolded in Brazil is important because it can help to unpack the power structures that are at play within the region and its relationship with the sex market.

In Brazil, coloniality manifests in the racialization of labor, the territorial marginalization of Black and Indigenous communities, and the epistemic silencing of non-Western cosmologies. These dynamics are especially visible in the North and Northeast region and the state of Amapá, where institutional neglect and cultural erasure intersect. Here, colonial structures persist through land appropriation, underinvestment in public services, and the relegation of Black and Indigenous knowledge to either folklore or threat to the ruling order (Cesarino, 2018; Poets, 2021). The theoretical approach adopted in this study interrogates how racial hierarchies have been naturalized and institutionalized, and how they continue to shape who is recognized as a full political subject and whose knowledge is made invisible.

Frantz Fanon's (1968, 1986) work offers a critical ontological and political foundation for this analysis. Fanon's conceptualization of the colonial world as bifurcated – divided into a zone of being and a zone of non-being – remains central to understanding the condition of Black and Indigenous peoples in Brazil, who have historically been positioned outside the boundaries of reason, law, and humanity. His critique of colonial violence is not only material but also existential: colonized peoples are subjected to forms of ontological erasure that deny them recognition as full human beings. In the context of Amapá, Fanon's insights help explain how Black and Indigenous women are simultaneously hyper-visible as bodies of labor and threat, and invisible as political and epistemic agents, and as victims of structural violence (Gordon, 2022).

Decolonial scholars have long interrogated processes of erasure to articulate the zone of nonbeing (Gordon, 2005; Mignolo, 2007b; Spivak, 1988). This thesis also draws on the concept of epistemic violence, that refers to the systematic devaluation and destruction of subaltern ways of knowing, often in the name of modernity, science, or development (Berenstein et al., 2022; Dotson, 2011). In Brazil, this is evident in the marginalization of quilombola's oral histories, Indigenous ontologies, and Afro-Brazilian religious practices – all

of which are dismissed, exoticized, or criminalized within dominant epistemological regimes. Understanding these forms of erasure as epistemic, not only material, is central to this study's political and methodological commitments (Berenstain, 2016).

Together, these theoretical frameworks allow for a multidimensional analysis of Brazil's colonial legacy, understood not merely as a historical moment, but as a living system of power that organizes race, labor, knowledge, and resistance. This framework informs every chapter of the thesis, offering tools to analyze how racialized women in Amapá resist these overlapping structures of violence while asserting their subjectivities, territorial rights, and epistemologies.

1.5. Methodological Overview

Given the exploratory and context-specific nature of this research, a qualitative case study design grounded in interpretivist and decolonial methodologies was adopted. This approach is particularly suitable for examining how colonial structures of power persist and are resisted in Amapá, a region where official data remains scarce and community perspectives are often excluded from public discourse. Qualitative research can be defined as “a type of scientific research that tries to bridge the gap of incomplete information, systematically collects evidence, produces findings, and thereby seeks answer to a problem or question” (Dubey & Kothari, 2022, p. 1290). Qualitative research allows for a close engagement with meanings, values, and experiences as expressed by participants in their own terms. It recognizes that knowledge is socially situated and that understanding power relations requires listening to marginalized voices. Within the context of Amapá, where structural neglect and epistemic erasure have historically shaped public narratives, such an approach enables a deeper analysis of how violence, race, and territory are lived and contested.

Qualitative research “is widely used in collecting and understanding specific information about the behaviors, opinions, values, and other social aspects of a particular community, culture, or population” (Dubey & Kothari, 2022, p. 129). This is necessary since the social and cultural factors of the Amapá need to be accounted for in the research, therefore, the method should help in answering the research questions as they require a close examination of the factors which influence the behavior of the local population and policy makers.

The research was conducted in three interrelated phases. The first phase focused on the literature review and secondary data analysis, examining how Quilombola communities are represented in media and institutional discourses. News articles, press releases, and official communications from regional and federal sources were collected between 2022 and 2025. These materials were analyzed to identify dominant narratives concerning land titling, development, and environmental justice, as well as the silences surrounding gender, race, and everyday labor.

The second phase centered on semi-structured interviews with six Quilombola leaders, activists and government representatives from Amapá. Guided by the main question “*What violence do you and your community experience the most?*” these conversations explored how participants interpret and respond to structural, environmental, bureaucratic, and gendered forms of violence. Interviews were conducted in Portuguese, recorded with consent, and transcribed verbatim for analysis.

The third phase consisted in the qualitative analysis of the collected data. All materials were imported into NVivo for systematic coding. Initial codes were derived from the research questions and interview guide (e.g., land dispossession, state neglect, resistance strategies), while new codes emerged inductively from participants’ narratives (e.g., fear of criminalization, silences of the state, ancestral memory). These were then refined into thematic

clusters – such as Silences, Bureaucracies, Recognition, Urban Capital, Violence, and Activism – forming the analytical framework for the results and discussion chapters.

Originally, this research proposed ethnography, but due to limitations (e.g., travel constraints), the field work had to be reshaped. Despite this limitation, it is also important to consider that all interviews were analyzed as narratives. According to Rau & Coetzee (2022), the main aim of narrative work is to gain an in-depth understanding of human experiences and the meaning behind them in different contexts. However, some aspects of these experiences may be unclear, unconscious, or hidden, requiring researchers to delve deeper and explore beyond what is visible or spoken. Hutson et al. (2007) is an example of the use of storytelling and narratives as means of understanding a community. The more nuanced the experience, the more refined narrative approaches need to be to fully comprehend and analyze complex layers of meaning. To achieve this, the narrative researcher seeks to understand the participant's world and their perspectives. However, to capture the complexities of their experience accurately and imaginatively, a well-thought-out plan and approach are necessary (Rau & Coetzee, 2022).

This methodological design not only allowed for the triangulation of data across media and interviews but also aligned with the decolonial commitment of the study: to foreground subaltern epistemologies, expose structural silences, and challenge state-centric narratives. Rather than treating the researcher as neutral, the approach recognizes the importance of reflexivity and ethical engagement, particularly in politically sensitive contexts marked by racialized dispossession.

In summary, the chosen methods enable a critical dialogue between institutional representations and lived experiences. By integrating documentary and interview data, this research seeks to uncover how colonial logic is sustained through bureaucracy and discourse, and how Quilombola communities actively resist through everyday practices of care, memory, and collective autonomy.

1.6. Structure of the Thesis

This thesis is organized into four interrelated chapters, each addressing a central dimension of the research problem and contributing to a deeper understanding of how colonial structures of power, race, and knowledge persist – and are resisted – within the social, political, and territorial landscape of Amapá. The structure follows a logical progression from conceptual framing to empirical analysis and theoretical reflection, ensuring that the inquiry remains grounded in both lived experience and decolonial critique.

Chapter 2 establishes the theoretical and historical foundation upon which the study is built. Drawing on the works of Aníbal Quijano, Nelson Maldonado-Torres, Walter D. Mignolo, Achille Mbembe and Cedric Robinson, it develops a conceptual framework that links coloniality of power, epistemic violence, and racial capitalism to contemporary structures of inequality in Brazil. The chapter then traces the historical processes of colonization, slavery, and resistance, focusing on the formation of quilombos and the later emergence of favelas as material and epistemic sites of Black survival. By exposing the silences and gaps in scholarship (particularly concerning the Amazon region and Amapá) it justifies the need for a study that foregrounds the experiences and knowledges of racialized women in northern Brazil.

The methodology chapter details the interpretivist and decolonial approach that guides this research. It outlines the case study design centered on Amapá and explains the combination of primary and secondary data collection methods. The section discusses the use of NVivo software and the iterative development of the codebook, showing how codes, categories, and themes were generated and refined in dialogue with the research questions. Reflexivity and ethical sensitivity are central throughout, reflecting the researcher's dual position as both insider and outsider. This chapter also highlights how methodological flexibility – adapting to local realities and ethical constraints – was integral to maintaining the integrity of a decolonial research practice.

Chapter 4 presents the empirical findings, integrating the analysis of media discourses and interview data to reveal how state practices, bureaucratic processes, and development agendas reproduce colonial hierarchies in Amapá. The chapter is organized around three main thematic axes: bureaucratic and environmental violence; gendered labor and territorial dispossession; and women's cultural and epistemic resistance. Each section illustrates how racial capitalism manifests through state neglect, infrastructural exclusion, and the commodification of land and labor, while also foregrounding the voices of Quilombola women who resist these dynamics through activism, cultural preservation, and epistemic disobedience. The discussion interweaves these findings with decolonial theory, demonstrating how everyday experiences of violence and resistance speak back to global structures of domination.

The concluding chapter synthesizes the findings and reflects on their theoretical, methodological, and political implications. It reaffirms the persistence of colonial logics within Brazil's racialized governance structures while highlighting the resilience and agency of Quilombola communities. The chapter revisits the research questions, summarizing how the analysis contributes to decolonial thought and to ongoing struggles for land, recognition, and epistemic justice. It also acknowledges the study's limitations and proposes directions for future research – particularly the need for continued attention to the northern region and to community-based forms of knowledge production that challenge the epistemic dominance of the Global North.

Chapter 2. Literature Review: Power, Resistance, and Racialized Territories in Brazil

2.1. Introduction: Revisiting Race, Power, Territory, and Knowledge in Brazil

This chapter aims to situate the present research within the broader academic debates on coloniality, racialized and gendered violence, epistemic violence and silencing, and territorial and economic exploitation in Brazil. It sets the stage for understanding how the historical and structural dynamics of colonial power continue to shape the material and symbolic landscapes of the Brazilian Amazon, particularly in the northern state of Amapá, and how Black and Indigenous women have been simultaneously rendered invisible and hyper-visible within these dynamics. While the existing literature on race, gender, and development in Brazil is rich and diverse, it has often failed to adequately address the specificities of Brazil's internal peripheries, or to take seriously the epistemologies and experiences emerging from communities historically positioned outside the centers of political and academic power. Using the discussion on quilombos proposed by Beatriz Nascimento (2023) and Abdias do Nascimento (1978, 2002) combined with the theoretical articulations of coloniality (Mignolo, 2007, 2021; Quijano, 2000, 2007; Santos, 2023), this chapter highlights the continuities between the colonial era and the present moment, shedding light on the ways in which Brazil's colonial past continues to influence its social, economic, and political realities.

In Brazil, as in other countries in the Americas, the control of Indigenous lands and the history of African enslavement have been central to the formation of its racial and social structures. From the beginning of the transatlantic slave trade (around the XVI century) until the abolition of slavery in 1888, Brazil was one of the largest destinations for enslaved Africans (Schwarcz & Starling, 2015). The lasting effects of this brutal system are often overlooked in Brazilian discourse, especially in the context of knowledge production. While the history of

African enslavement and Indigenous displacement have received extensive attention in North America, it has been somewhat neglected in Brazil, where the legacies of slavery and colonialism are frequently minimized or erased (Eltis, 2000; Klein & Luna, 2010). This form of historical/national amnesia has contributed to the marginalization of Black and Indigenous communities, whose experiences of exploitation, victimization, and criminalization remain largely absent from mainstream scholarly conversations (Campos, 2024; F. Fernandes, 2008; Gomes et al., 2024; Murphy, 2024; A. do Nascimento, 1978, 2002; V éran, 1988; Vinhas Batista, 2016).

This erasure is not only evident in the historical narratives but also in the lack of theorization around traditional Black communities in Brazil. These communities (*quilombos*) often descended from runaway slaves or other historical resistance movements, face ongoing threats such as land grabs, labor exploitation, and the criminalization of their cultural practices. The scarcity of research on these communities further obscures their importance in Brazil's racial and social dynamics. Scholars like Fernandes (2008); Medeiros Da Silva, n.d.; A. do Nascimento, (1978, 2002); M. Beatriz. Nascimento et al., (2023) have contributed significantly to the study of these traditional Black communities, offering critical perspectives on their history, struggles, and contributions. However, despite this important work, these communities remain under-researched, particularly in the context of their current vulnerabilities. This study aims to address this gap by exploring the unique erasure of traditional Black communities in Brazilian scholarship and the contemporary challenges they face in a society that continues to neglect their rights and histories, focusing on the reality of quilombos located in the Brazilian northern state of Amapá.

This chapter serves three primary purposes. First, it identifies key conceptual frameworks of coloniality of power, epistemic violence, and racial capitalism, that will guide this study's analytical approach. Second, it reviews and explores these historical processes and

their enduring legacies, focusing on the colonization of Brazil, the creation of *quilombos*, and the emergence of *favelas*. It examines the ways in which colonial narratives and policies shaped the experiences of Indigenous and African peoples, and how these communities resisted and adapted to the conditions imposed upon them. Third, it exposes the silences and gaps in current scholarship, especially in relation to the Amazon region and the racialized gendered geographies of Amapá. By doing so, this chapter not only situates this study within ongoing academic debates but also justifies the need for a study that centers the lived realities, struggles, and knowledge systems of racialized women in northern Brazil.

The chapter is divided into four main sections. The first section discusses the theoretical framework, focusing on coloniality, epistemic violence, racial capitalism and necropolitics. The second section provides an overview of Brazil's colonization, focusing on the exploitation of Indigenous and African labor and the construction of racial hierarchies. It draws on *Brasil: Uma Biografia* (Brazil: A Biography)² to explore the ways in which colonial narratives were used to justify the subjugation of Indigenous and African peoples, and how these narratives continue to shape contemporary perceptions of race and identity in Brazil. The third section examines the formation of *quilombos* as sites of resistance and cultural preservation, highlighting their significance in the context of Brazil's history of slavery and colonialism. Lastly, this section concludes with a discussion of the emergence of *favelas* in the post-abolition period. Parallels are drawn between the ways in which these communities and *quilombos* have emerged, in terms of how they have been shaped by and have resisted the structural inequalities that define Brazilian society.

² Brazil: a Biography (2015) by Lilia Schwarcz and Heloisa Starling is one of the most complete books on Brazil's history, addressing important gaps on race/ethnicity, and Indigenous and African enslavement in the colonial era.

2.2. Coloniality and race: setting the stage to understand Brazil's history

In order to understand coloniality, it is necessary to understand Frantz Fanon's (1968, 1986) work on colonialism, race, and identity. Frantz Fanon elaborates on how violence is embedded in colonialism, with coloniality sustaining this continuous cycle of violence. Walter D. Mignolo (2011, 2002, 2007, 2009, 2011a, 2011c, 2011b, 2021) and Aníbal Quijano (1969, 2000, 2007) suggest that colonial patterns recur even if they are less visible. This unseen force of colonial power endures in formerly colonized countries, which now continue to be influenced by colonial dynamics of control and violence.

However, that specific colonial structure of power produced the specific social discriminations which later were codified as 'racial', ethnic', 'anthropological' or 'national', according to the times, agents, and populations involved. These intersubjective constructions, product of Eurocentered colonial domination were even assumed to be 'objective', scientific', categories, then of a historical significance. That is, as natural phenomena, not referring to the history of power. This power structure was, and still is, the framework within which operate the other social relations of classes or estates (Quijano, 2007, p. 168).

An essential point in the discussion is Fanon's claims that knowledge serves as a form of violence against Indigenous populations. Quijano (2000) and Mignolo (2002) extend this argument drawing attention to colonialism's control over knowledge with a focus on the Global South. Knowledge standards are often dictated by countries in the global north that dominate systems at every societal level. Thus, the information received typically originates from these central powers. This can also be exemplified by Wagner Vinhas Batista (2016) doctoral thesis, where he discusses Black intellectuality. Black intellectuality is characterized by its subaltern origin, emerging from a social class that seeks to organize and specialize in its own historical and cultural narratives.

This intellectuality is also defined as a discursive unit that produces spoken or written statements capable of offering unique interpretations about Brazil, especially regarding the experiences of the Black population. Scholars have long discussed tensions between the colonial-scientific order, which defines rules of knowledge production, and the social order, marked by rigid hierarchies of race, gender and class (P. H. Collins, 1990; M. B. Nascimento, 2023; H. L. R. Santos, 2023; Skidmore, 1992; Vinhas Batista, 2016). Afro-Brazilian intellectuals are relegated to the margins of the conventional academic field. An important example is Beatriz Nascimento. Nascimento combined academic production and activism, challenging the historical silencing imposed upon Black contributions in Brazil (Vinhas Batista, 2016).

Batista (2016) also brings attention to the politics of forgetting that refers to a set of strategies aimed at erasing the contributions of Black intellectuals from collective memory, keeping them marginalized in hegemonic narratives. This process operates in several ways. Historically, Black contributions have been ignored or minimized in official historiography and teaching, making it difficult to build a collective memory that values their importance. Black intellectuals, in academia, face frequent delegitimization and their contributions attacked as lacking scientific "objectivity" or epistemological distance, due to their supposed engagement with race/racism and Blackness. For example, Beatriz Nascimento, who, writing critically during the Brazilian Military Dictatorship, exposed how racial structures inflict structural violence that is continuously reproduced in Black urban spaces like the *favelas* and *quilombos*. Her work critiques the racialized division of labor that relegates Black women to the lowest economic strata while simultaneously burdening them with the responsibility of maintaining cultural resistance and collective survival practices. Although Nascimento was an essential activist in the Unified Black Movement (Brazil's modern civil rights movement that commenced in 1978 São Paulo which later led to Black Consciousness Day in the same year),

her extensive academic and theoretical contributions only began to gain broader visibility and scholarly recognition in the post-dictatorship era of the early 1990s and beyond. Culturally, Black intellectual and artistic production is often excluded from educational institutions, museums, and memory spaces, contributing to the perpetuation of a Eurocentric view of national history. Even when recognized, Black intellectuals are presented as exceptions, disconnected from a broader tradition of Black intellectual production (Vinhas Batista, 2016).

The process of Eurocentrifcation of the new world power in the following centuries gave way to the imposition of such a ‘racial’ criteria to the new social classification of the world population on a global scale. So, in the first place, new social identities were produced all over the world: ‘whites’, ‘Indians’, ‘Negroes’, ‘yellows’, ‘olives’, using physiognomic traits of the peoples as external manifestations of their ‘racial’ nature. Then, on that basis, the new geocultural identities were produced: European, American, Asiatic, African, and much later, Oceania. During European colonial world domination, the distribution of work of the entire world capitalist system, between salaried, independent peasants, independent merchants, and slaves and serfs, was organized basically following the same ‘racial’ lines of global social classification, with all the implications for the processes of nationalization of societies and states, and for the formation of nation-states, citizenship, democracy and so on, around the world. Such distribution of work in the world capitalist system began to change slowly with the struggles against European colonialism, especially after the First World War, and with the changing requirements of capitalism itself. But distribution of work is by no means finished, since Eurocentered coloniality of power has proved to be longer lasting than Eurocentered colonialism. Without it, the history of capitalism in Latin America and other related places in the world can hardly be explained (Quijano, 2007, p. 171).

Some scholars have traced the violent dominance that caused the collapse of Indigenous societal structures, which were then overtaken and managed by the Portuguese colonizers (see, de Carvalho et al., 2021; de Holanda, 2012; Faoro, 2001; Kopkin & Mitchell-Walthour, 2020; Schwarcz & Starling, 2015). Violence inflicted upon this group was rooted in the social structure that the Portuguese established to gain Indigenous lands, resources and labor. Violent assaults and conquests upon Indigenous lands coupled with the Transatlantic African slave trade, set in motion a cycle of violence and exploitation that is evident today but is scantily examined in academic research (Bittencourt, 2024; Campos, 2024; Kopkin & Mitchell-Walthour, 2020; K. K. Y. Perry, 2013). Moreover, this understanding elucidates white racial dominance among Brazilian academic narratives that further obscures Black/Afro identities and political agency (M. Beatriz. Nascimento et al., 2023; Telles, 2014; Véran, 1988; Vinhas Batista, 2016).

In Brazil, the long-term enslavement of black and indigenous people and the structural violence that still affects these populations deeply mark the work of the police and criminal justice. In this regard, one can state that the racialized social stratification which characterized the colonial society is not a past reality. On the contrary, there is a genuine space of experience caused by colonial exploitation, which marks the present time and the horizon of expectation concerning the changing of penal institutions historically created in a racialized way (H. L. R. Santos, 2023, p. 201).

2.2.1. Brazil's Internal Colonialism and the Spatial Politics of Development

One of the most persistent legacies of colonialism in Brazil is its internal spatial fragmentation – the sharp divide between zones of power and zones of extraction. Scholars like Sérgio Buarque de Holanda (2012), Celso Furtado (2009), and Milton Santos (2021) have long highlighted how regional inequalities, particularly the historical marginalization of the North and Northeast, are structurally embedded in Brazil's national development model. While the

South and Southeast were consolidated as centers of political influence and industrial expansion, the North has functioned as an internal periphery: a space destined for resource extraction, state neglect, and developmentalist imposition.

This spatial division is not merely economic but also epistemological and symbolic. Brazil's national identity continues to reflect the colonial matrix of power, as it defines itself through the gaze of the colonizer. As Marilena Chauí (2000) argues, Brazil's self-image is shaped by an aspiration to emulate the capitalist centers of the Global North. This dynamic renders Brazil perpetually underdeveloped in its own eyes – always lagging behind, always available for exploitation. Coloniality, according to Chauí, is not merely a historical residue but a constitutive force: a will to know and to dominate that compels Brazil to reconstruct itself in the image of the Other (European) who once colonized it.

Yet, Chauí (2000) also notes that this colonial dynamic operates within Brazil itself. The Brazilian nation-state, while aspiring to Eurocentric ideals, selects from within its own territory those populations who most closely align with these ideals, while simultaneously excluding those who do not. The result is a process of internal othering that renders certain regions and communities (particularly Black and Indigenous) invisible or incompatible with the dominant image of the nation. This dual structure of ethnic and regional violation creates a system of territorial and epistemic domination. It sustains conquest and control while also deploying state mechanisms of tutelage and extermination. Race and social classification thus become foundational tools for producing and justifying hierarchies of power, making internal colonialism a core expression of the broader coloniality of power (Quijano, 2000). Which means that

The colonial model imposed on Brazil resulted in a kind of sub-citizenship of these marginalized social groups, due to an excluding and authoritarian process of peripheral modernization. Thus, within Brazilian society, there is a rabble (*'ralé'*; Souza, 2016)

that embraces a significant number of Black and Indigenous Brazilians. This enormous contingent of the population evidently represents the effects of socio-economic and political inequality in the country, since the representatives of these social strata have huge difficulties in accessing the most elementary rights and are disproportionately subjected to imprisonment and to the dynamics of violence. Following this reasoning, it is worthy of note that coloniality promotes racial stratification, which dehumanizes non-white populations (Santos, 2023, p. 201) .

From this perspective, the ongoing violence inflicted upon Indigenous and traditional communities in Brazil is not an anomaly but part of a historical continuum that links European colonialism to what some now describe as a “green and yellow” colonialism. This new colonialism is not driven by European empires but by the Brazilian state and its alliances with transnational capital. It is saturated with a nationalist discourse that normalizes violence against racialized communities and silences their historical ties to land, cosmology, and regional identity (Malheiro, 2020).

In this sense, the dynamics of ethnic violation in the structuring of a nation combine with unequal relations between regions, constructing a system of territorial and ethnic domination, expanding strategies of conquest and control, simultaneously with the undertaking of policies of guardianship and extermination of peoples. Race and the processes of social classification thus become structural elements in the production of hierarchies to justify domination; which is why the dynamics of internal colonialism are also the dynamics of the coloniality of power. (Malheiro, 2020, p. 77, translated by author)

The formation of the modern Brazilian state, what Agamben (2017) describes as anchored in the dual logic of nativity and sovereignty, has created a juridical framework where being born within the borders of a nation confers citizenship. However, citizenship, rights, and

political recognition are not guaranteed by birth alone. In Brazil, to be born in the national territory does not necessarily mean inclusion in the symbolic and political community of the nation. National identity, in this sense, becomes a powerful technology for defining who belongs and who does not.

This exclusion is particularly acute in the Amazon, a region repeatedly invoked in national discourse as the frontier of Brazil's future, and

For this reason [...] we are seeing an increase in the number of refugees, people who were born in the country, on the edge of an iron mine, a hydroelectric plant, in close proximity to the forest, but who do not fit into politics, because they become obstacles to the nation, faces that are not reflected in the mirror that has been conventionally called Brazil. Brazilian refugees in Brazil, too many Brazilians for statistics, not enough Brazilians for the law. The nation and its figurations are, therefore, ways of making absent what is present, of hiding with the shine of speeches, images and political and scientific convictions what one does not want to see, what one does not notice from the place from which one looks (Malheiro, 2020, p.78, translated by author).

Internal colonialism operates through mechanisms of national identity to suspend the rule of law for certain populations. As Agamben (2005) argues, this creates a “zone of indistinction” between democracy and absolutism. In these zones, common in the Amazon and other marginalized regions, entire communities are reduced to “bare life.” Their deaths are not registered as crimes or sacrifices, because their lives have been excluded from the juridical and moral order. This is a form of biopolitical governance that normalizes exception as the rule and sanctions death through state and para-state violence.

This framing of the Amazon as an externality to Brazilian society has a long ideological history. In his famous 1940 speech in Manaus, President Getúlio Vargas referred to the

Amazon as “a dramatic and seductive image of Brazilian nature,” evoking its distance from the political center and its role as a symbolic frontier (Vargas, 1940, as cited in SUDAM, 1968, p. 9). The region is imagined not as part of Brazilian society but as its natural “other”, immature, uncivilized, and therefore in need of conquest. This civilizational discourse frames nature as inferior and society as the site of progress, reinforcing the marginalization of Amazonian populations and territories.

What remains consistent throughout these varied articulations is the treatment of the Amazon as a space of exception, a space that exists both inside and outside the nation. This conception renders its people expendable, its lands extractable, and its knowledges dismissible. It also underlines the urgent need for a decolonial rethinking of national identity, development, and citizenship in Brazil.

2.3. Brazil and the Northeast as the first dominated territory

Pindorama, this is how Brazil was called by the *Tupi* ethnic group before the arrival of the Portuguese in the 1500s. The first *caravels* (Portuguese ships) arrived on April 22, 1500, there were 13 caravels led by Pedro Álvares Cabral. The vessels docked in the current city of *Porto Seguro*, in *Bahia* (northeast state), and the first Catholic mass was celebrated there on the new Island of Vera Cruz – the name given by the Portuguese (Schwarcz & Starling, 2015).

Significantly, the Northeast was the first region to be colonized and exploited, becoming the center of the early sugarcane plantation economy, built on the mass enslavement of Africans and Indigenous peoples (Alencastro, 2000; Schwartz, 2004). This system not only extracted wealth from the region, but it also laid the foundation for racialized inequalities that persist to this day. Although it was once the economic heart of colonial Brazil, the Northeast became an increasingly economically and politically oppressed region – although still heavily

exploited – with the shift of political and economic power toward the Southeast, especially Rio de Janeiro and São Paulo, in the 19th and 20th centuries (Fausto, 1998).

Today, the Northeast remains one of the poorest and most socioeconomically vulnerable regions in the country, marked by deep racial and regional inequalities. According to data from the Instituto Brasileiro de Geografia e Estatística (IBGE), the region has the highest poverty and extreme poverty rates in Brazil, with over 45% of its population living on low incomes and a high number identifying as Black or mixed race (IBGE, 2022). Public services such as health, education, and infrastructure remain underfunded/underdeveloped compared to wealthier southern regions, perpetuating cycles of structural inequality (Campos et al., 2022; IBGE, 2022; Paixão & Carvano, 2007; Telles, 2014).

The underdevelopment of the Northeast cannot be understood in isolation from institutions of slavery that established racial and economic capitalist hierarchies. During the 16th century, the main economic activity of the new colony was the production of sugar cane for export to European countries – which also attracted the Dutch, who settled in the current state of *Pernambuco* (also in the Northeast) in 1630 and remained until 1654, occupying the territory from *Sergipe* to *Maranhão*, all states located in the northeast of Brazil. The cultivation of sugar cane was done through slave labor, initially by Indigenous people. However, when Portuguese colonizers realized that Indigenous populations were not resistant to European diseases and were unable to meet the demand for labor (cheap and slave) with only locals, Brazil became part of the transatlantic slave trade. From the 17th century onwards, pastoral production and the discovery of gold and diamond deposits in the territory that is now the states of *Goiás*, *Minas Gerais* and *Mato Grosso*, caused the occupation of the territory to intensify internally, and new urban centers emerged (De Almeida Abreu, 2011).

The colonial period illuminates how Europeans established a relationship of direct control and domination over colonized peoples on all continents and situates Brazil within the

context of Eurocentric colonialism (Quijano, 2000). In Latin America, this control, like in North America, was obtained through the extermination of native peoples, cultural repression and colonization of the imagination, causing the destruction of societies and cultures throughout the continent – as can be seen from the first contacts and successive exploitation of the land by the Portuguese in relation to the Indigenous peoples of Brazil (Quijano, 2007).

2.3.1. *Colonization of Brazil: A Historical Overview*

The colonization of Brazil by the Portuguese in the 16th century was marked by the violent imposition of European values, the exploitation of Indigenous and African labor, and the creation of racial hierarchies that continue to shape Brazilian society to this day (Miki, 2021; Schwartz, 2004). Central to this historical trajectory was the construction of controlling narratives used to justify the subjugation of Indigenous peoples and the enslavement of Africans, framing them as "uncivilized" and in need of salvation through Christianity. These narratives, as explored by Lilia Schwarcz and Heloisa Starling (2015) in *Brasil: Uma Biografia*, were not merely descriptive but served as tools of violent domination, legitimizing the colonial project and its attendant violence. The legacy of these narratives is evident in the persistent racial and social inequalities that define contemporary Brazil, as highlighted by Nolan Kopkin and Gladys Mitchell-Walthour (2020) in their study on color discrimination and occupational prestige. They investigated how occupational prestige, a seldom-used measure of class in this context, influences the acknowledgement of skin color discrimination among Black and Brown (Afro-Brazilian) individuals. Contrary to the traditional scholarly expectation that high-status Afro-Brazilians would be more aware of color discrimination, their key finding was that there was little to no evidence supporting this idea.

Brazil's colonization was not a uniform process but rather a complex interplay of exploitation, resistance, and cultural dominance. The Portuguese Crown's division of the territory into hereditary captaincies in 1534 facilitated the expansion of colonial control and

systemic racism, entrenching a system of inequality and exploitation (Schwartz, 2004). Indigenous peoples, who had inhabited the region for millennia, were subjected to forced labor, displacement, and devastating epidemics brought by European colonizers. As Salo de Carvalho et al. (2021) argue, the colonial project was founded on the systematic victimization of Indigenous communities, whose lands and labor were violently appropriated to serve the interests of the colonizers. The introduction of African slavery further exacerbated these dynamics, as the demand for labor in the expanding sugar economy led to the mass enslavement of Africans (most of them originated from Angola). This dual system of exploitation – targeting both Indigenous and African populations – laid the foundation for Brazil’s society.

Despite the brutal conditions imposed by colonial rule, both Indigenous and African communities resisted their oppression in various ways and challenged the structures of domination. The formation of *quilombos*, communities founded by escaped enslaved Africans stands as a testament to the resilience and agency of those subjected to slavery (Maria da Silva & Souza, 2022). While the oldest recorded *quilombo* is believed to be *Quilombo do Piolho*, established in the early 1600s in present-day São Paulo, it was *Quilombo dos Palmares*, located in the Serra da Barriga region of Alagoas (Northeast of Brazil), that became the most organized, enduring, and symbolically important. Established around 1605, Palmares became a foundational symbol of Black resistance, both for its scale – estimated to have housed up to 20,000 inhabitants – and for its longevity, surviving nearly a century despite repeated military attacks by Portuguese and Dutch forces (Arruti, 2008; Maria da Silva & Souza, 2022; Schwarcz & Starling, 2015).

Palmares and other quilombos were not merely places of refuge from slavery; they were also intentional political and cultural projects. Governed through decentralized structures, with chosen leaders like *Zumbi dos Palmares*, Palmares operated as a confederation of villages that maintained agricultural production, trade networks, and defense systems. These communities

preserved African languages, spiritual practices, kinship systems, and legal norms, adapting them to local realities while creating alternative modes of social organization based on collective autonomy, mutual aid, and resistance to colonial authority (Arruti, 2008; Da Costa Ramalho, 2024; Leite, 1999).

In this context, quilombos exemplified what Frantz Fanon (1986) referred to as *ontological resistance* – a rejection of the colonized individual's imposed status as a *non-being* within the colonial framework. Here, non-being is understood as the existential and psychological state experienced by Black individuals in a white-dominated colonial society, where their humanity and subjectivity are systematically denied. This condition stems from the objectifying perspective of the colonizer, which reduces Black persons to mere stereotypes, thereby depriving them of reciprocal recognition and fostering internalized feelings of inferiority. Fanon, in discussing ontological resistance, emphasized the necessity of the colonized and the enslaved to reclaim space, history, and subjectivity as acts of liberation, particularly in the face of a system that sought to reduce enslaved Africans to objects of labor and punishment (Fanon, 1968). Palmares and other quilombos challenged this reduction, asserting the humanity, creativity, and political agency of Black communities in defiance of colonial logics. This resistance can also be understood through Aníbal Quijano (2000) concept of the *coloniality of power*, which highlights how colonialism imposed a racialized division of labor that positioned Blackness as synonymous with enslavement and inferiority. This framework has been extended by Latin American scholars to demonstrate how this coloniality permeates the legal system, codifying racial inequalities and property regimes; shapes knowledge production by privileging Eurocentric epistemologies and suppressing local forms of knowing; and instigates a profound coloniality of being that denies the full humanity of the colonized (Darke & Khan, 2021; Maldonado-Torres, 2007; Mignolo, 2002, 2007b, 2021; Nunes de Lima, 2021; H. L. R. Santos, 2023). Quilombos disrupted this system by reclaiming

land, labor, and community on their own terms, establishing spaces that resisted the racial capitalist structures at the heart of colonial modernity.

Brazilian scholars and intellectuals have also emphasized the radical political significance of quilombos. Beatriz Nascimento (2023), a foundational voice in Afro-Brazilian thought, framed quilombos as more than historical enclaves, for her they are ongoing projects of Black territoriality and resistance. Nascimento argued that the concept of *quilombo* transcends geography, representing a *territory of invention* where Black communities continuously resist exclusion and assert their cultural and political presence/agency.

The abolition of slavery in Brazil in 1888, marked the formal end of legal bondage, but it did not dismantle the racial structures that upheld slavery, nor did it repair the profound and multigenerational damage inflicted on Black people. For more than 300 years, the institution of slavery in Brazil subjected African and Afro-descendant populations to systematic dehumanization, including physical torture, sexual violence, forced family separation, and cultural erasure. Brazil imported more enslaved Africans than any other country in the Americas (over 4 million people) and developed a social, legal, and economic system that not only depended on slavery but actively normalized brutality and racial hierarchy (Alencastro, 2000; Conrad, 1983).

Within this system, violence was not an aberration, it was foundational. Enslaved people endured extreme physical punishments such as whipping, branding, mutilation, and death. Women were particularly vulnerable to sexual exploitation, often forced into coerced relationships with slave owners or used as reproductive laborers to increase their enslaver's wealth (J.-M. Collins, 2023; A. do Nascimento, 1979). Like in North America, the legal system recognized enslaved people as property, not persons, and denied them the right to family integrity, bodily autonomy, or protection under law (Chalhoub, 2011). This understanding is critical for grasping the development of the Northeast region with respect to slavery's afterlife

– embedded practices of systemic denial of Black humanity that plays out in precarious survival strategies (Hartman, 2007). Resistance, whether through escape, cultural survival, or covert acts designed to undermine productivity and exert a measure of control over their labor (such as feigning illness, intentionally breaking tools, or engaging in deliberate work slowdowns where tasks were performed inefficiently or at a reduced pace to minimize output), was met with repressive violence, and even the threat of rebellion was enough to provoke mass punishment (Schwarcz & Starling, 2015).

Brazil witnessed significant slave uprisings and organized forms of resistance throughout its history. A notable urban uprising was the *Revolta dos Alfaiates* (Tailors' Revolt) in 1798 in Salvador, Bahia, a republican and abolitionist revolt with significant participation from enslaved people, freed Blacks, and impoverished artisans. This movement, aiming for an independent republic with greater social equality and an end to slavery, posed a direct threat to the deeply racialized social order and the economic foundations of the colonial elite. Its suppression was swift and brutal: key leaders, largely from the working-class Black and mixed-race population, were publicly hanged and dismembered, their bodies displayed as a grim warning to deter any further challenges to the established hierarchy (Reis, 1995). This severe state repression underscored the colonial power's readiness to employ extreme violence to maintain control over its racialized labor force and prevent any disruption to its foundational system of exploitation.

With emancipation in 1888, these legacies of violence did not disappear; they were reorganized under new forms. The so-called freedom granted by the *Lei Áurea* (Golden Law) came without land redistribution, employment guarantees, or social rights (Klein & Luna, 2010). Enslavers were compensated with continued political and economic dominance; formerly enslaved people were left to navigate a society in which they remained targets of racism, suspicion, exploitation, and violence. Many were forced into various systems of

dependent labor that, while not identical to sharecropping in the U.S. South, shared its exploitative essence by tying workers to landholders through debt and limited autonomy. In Brazil, one common arrangement was *parceria* (partnership), where landless laborers, including many formerly enslaved individuals, worked plots of land in exchange for a share of the harvest, typically half (*meia*). Landowners often provided tools, seeds, and advances (often at inflated prices), creating cycles of debt that effectively bound workers to the land, mirroring the debt peonage seen elsewhere (Eisenberg, 1973). This system was particularly prevalent in the vast coffee-producing regions of São Paulo and Minas Gerais, where the demand for labor remained high even as European immigrants were increasingly sought. In the sugar-producing Northeast, forms of tenant farming (known by various local terms, sometimes involving a mix of cash rent and labor obligations) also emerged, often on the same plantations where slavery had flourished. These arrangements ensured that while the legal status of property was removed, the economic and social relations of exploitation persisted, compelling formerly enslaved people into precarious rural or urban labor under conditions that replicated many aspects of their prior bondage (Andrews, 2004; A. do Nascimento, 1979; Scott et al., 1988).

The processes of post-abolition exploitation can be mapped through several interlocking dimensions of oppression. First, the economic exclusion of formerly enslaved people was systematically orchestrated. The *Lei de Terras* (1850), passed before abolition, required land to be purchased, deliberately denying access to land ownership for Afro-Brazilians who were emerging from enslavement without wages or capital (F. Fernandes, 2008). Without land, they were barred from economic autonomy, forced into wage under exploitative conditions, often on the same plantations or in domestic service roles that resembled slavery in all but name (Andrews, 2004; Scott et al., 1988).

Second, the state engaged in deliberate demographic and labor engineering through its whitening policies (*branqueamento*). Between 1890 and 1930, Brazil subsidized the

immigration of millions of European workers, particularly Italians, Germans, and Portuguese, offering them jobs, housing, and resources while excluding Afro-Brazilians from the same economic opportunities. This marked the emergence of explicit, state-backed race-based strategies that systematically institutionalized the white body as the primary beneficiary of Brazil's project of modernity. By actively encouraging white immigration and integrating these new arrivals into nascent industries and urban centers, the state linked whiteness to progress, civilization, and the ideal citizen. This not only aimed to "purify" the national racial stock but also secured for white Brazilians and white immigrants privileged access to land, education, public services, and political participation, thereby solidifying their position as the architects and inheritors of the modern nation. These policies served a dual function: to populate Brazil's growing urban labor force and to ideologically reshape the national identity around whiteness, actively excluding Blackness from the imagined future of the nation (Schwarcz & Starling, 2015; Skidmore, 1992).

Third, Afro-Brazilians were subjected to legal and carceral repression through laws that targeted their visibility and mobility. Post-abolition, vagrancy laws criminalized poverty and unemployment, conditions which disproportionately affected Afro-descendants who had been denied access to housing, education, and land (Chalhoub, 1996). Indeed, immediately following the *Lei Áurea*, the newly established First Republic codified these punitive measures. The 1890 Penal Code (*Código Penal da República dos Estados Unidos do Brasil*), for instance, contained articles that explicitly targeted "vagrancy" (*vadiagem*) and "begging" (*mendicância*). Article 399, in particular, criminalized individuals found "without a fixed residence, profession, or honest means of subsistence, who frequent public places or lead a disorderly life," and threatened them with imprisonment or forced labor in agricultural colonies (Eisenberg, 1973). These provisions, while ostensibly class-neutral, were disproportionately enforced against Black individuals, transforming their economic vulnerability into criminal

offenses. Police forces, particularly in urban centers like Rio de Janeiro, deployed racial profiling and punitive surveillance to regulate Black bodies (Scott et al., 1988). As Holloway (1993) documents, the Rio police were instrumental in reproducing a racial order that defined Blackness as inherently dangerous and disorderly.

Women, in particular, experienced unique forms of racialized and gendered exploitation. As domestic workers, women primarily labored in the private homes of white and non-Black elites without legal protections. Abusive systems of exploitation occurred until the *PEC das Domésticas*, in 2013, finally formalized their labor rights more than a century later. For decades prior to this legal recognition, countless domestic workers, predominantly Black women, routinely endured excessively long hours often without fixed schedules or rest days, extremely low wages – frequently below minimum wage or compensated only with room and board – and a complete absence of social benefits such as vacation pay, sick leave, or social security contributions. Their vulnerability was compounded by the intimate nature of their workplace, which often subjected them to pervasive disrespect, verbal abuse, and a lack of privacy, with little to no legal recourse against exploitation. Black women were also hypersexualized in media and public discourse, denied reproductive healthcare, and often blamed for the poverty that was structurally imposed upon them. Their bodies remained objects of control, both economically and symbolically, mirroring the violence they had endured under slavery (J.-M. Collins, 2023; F. Fernandes, 1969; M. S. Santos, 2018).

In this post-abolition context, which most scholars define as broadly occurring from 1888 until the mid-20th century, violence assumed new, more diffuse forms. This included structural violence, which can be understood as the embedded nature of violence within political, economic, and cultural systems, manifesting in policies, institutions, and symbolic frameworks rather than solely overt acts of aggression (Rylko-Bauer & Farmer, 2017). It extends beyond physical harm, highlighting how governmental structures, which ideally should

offer protection, instead increase vulnerability for certain populations. For many Brazilians marked as poor, Black, or Indigenous, state power has historically amplified their precariousness, making their lives more rather than less unsafe (Hill & Brewster, 2016). Further reinforcing this, Ruth Wilson Gilmore (2007) argues that “racism, specifically, is the state-sanctioned or extralegal production and exploitation of group-differentiated vulnerability to premature death” (p. 28). It is important to note that death is but one outcome, with other life-altering consequences resulting from state-sanctioned racism that severely limit the maximization of one’s potential and can go under the radar causing devastating outcome.

Symbolic violence persisted through the stigmatization of Blackness, the glorification of European culture, and the erasure of Afro-Brazilian contributions to national identity (Skidmore, 1992). Institutional violence was present in law enforcement practices, urban planning, and labor markets that consistently coded Blackness as deviant, criminal, or inferior (Holloway, 1993). For example, this type of deviant coding of Blackness is seen in the criminalization of Afro-Brazilian cultural practices like *Capoeira*, which was outlawed in the 1890 Penal Code and persecuted by police as vagrancy or disorderly conduct, despite its roots as a vital form of self-defense and cultural expression. Similarly, the suppression of *Candomblé* and other Afro-Brazilian religions, often labeled as witchcraft or charlatanism under legal codes, demonstrates the systematic targeting of Black spiritual and communal life (Matory, 2005; Schwarcz & Starling, 2015). Urban reforms, such as the *bota-abaixo* (tear-down) policies in early 20th century Rio de Janeiro, forcibly removed poor, predominantly Black populations from central areas, re-coding their established communities as 'unsanitary' and 'undesirable' to justify their expulsion to precarious peripheries (Abreu, 1988). As Fanon (1986) theorized, the end of direct colonial or slave domination does not automatically lead to liberation; it inaugurated a new phase where power is exercised through laws, borders, language, and spatial segregation. In Brazil, this was manifested in how formerly enslaved populations were made

hyper-visible as a threat, and yet rendered invisible in policy, representation, and social protection. As the historian and activist Beatriz Nascimento (Bittencourt, 2024; M. Beatriz. Nascimento et al., 2023) argued, Afro-Brazilians were simultaneously forced into hyper-visibility as threats and rendered invisible in terms of their contributions and their rights, creating a paradoxical existence where their very presence was both feared and erased.

The type of political abandonment of Afro-Brazilians is most visible in the rise of *favelas* in the early 20th century. Favelas began as settlements initially populated by soldiers from the War of *Canudos* and increasingly became populated and home to displaced Afro-Brazilians, which must be understood within this continuum of violence. Tracey McIntosh and Curcic (2020) define the continuum of violence as the interconnected and persistent nature of various forms of harm, ranging from overt physical and sexual assault to systemic and institutional violence embedded in policies and practices that perpetuate subjugation and marginalization. The concept highlights how violence is not merely episodic but is an ongoing, pervasive, and evolving experience that links historical injustices to present-day vulnerabilities and social conditions. These were not informal settlements in the romanticized sense of grassroots organization alone; they were the result of spatial exclusion, racial policing and social control, and economic abandonment (Valladares & Anderson, 2019). As a spatial and symbolic response to urban exclusion, *favelas* became zones of both hyper-surveillance and state neglect, caught in the crossroads of state violence and public contempt.

The criminalization of favela residents (disproportionately Black and poor) became central to state governance. The rise of the War on Drugs in the late 20th century intensified this dynamic. Heavily militarized police operations, often justified under the rhetoric of security, have resulted in frequent extrajudicial killings, particularly of young Black men (Anistia Internacional, 2015; Valladares & Anderson, 2019). The very same state that neglected

favelas in terms of infrastructure and public services actively invested in controlling them through violence, creating a regime of racialized state terror.

These patterns of exclusion and control are compounded by institutional racism in education, employment, and media. Kopkin and Mitchell-Walthour (2020) demonstrate that skin color continues to determine life chances in Brazil: darker-skinned individuals face greater barriers in accessing higher education, formal employment, and upward mobility. Schools in predominantly Black neighborhoods are systematically underfunded, and affirmative action policies have only recently begun to address the deep gaps in representation and opportunity (E. E. Telles, 2014).

Fanon (1986) and Quijano (2000) both argue that colonialism and slavery do not simply disappear, they leave behind epistemic and institutional residues that shape how societies are organized and how subjects are racialized. In Brazil, the racial hierarchies forged under slavery have been rearticulated through modern forms of governance: unequal land distribution, punitive policing, exploitative labor markets, and cultural invisibilization (Lubke et al., 2021). These are not accidents or oversights – they are systemic mechanisms of racial capitalism, embedded in the very foundations of the modern Brazilian state. As Salo de Carvalho et al. (2021) argue, the victimization of Indigenous and African-descendant communities did not cease with the fall of the colonial regime or the end of slavery; rather, it has transmuted under new forms of modern statecraft, capitalist expansion, and racialized governance. These transformations, while less overtly brutal than slavery, have continued to target these communities through mechanisms such as criminalization, spatial segregation, economic disenfranchisement, and institutional neglect. Therefore, the suffering of Afro-Brazilians and Indigenous populations post-abolition must be understood not as a failure of the state to integrate, but as a success of the state in reconfiguring racial domination to fit a post-slavery

order. Violence did not end with abolition – it simply mutated into law, policy, space, and discourse.

2.3.2. The Construction of Colonial Narratives

The colonization of Brazil began with the arrival of Portuguese ships (*caravelas*) in 1500, led by Pedro Álvares Cabral. This marked the first sustained contact between Europeans and the Indigenous peoples of the region, initiating a long and violent history of colonization, domination, and resistance. From the outset, colonization in Brazil was not only a material project of land seizure and labor extraction but also an ideological enterprise, reliant on narratives that constructed Indigenous and later African peoples as inherently inferior. These narratives served to justify and normalize violence, embed racial hierarchies, and uphold a colonial order that would define Brazilian society for centuries (Schwarcz & Starling, 2015).

Early colonial ideology drew heavily on religious and legal frameworks to rationalize domination. The Catholic Church played a central role in producing and disseminating these narratives, portraying Indigenous peoples as “souls to be saved,” while simultaneously validating their forced conversion, cultural erasure, and exploitation (Fausto, 1998). The *Regimento das Terras* (1850) and other land laws codified the expropriation of Indigenous lands and restricted their autonomy, while the *Direito Indigenista* classified Indigenous people as “wards of the state,” legally infantilizing them and rendering them dependent on colonial and later republican authorities (de Carvalho et al., 2021; Poets, 2021). These frameworks reveal how colonial narratives were embedded not just in discourse but in policy, governance, and law, institutionalizing the social death of colonized peoples. As Nelson Maldonado-Torres (2007) points out,

[...] the encounter with death is no extra-ordinary affair, but a constitutive feature of the reality of colonized and racialized subjects. The colonized is thus not ordinary

Dasein, and the encounter with the possibility of death does not have the same impact or results than for someone whose mode of alienation is that of depersonalization by the One or They. Racialized subjects are constituted in different ways than those that form selves, others, and peoples. Death is not so much an individualizing factor as a constitutive feature of their reality. It is the encounter with daily forms of death, not the They, which afflicts them. The encounter with death always comes too late, as it were, since death is already beside them. For this reason, decolonization, deracialization, and des-gener-accio'n (in sum, decoloniality) emerge not through an encounter with one's own mortality, but from a desire to evade death, one's own but even more fundamentally that of others. (p. 251)

As Aníbal Quijano (1969, 2000, 2007) and Walter Mignolo (2007b, 2011a) argue, this is part of the broader coloniality of power, a matrix that outlives colonialism itself and continues to organize race, labor, and knowledge in postcolonial societies. These ideologies worked not only to exploit but to ontologically degrade. Nelson Maldonado-Torres (2007) asserts in his theory of the coloniality of being that colonized peoples were not simply seen as different or subordinate, they were rendered non-beings, undeserving of rights, freedom, or recognition. This ontological exclusion was central to enabling enslavement, genocide, and racialized dispossession.

2.3.2.1. Construction of the “Savage”: “Discovery” and Dehumanization

The first European descriptions of Indigenous peoples in what would become Brazil were deeply shaped by existing European ideologies, particularly those grounded in medieval Christian cosmology and Renaissance humanism. These ideologies framed non-European peoples as occupying a space between humanity and animality, lacking reason, Christianity, and civilization (Schwarcz & Starling, 2015). Christopher Columbus's early accounts of the Americas, written just a few years before Cabral's arrival in Brazil, had already laid the

groundwork for this perception. Columbus famously described the Indigenous peoples he encountered as *noble savages*: physically beautiful and seemingly generous, but spiritually and intellectually deficient, ready for conversion and exploitation. This dualistic portrayal, of fascination entwined with paternalistic disdain, was central to shaping the European imaginary of the New World (De Almeida Abreu, 2011; Schwarcz & Starling, 2015).

This framework is echoed clearly in the writings of Pero Vaz de Caminha, the Portuguese knight and secretary who accompanied Pedro Álvares Cabral's 1500 voyage and documented the first European impressions of the Brazilian coast. Caminha's letter to King Manuel I, often regarded as the "birth certificate" of Brazil, combines admiration for the Indigenous population with subtle ideological framing that justified colonization. According to Schwarcz & Starling (2015):

He enthusiastically recorded "the discovery of this new land of Yours, which was just found during this voyage". To the eyes of the crew and their spokesperson, it was definitively a new place, recently "found." As the saying goes, "what is found is not stolen," and the idea was to immediately claim ownership, even without knowing what would be discovered. (p.22, translated by author)

This sense of discovery and ownership was central to the colonial project, as it framed the land and its people as resources to be exploited. These early depictions were more than observations, they were ideological tools that reinforced and rationalized the colonial project. Portraying Indigenous peoples not as sovereign actors but as "raw material" for empire-building, asserting their supposed innocence, passivity, or lack of culture, these narratives enabled the Portuguese Crown and the Catholic Church to frame conquest as a civilizing mission rather than a violent act of dispossession (Fausto, 1998; Schwarcz & Starling, 2015).

After the Portuguese's exploration, several theories about the origins of Indigenous peoples emerged. In 1520, Paracelsus proposed that Indigenous peoples were not descendants of Adam but akin to mythical beings – giants, gnomes, and pygmies – thus placing them outside the theological framework of white/European Christian humanity. By 1547, Girolamo Cardano posited that Indigenous populations may have spontaneously emerged from decaying organic matter, likening them to worms and fungi (Schwarcz & Starling, 2015). These pseudoscientific speculations were not innocuous curiosities but instead reflected the European psyche and refusal to recognize Indigenous peoples as fully human – a refusal deeply embedded in the racial and religious worldview of early modern Europe. This refusal undergirds the forms of systematic erasure and violence that laid the groundwork for conquest, slavery, and genocide contemporary forms of genocide (e.g., land grabs). Indigenous peoples were not simply displaced, they were conceptually removed from the sphere of moral concern, rendered into tools, obstacles, or raw material for European expansion. This is a core feature of the coloniality of being, the denial of full humanity to colonized peoples, justified through religion, science, and philosophy (Maldonado-Torres, 2007).

Pero Vaz de Caminha's descriptions, however, were particularly influential in shaping European perceptions of Indigenous peoples. He reported:

All brown-skinned, all naked, with nothing to cover their privates [...] Nicolau Coelho gestured for them to lower their bows, and they complied. But there was no speech or understanding that could be made useful, as the sea broke on the coast. He only gave them a red cap and a linen hood he wore on his head, and a black hat. And one of them gave him a feathered headdress of long bird feathers, with a little tuft of red and grey feathers, like those of a parrot. (Caminha, 1500, as cited in Schwarcz & Starling, 2015, p. 24, translated by author)

Caminha's account contributed to the emerging narrative of the "noble Brazilian savage," a concept later adopted in French accounts and in Rousseau's 18th-century writings. Rousseau saw Indigenous peoples as models of human purity untainted by European corruption. However, in Brazil, this notion was not merely theoretical but shaped real colonial policies. Indigenous peoples were viewed as gentiles, capable of being catechized and guided toward "good faith" (Schwarcz & Starling, 2015). This idea justified attempts to assimilate Indigenous communities while ignoring their agency.

From Pero Vaz de Caminha's letters, colonial narratives began shaping a version of history that presented the conquest of the land as largely peaceful. His descriptions suggested that Indigenous peoples were docile, welcoming, and eager to be civilized. These accounts omitted the violence and resistance that characterized Indigenous interactions with the Portuguese. The framing of Indigenous peoples as a blank canvas legitimized the colonial project and justified the exploitation of their labor and resources as an act of salvation (Fausto, 1998; Schwarcz & Starling, 2015).

The logic embedded in Caminha's account mirrors the *Manifest Destiny* doctrine that would emerge in the 19th-century United States, which held that white invaders/settlers were divinely ordained to expand across the North American continent (Stephanson, 1995). Although the Manifest Destiny doctrine is often viewed as a uniquely American concept, its intellectual and theological roots lie in a shared colonial logic of white racial superiority and territorial entitlement. Stephanson (1995) notes that Manifest Destiny was a secularized continuation of earlier Christian imperial mandates, such as the *Doctrine of Discovery*, which justified European conquest on the grounds of civilizing "barbaric" lands.

In both Brazil and the United States, these ideologies legitimized the violent dispossession and racialized dehumanization of Indigenous peoples. In the Brazilian context, the expansion of Portuguese settlement and the extraction economy into the hinterlands

(*sertão*) followed the same ideological script as the Manifest Destiny: the erasure of Indigenous sovereignty, the criminalization of Indigenous resistance, and the institutionalization of racial hierarchies (Fausto, 1998; Hemming, 1978). Just as United States, invaders/settlers viewed westward expansion as a divine right and historical necessity. The Portuguese Crown promoted similar narratives in Brazil to justify border expansion through *Expedições Bandeirantes*, which enslaved and massacred Indigenous populations under the guise of progress and Christianization (Schwarcz & Starling, 2015).

This misrepresentation of history, while strategic, is reproduced through epistemic violence – the failure of mainstream academic scholarship to account for the colonial violence and white supremacy (Mignolo, 2009). By portraying Indigenous peoples as willing participants in their own colonization, the Portuguese justified policies that dispossessed them of their land and subjected them to forced labor. The notion of a peaceful conquest also helped the Portuguese Crown garner support for its colonial ambitions from European and Catholic authorities (Monteiro & Woodard, 2018).

2.3.2.2. Civilizing the “Savage”: Religion and the Colonial State

As stated earlier, religion played a central role in violent systems of erasure and domination, shaping European perceptions of Indigenous peoples to justify their exploitation and suppression. Portugal maintained a strong alliance with the Catholic Church, which wielded significant influence over colonial policies. The Vatican was given authority to determine how Indigenous populations should be treated, and both Portugal and the Church saw colonization as an opportunity to "save" Indigenous souls. Missionaries accompanied the first explorers and settlers, establishing missions within Indigenous territories to facilitate their conversion to Christianity (Schwarcz & Starling, 2015).

Missionaries viewed the erasure of Indigenous cultural identities as the most effective means of integrating them into colonial society. This process extended far beyond spiritual

conversion and encompassed linguistic suppression, cultural assimilation, and economic exploitation (Fausto, 1998). In Brazil, Jesuit missions – known as *aldeamentos* – became central instruments of this strategy, where Indigenous peoples were taught Portuguese, instructed in European agricultural techniques, and indoctrinated with Christian doctrines to align them with colonial interests (Hemming, 1978; Schwarcz & Starling, 2015). This model of domination closely paralleled practices in North America, where Catholic and Protestant missions similarly sought to "civilize" Indigenous populations by displacing their spiritual systems, languages, and social structures. Missionary efforts in Canada and the United States likewise used religious instruction as a vehicle for dispossession and identity reconstruction, often under the guise of salvation and progress (O'Brien, 2010; A. Perry, 2001). These transatlantic parallels underscore that such efforts were not incidental or region-specific but were rooted in a shared colonial logic of racial and civilizational hierarchy, which saw Indigenous cultures as obstacles to be erased in the formation of modern nation-states (Gilroy, 1993, 2010; Monteiro & Woodard, 2018).

The role of religion in the colonization process is also seen in the intensification of Indigenous wars

[...] which, while they already existed internally, were now also provoked by the colonizers, who made allies as quickly as they made enemies. In this context, there were Indigenous people living in villages allied with the Portuguese, and enemy Indigenous people scattered throughout the *sertões* (hinterlands). The distinction between 'friendly Indigenous' and 'angry gentiles' created a clear division in Indigenous legislation. Allied Indigenous people were granted freedom in their villages, and they were responsible for sustaining and securing the borders. For these 'friendly and village Indians,' the contact process always followed a similar pattern: first, they were 'brought down' – transported from their villages in the interior to areas near Portuguese settlements – and

then they were catechized, civilized, and thus transformed into 'useful vassals' (Schwarcz & Starling, 2015, p. 32, translated by author).

Once converted, Indigenous allies were often used as military forces against other Indigenous groups. These converted communities acted as the "*muralhas do sertão*," or "walls of the hinterlands," forming a buffer against foreign invaders and resisting Indigenous groups who refused conversion (Fausto, 1998; Schwarcz & Starling, 2015, p. 32).

The concept of the "good savage" was central to this religious narrative. Indigenous peoples were portrayed as inherently virtuous but misguided, capable of redemption through conversion to Christianity. While missionaries often idealized Indigenous peoples as potential converts, they also condemned their "pagan" practices, such as cannibalism and polytheism, as evidence of their moral inferiority. These practices, which were often exaggerated or misunderstood by Europeans, were used to justify the use of force in the conversion process (Hemming, 1978; Schwarcz & Starling, 2015). The result was a deeply ambivalent relationship between colonizers and Indigenous peoples, characterized by both paternalism and violence.

These ideological frameworks, rooted in religious paternalism, racialized epistemologies, and selective historical memory, were soon implemented through legal mechanisms that institutionalized the control of Indigenous peoples (Monteiro & Woodard, 2018). The portrayal of Indigenous communities as childlike and adaptable facilitated their integration into colonial labor systems, often under the pretext of protection and salvation. Early colonial policies from the Portuguese Crown aimed to regulate the treatment of Indigenous peoples, but these laws often justified their exploitation. A royal decree in 1570 prohibited Indigenous enslavement except in cases of "just war" or "rescue from cannibalism," loopholes that colonists frequently used to legitimize the continued capture and sale of Indigenous labor (Monteiro & Woodard, 2018).

The legal landscape began to shift in the mid-18th century under the Marquis of Pombal's reforms, which culminated in the formal abolition of Indigenous slavery in 1755. However, this abolition did not equate to autonomy. In 1757, the *Diretório dos Índios* (Directorate of the Indians) was enacted, reorganizing Indigenous communities into settlements known as *aldeias* and placing them under the control of state-appointed directors. Though legally free, Indigenous peoples were still compelled to perform labor for public works and private landowners under conditions resembling servitude (Fausto, 1998; Monteiro & Woodard, 2018). This paradox reflected a broader colonial ideology that sought to "civilize" Indigenous people while maintaining their labor as an economic resource.

Christianity was not merely a religion imposed upon Indigenous populations; it served as a civilizing project that justified the restructuring of Indigenous life. Conversion was often tied to labor obligations, and refusal to adopt Catholicism could be interpreted as rebellion or heresy, legitimizing punitive actions (Hemming, 1978; Schwarcz & Starling, 2015). Such actions illuminate the emerging carceral logic (punishment) undergirding the punitive nature of the state toward Indigenous people. Maldonado-Torres (2007) argues that such actions reveal how the colonial enterprise was grounded in a coloniality of being that systematically denied full humanity to colonized peoples through systems of punishment. This logic made Indigenous and Black populations subject to control, confinement, and violence under both spiritual and secular justifications.

In this way, religion operated together with colonial law, naturalizing the economic exploitation of Indigenous labor while producing knowledge systems that categorized them as inferior (Mignolo, 2009). Walter Mignolo (2009) concept of the coloniality of knowledge is key to understanding how the imposition of Christian-European worldviews erased Indigenous epistemologies, traditions, and cosmologies. Legal and religious frameworks together laid the

groundwork for a racialized social order in which whiteness, civilization, and Christianity were synonymous.

2.3.2.3. The “Savage” tamed: from enslavement to legal control

Later legal reforms continued this pattern of rhetorical emancipation coupled with practical control. The 1798 *Carta Régia* abolished the *Diretório dos Índios*, giving them relative freedom, while creating asymmetric relations between the Indigenous communities and the state representatives, prioritizing the interests of the State – mandating Indigenous participation in militias and labor obligations for the state, reinforcing their subordinate status in colonial society (Hemming, 1978; Monteiro & Woodard, 2018). Even into the 19th century, the Brazilian state maintained legal mechanisms to manage Indigenous labor. Laws passed in 1831 and 1834 placed Indigenous children and freed individuals under the oversight of orphan judges, effectively institutionalizing their dependence and continuing the colonial model of paternalistic control (Monteiro & Woodard, 2018).

These legal frameworks played a critical role in shaping colonial power structures, embedding Indigenous labor into the fabric of Brazil’s developing economy while upholding ideologies of racial and cultural superiority. As Quijano (2000) argues, such systems not only organized labor hierarchies but also constructed enduring categories of race and civilization that marginalized Indigenous and Black populations – the coloniality of power.

The historical regulation of Indigenous labor through legal and religious institutions has left enduring scars in Brazilian society. The dispossession of Indigenous lands and the denial of cultural autonomy created structural inequalities that persist to this day. Modern struggles over land demarcation, especially in the Amazon and Northeast, are rooted in these colonial patterns. Current quilombola and Indigenous communities continue to resist state and corporate encroachments, asserting their rights to self-determination, language, and cultural practice (Arruti, 2008; de Carvalho et al., 2021).

Moreover, the racial and social hierarchies shaped during colonization remain visible in patterns of exclusion from education, political representation, and access to healthcare. The concept of necropolitics, as articulated by Mbembe (2019), is particularly relevant here: both Indigenous and Black populations in Brazil have historically been treated as expendable under the logics of racial capitalism and state neglect. The legacy of early laws regulating labor and movement persists in contemporary forms of police violence, environmental racism, and socio-economic marginalization. Understanding these continuities is essential for unpacking Brazil's current struggles with inequality, violence, and racial injustice. They reveal how legal and religious institutions were not just historical forces but ongoing structures shaping the lived realities of racialized and Indigenous communities.

2.3.2.4. The “Savage” resistance

Despite the pervasive ideological and institutional apparatus designed to suppress them, Indigenous communities across Brazil actively resisted colonization from the very outset. Resistance took multiple forms – ranging from open warfare and flight to subtler tactics such as cultural preservation, spiritual defiance, and sabotage of labor systems. As Hemming (1978) illustrates, early Portuguese efforts to enslave and evangelize Indigenous peoples were frequently met with armed uprisings, such as the *Tupinambá* resistance in the 16th century, which disrupted missionary settlements and forced colonial authorities to temporarily reconsider their strategies. The *Confederação dos Tamoios* (1554 – 1567) for example, was a revolt led by the Indigenous group *Tamoios* (part of the *Tupinambá* resistance) that was motivated by the exploitation and oppression from Portugal. These acts of defiance were not merely reactionary; they were expressions of Indigenous political will and a rejection of the colonial order's moral and racial hierarchies. Even within *aldeamentos*, Indigenous groups negotiated and contested their conditions, often fleeing missions *en masse* or covertly maintaining elements of their traditional lifeways (Monteiro & Woodard, 2018).

Resistance also occurred through cognitive and cultural disobedience, a concept that Mignolo (2009) frames as epistemic insubordination – challenging the imposed colonial worldview by refusing to fully assimilate. Indigenous cosmologies, kinship systems, and oral traditions survived despite concerted efforts to erase them, creating spaces for alternative forms of knowledge and autonomy, safeguarding memory, identity, and resistance strategies across generations (Poets, 2021).

Even after the initial wave of conquest, Indigenous resistance continued into the 19th and 20th centuries, often adapting to new forms of state violence. The *Cabanagem* Rebellion (1835–1840) in the Amazon region (more precisely in what now is the state of Pará), although multiethnic in composition, included significant Indigenous participation and stands as one of the largest anti-colonial uprisings in Brazil’s history (Schwarcz & Starling, 2015). More recently, movements for Indigenous land demarcation³ and cultural recognition have drawn on this historical legacy, framing their demands within both legal and ancestral frameworks (de Carvalho et al., 2021).

While Indigenous resistance was persistent and multifaceted, colonial authorities responded by intensifying efforts to delegitimize Indigenous claims to land, identity, and political autonomy. When direct colonial violence and forced assimilation was met with defiance, colonizers turned increasingly to discursive strategies aimed at erasing Indigenous presence from both the historical record and the geographic landscape (Monteiro & Woodard, 2018). This gave rise to the enduring “myth of empty land” (*terra nullius*) – the idea that Brazil’s vast territories were uninhabited or underutilized, and thus available for legitimate

³ These contemporary struggles are exemplified by the persistent efforts of organizations like the *Articulação dos Povos Indígenas do Brasil* (APIB), which advocates for the demarcation and protection of Indigenous territories. Specific conflicts, such as those involving the Guarani-Kaiowá in Mato Grosso do Sul or the ongoing battles against illegal mining in Yanomami lands (located between the states of Amazonas and Roraima, north of Brazil), highlight the continuous threat of land grabbing and environmental degradation, particularly from agribusiness and extractivist industries. This enduring history of Indigenous resistance, from the *Cabanagem* Rebellion to these contemporary land rights movements, is crucial for understanding the complex interplay of historical coloniality and present-day struggles for justice and self-determination in Brazil (Mondardo, 2022).

European occupation and development (Fausto, 1998; Schwarcz & Starling, 2015). This narrative not only ignored the complex territorial systems, ecological knowledge, and spiritual geographies of Indigenous nations but also served as a rhetorical tool to mask genocide as progress (De Almeida Abreu, 2011). By reframing conquest as settlement and resistance as absence, colonial powers justified centuries of dispossession, paving the way for enduring structural inequalities.

2.3.3. The Myth of the "Empty Land" (Terra Nullius) and the Justification of Colonization

The history of Brazil's colonization is deeply intertwined with the myth of the empty land, or *terra nullius*, a narrative that framed the territory as an uninhabited, untamed expanse waiting for European exploration and settlement (Schwarcz & Starling, 2015). This myth, perpetuated by Portuguese colonizers and later embedded in Brazilian historiography, deliberately ignored the presence of millions of Indigenous peoples who had occupied the land for thousands of years. By erasing Indigenous claims to the land, European powers justified violent conquest, territorial appropriation, and the exploitation of native labor (Hemming, 1978).

Contrary to what has become popular in historiography – the replacement of Indigenous slave labor with that of Africans – it is currently known that, despite official discourse, Indigenous people were enslaved for a long period. The *Paulistas*, for example, acted until the 18th century as jailers of Indigenous people, who they sold or used as slave labor on agricultural farms on the *Piratininga* plateau. To this end, they not only attacked the Jesuit missions established in the Paraguay region, but also, from 1640 onwards, they practically emptied the hinterland – *sertão* – of the Northeast, where the colonization was then expanding (Schwarcz & Starling, 2015). However, with the expansion of the sugar market, more lasting and stable solutions were required, away from religious or moral controversies. Thus, profits from sugar

cane cultivation were associated with those from the trade of enslaved people. On the one hand, the Portuguese Empire established trading posts along the African coast. On the other hand, in Brazil, Portuguese merchants used prisoners from internal wars as future slaves, replicating the practice of slavery that existed in Africa (Fausto, 1998; Monteiro & Woodard, 2018; Schwarcz & Starling, 2015).

The purchase and distribution of slaves, when carried out by merchants from the metropolis, represented an advance of a considerable part of the income generated by the colony. Portugal controlled both sides of the market: the supply of labor and the sugarcane monopoly. However, almost nothing remained in the New World: neither the sugarcane nor the profit it produced. Over time, an increasing number of native traders became involved in the slave trade. It is possible that, for this reason, the term "Brazilian" appeared to designate these merchants, distinguishing them from Portuguese people of origin. In certain periods, such as in the 18th century, African slave markets controlled by the Dutch prevented exchanges with Portuguese traders, but not with Brazilians. The latter used brandy, tobacco and leather as currency in the slave trade (Schwarcz & Starling, 2015).

Portugal's involvement in the transatlantic slave trade, however, did not begin with Brazil. In fact, the Portuguese were the earliest European powers to engage in African slavery, developing a system of racialized labor that would later be transplanted wholesale to the Americas. By the 15th century, well before Pedro Álvares Cabral's arrival in Brazil, Portugal had already established trading posts along the West African coast and was actively involved in the enslavement and transport of African peoples to the Iberian Peninsula (Eltis, 2000; Klein & Luna, 2010). This early engagement gave the Portuguese not only economic motives but also ideological justifications for slavery, rooted in Christian doctrines of conquest and notions of African inferiority. These frameworks were later expanded and intensified during the rise of the Atlantic sugar economy.

The extensive experience of the Portuguese with black slavery in the Iberian Peninsula, which intensified with the expansion of the sugar industry in the Atlantic, acquainted them with Africans and their diverse skills. Historical records from the 16th century indicate that many African individuals had proficient knowledge of sugar manufacturing techniques (Klein & Luna, 2010; Schwarcz & Starling, 2015). The first Africans who arrived in Brazil, originating from Angola and Guinea, assumed specialized roles such as purgers, sugar masters, blacksmiths, and boilermakers. Many captives from West Africa had experience in agriculture, iron use, and livestock care. Over time, African slavery and the sugarcane industry became closely linked. During this period, terminology often overlapped, Indigenous people were called “gentiles of the land” or “blacks”, and Africans were called “blacks from Guinea” and “blacks of the land” — the name “black” corresponding to the generic designation of slave (Fausto, 1998; Schwarcz & Starling, 2015). These racialized designations were not merely descriptive; they reinforced a social order where Blackness was equated with servitude and dispossession. This linguistic conflation contributed to a racial ideology that would endure across centuries, shaping not only labor relations but also the very structure of Brazilian society.

This early configuration of racialized labor, in which Blackness was equated with enslavement and subhuman status, exemplifies the *coloniality of power*: the enduring structuring of social hierarchies along racial lines, established during colonialism and maintained through modern capitalism and state apparatuses (Quijano, 2007). The Portuguese colonizers did not merely exploit African labor; they imposed an epistemological and ontological order that positioned Africans as naturally inferior and permanently servile. Frantz Fanon (1986) discussed how this process reduced the Black subject to a position of non-being, where Blackness became the negation of civilization, reason, and humanity. In this context, the racialized economy of Brazil’s sugar plantations was not just about production, it was about

producing hierarchies of being. The Portuguese model of slavery in Brazil, therefore, must be seen not only as a historical instance of exploitation but as part of a global project of coloniality – a matrix of power that continues to shape race, labor, and subjectivity in the present.

Lilia Schwarcz and Heloisa Starling (2015) argue that the fabrication of colonial narratives was instrumental in constructing a colonial identity that positioned Europeans as civilizing agents and Indigenous peoples as impediments to progress. This framing was not incidental, it served the ideological function of legitimizing conquest, dispossession, and forced assimilation. Through the coordinated efforts of the Portuguese Crown and Jesuit missionaries, incursions into Indigenous territories were justified as part of a divine and civilizing mission, aimed at converting, pacifying, and integrating Indigenous peoples into the colonial system. However, this process also facilitated the emergence of whiteness as both a racial identity and an institutionalized structure of power (Mignolo, 2007b; Twine, 1998).

2.3.4. Whiteness, land and the matrix of coloniality: racial identity in Brazil

The colonial state, in alliance with the Catholic Church, actively constructed and institutionalized a racial taxonomy that placed white Europeans at the apex of moral, political, and epistemological hierarchies. Whiteness thus emerged not just as phenotype, but as a governing logic that marked the boundaries of reason, civilization, and legitimacy. This *white institutional body*, comprising colonial administrators, missionaries, and legal authorities, became the central apparatus through which racial classification, land dispossession, and forced labor were managed and morally justified (Gordon, 2005; Skidmore, 1992).

Achille Mbembe's (2019) concept of *necropolitics* further illuminates how the colonial state governed through the right to decide who may live and who must die. In the Brazilian context, Indigenous and Black populations were subject to regimes of control and violence that extended beyond enslavement to include forced removals, cultural erasure, and state-

sanctioned extermination. This power to determine life and death was inscribed into colonial policy and persists in modern policing, incarceration, and public health disparities that disproportionately affect racialized communities. Thus, the emergence of whiteness in Brazil cannot be understood simply as a demographic or cultural phenomenon. It must be seen as a structuring principle of colonial modernity, forged through epistemic violence, economic exploitation, and institutional control. This foundational racial order continues to shape Brazil's present-day inequalities and racial dynamics (Costa Vargas, 2004).

Prior to European contact, Indigenous societies in Brazil were highly diverse, comprising hundreds of distinct ethnic groups with unique languages, cultures, and political systems. Scholars estimate that Brazil's Indigenous population ranged from two to five million people in 1500, organized into semi-sedentary and sedentary societies that engaged in agriculture, trade, warfare, and complex social organization (Hemming, 1978). Many groups, such as the Tupinambá, Guarani, and Xavante, had intricate kinship structures and economic systems that sustained large communities. For instance, Tupinambá societies practiced slash-and-burn agriculture, cultivating cassava, maize, and beans while supplementing their diet with hunting and fishing. Other groups, like the Kayapó and Yanomami, maintained semi-nomadic lifestyles, demonstrating a deep knowledge of the Amazon rainforest's ecological cycles. This adaptability challenges European depictions of Indigenous peoples as primitive and disorganized (Hemming, 1978; Schwarcz & Starling, 2015).

Despite the narrative of an empty land, Indigenous communities had developed sophisticated land-use practices that were environmentally sustainable. The *terra preta* (dark earth) phenomenon, for example, reveals that pre-Columbian Amazonians enriched the soil using biochar techniques, creating fertile agricultural zones that remain productive today (Hecht, 2013). These practices stand in stark contrast to European deforestation and monoculture, which led to soil depletion and environmental degradation.

The *terra nullius* doctrine was more than just a misconception; it was a strategic ideological tool employed by Portuguese authorities to claim legal and moral authority over the lands they sought to control. By denying Indigenous sovereignty, the Crown could distribute vast tracts of land to Portuguese settlers, reinforcing European dominance. One of the earliest and most significant examples of this policy was the Captaincy System, established in 1534. The Portuguese divided Brazil into hereditary captaincies, granting control over large regions to noblemen (*donatários*), who were expected to develop these lands for economic purposes (Boxer, 1962). However, the success of this system hinged on the availability of labor, leading to the forced incorporation of Indigenous peoples into the colonial workforce.

The myth of an empty land also shaped colonial legal and race-based frameworks that benefited white/Europeans capitalism. The *Regimento das Missões* (1686) allowed Jesuits to establish white settlements (*aldeias*) where Indigenous peoples were forcibly relocated, stripped of their traditional ways of life, and subjected to religious conversion (Monteiro & Woodard, 2018). These missions functioned as tools of social control, reinforcing white/European cultural supremacy while eroding Indigenous autonomy.

2.3.4.1. The Myth of Racial Democracy and the Obfuscation of Structural Violence

Frequently, Brazil is presented as a model of pacific racial coexistence, sustained by the myth of racial democracy – discussed extensively by Gilberto Freyre (2008) in *Casa-grande & Senzala* (first published in 1933). This narrative was deeply embedded in culture and national policies, suggesting that inequalities are the result of economic issues, not racial (Håndlykken-Luz, 2020; C. Smith et al., 2021). However, racism in Brazil operates as the perfect crime: the concept of *racismo à brasileira*⁴ highlights how discrimination in the country is masked by miscegenation and the idea that inequalities are only socioeconomics. This creates

⁴ Can be translated as Brazilian racism.

a racial ambiguity, that gets in the way of the discussions of racism (Håndlykken-Luz, 2020; Munanga, 2010).

Although Black movements challenging this ideology have always existed, still, a rigid resistance towards the deconstruction of the racial democracy myth reflected on political discourses remains. One example is Brazil's former president Jair Bolsonaro, that affirmed several times that he is colorblind and denied the existence of racial inequities in the country (Murphy, 2024). This can be seen in Edward Telles (2014a) work, where he explores how skin color, rather than racial or ethnic identity alone, serves as a primary determinant of social status and socioeconomic inequality in many societies, particularly in Latin America. *Pigmentocracy*, this phenomenon, refers to a hierarchy where lighter skin tones are associated with higher socioeconomic status, power, and privilege, while darker skin tones are linked to lower status, poverty, and marginalization.

The pigmentocracy is a consequence of the slavery heritage in Brazil, that shapes the structural violence against black people, constraining their access to health, education, quality living, work and justice. Florestan Fernandes (2008) argues that structural racism in Brazil is an extension of the slave-owning order, which has never been completely overcome. He identified that the transition from the slave-owning system to the capitalist system did not include mechanisms that guaranteed the inclusion of Black populations. On the contrary, these populations were relegated to peripheral positions in society, facing systemic barriers to economic, social and political advancement. Abdias do Nascimento (1978) expanded this view by using the concept of *black genocide*. Black genocide constitutes a profound critique of racial structures in Brazil, highlighting how the marginalization and systematic elimination of the Black population operate in various spheres. Nascimento argues that genocide is not limited to physical violence, such as the high rates of deaths due to police actions, but also encompasses

symbolic and structural dimensions, such as economic exclusion, cultural erasure, and the historical invisibility of Afro-Brazilian contributions.

It is also relevant to notice that Abdias do Nascimento (1978) explores how practices such as whitening and institutional invisibility perpetuate forms of racial oppression, aspects corroborated by indicators that show the underrepresentation of Afro-descendants in leadership positions and their overrepresentation in poverty and incarceration rates. The United Nations (UN) report United Nations (2022) highlights that Afro-descendants, who represent around 55% of the Brazilian population, face alarming disproportionalities in several social indicators. For example, 82% of people killed in police interventions in 2022 were Black, demonstrating a worrying pattern of excessive use of force, a practice that Nascimento classified as *social cleansing*, in which the militarization of the outskirts of the city and police repression are disproportionately directed against Black communities.

Moreover, mass incarceration reveals the racial selectivity of the Brazilian penal system, with Black people representing approximately 69% of the prison population, a historical development of the dynamics of enslavement and ongoing marginalization. In the cultural field, Afro-Brazilian religious practices, such as Candomblé, frequently face persecution and violence, illustrating the symbolic dimension of genocide. The UN recently highlighted the murder of Mother Bernadete, a religious leader, as an example of the intersection between structural racism and violence directed at Afro-descendant communities (United Nations, 2022). This cultural erasure is exacerbated by the exclusion of Black people from essential services, such as health and education, which perpetuates structural inequalities.

Indicators show, for example, that Black people have higher illiteracy rates than white people (9.1% versus 3.9% in 2022) and average incomes that are equivalent to only 56% of the earnings of white people in similar positions. Furthermore, the cultural and political erasure of Afro-descendant contributions reinforces the narrative of whitening, excluding racial

categories from the census and criminalizing practices such as Candomblé and Capoeira (2022). Florestan Fernandes (add more references) criticizes the idea that Brazilian racism is "cordial," highlighting how it operates in a structural and subtle way, legitimizing discriminatory practices.

Despite advances, such as the affirmative action policies implemented in the 2000s (e.g. minimum enrollment of Black and Brown students at public universities), criticisms based on the ideology of racial democracy continue to delegitimize such measures, perpetuating inequalities. This resistance reflects the denial of the lived experiences of Black people, who are often held individually responsible for structural inequalities that are, in fact, the result of racism deeply rooted in the social, political, and economic foundations of Brazil.

The Black genocide discussion can be directly linked with necropolitics as discussed by Mbembe (2019). The sovereignty of the State is fundamentally linked to the ability to determine who shall live and who shall die. Necropolitics expands and reformulates Michel Foucault's notion of biopower, going beyond the administration of life to include practices that legitimize death on a large scale as a form of social and political control. Mbembe emphasizes that in contexts marked by colonization, war, and racism, the state and other political actors create "zones of death" where certain groups are considered dispensable. These zones are not only physical but also symbolic, including spaces such as slums, refugee camps, occupied territories, and we can also include *quilombos* and *favelas*, where violence, exclusion, and precarity are normalized.

This is particularly visible in colonial regimes, where dehumanization and exploitation justify massacres and genocides. In the contemporary world, Mbembe discusses how this logic persists in practices such as asymmetric warfare, terrorism, and security policies that transform populations into legitimate targets of elimination. In short, necropolitics reveals how modern

and contemporary regimes exercise power not only to govern life, but also to regulate and justify death, perpetuating inequalities and structural violence on a global scale (Ajari, 2022).

In both colonial and capitalist societies, the role of enforcers remains the same. The colonial-era authority that coerced and controlled Indigenous and enslaved populations has now transformed into the modern police force, perpetuating violence and systemic racism in today's society. For example, a recent report published by *Rede de Observatórios da Segurança* found that in 2023 at least seven Black people were killed by the police every 24 hours in Brazil. Overall, 87.8% of police killings were Black people. The study collected data of nine states in Brazil: Amazonas, Bahia, Ceará, Maranhão, Pará, Pernambuco, Piauí, Rio de Janeiro e São Paulo. While the United States leads the world in having the highest rates of incarceration, Brazil leads the world with the highest number of police murders (S. Ramos & et al., 2024). After the 2020 murder of George Floyd, Black Lives Matter emerged in Brazil to shed light on Jair Bolsonaro's politics that spurred police violence with tough-on-crime discourses and polices linking them to the trajectory of violent polices afflicting Afro-Brazilians (Ramos & Siri Völker, 2020). While Ramos and Siri Völker (2020) documented the spike in police murders back in 2018 and Black/Afro-Brazilians grossly high representation, academic research has paid scant attention to this phenomenon with historical roots in anti-Blackness. The ways explicit state violence against Black bodies are normalized and accepted by the wider Brazilian populace as addressing/eradicating a 'criminal' population speaks to the embedded nature of anti-blackness in Brazilian society and its under theorization. The ways Blackness is structured in Brazilian society deserves special attention in discussions of present-day forms of structural violence and exploitation. Such structural violence reinforces narratives of deviance, abnormality that have always marked Black identity to justify their oppression/exploitation. By extension, Black communities, are in turn, marked as undesirable, further marginalizing Black/Afro-Brazilian status in mainstream society (Da Costa Ramalho,

2024). For instance, communities such as quilombos are often stigmatized as dangerous or inferior, regardless of the realities of life within them. As a result, people in these communities are invisible as victims of state violence – not worthy of protection, and hyper visible as perpetrators of violence viewed through the lens of negative stereotypes. Negative social stigmas, born in colonial narratives, are often silenced in academic discourse, thus continuing Black marginalization, which limits their opportunities within society (Arruti, 2008; Campos, 2024; Da Costa Ramalho, 2024; F. Fernandes, 2008).

2.3.5. From Empty Land to Exploitative Labor: The Birth of Capitalism in Colonial Brazil

It is important to note, that Portuguese colonization of Brazil did not begin with the creation of agricultural estates or vast plantations, but rather with the extraction of Brazil's natural resources, most notably brazilwood (*pau-brasil*), which was highly prized for its red dye (Fausto, 1998). This initial phase of colonization was marked by the Portuguese establishing trade relationships with Indigenous groups, exchanging European goods (such as metal tools, cloth, and mirrors) for timber. While these exchanges might appear as mutual transactions, they were deeply exploitative. Indigenous groups were often coerced into these deals through deception, violence, and force (Metcalf, 2006).

However, the extraction of brazilwood did not signify a simple engagement in trade; it was the precursor to a more profound transformation in Brazil's colonial economy. This process involved the gradual displacement of Indigenous peoples from their lands, which had supported complex systems of subsistence agriculture for centuries. As the Portuguese sought to transform the land for mass production, Indigenous systems of communal land use were destroyed, and the land itself was reimagined as “empty” or “unproductive,” a concept which allowed the Portuguese to lay claim to it (Metcalf, 2006; Monteiro & Woodard, 2018; Schwarcz & Starling, 2015). This behavior of reimagining the land to be unproductive is still

reproduced in the present day, providing the justification for land grabs, aggressive resource extraction, and large-scale infrastructure projects that often disregard traditional land rights (Mondardo, 2022). Consequently, this historical precedent serves as a direct precursor to the state violence witnessed today, wherein communities who resist this ongoing dispossession and exploitation are systematically portrayed as deviant, criminal, or obstacles to progress (Leite, 2008). This framework is particularly relevant to the current study, illuminating how these historical patterns of land reimagining and the subsequent criminalization of traditional ways of life manifest in the ongoing exploitation of Black and Indigenous communities in the Brazilian state of Amapá, where their ancestral lands and resources remain under constant threat.

This notion of "empty land" was key to the development of capitalist relations in Brazil as it facilitated the transition from the extraction of natural resources to the establishment of plantation economies reliant on coerced labor. With the depletion of brazilwood and the need to create a sustainable colonial economy, the Portuguese began to establish sugar plantations, initially relying on Indigenous labor to clear land and work the fields. The transition from "empty land" to a labor-intensive agricultural economy marked the beginning of the capitalist structure in Brazil. The sugar plantations, driven by the demand for European exports, would become the focal point of Brazil's colonial economy.

As Eric Hobsbawm (1962) points out, the expansion of colonial capitalism in the Americas was characterized by the commodification of land, labor, and resources. This capitalist transformation was underpinned by the systematic dispossession of Indigenous peoples and the forced labor of both Indigenous groups and African slaves. The use of Indigenous labor on sugar plantations was a crucial step in the transition from simple colonial exploitation to the establishment of a more permanent capitalist system. This process involved not only the extraction of surplus value from Indigenous bodies but also the reorganization of

social relations on the land, fundamentally transforming Brazilian society (de Carvalho et al., 2021; Hemming, 1978). Thus, the displacement of Indigenous peoples, coupled with their coerced labor in the emerging sugar economy, was not an isolated event, but rather a critical moment in the evolution of colonial capitalism in Brazil. These initial practices of exploitation would lay the groundwork for the racialized capitalist structure that continues to shape Brazil's social and economic inequalities. This historical foundation is critically relevant to the current study, which examines how these deep-seated patterns of racialized capitalist exploitation continue to manifest in the contemporary experiences of Black and Indigenous communities in the north of Brazil, particularly regarding land rights and exploitation.

As demand for labor increased, the Portuguese expanded their use of Indigenous slavery, despite nominal opposition from the Catholic Church. The *bandeirantes*, groups of Portuguese settlers and mercenaries, played a crucial role in this process. Throughout the 17th century, these armed expeditions raided Indigenous villages in search of captives, devastating native populations and further entrenching European control (Monteiro & Woodard, 2018; Schwartz, 2004).

One of the most catastrophic consequences of European colonization was the introduction of foreign diseases to which Indigenous peoples had no immunity. Smallpox, measles, and influenza spread rapidly through Indigenous communities, often killing 90% of the population within a century of first contact (Crosby, 2003). These epidemics weakened Indigenous resistance and facilitated European territorial expansion. Survivors often found themselves forcibly relocated to colonial settlements, where they faced cultural assimilation and harsh labor conditions. The Portuguese capitalized on this demographic collapse by further advancing the narrative that the land was unoccupied and underutilized (Schwarcz & Starling, 2015).

As Indigenous populations declined due to disease, warfare, and forced labor, Portuguese colonizers increasingly turned to the transatlantic slave trade to meet the demands of Brazil's growing plantation economy. By the mid-16th century, enslaved Africans were being brought to Brazil in large numbers, a system that would intensify over the next three centuries. This transition did more than reshape the labor force; it laid the groundwork for a racialized structure of power and knowledge that would become foundational to Brazilian society (Eltis, 2000). This shift can be understood through the framework of coloniality, as defined by Aníbal Quijano (1969, 2000, 2007), which refers to the persistent patterns of domination that outlived colonial rule, particularly the interlinking of race, labor, and epistemology. The emerging colonial system did not only exploit bodies, but it also produced categories of being. Africans were increasingly cast as naturally suited for enslavement and reduced to chattel – a legal and social designation that stripped them of personhood and rendered them as movable property within the colonial economy (Maldonado-Torres, 2007). This legal codification of human beings as objects was central to the development of a colonial capitalist order, where ownership extended to people, not just land or goods.

Nelson Maldonado-Torres (2004; 2007, 2016) elaborates on this process as part of the *coloniality of being*, a structure in which certain populations (especially Black and Indigenous peoples) were systematically excluded from the status of fully human. Under this logic, the enslaved African was not merely a laborer but an entity outside the moral and legal boundaries of European conceptions of humanity. The denial of their subjectivity created the ideological conditions for anti-Blackness to become systemically inscribed into law, religion, and education.

Maldonado-Torres (2007) draws on Frantz Fanon (1986) discussion of colonization beyond exploitation to exploring systems of dehumanization, establishing a world divided between the human and the non-human, the colonizer and the colonized. In Brazil, this was

evident in how the law conflated racial identity with enslavement – so much so that “Black” and “slave” became interchangeable terms in everyday language and legal discourse (Schwarcz & Starling, 2015). This epistemic violence served to naturalize exploitation, while consolidating whiteness as both a racial identity and an institutionalized structure of power.

This practice would persist until the abolition of slavery in 1888. The transition to African slavery was accompanied by a shift in racial ideology, wherein Africans were portrayed as inherently suited for labor, while Indigenous peoples were increasingly depicted as either noble savages or obstacles to progress (Monteiro & Woodard, 2018; Schwartz, 2004). This evolving racial discourse justified the continued exploitation of enslaved labor while shaping the racial hierarchical structure of Brazilian society with white bodies at the top.

The myth of an empty land did not disappear with the end of colonization. Instead, it continued to shape Brazilian policies toward land distribution, Indigenous rights, and urbanization well into the 20th and 21st centuries (Monteiro & Woodard, 2018). The expansion of agribusiness, deforestation in the Amazon, and the marginalization of Indigenous and Afro-Brazilian communities are all rooted in this colonial ideology (H. L. R. Santos, 2023). Modern-day conflicts over Indigenous land rights – such as the protracted resistance of the *Guarani-Kaiowá* people in the southwestern state of Mato Grosso do Sul against illegal land seizures – highlight the ongoing impact of this myth. These seizures often involve large-scale agricultural interests (like soy and sugarcane monocultures) and cattle ranchers aggressively encroaching upon ancestral territories, frequently with the backing of private militias and, at times, state forces (Ionova, 2022; Mondardo, 2022).

Similarly, the humanitarian crisis in the vast Yanomami Indigenous Territory, spanning parts of Amazonas and Roraima states, starkly illustrates the persistent colonial disregard for Indigenous sovereignty. This crisis is primarily driven by the massive invasion of illegal gold miners (*garimpeiros*), who bring with them widespread violence, sexual abuse, mercury

poisoning of rivers and food sources, and the proliferation of diseases like malaria and malnutrition, leading to a shocking surge in preventable deaths (Al Jazeera, 2023; Gonzaga, 2023; Watts & Bedinelli, 2023). Despite severe threats, the Yanomami, led by organizations like the Hutukara Yanomami Association, have consistently resisted through direct expulsions of miners, international advocacy, and urgent calls for government intervention, asserting their right to a territory free from predatory extraction (Survival International, 2020). The displacement of poor and Afro-Brazilian communities in urban centers likewise mirrors the historical processes that began with the forced removal of Indigenous peoples from their ancestral lands (Miki, 2021; Poets, 2021; H. L. R. Santos, 2023).

2.3.6. The construction of Blackness and the transatlantic slave trade (16th –18th Century)

As discussed, the economic foundations of colonial Brazil were deeply intertwined with the exploitation of African enslaved labor. From the early 16th century to the late 18th century, the Portuguese Crown established an economic model that relied heavily on plantation agriculture, particularly sugarcane, as well as mining and urban labor (Schwartz, 2004).

At the outset of colonization, the Portuguese sought to extract wealth from Brazil primarily through the exploitation of its natural resources. Initially, brazilwood (pau-brasil) was the primary commodity sought by the Portuguese due to its value as a red dye in European markets (Schwarcz & Starling, 2015). However, the Crown soon realized the potential of sugarcane cultivation, which required a large and controllable labor force. To establish control over vast tracts of land, the Portuguese Crown implemented the *Capitanias Hereditárias* (hereditary captaincies) system in 1534, granting large landholdings to Portuguese nobles (Schwartz, 2004)⁵. However, these land grants were largely ineffective due to lack of

⁵ The *Capitanias Hereditárias* system was Brazil's first major administrative structure during colonization. Modeled after similar systems used in Madeira and other Atlantic colonies, it divided the Brazilian coast into 15

investment and difficulty in defending settlements from Indigenous resistance and European rivals. Consequently, in 1549, the Crown centralized governance with the establishment of the *Governo-Geral* in Salvador, laying the groundwork for a more structured economic model (Boxer, 1962; Schwarcz & Starling, 2015). It is important to notice that at this stage, the *capitanias hereditárias* were implemented throughout Brazil's territory, however, the most hard-to-reach parts were kept under this system longer than others due to lack of communication and difficulties of the crown to police whether the *donatários* were still in power. Despite its failures, the system set a precedent for the concentration of landownership and elite power that would persist throughout Brazil's colonial and post-colonial history.

The decision to cultivate sugarcane in Brazil was influenced by Portugal's prior success with sugar production in Madeira and the Azores. By the mid-16th century, sugar production became the dominant economic activity in Brazil, particularly in the northeastern regions of Pernambuco and Bahia (Boxer, 1962). The *engenhos* (sugar mills) required intensive labor, leading to the forced enslavement of both Indigenous peoples and Africans. Brazil's geographic proximity to the West African coast made it an especially accessible and profitable destination for the transatlantic slave trade, facilitating the mass importation of enslaved Africans. The efficiency and profitability of Brazil's sugar economy, powered by slave labor, later served as a model that influenced other Atlantic slave systems, including those in the Caribbean and North America (Eltis, 2000; Klein & Luna, 2010).

As discussed earlier, the Portuguese attempted to initially enslave Indigenous peoples, exploiting their familiarity with the land and existing agricultural knowledge (Fausto, 1998; Schwarcz & Starling, 2015; Schwartz, 2004). However, Indigenous resistance, high mortality

strips of land, which were granted to private individuals known as *donatários* (données). These hereditary landowners were responsible for financing colonization, defending the territory, and promoting agriculture and settlement. In exchange, they were granted extensive powers over their lands, including judicial and administrative authority (Boxer, 1962; Fausto, 1998).

rates due to European diseases, and opposition from the Catholic Church led to an increased reliance on enslaved Africans (Klein & Luna, 2010). Enslaved Africans were deployed across sugar plantations in the Northeast, gold and diamond mines in the interior (notably in Minas Gerais), and in urban settings where they worked as artisans, porters, and domestic laborers (Klein & Luna, 2010). This profound historical reliance on enslaved labor for mineral extraction established a violent and exploitative precedent that resonates deeply in present-day Brazil, especially in the Amazon region. Here, the ongoing exploitation of Black and Indigenous communities in extractive industries directly mirrors the colonial-era logic of valuing mineral wealth and raw resource acquisition over human life and traditional land rights. Thus, cycles of dispossession and precarious labor that often extend to contemporary forms of forced or coercive work were perpetuated. (Angelo, 2021; Boris, 2016; Veiga et al., 2002). The institution of slavery in colonial Brazil did not establish a codified legal system akin to the *Code Noir* observed in French colonies. Instead, slavery in Brazil was governed by a diffuse set of laws, royal decrees, and customs that evolved over the centuries (Klein & Luna, 2010).

Broadly speaking, royal legislation, frequently shaped by economic imperatives, regulated the transatlantic slave trade, imposing taxes on the entry of enslaved individuals and, at times, attempting to curb illegal trafficking, albeit with limited efficacy for a considerable period (Schwarcz & Starling, 2015). Furthermore, Portuguese law considered the enslaved person as chattel, a form of movable property belonging to the slaveholder. Consequently, enslaved individuals could be bought, sold, rented, bequeathed, and inherited – making chattel become a synonymous of Black bodies. This status as a mere "thing" formed the foundational basis for the exploitation and violence inherent within the slave system. This implies that the violence experienced by enslaved people was largely predicated on customs and the discretion of the slaveholder. The Portuguese Crown demonstrated a significantly greater concern for the collection of duties and taxes than for overseeing the treatment of enslaved individuals

(Conrad, 1983). The Penal Code of 1890 (article 399), although not exclusively targeting enslaved people, laid the groundwork for racialized policing and surveillance by criminalizing vagrancy and disobedience – charges disproportionately applied to Black and enslaved individuals (Vellozo & Almeida, 2019). Such policies were designed to recapture free Black bodies back into bondage after abolition in 1888.

These frameworks/policies did more than enable slavery – they codified Blackness as criminality and established enduring narratives of racial inferiority. As Frantz Fanon (1986) and Nelson Maldonado-Torres (2007) argue, colonial systems of power function not only through economic domination but also through epistemic and juridical violence that redefined what it meant to be human. In this sense, anti-Blackness became a structuring logic of Brazilian colonial modernity, in which Black bodies were rendered disposable, punishable, and permanently suspect. The legacy of this legal architecture persists in Brazil's modern racial order, seen in the hyper-policing of Afro-Brazilians, overrepresentation in prisons, and routine state violence in favelas (Campos et al., 2022; Håndlykken-Luz, 2020; M. B. Nascimento, 2023; Valladares & Anderson, 2019).

With the sugarcane economy entirely dependent on enslaved labor, the seasoning and brutal disciplining of African captives became a systematic process aimed at breaking bodies and wills to produce a compliant workforce. Upon disembarkation, newly arrived Africans were inspected by potential buyers, often in public. Families and communities were separated during this stage, affecting their support networks. They were quarantined in basic facilities to prevent the spread of diseases brought during the voyage. These conditions often led to further illnesses and deaths (Klein & Luna, 2010).

After being taken to the plantations, the seasoning period typically lasted from a few weeks to several months, depending on the individual's perceived resilience and the demands of the plantation or owner. It involved a systematic assault on their being. Beatings and

whippings were routine forms of punishment for any perceived disobedience, slowness, or even a lack of understanding of the new language and demands. The enslaved Africans were immediately forced into hard labor, often in unfamiliar and harsh conditions. This rapid transition from the confinement of the ship to grueling physical work, while malnourished and weakened, led to immense suffering, injury, and death. They were also deprived of food, water and shelter – a tactic to try and make them more docile.

The violence extended beyond physical beatings to systematic forms of control over enslaved bodies and reproduction. Enslaved men were not exempt from sexual violence, which served as a brutal tool of dehumanization and the assertion of absolute power by enslavers, aiming to shatter their spirit and masculinity (Karasch, 2019; Reis, 1995). Castration, though less common than whipping, was also inflicted as a severe form of punishment or mutilation, particularly for acts of defiance or attempted escape (Karasch, 2019). Women were subjected to sexual violence as a tool of domination and forced “breeding” to replenish the labor force. This "breeding" was a calculated economic strategy, aimed at increasing the enslaved population through forced reproduction to reduce reliance on the costly transatlantic slave trade (Conrad, 1983). It involved coerced sexual relations, often with specific enslaved men chosen by enslavers, and the systematic control over enslaved women's bodies and reproductive capacities, denying them autonomy over their families and personal lives. Children born from these forced unions were automatically considered property, perpetuating the cycle of bondage (Chalhoub, 2011; Fausto, 1998; A. do Nascimento, 1978; M. S. Santos, 2018).

Beyond physical violence, psychological violence was also a tool utilized to “break” enslaved Africans. Name changing, language suppression, cultural erasure and the constant threat of violence were the most common. The creation of hierarchies based on skin color within the slaves was also employed, giving more power to the ones with lighter skin or perceived docility so they could better divide and control them (Schwarcz & Starling, 2015).

This regimen of torture, deprivation, and dehumanization “seasoned” captives – physically acclimating them to the grueling rhythms of plantation work while instilling terror through public punishments such as stocks, iron collars, and executions (Eltis, 2000; Schwarcz & Starling, 2015; Schwartz, 2004). Enslaved people who resisted could be sold “downriver” to harsher plantations, a threat that enforced compliance across generations. Yet, these brutal conditions also gave rise to frequent acts of defiance: small-scale work slowdowns, the destruction of cane fields, escape into quilombos, and large-scale revolts such as the Malê revolt (1835) in Bahia⁶ (Klein & Luna, 2010; Schwarcz & Starling, 2015). Through these practices, enslaved Africans were legally and socially transformed into chattel, human beings stripped of personhood and reduced to property under colonial law. With the sugarcane economy entirely dependent on enslaved labor, enslaved Africans became the dominant workforce planting, harvesting, and processing sugarcane. The *senhores de engenho* (mill lords) wielded significant economic and political power, reinforcing a rigid social hierarchy that placed enslaved Africans at the bottom of the emerging social hierarchy (Schwartz, 2004).

Enslaved Africans also played a crucial role in the development of Brazilian cities. In urban centers such as Salvador and Rio de Janeiro, Afro-Brazilians often made up a large portion and recruited for domestic work: artisans, domestic servants, porters, and street vendors. Some were able to earn wages through skilled labor, occasionally purchasing their freedom through *alforria* (manumission) (Eisenberg, 1973).

⁶ Also known as Muslim Uprising, the Malê revolt was primarily led by enslaved and freed African Muslims in Salvador, Bahia. They were known as “Malê,” a term derived from the Yoruba word “imale,” which designated a Yoruba Muslim. Many of the participants were of Nagô (Yoruba) origin, and a significant number were literate in Arabic. The Muslim Africans sought to practice their religion freely, which was suppressed by the dominant Catholic culture, they also aimed to overthrow the brutal system of slavery and preserve their African identities and Islamic traditions in the face of forced assimilation. Their literacy in Arabic and Islamic scholarship fostered a sense of community and shared purpose. The revolt took place on a Sunday during Ramadan. The rebels, numbering around 600, armed themselves and took to the streets of Salvador. They attacked police barracks and attempted to free a jailed Muslim leader (Schwarcz & Starling, 2015).

2.3.7. Black Bodies in the Gold Economy: Mining, Violence, and the Expansion of Colonial Exploitation

The discovery of gold in Minas Gerais in the late 17th century (specifically around the 1690s) indeed marked a major economic shift in colonial Brazil, redirecting the Portuguese Crown's attention and resources from the established coastal sugarcane plantations to the mineral-rich interior. This transition did not disrupt but rather intensified the commodification of Black life, as enslaved Africans were forcibly relocated *en masse* to fuel the burgeoning gold economy. Between the 1690s and the late 18th century, it is estimated that hundreds of thousands of Africans were forcibly brought to work in the gold mines under exceptionally brutal and exploitative conditions. Some estimates suggest that during the peak of the gold rush in the first half of the 18th century, Minas Gerais received the largest number of enslaved Africans in Brazil (Boxer, 1962; Klein & Luna, 2010).

The recruitment and transport of enslaved Africans to the interior was inherently violent. Many endured long and arduous forced marches, often lasting weeks or even months, from coastal ports like Rio de Janeiro and Salvador to the inland mining zones. These journeys were characterized by shackling, inadequate food and water, disease, and high mortality rates. Upon arrival, they were subjected to grueling and dangerous labor in riverbeds (for alluvial gold), muddy open-pit mines, and claustrophobic underground shafts, where the risks of cave-ins, waterborne diseases (such as dysentery and malaria), and sheer exhaustion claimed countless lives (Conrad, 1983). In some mining areas, enslaved workers were chained together, even during work, to prevent escape, and their movements and productivity were constantly surveilled and strictly monitored by overseers (Alencastro, 2000).

To enforce this oppressive system, the colonial state developed proto-policing structures, notably the *capitães do mato* (bush captains), who were essentially slave catchers tasked with tracking, capturing, and returning fugitives, as well as suppressing potential revolts.

These figures often employed extreme violence, including torture and summary executions, and functioned similarly to the slave patrols of North America in their role of maintaining racial order and solidifying the role of state-sanctioned violence in controlling Black life (Klein & Luna, 2010; Marques, 2016). Indeed, despite not being widely linked, there are scholars who argue that the *capitães do mato* laid the foundational institutional and ideological groundwork for Brazil's modern policing apparatus, particularly in its enduring function of social control and repression explicitly targeting Black communities, a continuity widely recognized in the historiography of Brazilian policing (Amorim et al., 2025; Bretas & Rosemberg, 2013). Public punishments, such as lynchings (though perhaps not as systematic as in post-Civil War U.S. South), mutilations, and floggings, were common occurrences intended to terrorize both enslaved and free Black communities into submission and to serve as a brutal spectacle of colonial power (Conrad, 1983). While precise quantitative figures for these acts are difficult to ascertain due to fragmented historical records, scholarship consistently details these public atrocities as central to maintaining the slave system through terror (Karasch, 2019; Reis, 1995; Schwarcz & Starling, 2015).

The gold rush significantly intensified the racialized logic of colonial capitalism, deeply embedding anti-Blackness into legal frameworks (such as the vagrancy law and regulations regarding property) and the spatial organization of the colony (with mining areas becoming zones of intense exploitation and control) – legacies that persist in Brazil's socio-political fabric (Alencastro, 2000; Vellozo & Almeida, 2019). Today, many of the former gold mining regions – particularly in Minas Gerais – continue to grapple with the long-term consequences of environmental degradation caused by mining practices, significant economic inequality, and the disproportionate policing and criminalization of Afro-Brazilian populations. The historical exploitation of Black bodies to extract mineral wealth established a precedent for the racialized exploitation of labor and land that remains visible in the region's contemporary *garimpos* (often

illegal and environmentally damaging mines) and in the stark overrepresentation of Black men in Brazil's prison system (Vellozo & Almeida, 2019). As of 2023, over 68% of Brazil's prison population was Black or mixed-race (pardo), highlighting the enduring impact of historical racial inequalities within the criminal justice system (Fórum Brasileiro de Segurança Pública (FBSP), 2024).

Despite the brutal and dehumanizing realities of slavery, enslaved Africans in Brazil actively resisted their oppression through both overt and subtle means. Revolts, such as the significant Malê Revolt in Bahia in 1835, escapes, acts of sabotage against mining operations and tools, and the persistent preservation of African cultural traditions functioned not only as crucial survival strategies but also as powerful acts of political and spiritual resistance (Klein & Luna, 2010). One of the most striking manifestations of this resistance was the formation of *quilombos*, autonomous communities founded by individuals who had escaped slavery. The most famous among these, *Quilombo dos Palmares*, located in the present-day state of Alagoas, endured for nearly a century (roughly from the early 17th century to its final destruction in 1694) and at its height housed an estimated 20,000 to 30,000 people (Arruti, 2008; Conniff, 1999). Palmares was far more than a mere refuge; it developed into an alternative Black political and social order that directly challenged the colonial economy and power structure. Its complex social organization included forms of governance, agriculture, and defense (Schwarcz & Starling, 2015).

Life within *quilombos* reflected a deep cultural continuity with diverse African practices, particularly from Central and West Africa, including Angola and Congo, as well as Yoruba traditions (Chalhoub, 2011). In Palmares, for instance, leadership structures, particularly the figure of King Zumbi, echoed African models of kingship and governance, while religious practices involved a syncretism blending Kongo and Yoruba cosmologies with resistance to forced Christianization (Schwarcz & Starling, 2015). In some cases, traditional

African deities (*orixás*) were strategically merged or syncretized with Catholic saints in hidden forms of worship, clandestinely preserving African spiritual beliefs and ultimately laying the foundations for vibrant Afro-Brazilian religions like Candomblé and Umbanda, which endure and are significant cultural forces in Brazil to this day (Matory, 2005).

These autonomous communities, however, were constantly under severe threat from the Portuguese and later Dutch colonial authorities, who viewed *quilombos* as existential dangers to the slave-based plantation and mining economy and regularly dispatched heavily armed expeditions, local militias, and the feared *capitães do mato* to locate and violently destroy them (Schwarcz & Starling, 2015). The colonial state explicitly sanctioned extreme violence against runaway slaves as a means of control, including public executions, often involving gruesome dismemberment and beheadings, which were deliberately staged as terrifying spectacles intended to deter rebellion among the enslaved population. Enslaved people were routinely subjected to brutal whippings, intentionally starved, and faced the constant threat of sexual violence, and maiming – a systemic brutality designed not only to maximize the extraction of forced labor but also to crush the human spirit and deeply institutionalize anti-Blackness as a fundamental mechanism of state control (Conrad, 1983; Fausto, 1998; F. Fernandes, 1969; Vellozo & Almeida, 2019).

The colonial economy of Brazil was fundamentally shaped by the exploitation of enslaved Africans, whose labor fueled sugarcane plantations, mining enterprises, and urban industries. Forced migration of millions of Africans not only contributed to Brazil's economic development but also left a lasting impact on its cultural and social fabric. While enslaved Africans endured different kinds of violence, their resilience and resistance played a crucial role in shaping Brazilian identity. The legacies of colonial economic structures and racial hierarchies persist to this day, underscoring the importance of understanding this history in contemporary discussions of inequality and social justice in Brazil.

2.4. Quilombos

In Brazil, the violence against Indigenous populations and African slaves was not only a result of direct physical harm but also of systematic dispossession and exploitation that reshaped their communities and lands. From the 16th century, with the arrival of the Portuguese, Indigenous peoples were subjected to violent displacement through the expansion of colonial settlements, the forced labor systems, and the establishment of plantations. By the late 17th century and early 18th century, as Brazil's sugar industry expanded, Indigenous populations were increasingly pushed off their ancestral lands to make way for large-scale agricultural production, which catered to the sugar trade. The Indigenous peoples were either enslaved or pushed into the interior, where many faced further violence at the hands of settlers or succumbed to diseases introduced by Europeans (Schwarcz & Starling, 2015).

The enslavement of Africans, which began in the early 1500s, further exacerbated this process. Over the next three centuries, Brazil would become the largest importer of enslaved Africans in the Americas, with nearly 5 million brought through its ports by 1850. In direct response to this unrelenting violence and systemic oppression, both Indigenous populations and enslaved Africans actively developed multifaceted defense mechanisms. For Black people, a significant form of resistance emerged in the establishment of *quilombos* – autonomous communities founded by escaped slaves seeking refuge in remote and inaccessible areas, beyond the immediate reach of colonizers and Portuguese landowners (Conniff, 1999). These communities were not merely places of refuge; they represented active resistance, a means for Black people to preserve their freedom, cultural heritage, and autonomy within a violently colonized territory. Strategically situated in distant and challenging terrains, most quilombos offered a degree of natural protection from Portuguese colonial forces (Arruti, 2008).

2.4.1. Cultural Resilience and Identity Formation in Quilombos

African cultural traditions profoundly shaped the daily life and social fabric of quilombos. Religious practices, drawing from ancestor veneration and the worship of *orixás* rooted in *Yoruba* and *Bantu* cosmologies, were adapted and transformed into Afro-Brazilian religions such as Candomblé and Umbanda (Matory, 2005). These spiritual systems provided not only metaphysical resilience but also a vital sense of continuity with their ancestral past and a strong sense of belonging. Music, in forms such as drumming, call-and-response chants, and dances like the batuque and precursors of capoeira, played an essential role in cultural expression, resistance, and fostering unity and solidarity within quilombos, offering a powerful counterpoint to the alienation imposed by colonial violence (Andrews, 2004; Matory, 2005). Culinary traditions, evident in dishes like *acarajé* (black-eyed pea fritters), *feijoada*, and *vatapá*, blended African culinary heritage with local ingredients, reflecting the syncretic nature of quilombo culture (Schwarcz & Starling, 2015).

2.4.2. Quilombos as Decolonial Spaces: Challenging Coloniality of Power and Necropolitics

From a decolonial perspective, the quilombo emerged as a response to what Frantz Fanon's (1968) called the *zone of non-being*, a space where Black individuals are denied their full humanity and subjectivity. Black bodies are often seen as objects, defined by the gaze, violence, and stereotypes of the white colonizer, rather than as autonomous beings with their own thoughts, feelings, and histories. For Fanon, the act of escaping slavery and resisting colonial violence within these spaces represented a fundamental reclaiming of humanity, directly challenging the dehumanizing conditions imposed by colonial structures (Fanon, 1986). This resonates with Aníbal Quijano's (2000) concept of the *coloniality of power*, which underscores the enduring nature of colonial domination beyond formal political independence. The quilombos, as tangible sites of resistance, offer a powerful illustration of how African and

Indigenous peoples sought to dismantle the coloniality of power by asserting their agency and forging alternative socio-political systems in direct defiance of the colonial project (Marques, 2022).

Moreover, these communities served as both physical and symbolic rejections of the colonial racial hierarchies that systematically positioned Africans and Indigenous peoples as inherently inferior. The very existence of quilombos, often located in remote and strategically challenging areas, posed a direct threat to the colonial order that sought to control and exploit Black and Indigenous bodies. As Quijano (2000, 2007) argues, the construction of racial identities was a foundational mechanism of colonial domination, where whiteness was established as a privileged category, while Blackness was denigrated and Othered (Fanon, 1968). By rejecting these imposed hierarchies and creating new, autonomous spaces, quilombos embodied a powerful resistance to the colonial matrix of power and the deeply ingrained racialized logics that underpinned it.

Furthermore, from the lens of Necropolitics (Mbembe, 2019), quilombos can be understood as a direct and powerful contestation of colonial regimes of death, which sought to suppress and subjugate African bodies and extinguish their resistance. In the context of Brazil, the brutal forced migration of African peoples through the transatlantic slave trade was a literal and symbolic imposition of death, with enslaved Africans routinely subjected to extreme violence, profound suffering, and premature death under the inhumane system of slavery (Ajari, 2022). By forming quilombos, enslaved people symbolically and physically rejected the politics of death that coloniality imposed upon them, actively creating spaces where life, identity, and autonomy could be reimagined and fiercely defended (Tourinho & Sotero, 2023).

2.4.3. Quilombo dos Palmares: A Symbol of Enduring Resistance

The most celebrated of these autonomous communities was Quilombo dos Palmares, which evolved into a powerful symbol of Black resistance and self-determination, flourishing for several decades during the 17th century. Quilombos, particularly larger and more established ones like Palmares, also developed sophisticated defensive strategies to ensure their survival. Archaeological and historical evidence confirms the presence of fortified settlements, strategically placed lookouts, and organized military training (Arruti, 2008; Conniff, 1999; Maria da Silva & Souza, 2022). Palmares, the most extensive and enduring quilombo, comprised multiple settlements (*mocambos*) and reportedly reached a population exceeding 20,000 people at its zenith (Maria da Silva & Souza, 2022). It skillfully maintained diplomatic and military alliances with neighboring groups and successfully repelled numerous Portuguese and Dutch expeditions for nearly a century. The community's remarkable resilience and sophisticated governance structure led colonial chroniclers to describe it with a mixture of awe and fear as a “Black Republic,” with iconic leaders such as Ganga Zumba and Zumbi dos Palmares becoming enduring symbols of African resistance and sovereignty in the Americas (Schwarcz & Starling, 2015).

2.4.4. Quilombola Communities in Contemporary Brazil

The legacy of quilombos extends far beyond mere escape from oppression; it is a legacy of creating viable, alternative societies deeply rooted in African cultural knowledge, principles of political self-determination, and unwavering resistance to coloniality. Their profound contributions continue to resonate in contemporary Brazil, particularly in the ongoing struggles of quilombola communities for the recognition of their ancestral land rights, the preservation of their unique cultural heritage, and protection from persistent state and corporate violence (Arruti, 2008; Da Costa Ramalho, 2024). In 1988, Brazil's new constitution acknowledged the rights of quilombo descendants to their ancestral lands, and a formal land titling process was

introduced. However, the struggle for legal recognition and access to resources continues, as quilombola communities still face discrimination, land invasions, and socio-economic marginalization (Jorge, 2024).

It is important to note that Brazil was the last country in the Western world to formally abolish this brutal institution relatively late in 1888 with the signing of the *Lei Áurea* (Golden Law) on May 13th. The movement advocating for abolition gained momentum in the early 19th century with influential figures like *José Bonifácio Andrada e Silva* advocating for a gradual process of emancipation (Eisenberg, 1973). A significant precursor was the formal end of the transatlantic slave trade, enacted through the *Eusébio de Queirós* Law in 1850, which signaled a shift in the economic viability of the institution and reflected growing British diplomatic and economic influence (Schwarcz & Starling, 2015).

The abolitionist movement itself experienced a surge in the 1880s, fueled by the dedicated efforts of both elite and grassroots activists. Organizations such as the Brazilian Society Against Slavery, led by prominent figures like *Joaquim Nabuco* and *José do Patrocínio*, played crucial roles in raising public awareness and mobilizing support for the cause (Chalhoub, 2011). Intellectuals, artists, and journalists utilized their platforms to advocate for abolition, while women-led groups, such as the Ave Libertas Society, independently worked to secure freedom for enslaved individuals, highlighting the diverse actors involved in this pivotal movement (Scott et al., 1988). These multifaceted campaigns not only educated the public but also established crucial support networks for those who managed to escape slavery, thereby undermining the social and economic foundations of the institution (Eisenberg, 1973; Schwarcz & Starling, 2015).

The active resistance of enslaved individuals was a pivotal factor in accelerating the eventual abolition of slavery in Brazil. Beyond the establishment of quilombos as enduring symbols of liberation and cultural preservation, enslaved people sought freedom through

escape and actively participated in military conflicts, such as the Paraguayan War (1864–1870). Their participation in this war heightened public awareness of their inherent humanity and their capacity to fight for the nation, challenging prevailing racist ideologies (Eisenberg, 1973; Schwarcz & Starling, 2015). As mass escapes to quilombos became more frequent and as the military increasingly refused to participate in the recapture of fugitives in the late 1880s, the control exerted by slaveholders over enslaved people significantly weakened, ultimately contributing to the formal abolition of slavery in 1888 (Da Costa Ramalho, 2024). The legacy of quilombos, therefore, is inextricably linked to the broader struggle for Black freedom in Brazil, and quilombola communities continue to fight for their rights today, facing ongoing threats from economic and political forces seeking to exploit their lands and erase their history (Arruti, 2008). This underscores the central role of quilombos, both historically and in the present, in the pursuit of racial justice and Black autonomy in Brazil.

Economic and social transformations also contributed to the shifting landscape. The declining profitability of slavery in certain sectors, the gradual rise of wage labor, and increasing urbanization diminished the institution's overall appeal to some segments of the elite (although not all). Planters in regions like São Paulo began to transition towards employing European immigrant labor, viewing it as a more sustainable and modern alternative to enslaved labor, but also motivated by the perception of the need to white-wash the population (de Holanda, 2012; Graham & Buarque de Holanda, 1973). It is important to note that while the abolition of slavery in the United States in 1865 did exert some moral and political pressure on Brazil, the economic interests tied to slavery in Brazil were deeply entrenched.

Throughout the latter half of the 19th century, a series of key legislative milestones incrementally paved the way for full abolition. The *Rio Branco Law* of 1871, also known as the "Law of the Free Womb," declared that children born to enslaved mothers would be free, although it included provisions for their continued labor under their mothers' owners for a

significant period. The Sexagenarian Law of 1885 followed, granting freedom to enslaved individuals over the age of 60; however, its impact was limited due to the harsh living conditions under slavery that drastically reduced life expectancy. These gradual reforms reflected the cautious approach of Brazil's political elite, who were wary of the potential for abrupt economic and social upheaval, and also shows the resistance to granting humanity and freedom to Black people (Eisenberg, 1973; Schwarcz & Starling, 2015).

Despite the formal abolition of slavery in 1888, the transition to genuine freedom for formerly enslaved individuals was severely undermined by systemic violence and ongoing exploitation. Freed people were left without access to land, essential resources, or meaningful economic opportunities. Without property or adequate support, many were coerced into exploitative labor systems such as sharecropping, which often mirrored the oppressive conditions of slavery (Scott et al., 1988). These individuals were frequently subjected to unfair contracts that kept them in perpetual debt to former slave owners, effectively ensuring their continued labor on plantations or in other forms of agricultural work (Schwarcz & Starling, 2015). This created a system of economic dependency and exploitation, trapping African-descended and Indigenous populations in cycles of precarious labor under oppressive conditions.

Racially, the deep chasm between the colonizers and the formerly enslaved became starkly evident in the post-abolition period. While white elites consolidated their economic and political power, Black, mixed-race, and Indigenous populations were systematically ostracized, denied equitable access to quality education, healthcare, and stable employment opportunities. Consequently, these groups were disproportionately targeted by punitive labor practices, including the exploitative use of prison labor, which often replicated the brutal conditions of plantation work (Vellozo & Almeida, 2019). The post-abolition era also witnessed the consolidation of a police force that became a central institution for controlling and surveilling

Black and Indigenous populations, with racial profiling and violent encounters becoming tragically commonplace (de Carvalho et al., 2021).

Drawing on Frantz Fanon's (1986) observation, the colonial world is characterized by a violent bifurcation, rigidly separating those deemed worthy of the privileges of citizenship from those subjected to exclusion and brutality. In Brazil, this division manifested in the violent policing of Black bodies, as state power sought to regulate and constrain newfound freedom through criminalization and the enforcement of exploitative labor. The criminalization of Black and Indigenous people, coupled with the deliberate absence of meaningful economic opportunities, resulted in the entrenchment of deep-seated social inequalities, perpetuating the colonial structures of power and racial hierarchy that had been established and maintained under slavery (Darke & Khan, 2021).

The path to higher education for Black Brazilians has been fraught with barriers, deeply rooted in systemic racism and pervasive social exclusion. While formal, national laws in Brazil did not explicitly prohibit Black people from attending schools or universities after abolition, the enduring legacy of slavery and deeply ingrained racial prejudice effectively denied most Black Brazilians access to quality education for much of the nation's history (F. Fernandes, 1969; Scott et al., 1988). The lack of resources, insufficient political will, and pervasive societal discrimination meant that the Brazilian education system remained largely inaccessible to poor and marginalized populations, disproportionately impacting Black communities (Gomes et al., 2024).

One of the earliest documented instances of a Black individual accessing higher education in Brazil was *Luiz Gama*, a formerly enslaved person who rose to become a prominent abolitionist, lawyer, and intellectual. Gama's enrolment in the Law School of São Paulo (*Faculdade de Direito do Largo de São Francisco*) in the 1850s was a remarkable achievement and a significant moment for Black intellectual presence in Brazilian society

(Gomes et al., 2024). However, Gama's access was an exception rather than the rule. Throughout the 19th and much of the 20th centuries, Black Brazilians faced immense obstacles in accessing higher education due to entrenched racial discrimination, persistent economic hardships, and systemic exclusion from formal educational opportunities. Even in urban centers like Rio de Janeiro and São Paulo, Black children were often excluded from schools due to overt racial prejudice and the concentration of Black communities in impoverished neighborhoods with limited access to quality schooling (Telles, 2014b).

It wasn't until the late 20th and early 21st centuries that more substantive changes began to occur. The activism of the Black Movement and Afro-Brazilian intellectuals played a crucial role in advocating for greater inclusion and challenging historical disparities in education. A significant turning point came with the implementation of affirmative action policies in the early 2000s. Notably, the University of Brasília pioneered the adoption of racial quotas in 2004, reserving a specific percentage of university admissions for Afro-Brazilian and Indigenous students (Munanga, 2010). These policies represented a crucial step towards addressing the historical disadvantages faced by marginalized groups and promoting greater equity within Brazil's educational institutions (Paixão & Carvano, 2007).

Currently, just like in any capitalist society, the educational system, moral framework, and religious ideologies are deeply influenced by colonial-white-supremacist legacies (Mignolo, 2007). These structures, rooted in colonialism, have been adapted to fit a capitalist model, yet continue to replicate the social hierarchies established during the colonial era. Although there are discussions about how capitalist theory claims to transcend racial divisions, scholars such as Go (2021) and Sales Jr. (1978) argue that capitalism is a tool to maintain the racial exploitation system, preserving the same social structures as those of the colonial period. Frantz Fanon argues that this system of inherited colonial ideology fosters a culture of

submission among Indigenous and *Quilombolas* populations, which is reenforced by the colonized intellectual.

The colonized intellectual has invested his aggression in his barely veiled wish to be assimilated to the colonizer's world. He has placed his aggression at the service of his own interests, his interests as an individual. The result is the ready emergence of a kind of class of individually liberated slaves, of freed slaves. (Fanon, 1986, p. 22)

Submission from the colonized intellectual, in turn, facilitates the work of repressive forces – such as the police and military – by perpetuating a belief that the marginalized do not belong within the ‘advanced’ sphere of society. The seductive nature of colonialist bourgeoisies causes the colonized intellectual and business elites to believe their interests are identical to the colonialist. Thus, nonviolent approaches are advanced as matters of urgency – a means to settle colonial problems around a negotiating table “before the irreparable is done, before any bloodshed or equitable act is committed” (Fanon, 1986, p. 23). The problem with offering seats at the table instead of dismantling the table all together, Fanon argues, is to in buy into the beliefs that colonialism is a machine capable of thinking, a body endowed with reason, but it is not: “Colonialism is naked violence and only gives in when confronted with greater violence” (p. 23).

Separation between those in power and those who are systematically exploited is sustained through deeply embedded ideology that has received buy-in by a new (young) class of colonialized intellectuals, tradesmen, and businessmen. It comes as no surprise that the characteristics of nationalist political parties consist of the colonized intellectual, small tradesmen, shopkeepers, elementary school teachers, and urban voters who have begun to profit from the colonial situation, yet “in a pitiful sort of way” (Fanon, 1986, p. 22). With individualist interests at the forefront, their (colonized intellectuals) demand for a better life and improved

wages shapes the dialogue between political parties and colonialism in ways that cause no interruption to the colonial project. Fanon (1986) puts it this way:

In the colonized countries, the proletariat has everything to lose. It represents in fact that fraction of the colonized who are indispensable for running the colonial machine: tram drivers, taxi drivers, miners, dockers, interpreters, and nurses, etc. These elements make up the most loyal clientele of the nationalist parties and by the privileged position they occupy in the colonial system represent the "bourgeois" fraction of the colonized population.

So, it is understandable that the clientele of the nationalist parties is above all urban: technicians, manual workers, intellectuals, and tradespeople living mainly in towns. Their way of thinking, in many ways, already bears the mark of the technically advanced and relatively comfortable environment in which they live (p. 64-65)

Consideration devoted to Brazil's colonized intellectuals and urban voters has important implications for understanding northern Brazil, especially its large rural Black population. Fanon (1986) writes:

The large majority of the nationalist parties regard the rural masses with great mistrust. These masses give them the impression of being mired in inertia and sterility. Fairly quickly the nationalist party members (the urban workers and intellectuals) end up passing the same pejorative judgment on the peasantry as the colonists (p. 65).

The peasantry – including those relegated to favelas and extreme marginalization – is systematically left out of most of the nationalist parties' propaganda. But, like all colonial countries, only the peasantry, Fanon (1986) argues, is revolutionary. "It has nothing to lose and everything to gain. The underprivileged and starving peasant is the exploited who very soon discovers that only violence pays" (p. 23).

2.5. The Creation of Favelas: Racialized Urban Exclusion, Epistemic Oppression, and Spaces of Resistance

While *quilombos* emerged as rural spaces of resistance against slavery and colonial domination, the end of slavery and the rapid urbanization of Brazil produced new forms of racialized exclusion within the growing cities. The forced displacement of Afro-Brazilians and the denial of access to land, housing, and formal labor markets gave rise to a different kind of autonomous community: the *favela*. Much like the *quilombos* before them, *favelas* became both material expressions of systemic oppression and vital sites of cultural survival, collective resistance, and the ongoing struggle for Black autonomy within the urban landscape (Valladares & Anderson, 2019).

The emergence of *favelas* in Brazil must be understood not merely as a consequence of poverty, but as a direct outcome of the historical processes of racialized exclusion, epistemic oppression, and the enduring legacies of colonialism. Following the abolition of slavery in 1888, an estimated 700,000 formerly enslaved people were suddenly released into a society that offered them no land, no economic support, and actively discriminated against them (Andrews, 2004). Deprived of land, political recognition, and economic opportunities, many formerly enslaved individuals and their descendants were forced to build informal settlements on the precarious peripheries of urban centers like Rio de Janeiro, São Paulo, and Salvador (Holston, 2008; Valladares & Anderson, 2019). The very first *favelas* are often traced back to the *Morro da Providência* in Rio de Janeiro in the late 19th century, settled by soldiers returning from the War of *Canudos*⁷ who were promised housing that never materialized (Perlman, 2010).

⁷ The War of Canudos (1896-1897) erupted in the impoverished backlands of Bahia, where thousands of marginalized rural workers, including significant numbers of Afro-Brazilians and Indigenous individuals,

This marginalization was not accidental. As Aníbal Quijano (2000) points out, racial hierarchies established during colonization continued to structure colonized societies long after formal colonialism ended. Urban development projects, often financed by European capital and modelled on European urban planning, prioritized Euro-descended elites, while Black, Indigenous, and mixed-race populations were systematically denied access to land and other social services (Abreu, 1988). Cities were physically organized to reflect racial and class divisions, with modernity and whiteness spatially concentrated in central areas, and Blackness relegated to the peripheries and hillsides. For instance, early 20th century urban reforms in Rio de Janeiro, driven by a desire to create a "civilized" and "modern" city, often resulted in the violent removal of Afro-Brazilian populations from central tenements (*cortiços*), whose notoriously crowded and unsanitary living conditions were famously and vividly depicted in literary works such as Aluísio Azevedo's classic 1890 novel *O Cortiço*, to the distant hills, directly contributing to the growth of nascent *favelas* (Abreu, 1988; Perlman, 2010).

The construction of favelas thus reflects the afterlife of slavery and the ongoing colonial logic that defines whose lives are valued and whose are disposable (Hartman, 2007). Epistemically, favelas were framed not as legitimate urban spaces but as "pathologies" of the city, becoming synonymous with Black and Afro-Brazilian bodies and identities – and thus, with Black criminality. This phenomenon echoes W.E.B. Du Bois's foundational question, "How does it feel to be a problem?" which, as Lewis Gordon (2008) has explained, captures the essence of how Black existence is constituted as an ontological and political "problem" within a racist, anti-Black world, a status that justifies perpetual scrutiny and premature death. Media portrayals, public policies, and academic discourses frequently depicted *favelas* as

gathered around the charismatic religious leader Antônio Conselheiro. Their autonomous community of Canudos, with its own social and economic organization, was perceived as a threat by the republican government and local elites. This resulted in a brutal military campaign that culminated in the massacre and complete destruction of Canudos, highlighting the state's violent suppression of popular resistance and the constrained agency of rural populations in post-abolition Brazil (Fausto, 1998).

synonymous with disorder, criminality, and deviance (Perlman, 2010; Valladares & Anderson, 2019). As Walter Mignolo (2011e) highlights, this process of epistemic oppression erased the knowledge, culture, and histories of *favelados*, denying their agency and political subjectivity. Gordon's (2008) work on Black existence as a problem further illuminates this context, where the systemic denial of basic services is not mere neglect but a deliberate strategy of constituting *favelados* as non-citizens and perpetual problems of the state whose claims to full humanity and rights are suspended. This is evident in the historical lack of official recognition and provision of basic services like sanitation, electricity, and formal education in these communities, reinforcing their image as marginal and outside the purview of the state (Campos et al., 2022).

Yet, much like the *quilombos* that preceded them, *favelas* have been spaces of internal colonialism (Bledsoe & Wright, 2019), marked by resistance, cultural innovation, and community survival. Anti-Blackness, here, is understood as civil society, as understood today, is informed by dehumanizing conditions of chattel slavery, thus civil society is inherently antithetical to all manifestations of Black social life (Bledsoe & Wright, 2019). A concerted effort to mark both contexts as “empty” spaces, open for appropriation (Bledsoe & Wright, 2019, p. 8), is evidenced by perpetual state and structural violence driving mainly Black people and other marginalized groups to continually engage in strategies to reappropriate spaces to create autonomous zones of life in defiance of a hostile state and society. The practices of samba, *capoeira*, Afro-Brazilian religions such as *Candomblé* and *Umbanda*, and more recently funk and hip-hop, all emerged from these spaces as powerful forms of cultural resistance and identity affirmation (Hanchard, 1998; A. do Nascimento, 1978). These cultural expressions, often drawing on African and Indigenous roots, serve as a direct challenge to the dominant white/Eurocentric culture and provide a sense of collective identity and pride in the face of systemic racism.

Favelas should not be romanticized – poverty, state neglect, and structural violence are part of their day-to-day routine, but they must be recognized as active political and social spaces. As Abdias do Nascimento (1978, 1979) and contemporary scholars like Håndlykken-Luz (2020) argue, *favelas* represent the continuity of Black resistance in Brazil, serving as reservoirs of popular knowledge, solidarity economies, and urban activism.

Yet, this resilience is forged under the constant threat of the exploitation cycle, where the Black body remains disproportionately vulnerable to both political abandonment and premature death (Mbembe, 2019). This vulnerability manifests acutely in the context of persistent state violence, particularly through intensified policing that ensures favelados remain outside the protection of the state while being subjected to its most lethal control.

2.5.1. Persistence of Colonial Structures

Today, *favelas* remain at the heart of Brazil's racial and socio-economic inequalities. It is estimated that over 11 million Brazilians, a significant proportion of whom are Afro-Brazilian, reside in *favelas* (IBGE, 2022). Despite decades of activism and limited government programs like Favela-Bairro in the 1990s, most *favela* residents still lack full citizenship rights. This deficit is starkly evident in their precarious access to essential basic services; while residents may often pay for utilities, formal connections to reliable water, electricity, and sanitation networks are frequently absent or inadequate, leading to reliance on informal and often unsafe solutions. Healthcare and educational facilities within or near favelas are similarly underfunded and insufficient. Although favela residents possess the right to vote and actively participate in elections, their political representation remains profoundly limited; mainstream politicians rarely advocate for their specific needs, often perceiving favelas as mere electoral strongholds rather than communities requiring genuine policy support and investment. This translates into a lack of effective political champions for their causes and persistent neglect in public policymaking (Valladares & Anderson, 2019). They experience what James Holston

(2008) calls insurgent citizenship – a citizenship that is claimed through struggle, not granted by the state. This is manifested in the ongoing battles for land tenure, access to basic services, and political representation.

Militarized policing disproportionately targets *favelas*, often under the guise of "public security" operations, leading to alarmingly high rates of state violence against Afro-Brazilian youth. As stated earlier, data from 2023 indicated that over 80% of those killed by police in Rio de Janeiro were Black (Fórum Brasileiro de Segurança Pública, 2024). *Favela* residents are thus caught in a double bind: excluded from the rights and protections of formal citizenship while subjected to hyper-surveillance and lethal policing. This echoes the historical violence and lack of state protection experienced by *quilombo* residents. At the same time, *favelas* have become central sites of political innovation and resistance. Grassroots movements such as *Movimento de Favelas*, *Mães de Acari*, and *favela*-based media outlets like *Viva Favela* and *Rocinha sem Fronteiras* have challenged dominant narratives, demanding rights to housing, education, healthcare, and recognition of *favelas* as legitimate parts of the city (Håndlykken-Luz, 2020).

In tracing the emergence and evolution of *favelas*, it becomes clear that these spaces are not peripheral anomalies but central to understanding the unfinished project of colonization in Brazil. *Favelas* embody the ongoing racial, economic, and epistemic exclusions that began with Indigenous dispossession and the transatlantic slave trade (Valladares & Anderson, 2019). Yet, they also represent vibrant sites of resistance and cultural production, where marginalized communities continually reassert their right to existence, autonomy, and humanity (Håndlykken-Luz, 2020, 2024). To grasp the dynamics of Brazilian urban life today, one must recognize *favelas* not as failures of modernity, but as insurgent expressions against a colonial order that remains deeply entrenched in national structures. This means that their existence and form, marked by self-construction and non-compliance with state planning, directly contest the

official, racialized urban space intended to marginalize and control non-white populations. Consequently, the organic density and informal systems within favelas represent a fundamental rejection of colonial spatial logic (Mignolo, 2007a).

2.5.2. The Unfinished Colonial Project: Race, Space, and Power in Brazil

The history of Brazil's colonization, as discussed, reveals a deeply interconnected system of racialized violence, economic exploitation, and epistemic erasure. From the moment of Portuguese arrival, Indigenous peoples were subjected to dispossession and forced labor, their cosmologies and political systems violently overwritten by the Catholic colonial order. The transatlantic slave trade expanded this racialized system of domination, embedding Blackness within a capitalist economy predicated on extraction, commodification, and dehumanization (Quijano, 2000; Schwarcz & Starling, 2015).

However, the invention of whiteness in Brazil receives very little scholarly attention. While distinct from the North American context, whiteness served a similar function: to naturalize hierarchical race relations, mask systemic violence, and exclude racialized bodies from the privileges of modern citizenship (Walter. Mignolo, 2011; Nascimento, 1978; Beatriz. Nascimento et al., 2023). The *quilombos* of the colonial period and the *favelas* of the post-abolition era both testify to the resilience and insurgency of marginalized populations who consistently combated racial eradication in Brazil's pursuit whiteness.

Brazil can be seen as a bifurcated colonial world, where the zones of being, as Fanon discussed (1968), are reserved for the white, wealthy, and powerful, and are thus violently separated from the zones of non-being inhabited by Black, Indigenous, and mixed-race populations. This spatial and existential division is maintained not only through economic exclusion but also through military policing, discursive criminalization, and the persistent denial of full humanity to racialized communities (Maldonado-Torres, 2007; Mbembe, 2019).

The *favela*, in this context, represents a contemporary manifestation of the zone of non-being within the urban landscape.

Understanding *quilombos*, *favelas*, and other insurgent spaces not merely as reactions to oppression but as acts of epistemic, spatial, and political resistance challenges the myth of Brazilian racial democracy and reveals the urgent need to decolonize historical narratives and contemporary social structures. The cultural production and political organizing within *favelas* represent ongoing acts of epistemic disobedience, challenging the dominant colonial narratives that seek to silence and disregard their residents.

In this sense, the struggles of Indigenous peoples, Afro-Brazilians, and *favela* residents today are not isolated phenomena; they are ongoing chapters in the long global history of resistance against colonial violence. As Fanon (1986) insisted, decolonization must be total – it must dismantle not only material structures of domination but also the colonial imaginations that sustain them. Brazil's present inequalities, then, are not accidents of history, but the living aftershocks of coloniality. The existence and resilience of *favelas* serve as a stark reminder of this unfinished project and the ongoing need for decolonial interventions (Marques, 2022).

Chapter 3. Methodology

Methodology is never a purely technical component of research, it reflects choices about what counts as knowledge, whose voices are prioritized, and how the researcher positions themselves in relation to the field of study. In a project concerned with the historical and ongoing exploitation of Quilombola communities in the North of Brazil, these choices are not simply methodological, they are political. To study racialized territorial dispossession and epistemic erasure, this study requires more than the application of established social science techniques. It requires an approach that is historically grounded, ethically engaged, and critically reflexive about the colonial legacies that continue to shape knowledge production itself (Denscombe, 2025; Rodrigues, 2024).

This chapter outlines the methodological approach adopted in this thesis. Building upon decolonial and critical traditions, this research employs a qualitative case study design centered on the state of Amapá. As a region marked by geopolitical marginalization, and a strong historical presence of Quilombola and Indigenous resistance, Amapá provides an important site through which to interrogate how the coloniality of power manifests in contemporary Brazil (Quijano, 2000). By focusing on lived experiences and local perspectives, this study seeks to illuminate both the structures of dispossession and the practices of survival and resistance that have long been obscured in mainstream academic and policy discourse (Maldonado-Torres, 2007; Mignolo, 2007b, 2021).

This chapter begins by revisiting the research questions that guide this thesis. It then situates the study within a qualitative, interpretive tradition, explaining why this orientation is most appropriate for investigating processes of racialized exploitation and resistance. A rationale for the case study design is presented, with particular emphasis on Amapá's significance as a space of racial capitalism. The chapter then provides an overview of the two

main data sources: (1) secondary data; and (2) semi-structured interviews with Quilombola leaders, grassroots activists, and government representatives. The logic of case selection and the interview process are outlined, followed by reflections on ethics, positionality and reflexivity.

3.1. Research Questions and Methodological Implications

This study asks three central questions: (1) How have colonial structures of racial, spatial, and epistemic domination persisted and been reconfigured in Brazil's northern region, particularly in Amapá? (2) How do Quilombola women from Amapá experience and resist intersecting forms of racialized labor and territorial dispossession? (3) How do decolonial frameworks enhance our understanding of the relationship between racial capitalism, gendered violence, and the afterlives of slavery in northern Brazil?

These questions require a methodological approach that prioritizes lived experience and situated knowledge. A positivist framework that reduces these struggles to variables and indicators would fail to capture the depth of historical memory, the complexities of territorial struggles, and the epistemic dimensions of resistance (Moyo, 2020; L. T. Smith, 2021). Instead, this thesis adopts a qualitative approach that embraces narrative, storytelling, and interpretive analysis as central to understanding how structures of domination are both endured and contested (Rau & Coetzee, 2022).

In that sense, qualitative research offers the tools to engage communities whose experiences are frequently marginalized or misrepresented in dominant discourse. As Dubey & Kothari (2022) argue, qualitative inquiry allows for the systematic collection of evidence that is sensitive to context, culture, and meaning. This sensitivity is crucial in the case of Amapá, where the realities of Quilombola and Indigenous life cannot be reduced to economic

indicators or policy categories. Their struggles are entangled with histories of slavery, land dispossession, and epistemic silencing, and thus demand methods that can capture nuance, contradiction, and depth.

Moreover, qualitative approaches resonate with decolonial critiques of Western epistemologies. Walter D. Mignolo (2007b, 2009, 2021) has emphasized that coloniality persists not only through material domination but also through the imposition of knowledge systems that erase or delegitimize subaltern epistemologies. By foregrounding oral narratives, community perspectives, and activist voices, qualitative research can contribute to unsettling these hierarchies of knowledge. This does not mean romanticizing subaltern voices but rather recognizing them as essential sites of analysis and theorization.

The initial design for this project included an extended ethnographic component. Building on my earlier research experience in the Guyana Region, I envisioned a period of long-term immersion in Quilombola and Indigenous communities in Amapá. This ethnography would have involved participant observation in everyday community life, attendance at cultural and political events, and sustained engagement with households and community associations. Such immersion promised rich insights into the textures of daily life, the dynamics of collective decision-making, and the subtle practices through which communities navigate dispossession and resistance.

Ethnography provides opportunities for capturing not only what participants say but also what they do, how they interact, and how cultural norms are embodied in practice (Buscatto, 2022). In the field of political science, ethnographic approaches have been increasingly valued for their capacity to illuminate the micro-politics of power, the lived dimensions of state–society relations, and the meanings communities assign to their struggles (Weitzer, 2010; Zheng, 2009).

Adapting from ethnography to interviews inevitably involved trade-offs. Certain aspects of community life – everyday interactions, informal practices, and the embodied dimensions of resistance – were less accessible without long-term immersion. Ethnography might have provided richer insights into how cultural practices are sustained in daily life or how resistance strategies are negotiated within communities.

However, adaptation also produced gains. The focused nature of interviews facilitated concentrated discussions of key issues, reducing the risk of diffusion that can accompany prolonged observation. Interviews also allowed for greater feasibility in data management, enabling systematic coding in NVivo and the development of the codebook. Crucially, the adaptation minimized the risk of extractive engagement. By limiting the duration and intensity of demands on participants, interviews respected the limited time and resources of communities already stretched by political and economic pressures. In this sense, the adaptation was not only pragmatic but also ethically responsible.

3.1.1. Case Study Logic

The decision to focus on Amapá is both practical and analytical. Practically, it reflects the researcher's own familiarity with the region, cultural embeddedness, and capacity to build trust with participants. Analytically, Amapá represents a critical case for examining the coloniality of power in Brazil. Despite officially having 73% of its territory legally considered area of preservation, Amapá suffers from deforestation and mining (legal and illegal by transnational companies), and the state also shares a border with French Guiana (L. G. Fernandes et al., 2024; G. de V. Silva et al., 2019). Amapá embodies the contradictions of racial capitalism: peripheral to national development projects yet central to the exploitation of land, labor, and resources.

Case studies are particularly valuable for exploring processes that are deeply contextual and historically situated. As Dubey and Kothari (2022) note, case study research allows for the integration of multiple sources of data and the close examination of social dynamics in their specificity. Amapá, therefore, is not treated as a representative sample of all Brazilian borderlands but as a site through which the broader logics of coloniality can be interrogated in depth.

Underlying these methodological choices is a commitment to decolonial inquiry. Following Annibal Quijano's (1969, 2000) concept of the coloniality of power and Frantz Fanon's (1968, 1986) analysis of colonial violence, this study understands Brazil's racial order not as a legacy of the past but as an active configuration of power in the present. Methodology, in this light, is not only a means of data collection but also a site of epistemic struggle. To prioritize community narratives, to situate the researcher's own positionality, and to challenge the dominance of state and elite discourses are all methodological acts of resistance against the erasure of subaltern knowledges (Mbanjwa, 2025; Moyo, 2020).

Narrative and storytelling approaches are particularly significant in this context (Rau & Coetzee, 2022). They allow the researcher to attend not only to what participants say but also to how they frame their experiences, the silences they hold, and the epistemic frameworks that underpin their interpretations. By integrating these narrative dimensions with document and discourse analysis, the research captures both the material and epistemic structures of coloniality in Amapá.

3.2. Methodological Orientation

Methodological orientations refer to the deeper assumptions about the nature of reality and the production of knowledge. For a study concerned with the exploitation and resistance

of Quilombola communities in Brazil's northern region, these orientations must be made explicit. They are not secondary considerations but integral to the research itself, shaping what is studied, how it is studied, and how the findings are interpreted. This thesis is grounded in a qualitative, interpretive, and decolonial orientation. It proceeds from the premise that social life cannot be fully understood through abstract universal categories or purely quantitative indicators (Bairagi & Munot, 2019; Burnham et al., 2008; Chamberlain & Hodgetts, 2022). Instead, knowledge must emerge from lived experiences, situated perspectives, and historically specific contexts. This orientation acknowledges that the legacies of colonization are not only material but are also epistemic: they shape which forms of knowledge are valued, whose voices are legitimized, and which histories are erased (Mignolo, 2002, 2009, 2011c, 2021; Quijano, 1969, 2000, 2007; L. T. Smith, 2021). To address these dynamics, the research prioritizes local narratives, oral traditions, and community perspectives as legitimate and essential sources of knowledge.

In that sense, decolonial theory provides a critical lens for interrogating the structures of knowledge that have accompanied and sustained colonial domination. As Quijano (2000) argues, the colonality of power extends beyond economic exploitation to include the categorization of peoples and knowledges into hierarchies that persist long after formal colonialism has ended. Similarly, Mignolo (2002, 2007b, 2021) emphasizes that epistemic domination, presented through the universalization of Western categories of thought, remains a key mechanism of control.

In methodological terms, this requires rejecting approaches that treat European epistemologies as the normative standard for social science (Thambinathan & Kinsella, 2021). Instead, this research adopts what Nelson Maldonado-Torres (2007) calls a *decolonial attitude*, one that begins by questioning the structures of knowledge that silence subaltern epistemologies. Methodologically, this translates into practices that seek to listen, record, and

interpret the narratives of Quilombola and Indigenous interlocutors not as data points to be subsumed into external theories, but as grounded forms of theorizing in their own right (Denscombe, 2025).

This does not imply romanticizing community perspectives or treating them as unmediated truths. Rather, it means recognizing them as situated knowledges, shaped by historical context, and lived experience, and therefore indispensable to understanding the structures of exploitation and resistance in Amapá. As Fanon (1968, 1986) argues, colonial domination is not only material but ontological; it structures how people see themselves and are seen by others. Capturing this dimension requires methodologies attentive to voice, experience, and the politics of recognition.

3.2.1. Interpretivism and Situated Knowledge

To fulfill the commitments discussed above, this thesis locates itself within an interpretivist tradition. Interpretivism rejects the idea of a single, objective social reality that can be neutrally observed and measured. Instead, it posits that reality is constituted through meanings, practices, and relationships, and that the role of the researcher is to interpret these in context (Alharahsheh & Pius, 2020; Graue & Trainor, 2013). This is particularly relevant in a study of communities whose lived realities have been systematically misrepresented or erased.

Interpretivism also underscores the importance of researcher reflexivity. As Chamberlain and Hodgetts (2022) note, qualitative research involves dynamic relationships between researchers and participants, requiring sensitivity to power relations and the situated nature of interpretation. In this thesis, my own position as a woman from northern Brazil provides both access and responsibility: access to cultural knowledge and trust, but also

responsibility to remain critically reflexive about the ways in which I interpret and represent community narratives.

Patricia Hill Collins' (2002) states that marginalized groups often develop distinctive *standpoint epistemologies* that are instructive. While this thesis does not directly employ feminist theory, it acknowledges that women in Quilombola and Indigenous communities play central roles in sustaining culture, organizing collective resistance, and transmitting intergenerational knowledge. Their narratives therefore hold particular methodological significance, offering insights into both the vulnerabilities and the resilience that shape community life in Amapá.

3.2.2. The Role of Narrative and Storytelling

One of the methodological commitments of this thesis is to treat narrative and storytelling not as anecdotal or supplementary, but as central modes of knowledge. As Rau and Coetzee (2022) argue, narratives allow researchers to grasp the complexities of lived experience, including dimensions that may remain hidden or implicit in other forms of inquiry. Storytelling makes visible the meanings that individuals and communities assign to their experiences, the ways in which they interpret structural forces, and the strategies through which they articulate resistance.

For Quilombola communities, oral traditions are not merely communicative practices but repositories of history, memory, and cosmology. Attending to these traditions is therefore both an ethical and methodological imperative. It affirms the legitimacy of epistemologies that have been systematically devalued within the colonial matrix of power. It also enriches the analysis by situating contemporary struggles within deeper historical and cultural trajectories (Rau & Coetzee, 2022; L. T. Smith, 2021).

Narrative approaches also align with Fanon's (1968) call to address the subjective dimensions of colonial domination. While structural analysis is indispensable for understanding racial capitalism in Brazil, it must be complemented by attention to how these structures are lived, narrated, and resisted in everyday life. This dual focus on structures and subjectivities, guides the methodological orientation of the thesis.

3.2.3. Women's Centrality in Community Knowledge

Although this thesis does not frame itself within feminist theory per se, it is essential to recognize the significant role that women play in Quilombola and Indigenous communities. Women are often at the forefront of defending collective territories, organizing community associations, and sustaining cultural practices (M. B. Nascimento, 2023). Women and girls also bear the brunt of intersecting forms of exploitation, from precarious labor to environmental degradation and institutional neglect (Almeida et al., 2021; Dias & Aragão, 2025).

Marginalized women's experiences often produce distinctive ways of knowing, rooted in the intersections of oppression and survival (P. H. Collins, 2002, 2017). In the context of Amapá, the voices of Quilombola and Indigenous women provide critical insights into both the vulnerabilities and the strategies of resilience that characterize life in contested territories. Attending to these voices is thus not an optional addition but a methodological necessity for any research that seeks to understand the realities of racialized exploitation and resistance. In centering these experiences, the methodology foregrounds not only the structural and historical dimensions of inequity but also the dynamic and adaptive forms of agency exercised by community members, particularly women, in forging collective futures.

This approach requires continual engagement with both the constraints and the creative possibilities inherent in local epistemologies, as well as a recognition of the complex interplay between individual voices and collective narratives (Alharahsheh & Pius, 2020; Rodrigues,

2024). By weaving together lived realities and broader social forces, the research methodology becomes an active, reflective process – one that both draws from and contributes to the ongoing negotiations of meaning, power, and belonging within Amapá’s diverse communities. Such methodological attentiveness lays the groundwork for understanding research practice as inherently political.

3.2.4. Methodology as Political Practice

Taken together, these orientations highlight that methodology in this thesis is not simply a technical exercise but a political practice. To choose a decolonial, interpretive, qualitative approach is to take a stance on what counts as knowledge and whose perspectives matter. It is to resist the reproduction of colonial epistemologies that render subaltern communities visible only as problems to be managed or victims to be rescued. Instead, it is to affirm their agency, histories, and knowledge as central to the analysis of Brazil’s racialized state formation.

This orientation also requires constant reflexivity regarding the role of the researcher. As Buscatto (2022) emphasizes, rigorous qualitative research involves balancing immersion with analytical distance, empathy with critical interpretation. My own positionality as an insider-outsider shapes every stage of this research, from the formulation of questions to the interpretation of narratives. As a non-white Brazilian with ties to the legacy of slavery, I share a historical context with the participants, yet my light skin tone and position as a highly educated academic grant me a distinct distance and access, particularly in the northern region where colorism and educational attainment symbolize different class hierarchies. My presence and educational privilege inherently carry a specific set of assumptions and entitlements that must be constantly challenged. Rather than attempting to erase this influence, the methodological orientation embraces it as part of the interpretive process (P. H. Collins, 2002).

The methodological orientation of this thesis is therefore defined by three interrelated commitments: a decolonial epistemology that challenges the universalization of Western knowledge systems, an interpretivist stance that privileges meaning and context, and a recognition of narrative and storytelling as central to understanding lived realities. These commitments guide the research design, data collection, and analysis, ensuring that the study remains attentive to both the structures of racialized exploitation and the epistemologies of resistance that emerge from Quilombola and Indigenous communities in Amapá. By situating methodology as a political and epistemic practice, the thesis contributes not only to the understanding of Brazil's northern region but also to broader debates about how political sociology can engage critically with histories of coloniality and the struggles of subaltern communities.

3.3. Research Design

In this thesis, the research design reflects the commitments to decolonial, interpretivist, and qualitative approaches outlined above. It also reflects the pragmatic realities of fieldwork in a region that is simultaneously marginal and strategic within Brazil's racialized political economy. Therefore, this section provides the rationale for the design with a focus on three interrelated aspects. First, it explains the selection of Amapá as the case study, situating the state within Brazil's broader colonial and racial structures and giving historical background on the formation of Amapá. Second, it outlines the methodological process employed in the research. Third, it discusses the coherence of this design in relation to the research questions, emphasizing the capacity of a multi-stage, qualitative approach to illuminate the persistence and reconfiguration of colonial logics in Amapá.

3.3.1. Case study: Amapá - Territorial, Racial, and Economic Formation in Historical Perspective

Amapá, Brazil's northernmost state, sits at the crossroads of territorial integration, racialized dispossession, and extractivist development. Its history is marked by overlapping regimes of coloniality that shaped land tenure, population movements, and economic exploitation. Although often depicted as peripheral, Amapá embodies the contradictions of Brazil's modernity: it is simultaneously a frontier of resource extraction and a homeland for Afro-descendant and Indigenous peoples who continue to resist displacement (Custódio et al., 2019; L. G. Fernandes et al., 2024).

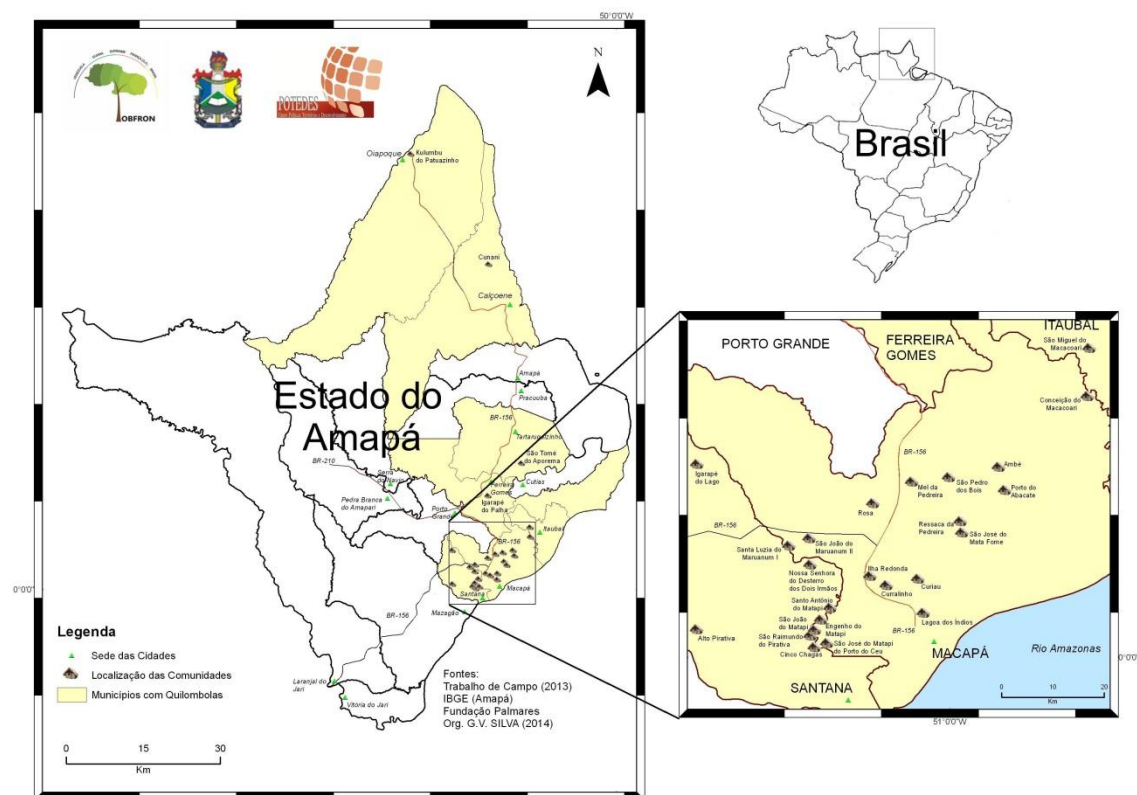
Historically, Amapá was created as a federal territory in 1943 during the Vargas regime and remained under federal oversight until 1988, when it achieved the status of state – coinciding with the end of the Military dictatorship and implementation of Brazil's current constitution. This delayed transition left institutional weaknesses in governance and land regulation (Superti & Silva, 2015). Approximately 72% of Amapá's territory is formally designated as conservation areas or Indigenous lands, one of the highest proportions in Brazil (Superti & Silva, 2015). While this configuration is often celebrated in environmental discourse, it has also complicated the recognition of Quilombola territories and fueled conflicts where conservation, development, and traditional claims overlap.

Quilombola communities, numbering 44 total according to Fundação Cultural Palmares (2024), include *Conceição do Macacoari*, *Mel da Pedreira*, *São Raimundo do Pirativa*, *Curiaú*, *Curralinho*, *Kulumbú do Patuazinho* and *Cunani*. Few of these communities have titled lands, leaving most legally insecure (Custódio et al., 2019). This insecurity makes them vulnerable to encroachment by miners, loggers, and ranchers, exemplifying how the coloniality of power persists through property regimes that privilege capitalist interests (Quijano, 2000).

Indigenous territories such as *Uaçá*, *Waiãpi*, and *Galibi* face parallel struggles, including bureaucratic delays in demarcation and securitization pressures. Amapá's location at Brazil's northern border has led to the militarization of Indigenous lands, with communities often framed as obstacles to sovereignty rather than rights-bearing subjects (Garfield, 2013).

This section examines the territorial, racial, and economic formation of Amapá, focusing on how authoritarian development under the Brazilian military dictatorship and the gold rush at Serra Pelada (Pará) entrenched patterns of exploitation and dispossession. These processes resonate with Quijano's (2000) discussion on how the colonial hierarchies persist in modern state structures, Mignolo's (2009) argument that it is necessary to challenge the state's erasure of subaltern knowledges, and Fanon's (1968, 1986) insights into the violent underpinnings of development and racial domination.

Figure 2 State of Amapá and Quilombola Communities



Source: Superti & Silva (2015)

Amapá is part of the Guiana Shield, a biodiverse region encompassing vast expanses of Amazonian forest, rivers, and savannahs. Its geographic isolation is underscored by the absence of federal highway connections to the rest of Brazil, with most access requiring ferries to Belém (Pará). This lack of infrastructure has historically served as a partial shield, delaying the intensity and scale of land exploitation and large-scale agricultural expansion seen in other Amazonian states. However, this protective effect is rapidly diminishing as new road projects (such as the BR-156) and energy corridors advance, bringing the territory into closer contact with the national and global extractive economy. The state's northern border with French Guiana makes it a site of geopolitical concern, shaping both migration and securitization (Farias da Silva, 2019; Martins et al., 2015; G. de V. Silva, 2018; G. de V. Silva et al., 2019; Superti, 2011).

The territory that today constitutes the state of Amapá was shaped over millennia by Indigenous occupation, and more recently by a succession of colonial, diplomatic and development projects that inscribed new spatial orders on top of older territorialities. Understanding Amapá's territorial formation – the long duration of Indigenous presence, the contested geopolitics of the North-Cape coast, the legal instruments and fortifications that consolidated Portuguese claims, and the latest patterns of extractive economy and settlement – is essential for interpreting contemporary land conflicts, quilombola claims, and the institutional silences documented in this study.

Long before European contact, the area now known as Amapá was populated by groups speaking Arawak and Carib language families, including peoples identified in the ethnohistoric and contemporary literature as *Waiãpi*, *Palikur*, *Karipuna* (and the extinct *Maracá-Cunani* and *Tucuju*), among others. Linguistic, ethnographic and archaeological work situates these groups within regional networks of mobility, riverine economies and cosmologies that structured how

people lived on and moved through the Guiana Shield (H. J. P. da Silva, 2018; Superti & Silva, 2015).

Archaeological sites shed light on the antiquity and density of occupation. Ceramic traditions associated with the *Maracá-Cunani* archaeological complexes have been documented across northern Amapá, and recent archaeological and archaeoastronomical work at the so-called *Parque Arqueológico do Solstício* documents a stone arrangement whose alignments suggest long-term calendrical/astronomical knowledge and occupation of the area (O. F. da Silva, 2023). Researchers have proposed dates for various features in the *Calçoene* area ranging from hundreds to over a thousand years, indicating sustained pre-colonial habitation and complex practices of landscape modification and memory (H. J. P. da Silva, 2018; O. F. da Silva, 2023). These material traces confirm that Amapá was not an empty frontier but a region of longstanding Indigenous territoriality and sociocultural complexity.

European knowledge of the North-Cape coast developed in the context of sixteenth- and seventeenth-century seafaring and imperial rivalry. Spanish navigators such as Vicente Yáñez Pinzón reached the mouth of the Amazon and the northern Guianas in the very late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries; subsequent centuries saw intermittent French, English, Dutch and Portuguese interests vying for resources along what was often called the *Costa do Cabo Norte* (Becker, 2005). The Treaty of Tordesillas (1494) and subsequent diplomatic instruments drew broad legal lines on paper, but they did not immediately translate into effective control on the ground; instead, control was contested through settlement, trade, and armed incursions (Garfield, 2013).

The diplomatic disputes over the North-Cape coast were incrementally addressed through a series of European treaties. The Treaty of Utrecht (1713) is often cited as a key turning point because it helped settle competing Iberian and French claims by recognizing the Oiapoque River as the boundary in that sector of the Guianas, although subsequent decades

witnessed further claims and contestation on specific river mouths and coastal points (Becker, 2005; Garfield, 2013). These diplomatic settlements must be read alongside on-the-ground measures: Portuguese authorities expanded fortifications, reconfigured settlement policies, and promoted colonial administrations intended to assert sovereignty in practical terms.

Portuguese consolidation accelerated in the second half of the eighteenth century under metropolitan reform programs aimed at securing Amazonian frontiers. The foundation and development of *Macapá* (*Vila de São José de Macapá*, founded 1758) and the construction of the *Fortaleza de São José* (works begun in the 1760s; formally inaugurated 1782) exemplify how military architecture and settlement policy became instruments of territorial consolidation (M. L. da Silva & Camilo, 2021). The fortification program and related settlement efforts combined geostrategic objectives with economic aims: securing maritime approaches, protecting nascent export flows, and asserting jurisdiction against rival colonial powers (Becker, 2005; M. L. da Silva & Camilo, 2021)

These projects relied heavily on coerced and hierarchical labor arrangements that tied together Indigenous labor regimes and the transatlantic slave economy. Contemporary archival and historiographic accounts document that the fortress and associated works mobilized both enslaved Africans and Indigenous labor under varying regimes of coercion and wage-labor imposition (M. L. da Silva & Camilo, 2021). The demographic shocks and social rearrangements produced by these projects created new patterns of settlement and dispossession: local Indigenous populations were subordinated to mission and administrative regimes; African-born and Afro-descendant labor circulated in the construction economy and fled or formed *quilombos* in zones of weaker state control (Schwarcz & Starling, 2015; M. L. da Silva & Camilo, 2021; Superti & Silva, 2015).

3.3.1.1. Quilombos, fugitivity and the geographies of refuge

Because of the sparse colonial presence and the complexity of coastal waterways, Amapá and adjacent Guianan shores functioned, at times, as zones of refuge for escaped enslaved people. Historical accounts and legal correspondence between colonial authorities document repeated agreements for the return and repatriation of fugitive enslaved people with neighboring colonial administrators (e.g., treaties and correspondence in the eighteenth century), while ethnohistorical research records the establishment of *quilombo* settlements that later persisted as quilombola communities (Arruti, 2008; Conniff, 1999; Superti & Silva, 2015). The persistence of quilombola communities in Amapá after abolition and into the twentieth and twenty-first centuries is the result of these deep historical geographies of refuge and resistance.

3.3.1.2. Territorial, racial and economic formation

Across the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, further diplomatic readjustments and the slow expansion of infrastructure reconfigured the region. Multiple international treaties clarified different segments of the frontier at different times, even as local cartographies often remained ambiguous. The Portuguese/Brazilian focus on securing Amazonian frontiers continued to prioritize control and resource extraction, rather than meaningful integration or recognition of Indigenous sovereignty (Becker, 2005; Gadelha, 2002; Garfield, 2013).

Amapá's formal status as a federal territory (created under the twentieth century) and only later its elevation to a federal state in 1988 had important consequences for institutional development and land governance. Federal administration meant long periods in which central agencies defined policies for extraction, conservation, and settlement; the delayed transfer to state institutions left institutional gaps in property registration, territorial demarcation, and local administration (Superti & Silva, 2015). At the same time, extractive economies – notably manganese mining around Serra do Navio during the mid-twentieth century – created enclave

dynamics: infrastructure built to service mineral extraction did not necessarily translate into broad local development, and boom–bust cycles produced social dislocation and environmental legacies (Drummond, 2000; Lomba et al., 2020).

The layered history of Amapá – Indigenous occupation, European contestation, fortified colonization, coerced labor, quilombo formation, extractive enclaves, and delayed institutional consolidation – explains much about present-day conflicts over land and recognition. Legal insecurity (certification without comprehensive titling), overlapping designations (conservation units, extractive concessions, Indigenous lands), and an institutional architecture shaped by federal priorities rather than local sovereignty create the conditions for recurrent disputes and the chronic vulnerability of quilombola and Indigenous claims (Dias & Aragão, 2025; Mondardo, 2022; Superti & Silva, 2015). In sum, Amapá's territorial formation is not an historical backdrop but an active structuring force: it produces the material and legal conditions under which racialized dispossession occurs, shapes the forms that resistance can take, and conditions the epistemic politics of whose presence counts in public and bureaucratic imaginaries.

Amapá's contemporary racial landscape reflects Brazil's broader pattern of *mestizaje*, while simultaneously containing distinct concentrations of Afro-descendant and Indigenous populations whose territorial presence and social reproduction are central to the state's political geography. According to the 2022 census, 65.3% of Amapá's residents self-identify as *pardo* (mixed race), 11.8% as Black, and 1.4% as Indigenous (IBGE, 2022). These aggregated percentages, however, obscure important spatial and political inequalities: Black and Indigenous populations in Amapá are disproportionately rural, riverine, and territorially marginalized, with lower access to services and insecure land rights (IBGE, 2022; Superti & Silva, 2015).

Quilombola communities deserve particular emphasis because they constitute living sites of resistance and historically produced alternatives to bondage. Quilombos in Amapá originated in the complex geographies of fugitive enslavement, frontier refuge and inter-ethnic encounters during the colonial and imperial eras; many formed in riverine and forested zones precisely because those places offered concealment and survival strategies (Custódio et al., 2019; M. das G. da Silva et al., 2022; Superti & Silva, 2015). Mapping work identifies dozens of communities in the state: Superti & Silva (2015) documented 28 certified quilombola communities up to 2013, while state reports and local government portals more recently refer to larger numbers of identified communities (44 communities) (Fundação Palmares, 2024) . Yet recognition and titling remain slow and uneven: certification by *Fundação Cultural Palmares* is only the first bureaucratic step; full collective titling by INCRA is far rarer, leaving most communities in legal limbo (Superti & Silva, 2015; Terra de Direitos, 2023b). This legal liminality produces structural vulnerability: uncertified and untitled communities are more exposed to land grabbing, extractive pressure, and forced displacement (Lomba et al., 2020).

Amapá's economy has long been defined by enclave extraction. The discovery of manganese in *Serra do Navio* in the 1940s led to the creation of ICOMI, a joint venture between Brazilian capital and U.S.-based Bethlehem Steel. This mining enclave dominated for decades, channeling resources through Santana port but leaving little in terms of long-term development. When the mine closed in the 1990s, Amapá was left with unemployment and environmental damage (Drummond, 2000).

Subsequent economic strategies replicated this extractivist model, emphasizing mining, timber, and hydropower projects. Urban centers like *Macapá* concentrate services and infrastructure, while rural communities remain isolated and impoverished. The 2020 blackout that left most of the state without electricity for weeks illustrated the fragility of infrastructure and the uneven distribution of resources (BBC Brasil, 2020; Gadelha, 2002). The extractivist

economy embodies what Fanon (1968, 1986) described as the violent underpinnings of development: modernity for some is built on the exploitation and dispossession of others. In Amapá, Afro-descendant and Indigenous communities disproportionately bear the costs of environmental degradation and social disruption while remaining excluded from promised benefits.

The military dictatorship (1964–1985) redefined the Amazon as a frontier to be secured, colonized, and exploited. Under the motto *Integrar para não entregar* (Integrate so as not to hand over), the regime promoted highways, colonization projects, and resource extraction (Becker, 1985). In Amapá, the dictatorship intensified infrastructure building, such as the BR-156 highway, while encouraging migration from Brazil's Northeast. Settlers were directed into areas occupied by Indigenous and Quilombola communities, producing overlapping land claims that remain contested today (Schmink & Wood, 1992). The regime's development policies were presented as modernizing narratives that mask the reproduction of racialized exploitation (Quijano, 2000). At the same time, the dictatorship militarized Brazil's northern border. Amapá was framed as a security frontier, with Indigenous lands monitored under sovereignty logics (Albuquerque Bomfim, 2010). Garfield (2013) argues that such policies subordinated community rights to military priorities, institutionalizing a pattern of securitization that persists to these days.

The discovery of gold at Serra Pelada in 1979 in the neighboring state of Pará produced a rush that reverberated across the Amazon. Within a few years, 80,000-100,000 garimpeiros had descended on the site, creating chaotic labor conditions, violence, and massive environmental degradation (Araujo da Silva, 2021). Although Serra Pelada was not in Amapá, its effects were regional. Migrants drawn to the Amazon often later settled in Amapá, contributing to demographic changes and pressures on land. More importantly, Serra Pelada crystallized the extractivist mentality: natural wealth framed as a treasure to be seized instantly,

regardless of costs. This mentality persists in Amapá, where state policies continue to privilege gold mining and industrial projects under modernization rhetoric (Veiga et al., 2002).

The Serra Pelada phenomenon illustrates how development can be equated with resource extraction, reproducing another of the colonial structures inherited from colonization, but under the guise of progress and wealth. It also highlights the epistemic dissonance identified by Mignolo (2009): while communities articulate sustainable practices and alternative knowledges, these are subordinated to extractive logics.

Colonial territoriality in northern Brazil was structured through enclosure and erasure. European empires mapped the Amazon as an “empty frontier,” disregarding Indigenous and later Afro-descendant presence, while militarizing it as a borderland (Garfield, 2013). Amapá’s creation as a federal territory in 1943 embodied this dual logic: framed as a remote frontier to be developed; yet administered directly by the central state to secure sovereignty. The same colonial rationale underlies today’s bureaucratic and legal mechanisms that keep communities in a state of perpetual uncertainty (Superti & Silva, 2015).

The legacies of the military dictatorship and the extractivist gold-rush era continue to shape Amapá’s political, territorial, and social contours, revealing themselves in ongoing conflicts over land, jurisdiction, and rights. One clear inheritance is the persistence of overlapping land claims: in Oiapoque, the *Kulumbú do Patuazinho* quilombola community has waited fourteen years for full territory titling, only recently winning a court injunction that demands the government establish a timeline for formal title amid threats posed by oil exploration. Such delays are not anomalies but systematic patterns that trace back to colonial and authoritarian frameworks of land appropriation and frontier development (Matias, 2025).

By 2013, Amapá had 28 recognized Quilombola communities, but only a handful of them possessed titled lands. Many remain “certified” yet untitled – a condition that translates

recognition into vulnerability (Custódio et al., 2019). Bureaucratic delays, overlapping conservation zones, and extractive concessions generate legal ambiguity that favors capital (Field notes, 2024). As Quijano (2000) argues, coloniality of power persists through property regimes that privilege Eurocentric notions of ownership, converting ancestral territories into commodities.

The choice of Amapá as the central site of research is both analytically significant and personally situated. Located in Brazil's far North, bordering French Guiana, Amapá is often considered peripheral to the nation's economic and political core. Yet this apparent marginality conceals its strategic importance. The state is central to extractive economies (gold, bauxite, timber), and geopolitical relations in the Guiana Shield region (L. G. Fernandes et al., 2024; G. de V. Silva, 2018). It is a space where contradictions of Brazil's racialized capitalism are starkly visible: it is marginalized from development while simultaneously central to resource extraction and territorial governance.

The state's contemporary dynamics cannot be disentangled from the history of slavery, Indigenous dispossession, and state violence. While Quilombola communities remain throughout the state, they are continuously threatened by agribusiness, mining, and infrastructural projects (M. das G. da Silva et al., 2022). Indigenous peoples, similarly, confront pressures on their lands and livelihoods from extractive industries and weak state protection (Malheiro, 2020). These communities are not merely passive victims of exploitation; they are active agents in defending territories, sustaining cultural practices, and contesting state policies.

The literature on Amapá, while still limited compared to southern Brazil, underscores these dynamics. Scholars such as Paulo Gustavo Pellegrino Correa (2015), Eliane Superti (2011) and Gutemberg de Vilhena Silva (2013, 2018) have shown how the state's geopolitical position shapes migration, labor, and development policies. Iuri Cavlak (2016b, 2016a, 2017) has examined the history of the Guyana region, highlighting Amapá's marginalization within

Brazil's own history. Carmentilla Martins et al. (2015) and Camilo Pereira Carneiro et al. (2020) emphasize how extractive economies and infrastructure projects have reshaped Amapá's territorial dynamics. Rafael Oliveira (2013) provides critical insights into labor exploitation and vulnerabilities in the Guyana region. In Cavlak and Correa 2021 edited volume *History and International Relations in the Guyana Region*, contributors discuss different areas of interest, including the historical context of the region, political and socio-economic issues, cross-border cooperation, migration, human trafficking, gender dynamics and culture – further highlighting the need to expand critical discussions within the region. Collectively, this scholarship affirms that Amapá is not peripheral in a trivial sense but is actively represented as a region of exploitation, underdevelopment, and racialized governance.

For this thesis, Amapá is not merely a case study but is also a critical site where the coloniality of power, epistemic erasures, and violent development converge. The dictatorship's integrationist policies, the gold rush's extractivist principles, and the ongoing silences in institutional discourse provide the context for the narratives and refusals I encountered during fieldwork. By analyzing Amapá's formation through the lenses of Quijano, Mignolo, and Fanon, this section demonstrates how contemporary conflicts are rooted in long-standing structures of racialized exploitation. It is within this context that the interviews with community leaders, activists, and state representatives must be situated: as voices navigating and contesting the enduring legacies of coloniality.

3.3.1. Stage One: Secondary data Analysis

This research was divided into three stages. The first stage of the research design consisted of the collection and analysis of documents and press releases relevant to Amapá. These included media coverage of Quilombola struggles and local government communications that reflect local epistemologies. Discourse analysis was employed to examine how Quilombola communities are represented in official and media discourses. As

Mignolo (2007b, 2021) argues, coloniality operates not only through material exploitation but also through epistemic framing: by defining certain groups as marginal, deviant, or invisible. Dominant discourses reproduce racial hierarchies. By analyzing how media frame communities in Amapá, this component illuminates the epistemic dimensions of exploitation and governance. This initial stage considered insights from Rau and Coetzee (2022), who emphasize that narratives, whether in stories, media, or policy, are central to understanding human experiences.

3.3.2. Stage Two: Semi-Structured Interviews

The second stage involved fieldwork in Amapá, consisting of six semi-structured interviews. Participants were strategically selected to capture diverse perspectives on the dynamics of racialized territorial exploitation: two Quilombola leaders, representing community struggles for land, cultural survival, and political recognition; two grassroots activists, engaged in mobilization around Quilombola rights and environmental defense; and two government representatives, offering insights into state policies, institutional practices, and the official framing of territorial and racial issues.

Semi-structured interviews were chosen because they provide both structure and flexibility. As Buscatto (2022) explains, qualitative interviews allow researchers to maintain thematic focus while enabling participants to articulate their experiences in their own terms. In this case, the interviews were guided by questions about territorial dispossession, violence, resistance practices, and the role of the state, but participants were encouraged to shape the conversation and prioritize issues they deemed important.

This stage of the research reflects an adaptation from the initial plan of conducting extended ethnographic immersion. Budgetary and logistical constraints limited the feasibility of long-term ethnography, but semi-structured interviews proved to be both feasible and

methodologically effective. They facilitated access to diverse interlocutors and produced rich narratives that illuminate both the structures of exploitation and the strategies of resistance in Amapá.

3.3.3. Stage Three: Analysis and Discussion

The third stage of the research design involved the analysis and discussion of the collected material. Analysis was guided by a combination of thematic and narrative approaches. Thematic analysis allowed for the identification of recurring patterns across interviews and documents, such as the centrality of land struggles, the persistence of racialized exploitation, and the ambivalent role of the state (Flick, 2022). Narrative analysis, following Rau and Coetzee (2022), enabled attention to how participants framed their experiences, the stories they told, and the epistemologies embedded in their accounts.

This interpretive analysis was informed by the decolonial framework outlined earlier. It sought not only to describe patterns but to interrogate how they relate to the colonality of power (Quijano, 2000), the persistence of epistemic domination (Maldonado-Torres, 2007; Mignolo, 2009), and the ontological dimensions of colonial violence (Fanon, 1968, 1986). By situating community narratives alongside policy and media discourses, the analysis highlighted both the tensions and disjunctures between official representations and lived realities. The discussion stage integrated these analyses into broader arguments about racial capitalism, territorial governance, and community resistance in Amapá. In doing so, it aimed to make visible the ways in which local experiences both reflect and contest the structures of Brazil's racialized state formation.

The three stages of the research design are not disconnected or sequential steps but interconnected components. Together, they allow the research to address the guiding questions in a comprehensive manner. Stage one situates the analysis within broader discursive

frameworks; stage two provides grounded insights from community and institutional actors; and stage three integrates these data into a critical analysis that foregrounds both structures of domination and practices of resistance.

This reflects the principle, emphasized by Dubey and Kothari (2022), that case study research is strengthened by methodological pluralism. By drawing on multiple sources and methods, the research captures different dimensions of the phenomenon under study. At the same time, the design remains anchored in the interpretivist and decolonial orientation of the thesis, ensuring that methods are not fragmented but unified by a shared epistemological stance.

3.3.4. Data Sources and Collection

Because this study examines how colonial structures of domination persist and are reconfigured in Amapá, it was necessary to analyze sources that capture both the discursive framing and the lived experiences of Quilombola communities. The research therefore combined secondary data – drawn primarily from regional and national media coverage – with semi-structured interviews conducted with community leaders. This design allowed for the triangulation of institutional narratives and community perspectives, situating localized experiences within broader structures of coloniality.

3.3.4.1. Secondary data

The media analysis sought to identify how Quilombola communities in Amapá are represented, silenced, or politicized within public discourse. Following Mignolo's (2002, 2007a, 2009, 2021) and Quijano's (2000) insights on the coloniality of knowledge, this phase explored how dominant narratives reproduce hierarchies of legitimacy, determining which experiences are rendered visible, which are distorted, and which remain unspeakable.

Secondary data were collected between 2022 and 2025 from a variety of regional and national outlets, including *Diário do Amapá*, *Portal do Governo do Amapá*, *Brasil de Fato*,

Terra de Direitos and Alma Preta. These materials included news articles, press releases, and official communications that addressed Quilombola territories, land conflicts, development projects, and incidents of violence or protest. Critical attention was directed toward four main areas: (1) the framing of communities as obstacles to development or as beneficiaries of state modernization projects; (2) the criminalization or marginalization of community leaders and activists; (3) the portrayal of extractive or infrastructural projects as symbols of progress, often without reference to their social or ecological impact; and (4) the selective use of racial and territorial identifiers, which alternately emphasize or erase communities' Black ancestry and collective rights depending on the narrative needs of the publication.

This corpus of news and institutional communication revealed an endurance of colonial tropes in representations of the Amazon and its peoples – particularly the construction of Amapá as peripheral, underdeveloped, and dependent on external intervention (Martins et al., 2015; Superti, 2011). Through systematic reading and coding in NVivo, these materials were analyzed to trace how such framings sustain the epistemic and racial hierarchies that structure public debate.

All media texts were collected through online archives, institutional websites, and university repositories. Each document was stored and coded in NVivo, where recurring categories such as violence, recognition, development, and resistance were identified. Manual coding was also applied to capture more nuanced patterns, such as the tone of coverage or the implicit racialization of narratives.

The goal was not to produce a quantitative content analysis but to map the discursive environment within which Quilombola struggles are articulated or suppressed. These findings informed the design of the interview guide, particularly the central question “*What violence do you and your community experience most?*” which encouraged participants to situate their experiences in relation to the narratives circulating in the media. By juxtaposing institutional

representations with lived accounts, the research illuminated the epistemic dissonances that characterize Amapá's public discourse: while official outlets often depict development as progress, community voices reveal its continuity with older forms of racialized dispossession. Secondary data were examined to trace the circulation of stereotypes and narratives about Amapá. As Almeida et al. (2021) and Nunes de Lima (2021) observe, the North is frequently depicted as peripheral, backward, or dangerous. The analysis confirmed that coverage of land conflicts often cast communities as disruptive, while coverage of development projects emphasized modernization without acknowledging dispossession. Such discourses reproduce colonial dichotomies of progress versus tradition, development versus resistance. The second analytical layer focused on the six semi-structured interviews with Quilombola leaders, grassroots activists, and government representatives. Interviews were analyzed through a combination of thematic and narrative approaches, supported by NVivo software for coding and organization.

The next section outlines the procedures used in collecting and analyzing interview data, which serve as the primary empirical foundation for this study

3.3.4.2. Semi-Structured Interviews

Although documents and media offer valuable insights into discursive and institutional frameworks, they are limited in their ability to capture the lived experiences of individuals most directly impacted by territorial dispossession and racialized exploitation. To address this limitation, the second phase of data collection employed semi-structured interviews. This approach achieves a balance between thematic direction and conversational adaptability, allowing participants to express their perspectives in their own words (Buscatto, 2022).

This purposive sampling strategy was designed to capture diverse positionalities: from community perspectives on the ground, to activist framings of resistance, to institutional viewpoints from within the state. The small number of participants reflects the depth rather

than breadth of qualitative inquiry, in line with the case study design (Dubey & Kothari, 2022; Flick, 2022). Participants were identified through existing networks – established during previous field work for my master’s research, focused on gold mining and women trafficking – and snowball sampling. My personal connections to the region facilitated initial introductions, while subsequent referrals (snow balling method) enabled access to additional interlocutors. Building trust was essential, particularly with community leaders and activists who face risks of criminalization and violence. Consent was obtained verbally and in writing, and participants were assured of anonymity and confidentiality.

Interviews were conducted in Portuguese, in person in Macapá. Each interview lasted between 60 and 90 minutes. A flexible interview guide was used, structured around three themes: (1) experiences of territorial dispossession, exploitation, violence, and state neglect, (2) strategies of resistance, community organization, and cultural survival, and (3) perceptions of government policies, institutional practices, and the broader significance of Amapá within Brazil. Within these themes, participants were encouraged to narrate their experiences and prioritize issues most relevant to them. This approach aligns with the recognition of storytelling as a methodological tool (Rau & Coetzee, 2022) and with the decolonial emphasis on privileging subaltern epistemologies (Mignolo, 2011c, 2021; L. T. Smith, 2021; Thambinathan & Kinsella, 2021). With participants’ consent, interviews were audio-recorded and later transcribed. Transcriptions were translated into English where necessary for writing purposes, though key terms and concepts were preserved in Portuguese to retain their cultural specificity.

All interview transcripts were imported into NVivo to support a systematic yet interpretive process of thematic analysis. The coding strategy combined deductive and inductive approaches, allowing theoretical commitments and participants’ lived narratives to inform one another in an iterative manner. Initial (deductive) codes were generated directly from the research questions and interview guide – for example, land dispossession, state

policies, forms of violence, and resistance strategies. These reflected the core analytical foci derived from the guiding framework on coloniality, racial capitalism, and gendered labor.

As transcripts were reviewed line by line, new inductive codes emerged organically from participants' language, gestures, and silences. Examples included ancestral memory, fear of criminalization, environmental degradation, and urban pressure. These emergent categories expanded the analytical vocabulary beyond predefined theoretical constructs, anchoring the study in participants' epistemic perspectives.

Over several rounds of coding and memo writing, these descriptive codes were refined and grouped into broader analytical categories, forming the project's codebook (Appendix A). The codebook functioned as both a technical and interpretive tool, enabling transparency and reflexivity in theme development. It evolved continuously as new insights surfaced, illustrating the iterative and interpretivist nature of the analysis.

Following this iterative process, seven key themes were identified. Each theme condensed recurring patterns in participants' narratives and field notes, representing the structural, affective, and epistemic dimensions of violence and resistance in Amapá. Within each theme, sub-themes captured more specific facets of experience.

The codebook was not static but evolved through multiple rounds of coding. This iterative process reflects the interpretivist stance of the research: codes were not imposed mechanically but refined as understanding deepened. NVivo facilitated the organization and retrieval of coded material, but the interpretive work of identifying themes and patterns remained the responsibility of the researcher.

The final analytical layer involved integrating findings from documents, media, and interviews. This process was not simply about triangulation in the positivist sense of verifying

data from multiple sources, but about cross-reading materials to reveal tensions, silences, and contradictions.

3.3.5. *Limitations*

No qualitative research is exhaustive, and this thesis is no exception. The deliberate scope and methods chosen, centered on Amapá, six semi-structured interviews, and discourse analysis, reflect a balance between depth and practicality. However, it is essential to acknowledge key limitations shaped by field conditions and broader socio-political dynamics. The key limitations are summarized in table 1.

Table 1 Summary of Key Limitations on Field Research

Limitation	Cause	Analytical Implication
Fewer interviews	Land-conflict-related insecurity	Reduced diversity, but increased depth with key positionalities
Geographic restriction	Access and safety constraints	Limited regional breadth; focus on strategic locales
Fear among participants	Risk of violence or surveillance	Silences reveal power dynamics; inform analytic framing
Temporal snapshot	Fieldwork during active conflict	Captures acute phase; limits long-term trend analysis

Despite its promise, extended ethnography proved unfeasible in practice. The most significant constraint to executing an ethnography was financial: long-term residence in remote areas of Amapá required resources beyond the scope of this project. Additionally, upon my arrival in Amapá, I was informed that land conflicts were happening in the proposed researched communities and was recommended by community leaders to not leave the capital (Macapá) for my safety.

Ethical considerations further complicated the feasibility of ethnography. Sustained participant observation requires not only researcher immersion but also community willingness to accept such immersion. For communities facing constant pressures from extractive industries, government neglect, and occasional criminalization of leaders, the presence of a researcher for extended periods risked adding to their burdens. While some leaders were open to engagement, others expressed concerns about the demands ethnography would place on them. Respecting these concerns meant recognizing that ethnography, while desirable from a research perspective, was not the most ethical or realistic option under the circumstances.

Perhaps the most significant safety constraint stemmed from the proliferation of land conflicts in northern Brazil during the period of fieldwork. Across the Amazon, violence over territorial disputes has escalated, affecting Indigenous and Quilombola communities profoundly. In numerous regions, private militias, and communities have engaged in confrontations that forced communities to withdraw or cease mobilizations. In Pará, for example, Quilombola and Indigenous leaders reported violent clashes with private security and police during attempts to assert land rights against a palm oil firm – incidents that led to evictions and the destruction of boundary markers (Mendes, 2023). This violence created an environment of fear that limited community accessibility.

As a consequence of heightened insecurity, several community leaders and potential interviewees expressed fear about participating in interviews. In some Quilombola and Indigenous settlements, the mere presence of visitors was viewed as raising the risk of scrutiny from local landholders, militias, or law enforcement. These safety concerns forced postponements or cancellations of planned visits. In a few cases, participants explicitly cited fears of violent reprisals as the reason for declining, which directly limited the number of interviews and the range of perspectives captured.

These limitations shaped the contours of the research but did not fundamentally compromise its depth. Two core reflections emerged from it: concentrated insights and contextual significance of the limitations. While the sample is small, the positions of the interviewees (community leaders, activists, and government reps) provided access to perspectives spanning grassroots struggles, institutional rationales, and policy framing. This strategic configuration preserved analytical diversity despite restricted geographic coverage.

The fact that leaders feared interviews is itself analytically meaningful. It underscores the violence and surveillance that condition community agency and epistemic exposure. In other words, these limitations are not neutral but reflect structural pressures shaping visibility and voice. Acknowledging them is part of the decolonial reflexivity of the project.

The fieldwork occurred during a period of escalating territorial tensions, which means findings capture a moment of heightened conflict rather than a baseline or long-term trend. Future research could build longitudinal perspectives by documenting how community strategies and vulnerability evolve over time – especially in relation to policy changes or shifts in political contexts.

3.4. Positionality, Ethics and Reflexivity

Positionality, ethics and reflexivity are not ancillary dimensions of research design; they are constitutive of the methodological orientation adopted in this thesis. In a study concerned with the exploitation of Quilombola communities in Amapá, ethical responsibility extends beyond compliance with institutional protocols. It encompasses attentiveness to power relations, recognition of the risks participants face, and reflexivity about the researcher's own position in relation to the field. This section therefore outlines the positionality, ethical

procedures followed during the research, and the reflexive stance that guided its conduct and analysis.

3.4.1. Positionality

My positionality required continuous reflexivity regarding the role of the researcher and the power dynamics inherent in knowledge production. As Buscatto (2022) argues, rigorous qualitative inquiry demands a delicate balance between immersion and analytical distance, empathy and critical interpretation. Throughout this research, I navigated these tensions as an insider-outsider, positioned simultaneously within and beyond the worlds I sought to understand.

As a non-white Brazilian with direct ancestry from enslaved people on my mother's side, I share a historical and racial context with the communities participating in this study. Yet, my light skin tone and position as a highly educated academic confer a degree of privilege and mobility – particularly in northern Brazil, where colorism and educational attainment often define class hierarchies. My identity thus grants both access and distance: it opens certain conversations while marking me as someone partially external to the everyday realities of community struggle. These privileges bring their own assumptions and entitlements, which I approached with constant awareness and self-questioning.

I was born in Belém (Pará) and raised in Macapá (Amapá), a background that provided cultural proximity to participants and fluency in the linguistic and symbolic repertoires of the region. This shared regional identity often facilitated trust – participants were more inclined to speak openly with someone who understood local expressions, humor, and political rhythms. However, it also illuminated the structural limitations of research in the North. Amapá's late academic institutionalization (the Federal University of Amapá (UNIFAP) was only established in 1990) reflects broader historical neglect by the Brazilian state (Farias da Silva,

2019). The resulting scarcity of archives, research funding, and local data means that much scholarship on the region has been produced by external researchers, typically white, southern, and male. Acknowledging this uneven academic geography was essential to situating my own position within it.

This imbalance is also epistemic and spiritual. Academic and institutional perspectives often fail to grasp the significance of Quilombola spiritual practices, such as *Marabaixo* rituals, beyond their folkloric representation. Recognizing this limitation demanded sensitivity to how participants protect and transmit their truths – sometimes through metaphor or silence rather than explicit statement. Following Collins (2002), I treated these epistemologies not as barriers to objectivity but as alternative modes of theorizing that expand the boundaries of what counts as knowledge.

My current position as a doctoral researcher based in New Zealand introduced another layer of complexity. I entered the field as a community member shaped by the Amazonian North but also as an academic interlocutor embedded within a Global North institution. This dual position required vigilance against both over-identification with participants and the reproduction of external interpretive frameworks. Writing from the West afforded me critical distance and safety to address politically sensitive issues, yet it also situated me within a global academic system that privileges certain languages, concepts, and modes of legitimacy. Reflexivity therefore became not a discrete phase of the project but a continuous ethical practice of negotiating between belonging and difference.

Finally, my gender shaped how I experienced and interpreted the field. As a woman from the North, I shared with many participants a sense of navigating patriarchal and racialized structures both within and outside academic spaces. Women in Quilombola communities play central roles in cultural transmission, political organization, and the defense of territory. My gender facilitated rapport with female participants, who spoke candidly about domestic

responsibilities, fear, and resilience – topics they might have withheld from male researchers. At the same time, I remained attentive not to reduce these accounts to women’s issues but to interpret them as part of broader dynamics of community life and collective survival. As Patricia Hill Collins (2002) observes, marginalized women’s experiences produce distinctive epistemologies, rooted in struggle, that illuminate the intersections of oppression and resistance. Engaging these epistemologies enriched not only the data but also the ethical and interpretive depth of this research.

3.4.2. Ethical Protocols

All research activities were conducted under the approval of the Human Research Ethics Committee of the School of Arts, Psychology, Law, and Social Sciences at the University of Waikato (Appendix B). This approval required adherence to formal standards of informed consent, confidentiality, and risk management. These standards were implemented in ways tailored to the specificities of the fieldwork in Amapá.

Participants were provided with clear explanations of the research objectives, methods, and potential uses of their contributions. Consent was obtained both in writing and orally, acknowledging that in some contexts oral agreement is a culturally appropriate practice. Participants were informed that their participation was voluntary, that they could decline to answer any questions, and that they could withdraw at any stage without consequence.

Given the sensitivity of the subject matter – land rights, resistance to extractive industries, and critiques of government institutions – confidentiality was paramount. Identifying details were removed from transcripts, and pseudonyms were used in all notes and analysis. Particular care was taken with community leaders and activists, who may be subject to surveillance or retaliation for their political activities. Data were stored securely in encrypted files accessible only to the researcher.

The research acknowledged the risks participants faced in discussing sensitive issues. For activists and Quilombola leaders, speaking openly about resistance strategies could expose them to political or legal consequences. For government representatives, criticizing institutional practices could carry professional risks. Interviews were therefore conducted in settings chosen by participants to maximize their comfort and safety.

Ethical research also required attentiveness to cultural protocols. For Quilombola and Indigenous interlocutors, this meant respecting forms of address, acknowledging the authority of community leadership, and recognizing the collective dimension of knowledge. Rather than treating participants as isolated informants, the research acknowledged their roles as representatives of broader communities and traditions.

While institutional approval provided a necessary framework, this thesis understands ethics as extending beyond conformity. As Rau and Coetzee (2022) argue, ethical research requires not only protecting participants from harm but also recognizing their agency and the legitimacy of their knowledge. In decolonial terms, ethics entail resisting the extractive tendencies of academic research that treats subaltern communities as sources of data while failing to recognize their epistemic contributions (Mignolo, 2009; Moyo, 2020; L. T. Smith, 2021).

This thesis therefore approached ethics as an ongoing relational practice. Interviews were framed not as one-sided interrogations but as conversations in which participants guided the direction of discussion. Cultural texts were treated with respect for their symbolic and epistemic value. Silences in interviews, whether pauses, hesitations, or refusals, were respected as meaningful choices rather than gaps to be filled.

3.4.3. Reflexivity

Throughout the analytical process, reflexivity was crucial. As Buscatto (2022) notes, qualitative analysis involves balancing immersion with analytical distance. NVivo provided technical tools for coding, but interpretation required constant reflection on how my background shaped the identification of themes and the framing of narratives. Reflexivity also extended to the recognition of limitations. With only six interviews, the analysis could not capture the full diversity of experiences within Quilombola and Indigenous communities. However, by focusing on strategically selected interlocutors and integrating multiple data sources, the research provided a depth of insight consistent with qualitative case study design (Chamberlain & Hodgetts, 2022; Flick, 2022; Graue & Trainor, 2013).

Reflexivity shaped the way data were collected. In interviews, I was attentive not only to what participants said but also to how my presence as a northern Brazilian academic influenced their narratives. Some participants emphasized shared cultural references, positioning me as an insider. Others highlighted the relevance they perceived of this research to give them their voices back on the academic field, reminding me that my role was to listen rather than to prescribe.

My insider status also posed challenges. Familiarity with the region risked leading to assumptions about shared knowledge. To counter this, I deliberately asked participants to elaborate on terms or practices that might have seemed obvious, ensuring that meanings were articulated in their own words rather than assumed through my own background knowledge.

Reflexivity also informed the analysis of data. NVivo provided tools for coding, but interpretation remained a subjective process shaped by my own perspectives. Recognizing this, I maintained analytic memos throughout coding to document not only emerging themes but also my reflections on how personal background influenced interpretation. For example, my

familiarity with narratives of racialized exclusion in Amapá made it easier to identify them in participants' accounts. At the same time, this familiarity risked normalizing such narratives rather than recognizing their analytical significance. Writing memos allowed me to interrogate these assumptions, ensuring that interpretation remained critical rather than complacent.

Reflexivity also guided the treatment of silences. The absence of references to race in the federal police report, for instance, initially seemed unsurprising given the institutional context. But reflexive consideration revealed this silence as an analytical finding: an expression of the colonality of power through the erasure of race as a category of governance. By interrogating my own inclination to treat the absence as normal, I was able to reframe it as a meaningful dimension of analysis.

Ethics and reflexivity converge in the recognition of power relations that shape the research process. These relations operate at multiple levels – between researcher and participants, between communities and the state, and between Global North and South knowledge systems.

While I sought to create conversational dynamics, the asymmetry of academic authority remained. I had the power to select quotations, frame narratives, and translate experiences into academic arguments. Reflexivity required constant awareness of this authority and efforts to minimize its distortions. On the state level, interviews and documents highlighted the asymmetries between marginalized communities and state institutions. Recognizing these dynamics was essential to interpreting participants' accounts without reproducing the hierarchies they critiqued.

On the global level, conducting doctoral research in New Zealand while studying communities in northern Brazil inherently reflects the global inequalities of academic production. However, this global location provided a crucial double-edge. While it signifies

the extraction of knowledge from the periphery to the core, it simultaneously provided access to robust academic databases, books, and resources – materials often unavailable in underfunded Brazilian regional institutions. Furthermore, this distance was intellectually advantageous for engaging with sensitive topics like race and ethnicity. The Western academy, particularly when informed by critical race theory and decolonial studies, offered a critical distance and the freedom to engage with frameworks (like coloniality and the afterlives of slavery) that remain marginalized or politically contentious within the Brazilian academic context. Specifically, having access to an African-American supervisor specializing in critical race theory provided intellectual frameworks that are essential for resisting the pervasive epistemic erasure of Quilombola struggles in Brazil. Decolonial reflexivity required acknowledging this complex positionality, resisting the extraction of data for external validation, and committing to represent participants' perspectives with integrity.

In summary, ethics and reflexivity in this thesis are understood as relational, political, and epistemic practices. Ethical responsibility required adherence to formal protocols of consent, confidentiality, and risk management, but it also extended to recognizing participants' agency, respecting cultural protocols, and resisting the extractive tendencies of academic research. Reflexivity required critical awareness of my own positionality as an insider-outsider, a northern Brazilian woman conducting research within a Global North institution. It shaped not only data collection but also analysis, interpretation, and representation.

By integrating ethics and reflexivity into every stage of the research process, the thesis sought to align its methodological practices with its decolonial orientation. This meant treating participants not as sources of data but as interlocutors with legitimate epistemologies; treating silences not as voids but as findings; and treating methodology not as neutral technique but as a political practice. In doing so, the research aimed to contribute to political sociology that is ethically grounded, reflexively aware, and epistemically decolonial.

Chapter 4. Results and Discussion: Amapá

4.1. Introduction

This chapter presents the empirical findings of this thesis and situates them within the decolonial, interpretivist framework that underpins this research. The choice to present the results and discussion in the same chapter reflects the methodological path of this thesis. Here, it is possible to understand that data is never neutral, but is embedded within the histories of violence, epistemic erasure, and resistance. Separating results and interpretations as two different discussions would risk reproducing the very divisions between fact and meaning that decolonial approaches seek to unsettle. Instead, the voices of Quilombola leaders, activists, and government representatives, alongside secondary data, are analyzed thematically as contributions to ongoing political and epistemic struggles.

This chapter is guided by the three central research questions: How have colonial structures of racial, spatial, and epistemic domination persisted and been reconfigured in Brazil's northern region, particularly in Amapá? How do Quilombola women from Amapá experience and resist intersecting forms of racialized labor and territorial dispossession? How do decolonial frameworks enhance our understanding of the relationship between racial capitalism, gendered violence, and the afterlives of slavery in northern Brazil? Together, these questions position Amapá not simply as a peripheral or local case, but as a critical site for examining the endurance and transformation of colonial logics in contemporary Brazil. As the literature review demonstrated, Quijano's (1969, 2000, 2007) discussion on coloniality of power reveals how modernity reproduces hierarchies of race, labor, and knowledge. Fanon (1986) emphasizes the violence inherent in development projects that displace colonized peoples while promising progress. Mignolo (2002, 2007a, 2009, 2011a, 2011c) brings the debate of epistemic disobedience, which foregrounds the knowledge of those excluded from

dominant frameworks. These theoretical perspectives frame the findings, enabling an analysis that treats community narratives as epistemic interventions and institutional silences as structured effects of power.

Methodologically, the research proceeded through a qualitative case study centered on Amapá, drawing on reports from government and grassroots organizations, secondary data, and six semi-structured interviews with Quilombola leaders, grassroots activists, and government representatives. While interviews with community leaders and activists offered in-depth accounts of ongoing struggles, the conversations with government representatives were notably cautious. Their responses tended to avoid direct discussion of racial or territorial issues, often addressing them only in superficial terms. This lack of depth constitutes a significant finding, reflecting institutional silences and a reluctance to acknowledge the racialized dimensions of land conflict – or even fear of persecution within their institutions. The interviews were coded and analyzed in NVivo, but interpretation remained iterative, guided by reflexive engagement with my positionality as a northern Brazilian woman and by ethical commitments to minimize extractive research practices. Fieldwork conditions, marked by ongoing land conflicts and fear of violence, shaped both access and content, as some community leaders declined interviews due to security concerns. These refusals are not treated as shortcomings but as findings in themselves, evidence of the violent conditions under which communities articulate their rights.

This chapter unfolds across three major sections that together address the central research questions and thematic findings of this study. The first section analyzes how state and media discourses construct the visibility and legitimacy of Quilombola communities, drawing from mainstream sources such as press releases from Portal Governo do Amapá (2016, 2023, 2025), National Institute of Colonization and Land Reform (INCRA) (2024), and reports from Diário do Amapá (2024), O Globo (2025), Brasil de Fato (2022, 2024) – amongst other sources.

This section examines how development-oriented narratives frame communities as passive recipients of state projects. In contrast, rights-based and environmental justice framings emphasize land titling and recognition as forms of resistance. The analysis reveals how these competing discourses sustain epistemic silences and normalize bureaucratic delay as administrative neutrality.

The second section presents the empirical findings derived from six in-depth interviews with Quilombola leaders, activists, and community members. It identifies three central themes that correspond with the research questions: (1) the persistence of colonial governance and bureaucratic violence in Amapá; (2) racialized and gendered labor structures that reproduce economic precarity; and (3) territorial dispossession and cultural erosion as forms of slow violence. Through participants' narratives, this section shows how colonial power continues to shape everyday life in the state, while also foregrounding the strategies of resilience and epistemic disobedience that sustain community survival.

The third section engages more directly with decolonial theory to interpret the findings. It draws on Fanon's (1986) critique of colonial development, Quijano's (2000) concept of coloniality of power, and Mignolo's (2009) notion of epistemic disobedience to unpack the contradictions between state discourses of modernization and community experiences of abandonment. This discussion situates Amapá within the broader context of racial capitalism in Brazil, showing how bureaucratic violence, economic extraction, and epistemic silencing reproduce the afterlives of slavery.

Finally, the chapter conclusion synthesizes the insights from both empirical and theoretical analyses. It highlights the dissonance between institutional framings of development and community understandings of justice and argues that decolonial approaches are essential to interpreting how power, race, and knowledge intersect in the governance of Black territories in northern Brazil.

By structuring the chapter in this way, the analysis connects discourse, lived experience, and theory in a continuous dialogue. It remains faithful to the voices and silences encountered in Amapá while demonstrating how colonial logics persist through bureaucratic, environmental, and epistemic means.

4.2. Secondary data results: Representations of Quilombola Communities in Amapá

Mainstream, regional, and government-affiliated news media in Amapá, together with press releases from state agencies, were reviewed to understand how Quilombola communities are publicly represented in a context where legal recognition of their territories remains limited. Titling (the formal legal process of granting collective land titles to Quilombola communities) emerged as a central and contested issue across the materials. The secondary data analyzed (published between 2016 and 2025) included press releases from Portal Governo do Amapá (2016, 2023, 2025), National Institute of Colonization and Land Reform (INCRA) (2024), and reports from Diário do Amapá (2024), O Globo (2025), Brasil de Fato (2022, 2024), Terra de Direitos (2023a), Mongabay (2021, 2024), InfoAmazonia (2025), Folha de São Paulo (2025), OMaringá (2025), Instituto Igarapé (2024), Alma Preta (2025b, 2025a), ANDES (2022), Movimento dos Trabalhadores Rurais Sem Terra (MST) (2020), and Jeso Carneiro (2023).

Across these materials, three key themes emerged with varying frequency: Recognition of Quilombos, Climate Justice, and Violence – revealing distinct yet overlapping ways through which media construct and silence Quilombola realities. Recognition of Quilombos appeared most frequently, in ten out of the seventeen documents, with keywords such as *titulação* (titling, appearing 28 times), *regularização fundiária* (land regularization, 14 times), and *reconhecimento* (recognition, 19 times). This theme includes sub-themes of *legally recognized communities*, *titling*, *certification*, and *community agency or voice*. Government-affiliated

media such as Portal Governo do Amapá (2016) and Diário do Amapá (2024) perceive progress as administrative achievement, reporting on title delivery ceremonies and the recognition of new communities. However, these narratives often depoliticize racial and historical dimensions of dispossession. In contrast, national and civil society outlets such as Terra de Direitos (2023a) and Brasil de Fato (2022, 2024) frame recognition within the language of structural violence, noting that, at the current rate, Brazil would need over two millennia to finalize the titling of all quilombola lands. Mentions of certification (*certificação*) occurred in seven documents, emphasizing the bureaucratic nature of recognition tied to state validation. Community agency appeared least frequently, in only four sources, where outlets like Folha de São Paulo (2025) and Brasil de Fato (2022) foreground local leaders' voices rather than institutional actors.

Climate Justice emerged in approximately one-third of the documents (six of eighteen), with keywords such as *clima* (climate, 12 times), *meio ambiente* (environment, 15 times), and *desenvolvimento sustentável* (sustainable development, 9 times). This theme encompasses sub-themes of positive framing, dominant environmental lens, policy prioritization, disconnection from communities, and conflicts with extractive industries. Outlets like Greenpeace (2023) and InfoAmazonia (2025) portray Quilombola communities as active participants in environmental governance, especially during the *COP Quilombola da Amazônia*, where territorial defense was linked to climate justice. Conversely, state press releases from Portal do Governo do Amapá (2023) present oil exploration as a symbol of progress and sustainability, framing extractive projects as compatible with environmental stewardship while omitting the voices of affected communities. Mongabay (2021, 2024) introduces more nuanced environmental framing, connecting delays in land titling to ecological degradation and the erosion of conservation outcomes. These contrasts demonstrate how climate justice is often instrumentalized as a development narrative that obscures racialized territorial struggles.

Violence appeared in six documents, reflected in keywords such as *violência* (violence, 18 times), *ameaça* (threat, 7 times), and *conflito* (conflict, 11 times). Sub-themes include interpersonal or direct violence, structural violence, and criminalization. Reports from Alma Preta (2025b) detail the violent eviction of residents in the *Quilombo do Curiaú*, including elderly individuals subjected to physical aggression by state forces. ANDES (2022) documents judicial orders to evict over 300 families from the *Quilombo Lagoa dos Índios*, exemplifying institutional and structural violence justified through legal procedure. MST (2020) attributes the disproportionate impact of COVID-19 deaths among Quilombolas in Amapá to systemic neglect (another form of slow violence) while Jeso Carneiro (2023) describes the detention of a community leader as evidence of criminalization and surveillance. These cases illustrate how interpersonal violence operates in tandem with slower bureaucratic and institutional mechanisms of harm, producing enduring insecurity and reinforcing racialized hierarchies of belonging.

Taken together, these representations reveal how the public narrative around Quilombola communities oscillates between partial recognition and persistent erasure. References to administrative progress are frequent, yet acknowledgments of racial justice or historical repair remain rare. Environmental and developmental discourses often depoliticize territorial conflict, while portrayals of violence expose the ongoing material consequences of state neglect.

Table 1 synthesizes the distribution of key themes and sub-themes across the seventeen analyzed documents. It demonstrates how *Recognition of Quilombos* dominates public discourse, particularly through references to legal recognition and titling, while community voice remains comparatively marginal. *Climate Justice* themes reveal tensions between environmental narratives and local experiences of defense and displacement. *Violence* – both structural and direct – acts as a transversal thread, linking the other two themes through its

exposure of the lived realities behind administrative silence. Together, these patterns illustrate the layered ways in which media construct, limit, and silence Quilombola presence in Amapá's public sphere.

Table 2 Key Themes and Sub-Themes identified in secondary data

Key Theme	Sub-Themes	Definition / Focus	Example Sources	Frequency (out of 18)
Recognition of Quilombos	Legally recognized	References to communities formally acknowledged as Quilombola territories by state institutions	Diário do Amapá (2024); Portal Governo do Amapá (2023)	8
	Titling	Formal process of granting collective land ownership (<i>titulação coletiva</i>)	Terra de Direitos (2023a); Brasil de Fato (2022)	11
	Certification	Recognition through administrative validation for legal protection or funding	Portal Governo do Amapá (2016)	7
	Community agency / voice	Inclusion of Quilombola perspectives or leadership in coverage	Folha de São Paulo (2025); Brasil de Fato (2022, 2024)	5
Climate Justice	Positive framing	Quilombola territorial defense represented as legitimate environmental activism	Greenpeace (2023); InfoAmazonia (2025)	4
	Dominant environmental lens	Framing centered on state or market environmental policy rather than community experience	Portal do Governo do Amapá (2016, 2025); Mongabay (2021)	5
	Policy prioritization	Environmental goals presented as superior to racial or social justice concerns	Mongabay (2024); O Globo (2025)	3
	Disconnection from communities	Environmental issues discussed without reference to affected local populations	Portal do Governo do Amapá (2025); Folha de São Paulo (2025)	4
	Conflicts with extractive industries	Environmental risks linked to oil and mining projects threatening Quilombola lands	Greenpeace (2023); Folha de São Paulo (2025)	3
Violence	Interpersonal / direct	Acts of aggression or repression targeting individuals or communities	Alma Preta (2025b); Jeso Carneiro (2023)	4
	Structural	Bureaucratic omission, eviction orders, neglect of health, and other systemic harms	ANDES (2022); MST (2020); Alma Preta (2025a)	7
	Criminalization	Surveillance, policing, or judicial persecution of community members	Jeso Carneiro (2023); Alma Preta (2025b, 2025a)	3

4.2.1. Recognition as Progress

Across the three key themes identified, as discussed above, recognition of land rights as progress was one of the most dominant narratives. This framing positioned the formal titling of Quilombola lands as a visible milestone of justice and administrative success. However, recognition in this context referred primarily to the legal acknowledgment of collective land ownership rather than a broader reckoning with historical or racial injustice. While the documents often highlighted bureaucratic milestones, few explicitly mentioned the legacies of slavery, Black identity, or the Afro-Brazilian struggles for land that underpin Quilombola claims.

For example, regarding the Quilombo do Rosa, both the federal agency INCRA (National Institute of Colonization and Land Reform) and the local outlet *Diário do Amapá* emphasized the duration and effort involved in granting the title:

Após 17 anos de trabalho e persistência dos servidores do Incra no Amapá, em novembro de 2024 finalmente o órgão conseguiu emitir o Título Definitivo coletivo para a Comunidade do Quilombo do Rosa – que fica localizado às margens do Rio Matapi, a cerca de 30 quilômetros da capital Macapá. (INCRA, 2024)

After 17 years of work and persistence by INCRA employees in Amapá, in November 2024 the agency finally managed to issue the collective Definitive Title for the Quilombo do Rosa Community – which is located on the banks of the Matapi River, about 30 kilometers from the capital Macapá.

And similarly:

Em um marco para a regularização fundiária do Amapá, o Quilombo do Rosa, na zona rural de Macapá, recebeu o título definitivo do seu território pelo Ministério do

Desenvolvimento Agrário e Agricultura Familiar (MDA), na sexta-feira, 29. A iniciativa, articulada pelo Governo do Estado, marca a retomada da emissão do documento para uma comunidade quilombola amapaense após 17 anos. (Diário do Amapá, 2024)

In a milestone for land regularization in Amapá, Quilombo do Rosa, in the rural area of Macapá, received the definitive title to its territory from the Ministry of Agrarian Development and Family Farming (MDA), on Friday, the 29th. The initiative, coordinated by the State Government, marks the resumption of the issuance of the document for a quilombola community in Amapá after 17 years.

These excerpts demonstrate how both federal and state press releases highlight recognition as an achievement of governance, portraying titling as a product of institutional persistence. Recognition, in this sense, symbolized the completion of a bureaucratic process rather than the redress of historical dispossession. The language of delay (“after 17 years”) appeared as a recurring motif – implicitly acknowledging structural inefficiency without naming the racialized exclusion that sustains it.

Grassroots and NGO sources, however, frame recognition differently. For them, recognition is not merely administrative progress but a form of structural justice that must account for historical violence, ongoing exclusion, and the right to self-determination. Outlets such as Brasil de Fato and Terra de Direitos contest the state narrative of recognition-as-progress by emphasizing the ongoing denial of rights and the bureaucratic structures that sustain inequality (Brasil de Fato, 2022, 2024; Terra de Direitos, 2023a).

This pattern reflects a broader reconfiguration of colonial structures. Although formal recognition of Quilombola lands is now possible within democratic institutions, the process

remains gated, delayed, and uneven (Quijano, 2000). The state continues to act as the arbiter of legitimacy – deciding which communities qualify for recognition and when; thus, reproducing hierarchies reminiscent of colonial governance, where recognition was conditional and granted at the discretion of external authorities. In this sense, the discourse of recognition as progress simultaneously acknowledges and conceals inequality: it celebrates individual titles while normalizing the systemic deferral of justice.

4.2.2. Justice, Climate, and Territorial Demands

The second key media frame that recurs is the strategy of combining Quilombola territorial claims with larger political or environmental agendas. This framing, often articulated through the discourse of Climate Justice, functions distinctly from the administrative focus on titling, yet it remains tethered to the ultimate goal of territorial recognition. For example:

Somos o estado mais preservado da Amazônia, temos uma população negra de destaque na região e estamos fortalecendo a representatividade quilombola. O governador Clécio Luís compreende que não existe justiça climática sem o direito ao território titulado. O Amapá está investindo nos eventos preparatórios e se consolidando como referência para a COP-30. (Portal Governo do Amapá, 2025)

We are the most preserved state in the Amazon, we have a prominent Black population in the region, and we are strengthening quilombola representation. Governor Clécio Luís understands that there is no climate justice without the right to titled land. Amapá is investing in preparatory events and establishing itself as a benchmark for COP-30.

This quote, originating from Portal Governo do Amapá (2025), explicitly situates Quilombola territorial rights within the discourse of climate justice and environmental preservation. It links the legitimacy of territorial claims with global and state objectives,

specifically mentioning international climate conferences (COP-30). The media, in this case the state-affiliated outlet, frames Quilombola recognition – which here refers to the formal acknowledgment and titling of territories rather than a broad reckoning with historical harm – not merely as a social justice issue but as central to environmental politics, thereby connecting these communities to wider policy discourses. This emphasis on the environment serves a dual purpose: while an environmental frame grants the communities increased political visibility, it also appears to be deployed as an intentional strategy to circumvent direct discussion of the root issues of historical land dispossession, institutional racism, and resource exploitation as they relate to Afro-Brazilians. By focusing on future-oriented, technical concerns like climate mitigation, this framing downplays the enduring legacy of colonial violence and the reparative dimension of the Quilombola land struggle.

On one hand, the environmental framing of this issue is helpful because it gives Quilombola territorial claims political weight and visibility by situating them within globally recognized policy concerns like climate change. This integration elevates the claims beyond a purely local or national minority rights issue, offering new avenues for political leverage and advocacy. On the other hand, this framing risks shifting the terms of recognition into technical/regulatory domains (such as titling and climate policy) rather than addressing the core issues of land justice, reparations, or historical violence. This emphasis on climate justice encourages a narrative where environmental concerns are part of, but may ultimately overshadow historical, racial and property demands. This logic of development and control, where recognition is conditional on alignment with a state or global agenda, aligns with a continued form of structural violence by the State (Fanon, 1986).

4.2.3. *The Violence of Racial Invisibility*

The third key theme emerging from the media corpus is violence and conflict, encompassing physical aggression, administrative neglect, and the epistemic erasure embedded in official and media representations. Violence here extends beyond acts of direct harm to include the more subtle forms of silencing that render certain bodies, experiences, and histories invisible.

Reports from Alma Preta (2025b, 2025a), ANDES (2022), MST (2020), and Jeso Carneiro (2023) document the material expressions of this violence. Interpersonal violence appears in incidents such as those affecting the *Quilombo do Curiaú*, where state forces used physical intimidation during forced removal operations (Alma Preta, 2025b). Structural violence manifests in eviction orders and delayed titling processes that perpetuate dispossession, as illustrated in the ANDES (2022) report on Lagoa dos Índios, where nearly 300 families faced removal despite long-term occupation. The criminalization of local leaders, reported by Jeso Carneiro (2023), and the accounts of systemic neglect during the pandemic (MST, 2020), further expose how state institutions produce and sustain racialized vulnerability.

These recurring examples reveal a continuum between structural and interpersonal forms of harm: direct aggression often arises from the conditions created by administrative omission and the slow violence of bureaucracy. The persistence of these practices points to the colonial continuity of governance, where the state simultaneously recognizes and regulates, protecting rights in principle while delaying or denying them in practice.

Invisibility operates as a defining dimension of this violence. Explicit references to race or Black identity are rarely articulated in the analyzed materials, even though the term *Quilombo* inherently signals a history of resistance to slavery and the territorial struggles of Afro-Brazilian peoples. In most state and mainstream media, this historical meaning is stripped

away, and *Quilombo* is mobilized as a neutral, technical category (enumerated, certified, or titled) without acknowledgment of the racial and historical structures that produced dispossession. This process of invisibility transforms communities into quantifiable data points, producing visibility through numbers while simultaneously erasing the lived realities and racialized histories that give these identities meaning. Such abstraction constitutes a subtle but pervasive form of epistemic and structural violence, where recognition is granted through administrative metrics rather than through the acknowledgment of Black life, history, and ongoing territorial struggle.

Media reports, particularly news articles, institutional press releases, and government bulletins, often deploy statistics to convey a sense of scale and administrative progress in Quilombola land recognition. These numerical framings construct an image of efficiency and accountability, suggesting measurable advancement toward justice. Yet the same figures frequently obscure the lived realities of precarity that persist beyond what is counted. As reported by the Portal Governo do Amapá (2016),

No Amapá existem 200 comunidades quilombolas identificadas, sendo 47 certificadas junto a Fundação Palmares e outras quatro tituladas através Instituto Nacional de Colonização Reforma Agrária (Incra). Nos próximos dois meses, outras 11 comunidades no Estado também deverão receber a certificação. (Portal Governo do Amapá, 2016)

In Amapá, there are 200 identified quilombola communities, 47 of which are certified by the Palmares Foundation and another four are titled by the National Institute of Colonization and Agrarian Reform (INCRA). In the next two months, another 11 communities in the state are also expected to receive certification.

The enumeration of Quilombos (200 identified, 47 certified, 4 titled) is important because it provides a crucial metric of partial progress – specifically, progress toward official recognition and the granting of collective land rights and the subsequent protection and resources they entail. In this count, certification refers to the bureaucratic acknowledgment by the Fundação Palmares, which legally confirms a community's historical and cultural identity as Quilombola and is a prerequisite for titling (INCRA land grant). However, this focus on certified and titled communities creates a statistical illusion of success while simultaneously silencing the condition of the majority who live under insecure tenure. Insecure tenure manifests as extreme precarity, often including vulnerability to land grabs, illegal mining incursions, and a systemic lack of public services like healthcare and education. The numbers suggest progress, but a pervasive silence often persists around the daily struggles of the untitled, including the political abandonment, the threat of violence (such as trafficking of women), and direct threats from actors attempting to confiscate land. This omission is a form of epistemic marginality, where only State-legible metrics (certification, titling) are validated as newsworthy knowledge, while the complex, lived experiences of precariousness are rendered invisible (L. H. G. Marques, 2022; Mignolo, 2009).

While many items mention *quilombola* or *comunidades tradicionais*, explicit mention of race, gendered experience, or neglected labor (subsistence, household work, forest work) is often absent in mainstream/regional coverage. None of the quotes above foreground gender, nor do they typically report on the specific roles of Black or Indigenous women, the violence or fear leaders face, or how everyday socio-economic and racial inequalities persist outside formal titles or projects.

For example, in the speech delivered by Governor Clécio Luís at the COP Quilombola da Amazônia event (as reported by Portal Governo do Amapá), a *população negra de destaque na região* (the prominent Black population in the region) is named. However, the discussion

swiftly moves to *território titulado* (titled territory) and institutional recognition (Portal Governo do Amapá, 2025), rather than the gendered violence of land conflict, the daily labor of subsistence, or epistemic marginality. This pattern illustrates how institutional recognition of Quilombos is the dominant concern within state media framing.

As illustrated in Table 1, it is often the grassroots and specialized media that foreground these elements as integral to historical and contemporary social issues, directly connecting violence and dispossession to broader structural violence and racism.

The analysis of media framing in Amapá reveals a pattern of partial recognition and structural omission, where progress is celebrated but justice remains deferred. Recognition is repeatedly portrayed as administrative success – through titling, certification, and event-based visibility; yet this framing reproduces colonial hierarchies by defining rights as conditional and exceptional. Climate justice narratives extend visibility but often depoliticize racial and historical claims, recasting dispossession as a technical or environmental concern. Likewise, the statistical language of progress produces an illusion of inclusion while erasing the lived realities of insecurity, gendered labor, and racialized vulnerability. These silences, both structural and epistemic, illustrate how media discourse continues to privilege state-legible forms of knowledge while marginalizing the embodied, historical, and political dimensions of Quilombola life. Understanding these framings is essential, as they not only shape the public legitimacy of state action but also set the conditions through which these communities articulate resistance and self-definition – themes that become more explicit in the fieldwork findings discussed next.

4.3. Interview results: overview

This section presents the results of six semi-structured interviews conducted with community leaders, grassroots activists, and institutional representatives in Amapá. Most interviews were guided by the central question: *What violence do you and your community experience the most?*

This question prompted participants to articulate violence as a multidimensional reality, encompassing racialized neglect, bureaucratic exclusion, environmental degradation, and gendered oppression. Each participant approached the topic from their lived position – whether as leaders engaged in community defense, as women balancing daily responsibilities and activism, or as institutional actors navigating bureaucratic constraints.

The thematic analysis was conducted using NVivo and supported by manual coding. Initial coding was guided by the study's three research questions, from which themes and subthemes emerged inductively. These were then refined through iterative comparison across interviews. The final coding framework reflects three analytical domains: colonial structures and governance, gendered and racialized labor, and forms of violence and resistance; within which eight overarching themes were identified (Table 3).

Table 3 Key Themes and Sub-themes in the interviews

Key Theme	Subthemes	Description (Based on Participants' Accounts)
Silences	People	Absence of certain narratives and voices, particularly those of women and Black or Indigenous leaders; silences as both a symptom of marginalization and a form of protection.
	Historical dispossession / slavery	
	Race / ethnicity	
	Gender	
Bureaucracies	Delayed titling	Bureaucratic processes that reproduce inequality by privileging elites and delaying community rights; corruption as a normalized aspect of governance.
	Institutional corruption	
	Selective governance	
Recognition of Quilombos	Dispossession	Formal recognition of territories framed as progress while concealing ongoing dispossession and racialized governance.
	Territorial recognition	
Urban Capital	Insecure tenure	Urban and industrial expansion produces insecurity and undermines traditional cultural reproduction.
	Cultural erosion	
Environmental Degradation	Mining	Environmental destruction through extractive projects and weak regulation; ecological damage linked to racialized neglect.
	Pollution / lack of monitoring	
Cultural Autonomy	Traditional practices	Women's central role in sustaining and transmitting cultural and ancestral knowledge as political resistance.
	Knowledge transmission	
	Rituals	
Violence	Structural	Violence articulated as systemic and intersecting: from delayed rights and poverty to gendered and racialized threats.
	Interpersonal	
	Political	
	Climate justice	
	Gendered	
	Race / racism	
Activism	Urban resistance	Everyday acts of resistance, legal mobilization, and leadership by women confronting institutional and physical violence.
	Women's leadership	
	Resisting police presence	

4.3.1. Colonial Governance, Bureaucratic Violence, and Environmental Exploitation

The interviews reveal how colonial governance in Amapá continues to operate through intertwined mechanisms of corruption, selective state presence, and environmental neglect. Participants described a political and bureaucratic order in which the state's regulatory structures (particularly environmental licensing, land titling, and urban planning) function as instruments of dispossession rather than protection. Three interlinked dynamics emerged from the testimonies: Bureaucratic Collusion and Corruption (the weaponization of state regulatory processes, like environmental licensing, to enable private profit); Racialized Environmental Neglect (the systemic failure of public agencies to enforce safeguards in Quilombola territories, reproducing geographies of exclusion); State-Enabled Territorial Invasion the direct or indirect participation of state actors in facilitating the incursion of private capital into legally disputed lands).

P1, a community leader and lawyer from the Quilombo do Curiaú, described how corruption and environmental neglect converge in local governance. She characterized Curiaú as *“uma área nobre ali que está dentro da cidade, então o olho [ganância]”* – a prime area right there within the city, so it attracts greed. According to her, state officials and developers collaborate to advance real-estate projects, particularly large housing complexes, that encroach on protected territories. P1 highlighted that the issue lies not only in the granting of environmental licenses but in the absence of subsequent inspection and enforcement: *“Verificar se a execução do que está no projeto está de fato acontecendo”* (To verify if what was promised in the project is actually being carried out).

Her requests for on-site verification were repeatedly ignored. Environmental licensing, designed as a safeguard, thus becomes a mechanism of racialized dispossession, operating through collusion between developers and public officials. As P1 observed:

[...] Mas não vai, não vai. Porque os caras ganham com isso. Não é à toa que tu vê vereador, que tu vê eles aqui, um secretário... Rico, com casa espetacular, donos de prédios e tudo mais. E você vê os caras dessas secretarias aí que não são secretários, mas que tem um papel lá dentro, riquíssimos e tudo mais, com o carro do ano trocando o carro. Tá doido, meu amigo. Muitos interesses, e os discursos por trás... (P1, 2024).

But they won't go, they won't go. Because those guys profit from this. It's no coincidence that you see councilmen, that you see a Secretary here... Rich, with spectacular houses, owners of buildings and all that. And you see the guys in those Secretariats who aren't Secretaries but hold a position there...filthy rich and all that, driving the car of the year, trading in their cars. It's crazy, my friend. So many interests at play, and the narratives behind it....

This testimony exposes how economic greed and political gain underpin institutional neglect. For P1, the failure to enforce environmental law is a sophisticated form of institutionalized abandonment, a racialized mechanism that maintains economic extraction under bureaucratic legitimacy.

Environmental racism also appears in the state's neglect of public health and monitoring of noise pollution. As P1 explained: "*A maioria morre de infarto... mas ninguém fiscaliza porque é Curiaú, deixa.*" (Most people [elders] die of heart attacks... but no one inspects anything because it's Curiaú, just let it be.) Such neglect exemplifies slow violence, a form of

harm that is continuous, diffuse, and deeply racialized. The state's silence here functions as complicity, sustaining a geography of exclusion under the guise of bureaucratic neutrality.

Beyond negligence, P1 described cases of state-enabled territorial invasion, where local officials or intermediaries facilitate incursions by private developers into disputed or protected lands. This is achieved through manipulated registries, judicial orders, or simply by refusing to enforce existing protections. The result is a paradoxical presence: the state is absent in providing healthcare or education but fully present when authorizing extraction or eviction. As P1 put it, “*uma ausência do Estado muito grande.*” (an extreme absence of the state).

This absence, however, is selective: a deliberate configuration of governance that protects investment while withholding rights. Recognition, in this context, is not a reparative act but a conditional instrument of control, granted only when it aligns with state or corporate interests. This pattern extends beyond Curiaú. Interviewees consistently pointed to urban expansion and infrastructural neglect as mechanisms that reproduce exclusion. P2 connected these pressures to cultural and generational erosion: “*nossos jovens não estão mais valorizando a nossa cultura... senão eles vão se perdendo.*” (P2, 2024) (our young people aren't valuing our culture anymore... and if they don't, they'll lose their way).

For P2, speculative development and new roads threaten not only land but cultural transmission, eroding practices such as Marabaixo and Batuque. This reflects how economic coloniality extends into cultural dispossession, undermining community reproduction and autonomy.

Infrastructure inequality was also identified as a technology of exclusion. P1 (2024) described transportation barriers that isolate Curiaú residents from education and employment: “*O ônibus passa de hora em hora... dificulta demais o acesso à educação.*” (The bus runs only once an hour... it makes access to education extremely difficult). Such infrastructural scarcity

was not framed as mere inefficiency but as an intentional form of spatial segregation. Grassroots activists confirmed this dynamic, emphasizing their continuous struggle to improve access to schools and healthcare: “*Estamos lutando muito para melhorar o acesso às comunidades.*” (P3, 2024) (We have been fighting very hard to improve access to the communities). “*Lutamos pela criação de escolas e polos universitários para facilitar o acesso dos quilombolas.*” (P4, 2024) (We have been fighting for the creation of schools and university centers to facilitate access for Quilombola people).

Across all interviews, violence appeared not as overt conflict but as administrative and spatial, manifesting through selective governance, delayed titling, and incomplete infrastructure. These everyday violences (paperwork, silence, and inaction) accumulate into a geography of abandonment that defines life in Amapá’s Black territories.

4.3.2. Gendered Labor, Territorial Dispossession, and Embodied Violence

Participants identified labor as one of the most visible expressions of gendered and racialized inequality in Amapá. Quilombola women occupy precarious positions – informal employment, domestic service, or underpaid work – that reproduce colonial hierarchies valuing their labor while denying their rights. All the interviewees highlighted that it has been progress regarding the access to formal education, allowing women to seek different work, but it was also observed that they end up having limitations due to their responsibilities with children, community and also racism.

P1, reflecting on her own professional experience, described the persistence of institutional racism within state structures:

Eu sofro racismo dentro da minha instituição... agora, para a questão da cota, basta a declaração de autoidentificação... uma loira de olhos azuis diz que é preta, e eu penso: onde eu me encaixo?” (P1, 2024)

I suffer racism inside my own institution... now, when it comes to the racial quota, all it takes is self-identification... a blonde woman with blue eyes says she's Black, and I think: where do I fit in?

Her account illustrates how policies such as racial quotas, designed to redress exclusion, are undermined by superficial implementation and white resistance. Inclusion, in this sense, remains symbolic rather than transformative. Other participants emphasized that although access to education has improved, structural racism, unequal domestic responsibilities, and the racialized division of labor continue to limit women's mobility and autonomy.

The intersection of gender and territory emerged as a central theme. Women leaders linked land insecurity to increased domestic burdens and fear. Several participants declined interviews altogether due to safety concerns, underscoring how visibility itself can become a risk. P1 (2024) described the experience of living under constant threat: *"Eu sofri várias ameaças de morte, não tenho segurança para caminhar na rodovia."* (I've suffered several death threats; I don't even feel safe walking along the highway). This illustrates how the defense of territory often exposes women to direct and gendered forms of violence. Their bodies, situated at the crossroads of domestic responsibilities and activism, become both targets.

Participants also noted that the proximity to urban centers has intensified social vulnerability. P2 (2024), when asked about her point of view regarding the housing developments expanding to the Quilombola territory, described how new urban dynamics have brought external actors and illicit economies into the community: *"A gente está herdando as drogas, é a prostituição..."* (We are inheriting drugs and prostitution...)

For P2, urbanization introduces moral and material disruptions that deepen gendered precarity. P1 (2024) expanded on this issue when asked the same question, recounting the

normalization of sexualized discourse about Black women among outsiders: “*Vou lá no Curiaú comer uma neguinha... não precisa gastar dinheiro, pego embaixo da árvore.*” (I’m going to Curiaú to sleep with a Black girl... you don’t even need to spend money, you just take her under a tree).

This account captures how racism and misogyny intersect, producing narratives that dehumanize Quilombola women while reinforcing the sexual availability historically imposed on Black female bodies. The language of entitlement in these statements mirrors the logic of territorial domination, where both land and women’s bodies are treated as exploitable resources.

State complicity was another recurrent theme. P5 (2024), a public official, acknowledged the political interference and lack of autonomy within bureaucratic processes related to land titling: “*A dificuldade maior é passar por todos os trâmites sem interferência.*” (The greatest difficulty is getting through all the bureaucratic steps without interference). This observation aligns with community leaders’ claims that violence often operates through bureaucratic obstruction and silence rather than overt aggression. By delaying titling and enabling external occupation, state institutions perpetuate dependency and undermine women’s collective organizing efforts.

4.3.3. Cultural Resistance, Activism, and Strategic Silences

Despite the overlapping forms of violence they face, women in Amapá actively engage in preserving culture and sustaining collective resistance. Their roles as guardians of cultural continuity and knowledge transmission are both political and epistemic, ensuring the survival of ancestral practices in the face of extractivist and colonial pressures. Women’s participation in rituals, oral histories, and community organization constitutes a form of everyday resistance, rooted in collective memory and spiritual endurance. P2 (2024) described how women have

increasingly taken on the responsibility of maintaining *ladainhas* (traditional Catholic chants) and other rituals in the *Quilombo do Curiaú*:

Hoje nós temos dificuldade para acompanhar as ladainhas... em Curiaú tem uma tradição que vinha lá de São Joaquim, o padroeiro da comunidade... tivemos dificuldade de ter um jovem para receber esse legado de cantar a ladainha. Hoje, aqui no Curiaú de Baixo, nós temos muitas mulheres que já estão rezando a ladainha... quando tem alguma festividade, as mulheres vão rezar.

Today we have difficulty keeping up with the ladainhas... in Curiaú there is a tradition that goes back to São Joaquim, the patron saint of the community... we had trouble finding a young person to inherit this legacy of singing the ladainha. Now, here in Curiaú de Baixo, many women are already leading the prayers... whenever there is a festivity, the women go and they pray.

In other communities, women's roles in traditional crafts and subsistence activities carry similar significance. The *Louceiras do Maruanum*, women potters from a neighboring region, exemplify this interweaving of spirituality, material production, and knowledge transmission. Their pottery practice embodies layers of wisdom, mysticism, patience, and empiric knowledge, as women collectively decide how to mold, burn, and present the final pieces.

Beyond cultural practices, women in Amapá also participate directly in collective political resistance. They engage in local associations, mobilize legal claims for land titling, and participate in protests. Women leaders often emerge as spokespersons in conflicts, articulating demands in public forums and negotiating with state officials (Field notes, 2024).

Not all forms of resistance are visible or vocal. As my fieldwork revealed, some women chose silence as a strategy of survival. Refusing interviews was not simply an absence of data

but a conscious act of protection. One of the activists interviewed alerted about the risk the leaders take when they share their experiences, when telling me about how it would be hard to reach some of the communities, and said that *“apesar dos esforços que nós temos pra garantir mobilização institucional na proteção dessas pessoas, nós também estamos em risco e muitas vezes as instituições responsáveis não nos dão apoio”* (Despite our efforts to ensure institutional mobilization to protect these people, we ourselves are at risk, and many times the institutions responsible do not support us) (P3, 2024).

P1 (2024) summarized how activism and visibility can provoke retaliatory acts:

As pessoas falavam nos pontos de ônibus... uma vez, uma senhorinha que trabalhava lá em casa chegou desesperada [...] disse que ouviu no ponto de ônibus que tinham me dado um tiro na cara [...] eu tava em casa, mas se eu não estivesse... mamãe ia morrer do coração (P1, 2024).

People were talking at the bus stops... once, an elderly woman who worked at my house arrived desperate [...] she said she heard at the bus stop that they had shot me in the face [...] I was at home, but if I hadn't been... Mom would have died of a heart attack.

While some women community leaders agreed to participate in interviews, others declined due to fear of violence. These silences are not treated as absences but as findings in themselves, reflecting the climate of intimidation surrounding land conflicts.

The interview results reveal how everyday experiences of violence in Amapá are embedded within broader structures of recognition, invisibility, and colonial governance. Participants' testimonies show that recognition – whether through land titling, policy acknowledgment, or cultural representation, remains conditional and bureaucratically mediated, offering visibility without guaranteeing justice. This limited recognition produces

new forms of invisibility, where communities become legible only through state-defined metrics while their lived realities, labor, and histories are silenced. At the same time, violence emerges not only in its physical and overt forms – such as threats, environmental harm, or police presence – but also through diffuse bureaucratic processes, delayed rights, and systemic neglect that sustain racialized precarity.

Yet within these constrained structures, participants also expose the cracks where resistance takes root. Women’s leadership, cultural preservation, and strategic silences constitute active refusals of erasure, asserting alternative modes of visibility and belonging. These results demonstrate that colonial domination in northern Brazil is not merely historical but continuously reconfigured through governance, economy, and discourse. The following discussion section builds on these findings to explore how the persistence of colonial rationalities (particularly through bureaucratic delay, racialized environmental neglect, and epistemic marginality) reveals the contemporary workings of coloniality in Amapá.

4.4. Discussion: Amapá – Coloniality, Racial Capitalism and Epistemic Disobedience

This discussion interprets the empirical findings in light of the broader theoretical frameworks of coloniality, racial capitalism, and epistemic disobedience. It seeks to address the central research questions guiding this study: how colonial structures of racial, spatial, and epistemic domination have persisted and been reconfigured in Amapá; how Black women from Quilombola communities experience and resist intersecting forms of racialized labor and territorial dispossession; and how decolonial frameworks help elucidate the relationship between racial capitalism, gendered violence, and the afterlives of slavery in northern Brazil. Drawing on six in-depth interviews with community leaders, activists, and government representatives, this section situates participants’ narratives within the enduring logics of

colonial power that shape both material and symbolic forms of exclusion. Rather than treating these accounts as isolated experiences, the discussion interprets them as expressions of structural continuities where bureaucratic neglect, environmental degradation, and gendered violence operate as contemporary modalities of colonial domination. At the same time, these testimonies reveal practices of resilience, cultural preservation, and epistemic disobedience that challenge the coloniality of power.

4.4.1. Recognition, Bureaucratic Violence, and the Colonial State

Colonial territoriality in northern Brazil was structured through enclosure and erasure. European empires mapped the Amazon as an “empty frontier,” disregarding Indigenous and later Afro-descendant presence, while militarizing it as a borderland (Garfield, 2013). Amapá’s creation as a federal territory in 1943 embodied this dual logic: framed as a remote frontier to be developed; yet administered directly by the central state to secure sovereignty. The same colonial rationale underlies today’s bureaucratic and legal mechanisms that keep communities in a state of perpetual uncertainty (Superti & Silva, 2015).

By 2013, Amapá had 28 recognized Quilombola communities, but only a handful possessed titled lands. Many remain “certified” yet untitled – a condition that translates recognition into vulnerability (Custódio et al., 2019). Bureaucratic delays, overlapping conservation zones, and extractive concessions generate legal ambiguity that favors capital (Field notes, 2024). As Quijano (2000) argues, coloniality of power persists through property regimes that privilege Eurocentric notions of ownership, converting ancestral territories into commodities.

The economic architecture of Amapá further reveals how coloniality adapts to new global configurations. The establishment of the Indústria e Comércio de Minérios (ICOMI) in Serra do Navio in the 1940s, in partnership with U.S. company Bethlehem Steel, inaugurated

a model of enclave capitalism: infrastructure was built for extraction, not for life. The town that grew around the mine – complete with imported technology and American-style housing – symbolized progress, yet when operations ceased in the 1990s, it became a ghost town, leaving behind unemployment and contamination (Drummond, 2000).

In the decades that followed, Amapá became a laboratory for the next phase of extractivism. Gold, bauxite, and oil projects proliferated, each promising modernization. The most recent example is Petrobras' exploration at the Foz do Amazonas Basin, off Amapá's coast. Environmental organizations and community groups have denounced the risks of oil drilling to marine ecosystems and coastal livelihoods (Terra, 2025). Yet, government officials frame it as an opportunity to *bring development to the North* (SECOM, 2023). The extractivist discourse thus reproduces violence once again: development as justification for dispossession.

One of the communities I could not visit due to safety concerns is in the center of the oil exploration discussion: *Kulumbú do Patuazinho*, located in Oiapoque, will be one of the affected communities in case an oil leak happens – their whole subsistence is threatened, and because of the potential the location has of housing and providing for *Petrobrás* employees in the future, the community has also been facing armed conflicts against *grileiros* (Field notes, 2024).

For local communities, extractivism translates into land conflicts, environmental degradation, and intensified social vulnerability. *Grilagem*, the illegal occupation and sale of land, thrives where titling is incomplete – or even where titling is completed, but ignored by the state (Field notes, 2024). Indigenous and Afro-descendant territories are designated as zones of sacrifice, their inhabitants rendered dispensable within capitalist accumulation. In the epistemic realm, extractivism depends not only on land appropriation but on the erasure of alternative knowledges of sustainability (Mignolo, 2002).

Infrastructure deficits compound another aspect of this violence. Transportation gaps, limited education access, and poor health services function as technologies of control – as discussed in the results section above. These patterns reflect another layer of the violence these communities face: development policies that channel risk and scarcity toward racialized territories. The state’s failure to provide infrastructure (transportation, sanitation, and education) compounds the violence of extraction. Communities isolated by poor roads and lack of services are kept in a state of enforced dependency. The deprivation of basic rights becomes a means of control, reinforcing the idea that modernity belongs elsewhere.

This reflects the persistence of colonial economic narratives: communities are framed as beneficiaries, never as decision-makers; their livelihoods are presumed subordinate to extractive progress. As Quijano (2000) notes, coloniality of power operates through the racialization of labor and the positioning of non-European populations as subordinate in capitalist economies.

4.4.2. Epistemic Erasures and the Politics of Silence

Epistemic domination is another dimension through which colonial structures persist in Amapá. State documents and reports often erase race, rendering Afro-descendant and Indigenous experiences invisible. The federal police report on human rights violations in Amapá that I obtained illustrates this: while it documents violations, it makes no mention of race, despite racial hierarchies being central to land conflicts⁸.

This erasure exemplifies another layer of epistemic violence that can be linked to Mignolo’s (2002) coloniality of knowledge: official discourses establish what counts as valid knowledge, while downgrading the knowledges of racialized communities. By omitting race,

⁸ It is also relevant to notice that the report obtained does not classify the types of human rights violations investigated, giving no real relevant data for this research in the sense of understanding the depth of state presence/absence and violence suffered by quilombola and indigenous people.

institutions deny the epistemic legitimacy of community perspectives that insist on its centrality.

Interviewees recognized this erasure as a continuation of slavery's afterlives when asked about their understanding about their voices and representations. This phenomenon of epistemic domination emerged in two distinct forms in the secondary data analysis and interviews: narrative omission – manifested in the systematic exclusion of race and contemporary struggles from official discourse; and historical flattening – manifested in the reduction of Quilombola identity to a single historical category (descendants of slaves), thereby denying its present-day complexity and agency. One activist stated: “*Quando falam dos quilombos, falam apenas descendentes de escravos, não se fala sobre a nossa luta pelo reconhecimento das terras, manutenção da cultura e do ambiente... Não se fala sobre quem nós somos hoje.*” (P4, 2024)⁹. By invoking slavery as a living structure, the mainstream discourse illustrates how epistemic erasure intersects with racial and territorial domination. The persistence of coloniality is not only material but discursive, shaping which voices are heard and which are excluded.

Epistemic disobedience (Mignolo, 2009) emerges in the ways communities document their own histories through oral traditions, festivities, and local archives. *Marabaixo* and *Batuque* are not mere cultural expressions but forms of knowledge production that assert alternative temporalities and values. P2 emphasized that “*hoje a gente tem dificuldade para acompanhar as ladainhas... os jovens não querem mais aprender... se a cultura não for repassada, ela pode ficar esquecida*” (P2, 2024)¹⁰. The erosion of these practices reflects how epistemic coloniality operates through generational rupture and cultural displacement.

⁹ "When they talk about the *Quilombos*, they speak only of descendants of slaves; they don't speak about our struggle for land recognition, maintenance of culture, and the environment... They don't speak about who we are today." (P4, 2024)

¹⁰ "Today we have difficulty keeping up with the *ladainhas* [traditional cultural/religious chants]... the young people no longer want to learn... if the culture is not passed on, it can be forgotten." (P2, 2024).

By foregrounding these voices, this research aligns with decolonial methodologies that treat testimony as theory (L. T. Smith, 2021; Thambinathan & Kinsella, 2021). Recognizing community narratives as epistemic acts challenges the academic and bureaucratic monopoly over knowledge about Amapá.

4.4.3. Reconfiguring Coloniality in the Present

Colonial structures in Amapá do not persist unchanged; they are continually adapted to meet new political and economic imperatives. What is often presented as modernization, integration, or sustainability is, in practice, a reformulation of older hierarchies. State and corporate actors deploy the rhetoric of development and economic growth, while the lived experience of many Afro-descendant and Indigenous residents remains one of displacement and precarity.

As noted by Bertha Becker (2005), Brazil's northern borderlands have been historically instrumentalized to demonstrate sovereignty rather than to promote equality. In Amapá, these geopolitical logics endure through contemporary projects: roads, energy corridors, and "green" conservation programs that promise modernization but reproduce colonial asymmetries. Conservation zones frequently overlap with traditional territories, imposing bureaucratic restrictions on communities while enabling corporate partnerships in bio-economy initiatives (Becker, 2005; Field notes, 2024; Moncau, 2022; Schmink et al., 2019).

In response to a question regarding the persistence and reconfiguration of colonial structures in Amapá, a key thematic tension emerged: Skepticism toward Conditional Protection. Interviewees clearly perceive the shifts in governmental approach toward traditional territories but interpret these changes with significant caution, doubting the sustainability or sincerity of the state's intent. P1 (2024) remarked on the sudden appearance of

federal and state programs framed as protection but implemented without genuine participation:

Agora que eu tô vendo o movimento... parece até com a mudança do governo. Eu vejo o movimento em realmente querer proteger essas comunidades... parecem que eles acordaram, 'a gente tem que proteger realmente'... Mas a gente precisa provocar, porque as pessoas não conhecem o direito delas.

Now I'm seeing the movement... it even seems connected to the change in government. I see a move to really want to protect these communities... it seems like they woke up, [thinking] 'we really have to protect them.' But we need to provoke them, because the people don't know their own rights.

Her statement expresses a measured sense of optimism alongside significant skepticism: the dynamic between recognition and redistribution remains central to state–community relations. Fanon (1986) observed that post-colonial leadership frequently maintains the structural framework of the colonial state, changing its personnel but not its underlying principles. Consequently, contemporary measures to protect traditional communities may risk perpetuating paternalistic administration, rather than achieving genuine emancipation.

The persistence of epistemic enclosure, the framing of quilombola and Indigenous knowledge as cultural heritage rather than political authority, further entrenches colonial relations. Mignolo (2009) argues that epistemic disobedience is necessary to resist the re-centering of Eurocentric categories of progress. In *Curiaú*, elders' defense of *Batuque* and *Marabaixo* practices against commercialization exemplifies such disobedience. As P1 explained, "*A cultura é o batuque, o marabaixo, o tambor... não é uma aparelhagem de som*

de toneladas... Isso não é a nossa tradição” (P1, 2024)¹¹. By distinguishing ancestral culture from commodified tradition, she contests the state’s tendency to celebrate cultural forms stripped of their political meaning. In this sense, Amapá stands at the intersection of old and new colonialities: a territory where environmental, racial, and epistemic hierarchies are constantly updated to fit global markets.

The persistence and reconfiguration of colonial structures in Amapá reveal how racialized domination adapts rather than disappears. Across territorial governance, economic exploitation, and epistemic erasure, colonial logic continues to shape who owns land, who speaks with authority, and whose life is deemed expendable.

The evidence presented here shows that the state’s relationship to Afro-descendant and Indigenous peoples remains structured by selective visibility. Land recognition occurs without full titling; infrastructure arrives for extraction but not for education or health; and culture is celebrated as folklore while silenced as political critique. These are not remnants of a bygone colonial era but living expressions of what the colonality of power means (Quijano, 1969, 2000, 2007).

Fanon’s (1986) insights into violence help interpret the apparent paradox whereby progress produces insecurity. Development projects in Amapá, whether mining, housing, or conservation, sustain the colonial grammar of accumulation by dispossession. Meanwhile, Mignolo’s (2009) notion of epistemic disobedience offers a framework for understanding community practices such as *Marabaixo* and *Batuque* as forms of resistance that unsettle these hierarchies.

For the residents of the Quilombos, colonality is experienced not as an abstraction but as daily life: the bus that never arrives, the license that is never inspected, the festival that

¹¹ "The culture is the Batuque, the Marabaixo, the drum... it is not a sound system of many tons... That is not our tradition." (P1, 2024).

becomes a site of violence. Yet, within these conditions, a collective agency forms and persists that refuses invisibility. Community leaders like P1 and P2 articulate an alternative vision of development grounded in mutual care, cultural continuity, and territorial justice. Their words echo Patricia Hill Collins's (2002) claim that subaltern epistemologies arise from lived struggle; they are not supplementary but constitutive of knowledge.

Understanding these dynamics addresses the first research question of this thesis: how colonial structures of racial, spatial, and epistemic domination have persisted and been reconfigured in Amapá. The next section turns to the second question: how Black and Indigenous women experience and resist these intersecting structures. It is through their actions and knowledges that the possibilities of decolonial transformation begin to materialize.

4.4.4. Decolonial Interpretations: Racial Capitalism, Gendered Violence, and the Afterlives of Slavery

The findings presented in the previous sections illustrate the brutality and shape of dispossession and resistance within Quilombola and Indigenous communities in Amapá. However, to fully grasp their significance requires situating them within an integrated decolonial framework. Decolonial thought provides the necessary tools to interpret these local dynamics not as isolated struggles or mere remnants of the past, but as living expressions of coloniality in the present. This section brings the empirical evidence from northern Brazil into direct dialogue with the theoretical insights of Aníbal Quijano (2000, 2007), Walter D. Mignolo (2002, 2007a, 2009), and Frantz Fanon (1968, 1986) to formulate a precise analytical lens. The central argument is that the persistent structures of racial capitalism in Amapá, marked by extractive economies and racialized labor divisions, are fundamentally rooted in the afterlives of slavery (Hartman, 2007) and are operationalized through systematic gendered violence. By demonstrating the convergence of these three concepts (race, history, and gender) this

framework moves beyond describing oppression to offering a diagnosis of the mechanisms that sustain colonial domination on Brazil's northern frontier.

This integrated analysis posits that the afterlives of slavery (Hartman, 2007) provide the foundational historical and structural logic that enables contemporary racial capitalism (Hartman, 2007; Robinson, 2000). The devaluation of Afro-descendant labor, the systemic neglect of social infrastructure, and the bureaucratic violence of land titling are all modern iterations of colonial power designed to maintain accumulation by dispossession (Quijano, 2000). Crucially, the system requires a mechanism of social control beyond simple economic exploitation; this is where gendered violence functions as a tool of racial-capitalist enforcement. By targeting women leaders with threats and intimidation, and by exposing women to increased social disruption through resource encroachment, the system simultaneously suppresses political resistance and enforces a racialized, gendered labor hierarchy. Thus, the intersection of these three dimensions reveals how the colonial structure of accumulation persists, while the subsequent discussion of epistemic disobedience highlights the forms of resistance that challenge this structure (Mignolo, 2007a, 2009).

The colonality of power, as articulated by Quijano (2000), operates through an interlocking matrix where race, labor, and knowledge define the structural organization of global capitalism. In Amapá, the empirical evidence – ranging from the legal ambiguity surrounding *Quilombola* land titles to the racialized precarity of labor – combines to reveal that this matrix is not merely an inherited condition, but a continuously reproduced system in which racial capitalism is predicated upon and functionally sustained by the afterlives of slavery and enforced through gendered violence. Expressions of violence, outlined by Bledsoe and Wright (2019), are often the result of structural arrangements:

Much of the routinized violence of the present day is tied to localized manifestations of global capitalism. These manifestations have resulted in new social and spatial

relations, labor regimes, and specific practices of organizing and managing built and “natural” environments, as well as the populations therein. Regarding Afro-descendant populations, these changes result in new manifestations of violence ...like Black spatial displacement (p. 10).

The study participants have had to understand, identify and resist continual attempts of displacement which is observed foremost through recognition of quilombos and their slavery roots. Positioning Amapá as a paradigmatic case of contemporary coloniality, we come to see past structures animate present crises. It is essential to recognize the afterlives of slavery (Hartman, 2007) as the original, constitutive structure of the region's political economy. Racial capitalism, as Cedric Robinson (2000) argued, is not a later deviation from pure capitalism; rather, it has always been dependent on the racial stratification of labor, where specific populations are designated as inherently exploitable. In the Brazilian Amazon, this foundation is manifested through two specific, enduring logics: territorial erasure and the racialization of labor value.

The colonial territoriality of the region, structured through the enclosure of the Amazon as an empty frontier (Garfield, 2013), provided the initial basis for the accumulation by dispossession that continues today. The present-day dilemma of communities remaining certified yet untitled (Custódio et al., 2019) is the bureaucratic residue of slavery's afterlives (Custódio et al., 2019). It is a legal apparatus that maintains ancestral territories in a state of perpetual limbo (Gonzales, 2024; Leite, 2008; Superti & Silva, 2015), converting them into available commodities for capital – whether through mining, agribusiness, or real estate development (Quijano, 2000). The interview with P1, who described the collusion between developers and public officials over environmental licensing as bureaucratic violence, exposes how the state's failure to recognize and protect ancestral tenure is an organized action of dispossession, inherited directly from colonial and slave-era property regimes that privileged

Eurocentric notions of ownership. This institutionalized abandonment is the state's operational mode for managing the afterlives of slavery; it protects extraction while selectively withholding rights.

Furthermore, the afterlives of slavery are evident in the racialization of labor value. The testimonies detail the persistent stereotyping of *Quilombola* communities as "lazy" (P1, 2024) – a discourse that reproduces colonial hierarchies of value, casting Black labor as deficient and thus undeserving of public investment and economic security. This ideology justifies the structural exclusion of Black women from secure employment, confining them to undervalued, precarious work such as domestic labor – a direct historical echo of the forced servitude that defined the slave economy. The colonial division of labor did not end with abolition; it merely reconfigured itself, ensuring that racialized populations remain subordinate within the capitalist economy (Quijano, 2000). Thus, the afterlives of slavery function as the historical engine that generates and rationalizes the specific form of racial capitalism operating in Amapá.

If the afterlives of slavery are the foundation, and racial capitalism is the economic structure, then gendered violence functions as the enforcement tool of this interlocking system. It is not merely a social problem that exists *alongside* capitalism; it is a vital tool for ensuring the profitability and stability of accumulation by dispossession. This violence operates on multiple fronts. First, it is a strategy of political discipline. The documented fear of reprisals among women leaders who spoke out, and the explicit choice of strategic silence among others (Field notes, 2024), underscores the tactical deployment of gendered threats. By targeting women – who are simultaneously the custodians of cultural continuity, knowledge transmission, and household reproduction (P. H. Collins, 2002); perpetrators aim to generate fear that paralyzes the entire community's capacity for collective resistance (Fanon, 1986). The violence against the female body and life thus translates directly into a victory for the capital interests seeking access to the land.

Second, gendered violence maintains the racialized geography of extraction. The testimony linking urbanization, external parties, drug circulation, and the explicit sexual objectification of Black women ("*vou lá no Curiaú comer uma neguinha*"¹²) demonstrates how the expansion of racial capitalism (urban capital, extractive enterprises) is accompanied by the *gendering* of racialized territories as sites of sexual availability and disposable bodies. This is a continuation of the colonial tradition of using Black women's bodies as territory and commodity, effectively rendering them and their lands as zones of sacrifice (Mbembe, 2019). The complicity of state agencies, described by P1, in failing to enforce regulations against disruptive events (parties with powerful sound systems and associated social harms) illustrates how institutional neglect becomes an active mechanism that channels social risk and scarcity toward racialized territories, protecting the extractive economy from its own social costs. This is necropolitics in action: the power to decide whose lives are worth protecting is executed through the selective *absence* of the state.

The full destructive force of this intersection is revealed in its totality (Fanon, 1986). The bureaucratic violence of un-titling land, the economic violence of undervalued labor, and the symbolic/physical violence against women leaders are not separate incidents; they constitute a unified, total colonial project in Amapá. Furthermore, this system relies on epistemic erasure to legitimize its violence. Official state documents systematically omit the category of race, thereby denying the epistemic legitimacy of community perspectives that insist on the centrality of race to their land conflicts (Mignolo, 2002). This institutional erasure is particularly targeted at women, whose testimonies about violence, dispossession, and survival, rich in subaltern epistemology, are rendered invisible in reports that prefer the neutral language of 'traditional populations' (P4, 2024). The violence of dispossession is thus completed by the violence of the archive, cementing the colonality of knowledge (Mignolo,

¹² I'm going over to Curiaú for a screw/hookup with a *neguinha*

2002). In summary, Amapá is not simply dealing with colonial remnants, but is also experiencing a reconfigured colonial structure where the afterlives of slavery define the historical-racial criteria for disposability; racial capitalism exploits this disposability for economic accumulation (extractivism and cheap labor); and gendered violence acts as the crucial lever of social and political control, enforcing racialized gender hierarchies that undermine resistance. This integrated framework offers a necessary interpretive depth, allowing the subsequent analysis to frame community resistance not merely as activism, but as profound acts of epistemic and political delinking from this totalizing colonial system.

4.4.5. Epistemic Disobedience: Refusal and Decolonial Futures

The coloniality of power relies fundamentally on the coloniality of knowledge (Mignolo, 2002, 2011; Quijano, 2000). This is the hierarchical system that designates European (and later, U.S.-centric) thought as universal and rational, while systematically relegating Indigenous, Black, and community knowledges to the realm of the local, the traditional, or the superstitious. In Amapá, this is evidenced in the state's unwavering commitment to extractive development paradigms – mining, logging, and agribusiness – which treat the Amazonian ecosystem and its populations as resources to be managed and monetized. Epistemic disobedience begins with the refusal to accept this metric of value, asserting instead a worldview where subsistence, communal care, and ancestral continuity take precedence over profit.

The community's insistence on the political and economic value of subsistence practices exemplifies this decolonial shift. As one activist explained: *“as comunidades precisam produzir, a agricultura familiar é um dos pilares dos quilombos, e muitos quilombos também são ribeirinhos, dependendo do rio para pesca”* (the communities need to produce; family farming is one of the pillars of the quilombos, and many quilombos are also riverine communities, depending on the river for fishing). (P3, 2024). This statement is far more than a

cultural preference; it is a radical political economy in action. It rejects the fundamental premise of racial capitalism, that value is derived only from commodity production for the external market, and asserts a sovereign definition of well-being rooted in territorial integrity and social reproduction. This resistance highlights the contradiction between the state's discourse of modernization and the community's discourse of life affirmation. The former requires the destruction of the ecosystem and the dispossession of land to achieve growth, whereas the latter defines growth as the sustainable flourishing of the ecosystem and the preservation of ancestral lifeways. In valuing uncommodified labor (fishing, planting, artisanal production), women challenge the logic that seeks to render their lives invisible, thereby resisting the coloniality of labor at its ideological root.

Furthermore, epistemic disobedience manifests powerfully in the politics of refusal, particularly through the strategic use of silence. The fear of gendered violence – the threats, the intimidation, and the constant exposure to precariousness – has been shown to be a tool of control, seeking to enforce silence as submission. Yet, the testimonies also indicate that silence is often utilized as a complex, active form of resistance (Mignolo, 2009). To choose not to speak about certain practices, certain knowledges, or certain acts of violence to a researcher, a journalist, or a state official, is an exercise of epistemic autonomy. It is a refusal to submit subaltern knowledge, which has often been weaponized against communities, to the white gaze or the extractive logic of the state (Mignolo, 2007a). This resonates with Black feminist epistemology (P. H. Collins, 2002), which demonstrates how knowledge is often generated and protected outside institutional parameters. In Amapá, this strategic silence becomes a shield against co-optation or further harm, asserting the community's right to define the conditions under which its truth is articulated. This makes silence, paradoxically, a form of political speech, a clear act of delinking from the colonial expectation of total transparency and subjugation.

The construction of alternative political realities is also channeled through cultural practices such as *Marabaixo* and *Batuque*. These Afro-Brazilian traditions, central to Quilombola life in Amapá, function as sites of epistemic memory and temporal resistance. They are not merely cultural folklore but tools of history that transmit ancestral knowledge, celebrate defiance, and affirm Black collectivity outside the state's official, Eurocentric timeline (Hanchard, 1998; M. das G. da Silva et al., 2022). The rhythms, the lyrics, the prayers (*ladainhas*), and the community gatherings organized around these practices produce a sense of political identity and historical continuity that cannot be captured or validated by colonial institutions. In this sense, *Marabaixo* becomes a performance of decolonial future, wherein the history of slavery is confronted and transformed into a collective resource for resilience. When women lead these cultural and ritual practices, they are asserting their roles as epistemic guardians, reinforcing their central position in the project of cultural and political survival in the face of ongoing territorial and economic assault. This cultural affirmation directly challenges the necropolitics of the state, which seeks to manage racialized populations through abandonment and control (Mbembe, 2019); by contrast, these cultural spaces are places of life affirmation and shared vitality.

Ultimately, the women's resistance in Amapá, whether manifested in subsistence work, the tactical use of silence, or the power of ancestral rhythms, transforms a crisis of domination into a moment of decolonial opportunity. Their insistence on valuing community and environment over profit, despite the immense pressure of racial capitalism and gendered violence, demonstrates that epistemic disobedience is the necessary intellectual and political tool for realizing alternative futures. It illuminates a path away from the logic of modernity/coloniality (Mignolo, 2007a), providing an indigenous and Black feminist map for defining sovereignty, justice, and development on their own terms. This analysis thus frames

the women's struggle not merely as protest, but as the active construction of a new, decolonial paradigm of life in the Amazon.

4.5. Considerations on The Decolonial Paradigm

This section has systematically advanced the theoretical argument of the thesis, moving beyond the empirical documentation of dispossession and resistance to formalize an integrated decolonial framework rooted in the specific realities of Amapá. The goal was to examine how racial capitalism, gendered violence, and the afterlives of slavery intersect, and the preceding analysis demonstrates that these concepts function not as separate phenomena, but as interlocking structural components of a total system of coloniality (Quijano, 2000). The evidence shows that the political economy of Amapá is fundamentally shaped by a historical structure inherited from the slave regime, which provides the racialized foundation for dispossession and cheap labor necessary for racial capitalism to function (Hartman, 2007; Robinson, 2000). Crucially, this system is maintained and enforced through a targeted and systemic application of gendered violence, which acts as a technology of political discipline and territorial control.

The most significant contribution of this framework is its diagnostic clarity. By integrating these three analytical lenses, it becomes impossible to categorize the struggles in Amapá as merely an outcome of poverty, corruption, or underdevelopment – the standard explanations often supplied by institutional discourse. Instead, the framework reveals these conditions as the intended and necessary outcomes of coloniality's persistence. The afterlives of slavery explain the persistence of a devalued Black labor pool and the perpetual uncertainty of ancestral land tenure (Da Costa Ramalho, 2024; Superti & Silva, 2015), effectively maintaining a geography of accumulation by dispossession. Racial capitalism explains why

state institutions continually prioritize large-scale extraction (mining, logging) over the sustainable subsistence economies that communities rely upon, viewing the former as development and the latter as primitive (Fanon, 1986). Finally, gendered violence explains the strategic silencing of political dissent and the erosion of social cohesion, demonstrating how the control over the reproductive and political labor of women is essential to the maintenance of the extractive order.

This synthesis requires a profound conceptual shift: to understand Amapá is to recognize that the violence of the past is not over but has been reconfigured into contemporary institutional and economic practice. The state's selective absence, its refusal to enforce environmental protections, its slow-walking of land titling processes, and its neglect of social safety nets; is not a governance failure, but an act of racialized and gendered necropolitics (Mbembe, 2019). This calculated lack of care externalizes the social costs of resource extraction onto Black and Indigenous women, who must expend disproportionate effort in social reproduction, cultural maintenance, and political defense, effectively subsidizing the racial-capitalist economy with their own precarity and risk. The testimonies, particularly those concerning bureaucratic hurdles and the fear of speaking out, illustrate how this system operates through the mundane and the spectacular, uniting the quiet violence of institutional delay with the loud violence of threats and intimidation.

The detailed analysis of these dynamics forces a rejection of the idea that Amapá is a remote or marginal case. By highlighting the continuity of coloniality, this section reframes the Brazilian northern frontier as a paradigmatic example of the structural logics that define global modernity. Where the European Enlightenment positioned its own development as the goal, decolonial thought insists that this modernity was built upon the subjugation of the colonized periphery (Mignolo, 2007a, 2011a). Amapá's experiences, where territorial encroachment is

justified by a discourse of universal progress while simultaneously relying on racialized and gendered hierarchies, perfectly embody this contradiction.

This reframing holds significant theoretical weight. It moves the conversation beyond nation-state studies of race and class to demonstrate how global-colonial structures are continually re-localizing themselves. The extractivist industries operating in Amapá, often serving global markets, embody the transnational reach of racial capitalism, while the local violence is a hyper-localized enforcement of its universal logic. By centering the experiences of Black and Indigenous women, the framework ensures that the intersectional complexity of colonial domination is not obscured (P. H. Collins, 2002). Their narratives, often excluded from official histories, provide the most granular and authentic data points for tracing the daily operations of the afterlives of slavery, which continue to dictate who lives in precarity and whose lands are disposable. Their vulnerability is not incidental; it is the functional prerequisite for the local system of capital accumulation.

Despite the totalizing nature of this colonial structure, the evidence simultaneously illuminated the profound power of epistemic disobedience (Mignolo, 2007a). The resistance documented in Section 4.3, from the political economy of subsistence practices to the strategic use of silence and the affirmation of ancestral culture (*Marabaixo/Batuque*), serves as the decolonial counter-thesis. These acts constitute a conscious political and intellectual delinking from the logic of modernity/coloniality.

The core dissonance highlighted is the chasm between the institutional discourse and the community narratives. The state views subsistence farming and cultural practices as obstacles to be overcome by development policies; the communities view them as the definition of development itself: as the practice of life affirmation, autonomy, and sovereignty. This epistemological conflict is where the possibility for decolonial futures resides. Women, as the custodians of cultural memory and the managers of domestic and subsistence economies, are

revealed as the primary agents of this delinking. Their resistance is not just an objection to unfair policy, but a radical assertion of an alternative political and temporal reality where Black and Indigenous life holds intrinsic, non-extractive value (Almeida et al., 2021; Dias & Aragão, 2025; Nunes de Lima, 2021).

In conclusion, this section has addressed the thesis's central theoretical inquiry by providing a comprehensive decolonial interpretation of the dynamics in Amapá. The findings confirm that colonial domination persists not only through material dispossession but also through epistemic erasure and the targeted deployment of symbolic and gendered violence. The integrated framework offers a necessary diagnosis of the political-economic structure, while the focus on epistemic disobedience affirms the possibility of alternative futures rooted in the sovereign knowledge and resistance of communities.

Chapter 5. Conclusion: “*Eles tentam deturpar quem tu és, sabe?*”: Reflections on Coloniality, Epistemic Disobedience and Violence of development

This thesis has examined how colonial structures of domination persist and are reconfigured in Brazil’s northern region, focusing on the state of Amapá. By tracing the intersections of race, gender, territory, and knowledge, the research demonstrated that coloniality remains an organizing principle of the present, rather than a remnant of the past. Across territorial governance, economic exploitation, and epistemic representation, the analysis revealed that the colonial logics of enclosure, extraction, and erasure continue to shape Amapá’s material and symbolic landscape. Yet within and against these structures, Quilombola people articulate complex forms of resistance grounded in memory, survival, and epistemic disobedience.

By situating local narratives within global theoretical frameworks, the research has shown that racial capitalism operates not only through extractive economies but also through epistemic regimes that devalue subaltern knowledges. Quilombola women engage in epistemic disobedience – a refusal to conform to dominant ways of knowing – through activism, culture, and silence. This concluding chapter revisits the three research questions to synthesize theoretical and empirical implications, then reflects on methodological and ethical contributions before outlining broader political and epistemic lessons.

Persistence and Reconfiguration of Colonial Structures

The persistence of colonial structures in Amapá cannot be understood without acknowledging the historical continuities that connect colonial conquest, military authoritarianism, and neoliberal extraction. The legacies of the military dictatorship and the gold rush continue to shape the political, economic, and racial landscape of Amapá in ways that are immediately visible in contemporary conflicts. The colonization projects initiated

under authoritarian rule, alongside later conservation units and extractive concessions, generated a dense web of overlapping land claims. This juridical and spatial layering has created ongoing disputes in which Quilombola territories remain precariously situated, often caught between competing state priorities and private interests (Lomba & Schweitzer, 2022; H. L. R. Santos, 2023).

This study revealed that racialized communities are disproportionately denied recognition or displaced from their ancestral lands, their presence rendered either invisible in official documentation or reframed as incompatible with development agendas. The slow progress of quilombola land titling in Amapá illustrates this persistent dynamic of racialized dispossession, where historical marginalization is reproduced in the present through bureaucratic omission and political inertia. The dictatorship also intensified the militarization of Amapá's borderlands. Security discourses cast the region not only as a national defense zone but also as a space where quilombola communities were monitored and displaced. Communities who inhabit these regions are thus doubly burdened: they are guardians of ecological and cultural continuity, yet they are often approached by the state as populations to be controlled.

The extractivist philosophy consolidated during the gold rush at Serra Pelada further entrenched a cultural and political association of development with chaotic resource exploitation. Although Serra Pelada itself lies in Pará, its logics reverberated across the Amazon, shaping expectations in Amapá that mineral wealth could be quickly transformed into progress, regardless of the social and ecological devastation that followed. This logic remains evident in the promotion of large-scale infrastructure and resource projects in Amapá, which continue to prioritize extractive accumulation over community well-being.

These continuities help explain the reconfiguration of coloniality in contemporary governance. The study found that colonial logic continues to operate as the organizing principle

of territorial management, policy discourse, and environmental development. The same mechanisms that once justified conquest – racial hierarchies, security doctrines, and extractive capitalism – are now reframed in the language of modernization and sustainability. In this sense, coloniality persists not as residue but as structure: adaptable, resilient, and legitimized through the moral economy of development.

Through land conflicts, environmental degradation, and bureaucratic obstruction, state and private actors reproduce a hierarchy of belonging that privileges extractive and commercial interests over the rights of traditional communities. As revealed in the interviews and field notes, community leaders repeatedly described the collusion between developers, public officials, and environmental agencies that facilitate land invasion and ecological harm. P1's testimony about housing developments in the *Curiaú* community exemplified this nexus:

Se eles cumpriram o que eles se propuseram no projeto, nas licenças... Até hoje, minha amiga, não tem feito. Nada. [...] Mas não vai, não vai. Porque os caras ganham com isso. Não é à toa que tu vê vereador, que tu vê eles aqui, um secretário... Rico, com casa espetacular, donos de prédios e tudo mais. (P1, 2024)

If they fulfilled what they promised in the project, in the licenses... up to today, nothing. They won't go because those guys profit from it. You see councilmen and secretaries...rich, with spectacular houses, owners of buildings and all.

This systemic and normalized form of corruption reflects the coloniality of power, highlighting the persistent relationship among race, labor, and land within frameworks of capitalist accumulation (Quijano, 2000, 2007). In Amapá, selective enforcement of environmental regulations by the state, along with slow progress in land titling, perpetuates legal precarity reminiscent of historical colonial practices of dispossession.

The study further revealed that these dynamics are not limited to material domination but extend into epistemic control. Governmental reports and press releases consistently omit racial and gender categories, deploying neutral terms such as *populações tradicionais* (traditional populations) that erase specific histories of Black struggle – and making use of Quilombola and Indigenous when convenient, while also avoiding to fully address their struggles. This institutional silencing aligns with the discussion about coloniality of knowledge, the power to define what counts as legitimate knowledge and whose experiences are visible within official discourse (Mignolo, 2002, 2011c; Quijano, 2000). Thus, coloniality in Amapá is both infrastructural and discursive: it persists through bureaucratic procedures that regulate land and through epistemic frameworks that deny racialized and gendered realities.

Simultaneously, the findings indicate that coloniality is being reconfigured under current neoliberal and environmental frameworks. Development initiatives, urban expansion, and conservation policies often utilize the rhetoric of sustainability but continue to enable extractive forms of exploitation. This demonstrates how mechanisms of colonial control adapt to emerging economic and ideological circumstances, shifting from overt domination to governance through market-based and technocratic logics. As Fanon (1986) observed, postcolonial states frequently inherit and reproduce colonial patterns of violence, reframing them as markers of progress. In Amapá, this progress manifests as infrastructure that serves industry, not community, roads that are not well-maintained making access harder for the average vehicle, and environmental programs that restrict local subsistence while permitting corporate extraction.

Quilombola Women's Experiences and Resistance

The second research question examined how Quilombola women experience and resist intersecting forms of racialized labor and territorial dispossession. Across interviews and field notes, women's narratives revealed the deeply gendered nature of colonial domination in

Amapá. They carry the physical and emotional burden of sustaining households, culture and communities amid economic insecurity, state neglect, and environmental degradation. Many Quilombola women continue to occupy precarious, undervalued positions in domestic and informal labor – an echo of historical servitude. Their agricultural and artisanal work, vital for community survival, remains unrecognized by state development metrics.

These patterns reflect the colonality of gender described by Lugones (2016), in which the colonial order imposed Eurocentric binaries and subordinated Afro-descendant women within racialized labor hierarchies. Yet women's testimonies also illuminate powerful strategies of resistance. In P1's (2024) words, "*Eu tô exigindo que façam vistoria... a gente junto com o Ministério Público.*" (I'm demanding that they do the inspection... we and the *Ministério Público*). This statement exemplifies how women assert political agency by mobilizing institutional channels even as they critique them. Their activism blurs the boundary between their traditional roles and politics: the same women who organize cultural festivals also lead advocacy for land titling and environmental monitoring. As Collins (2002) argues, those subaltern epistemologies are born from the intersection of oppression and the sense of community.

Crucially, the research also uncovered resistance in less visible forms. Several women declined interviews, citing fear of retaliation, yet their silences conveyed the pervasive threat of gendered violence. In these moments, silence itself became a political gesture, a mode of survival and refusal to feed extractive systems of knowledge production. Once more, we can see the practice of epistemic disobedience: choosing what to disclose and what to protect is an assertion of autonomy.

Furthermore, cultural continuity emerged as a central site of resistance. Through festivals like *Marabaixo*, the tradition of producing earthenware from the *Maruanum* potteries, and oral storytelling, women preserve ancestral memory and transmit alternative visions of

belonging. These practices, often dismissed as folklore, are in fact everyday acts that challenge the epistemic and material erasures of colonial modernity. In sustaining these cultural rhythms, women remake territory not just as land but as living heritage, a political space grounded in historical consciousness.

Decolonial Frameworks and the Afterlives of Slavery

The third research question explored how decolonial frameworks can help us understand the relationship between racial capitalism, gendered violence, and the afterlives of slavery in northern Brazil. The findings demonstrate that these frameworks are indispensable for interpreting the entanglement of economic exploitation, racial hierarchies, and epistemic domination that define Amapá's contemporary condition.

Following Robinson's (2000) theory of racial capitalism, the study showed how extractive industries and urban development depend on the devaluation of Black and Indigenous lives. The environmental destruction of Quilombola and Indigenous territories is not an accident of policy, but a continuation of a racialized economic order rooted in the slave economy. As Hartman (2007) argues, the afterlives of slavery persist through premature death, dispossession, and exclusion from political recognition. Bledsoe and Wright (2019) draw on Black Lives Matter protests from Ferguson to Baltimore to Rio de Janeiro to reflect on the material and immaterial factors that have created the world in which the issue of anti-Blackness in present-day constitutions of space reveal forms of internal colonialism wherein spaces like the 'Black Ghetto' remain a space of colonial administration and imperial violence. Favelas and quilombos represent how colonial ethics reverberate in the present wherein capital and spatial marginalization of "superfluous" populations is fundamentally tied to the negation of Black life and assumptions of Black non-being" (Bledsoe & Wright, 2019, p. 11). This negation is reflected in Black and mixed-raced deaths at the hands of police where Brazil leads the world in deaths at the hands of law enforcement. The authors argue that capitalism is dependent on

anti-Blackness (violence) to realize itself – an inheritance of chattel slavery. This study's analysis revealed Bledsoe & Wright's (2019) argument that it is imperative to move beyond assumptions of economic causality and grapple with the ways in which anti-Blackness is actually an always-present precondition for capital accumulation. Meaning, logics undergirding anti-Black violence (structural, interpersonal, institutional) cast Black geographies as empty and threatening, open to occupation. This process is evident in the slow titles/rights given to quilombos wherein they are constantly under threat of government seizure for corporate interests or singled out for militaristic intervention as solutions to social problems such as poverty and long-term government abandonment.

Decolonial frameworks also illuminate how resistance is theorized and practiced from below (e.g., subaltern). By grounding analysis in women's lived experiences, the study affirmed that memory and spirituality are not merely cultural forms but political theories in practice. Mignolo's discussion on ditching the dichotomy created by the west, becomes tangible in the ways women navigate between state bureaucracy and ancestral cosmology, between fear and persistence.

These findings also contribute to rethinking development. Where mainstream paradigms equate progress with resource extraction, urbanization, and gentrification (Bledsoe & Wright, 2019), a decolonial perspective reveals these as forms of ongoing colonial violence where undervalued locations become sites of real estate speculation and so-called renewal (Fanon, 1986). In contrast, the women in this study articulate alternative visions of prosperity centered on collective well-being and environmental reciprocity. Their resistance constitutes challenge to the necropolitical logic of racial capitalism (Mbembe, 2019). Decolonial frameworks allow us to see that Amapá's struggles are not peripheral but paradigmatic: they expose how modernity itself rests on colonial foundations. Understanding these dynamics

through decolonial lenses makes visible both the persistence of domination and the transformative potential embedded in everyday acts of survival.

Together, these three analytical threads (colonial persistence, gendered resistance, and decolonial re-theorization) form the foundation for the thesis's broader theoretical and methodological contributions. The next section reflects on how these findings advance decolonial political science, methodology, and the ethics of research in contested terrains.

5.1. Theoretical and Methodological Contributions

This study contributes to both decolonial theory and methodology by demonstrating how racialized and gendered structures of colonial domination persist through contemporary forms of governance, development, and knowledge production. At the same time, it illustrates how Black women in Amapá theorize from their lived experiences, producing alternative epistemologies that unsettle the boundaries between academic theory, political practice, and cultural survival. The research therefore operates at two levels: it advances theoretical debates on coloniality that addresses the logics of anti-Blackness, racial capitalism, and gender; and it models a decolonial research praxis that privileges relational ethics, linguistic integrity, and the co-production of knowledge.

A central theoretical contribution of this thesis lies in extending the concept of coloniality of power (Quijano, 1969, 2000) to the specific context of Brazil's northern region (Quijano, 1969, 2000). While Quijano conceptualized coloniality as the enduring matrix that structures modernity through race, labor, and epistemology, this study demonstrates how these dynamics are reterritorialized in Amapá through extractive racial capitalism and environmental governance. The findings reveal that coloniality is not merely an abstract structure, but a lived condition mediated by state bureaucracy, land markets, and the social valuation of knowledge.

By examining Amapá as a borderland of colonial modernity, the thesis reaffirms that colonial domination persists through the normalization of legal ambiguity, infrastructural neglect, and selective recognition of rights.

At the same time, the research engages with Lugones's (2016) theory of coloniality of gender, illustrating how racial and gender hierarchies co-produce each other in the organization of labor. In Amapá, women's unpaid agricultural and domestic work, coupled with their central role in community leadership, shows that gendered exploitation is inseparable from the racialized spatial order of coloniality. The women who participated in this study inhabit what Lugones calls the colonial difference: spaces where subaltern subjects must constantly negotiate between systems of domination and the collective ethics that sustain life. The narratives from women participants, demonstrate that persistence and cultural continuity are not merely responses to oppression but acts of embodied theory.

The analysis also highlights Mignolo's (2009) concept of epistemic disobedience by situating it in the embodied practices of resistance observed in Amapá. Mignolo's argument that decolonial thought emerges from the border is given material expression here: women's selective silences, local epistemologies, and their insistence on narrating history in their own terms all represent acts of epistemic disobedience. The research thus expands decolonial theory by linking epistemic refusal to concrete political and ecological struggles. As Santos (2015) has argued, epistemic justice requires not only recognizing other knowledges but reconfiguring the very conditions under which knowledge is validated. The women of Amapá exemplify this transformation, making it visible through their everyday forms of survival.

The theoretical synthesis developed here also connects racial capitalism (Robinson, 2000) and necropolitics (Mbembe, 2019) to the Amazonian context. By analyzing how extractive projects, urban housing developments, and environmental policies perpetuate racialized vulnerability, the study demonstrates that capitalism in Amapá remains predicated

on racial differentiation and dispossession. Fanon's (1986) critique of development as a continuation of colonial violence provides an interpretive lens for understanding how infrastructure and conservation can operate as instruments of domination. In this sense, Amapá functions as a microcosm of what Robinson described as the global racial order of capitalism: a system that sustains itself by devaluing the lives, labour, and lands of racialized populations. Bledsoe and Wright (2019) draw on Newton (2002) discussion of how globalized capital leads to increasing numbers of Black people falling into the category of the lumpen proletariat. For Black people, classed subordination is not the only (nor necessarily the most fundamental) form of oppression. Rather, in this modern epoch, anti-Blackness is manifested through perpetual and multifaceted enactments of violence; it makes accumulation both possible and necessary for capitalist reproduction (Bledsoe & Wright, 2019).

Methodological Innovations and Reflections

Methodologically, this research demonstrates how decolonial inquiry can be operationalized within qualitative political science while maintaining rigor and reflexivity. The study combined thematic and framework (axial) coding to bridge inductive data analysis with theoretical interpretation. The resulting codebook, organized around the thesis' three research questions, ensured analytical coherence between empirical evidence and theoretical categories (see Appendix A). This structure guarantees a transparent, systematic process that allows themes to emerge inductively while grounding them in theoretical scaffolding (Flick, 2022; Goldkuhl, 2012).

The analytical strategy adopted in this thesis reflects the methodological orientation of decolonial, interpretive inquiry. It combined analysis secondary data with thematic and narrative analysis of interviews and field notes. Coding and analysis were facilitated through NVivo, allowing for a systematic yet flexible engagement with both explicit themes and latent meanings across data sources. This integration of layers enabled the identification of recurring

patterns, silences, and contradictions that traversed institutional discourses and community narratives. Crucially, the analysis treated silences not as absences or data gaps, but as meaningful findings. By foregrounding these silences, the analysis moved beyond description to reveal the operation of power in what is left unsaid or rendered unsayable.

Equally important was the recognition of community narratives as epistemic contributions rather than raw data to be subsumed into theoretical frameworks. The words, gestures, and silences of Black and Indigenous women in Amapá were treated as forms of theorizing about coloniality, survival, and justice. This approach aligns with the decolonial imperative to privilege subaltern epistemologies and interrogate the colonial hierarchies embedded in conventional social science research. By doing so, the analysis sought to ensure that the research questions were addressed not only empirically but critically, situating the exploitation and resistance of quilombola communities within broader debates about racial capitalism, the coloniality of power, and epistemic disobedience (Mignolo, 2007a, 2009; Quijano, 2000, 2007; Robinson, 2000; B. de S. Santos, 2015)

Decolonial Research Praxis

Together, these theoretical and methodological contributions advance what Santos (2015) calls a decolonial research praxis: a mode of inquiry that challenges the epistemic and institutional structures of Western academia. By centering the experiences and knowledges of Black and Indigenous women, the study reconfigures who is recognized as a producer of theory and what counts as legitimate political knowledge. It also challenges the assumption that methodological rigor is incompatible with relational ethics or political commitment. On the contrary, the rigor of decolonial research lies precisely in its attentiveness to context and accountability.

In doing so, the dissertation offers a model for conducting political research that is reflexive, collaborative, and transformative. It demonstrates that theory-making can emerge from the act of listening and that silence can be data. These insights not only enrich decolonial theory but also provide a pathway for reimagining social science as a practice of solidarity and ethical responsibility. The next section turns explicitly to questions of positionality, reflexivity, and the methodological adaptation that shaped this project.

5.2. Ethical and Reflexive Challenges

Several challenges emerged throughout fieldwork and analysis. First, the limited number of interviews raised questions about representativeness. Reflexivity required acknowledging this limitation while emphasizing the depth and positional significance of the interlocutors who participated. Each participant held strategic knowledge of community struggles, institutional dynamics, or activist networks, and their testimonies provided insight into the broader structural patterns shaping Amapá's racialized and territorial inequalities.

Second, the political sensitivity of the research context required careful navigation between transparency and protection. Many participants expressed fear of retaliation due to their visibility as community leaders. Consequently, anonymization was not simply an ethical formality but a political necessity. Decisions about how to quote, paraphrase, or withhold material were made collectively with participants where possible. This process prioritized participants' safety and dignity over the completeness of data (Chamberlain & Hodgetts, 2022; Graue & Trainor, 2013; L. T. Smith, 2021).

Third, reflexivity demanded an awareness of the emotional dimensions of research. Listening to accounts of land dispossession, police intimidation, and gendered violence was not a detached exercise. It required empathy, patience, and affective endurance, but also the

ability to maintain analytical distance. The balance between emotional engagement and critical distance was managed through ongoing reflection. This practice ensured that empathy was grounded in accountability rather than projection, and that participants' stories were analyzed without appropriation (Buscatto, 2022; Rau & Coetzee, 2022; Thambinathan & Kinsella, 2021).

Methodological Adaptation

No research design unfolds exactly as envisioned. Fieldwork is shaped as much by theoretical commitments as by practical constraints, ethical obligations, and unanticipated circumstances. A central principle of interpretive qualitative inquiry, as Chamberlain and Hodgetts (2022) note, is its flexibility, methods must adapt to context rather than compel context to fit predetermined designs. In this project, adaptation was not a deviation from the plan but an epistemological stance aligned with decolonial praxis.

Originally, the research aimed to employ a multi-sited ethnographic approach involving prolonged immersion in several communities. However, escalating tensions, surveillance, and threats against local leaders made extended residence infeasible and ethically unsafe. The design was therefore recalibrated toward a combination of semi-structured interviews, field visits, and documentary analysis. While this shift reduced the duration of on-site observation, it preserved the relational and reflexive nature of ethnography by centering collaboration, trust-building, and co-interpretation with participants.

This adaptation ultimately strengthened the coherence of the study. It allowed for greater responsiveness to local conditions and aligned with the decolonial ethic of minimizing extractive presence. It also demonstrated how methodological flexibility can be an enactment of epistemic responsibility, acknowledging that in contexts of surveillance and vulnerability, the researcher's priority must be to avoid reproducing harm. The fieldwork thus became a form

of slow research: iterative, dialogical, and ethically attentive to the rhythms and risks of participants' lives.

5.3. Implications and Future Directions

The findings of this research extend beyond Amapá, contributing to broader debates on decolonial governance, racial capitalism, and epistemic transformation in Latin America. By tracing how colonial logics of power, race, and knowledge persist and are reconfigured in the present, the study exposes the structural limits of development and policy frameworks that reproduce exclusion under new discursive forms. The implications unfold across three interrelated dimensions: political transformation, epistemic renewal, and directions for future inquiry.

Political Implications

At the political level, the research highlights the need to confront the racialized hierarchies embedded in territorial governance and environmental policy in northern Brazil. Testimonies from community leaders reveal that state agencies and corporate actors continue to operate through a logic that separates those recognized as full political subjects from those rendered invisible (B. de S. Santos, 2015). In Amapá, such logics manifest through bureaucratic inertia around land titling, the selective enforcement of environmental regulations, and the appropriation of participatory mechanisms for extractive ends.

Addressing these dynamics requires a profound rethinking of land and environmental governance. Policy frameworks must move beyond formal recognition toward effective redistribution of territorial rights and political authority. The study underscores that state recognition without protection perpetuates coloniality: communities remain legally visible yet materially vulnerable.

Finally, the findings call for re-examining the dominant notion of development. Fanon's (1986) critique of postcolonial modernization as a continuation of colonial violence remains salient in Amapá, where infrastructure and conservation projects frequently benefit corporate and elite interests while displacing traditional populations. A decolonial approach to development must therefore emphasize regeneration rather than extraction, collective well-being rather than accumulation, and the primacy of territorial sovereignty over external investment.

Epistemic Implications

Beyond the political realm, this research contributes to ongoing efforts to decolonize knowledge production. The narratives and silences recorded in Amapá challenge the hegemony of Eurocentric epistemologies that continue to define what counts as legitimate knowledge. As Mignolo (2007a) and Santos (2015) argue, decolonial thought requires not only the inclusion of marginalized perspectives but the reconfiguration of the epistemic architectures that sustain inequality.

The study demonstrates that community leaders and residents are not merely subjects of inquiry but producers of theoretical insight. Their interpretations of land, memory, and conflict articulate concepts that transverse the boundaries of political thought. Retaining participants' words in Portuguese was both a methodological and political choice, an act of resistance to linguistic homogenization and an affirmation of epistemic plurality.

Universities and research institutions must therefore foster conditions for epistemic justice: the coexistence of multiple knowledges within the same intellectual and institutional space (B. de S. Santos, 2015). This requires re-evaluating methodological hierarchies, valuing oral and experiential accounts alongside written analysis, and engaging in collaborative modes of inquiry that respect local epistemic authority.

Directions for Future Research

While this thesis has provided a detailed account of the persistence and reconfiguration of coloniality in Amapá, it also opens several directions for further inquiry. The complexity of the themes examined here (territorial dispossession, racial capitalism, and community resistance) suggests that many layers of political and cultural struggle remain to be explored. Future research could build upon the present findings by expanding comparative, temporal, and interpretive dimensions.

First, comparative analysis across other Amazonian and borderland contexts (such as Pará, Roraima, or French Guiana) would help clarify how different configurations of coloniality intersect with national, regional, and transnational policies. The dynamics of land governance and extractivism are rarely confined within administrative boundaries. Each frontier reproduces its own articulation of domination and resistance, shaped by distinct political histories and ecological conditions. Comparative work would enable scholars to examine how the logic of coloniality operates unevenly across the Amazonian arc, producing differentiated yet interconnected forms of racialized territorial control. It would also allow for an analysis of how border militarization and conservation regimes are adapted to the geopolitical priorities of the Brazilian state and international environmental governance.

Second, longitudinal approaches are crucial for understanding the temporal dimensions of resistance. Tracking community struggles over time could reveal how collective mobilization emerges, consolidates, and sometimes fragments under shifting political and economic pressures. As Fanon (1986) states, colonial domination does not end with a single act of liberation; it reconfigures itself in new forms. Similarly, community resistance evolves through cycles of visibility and repression, victory and co-optation. Long-term studies could document how intergenerational transmission of memory sustains resistance and how political participation transforms as communities gain, lose, or renegotiate territorial rights. Such

research would contribute to a deeper understanding of the durability and adaptability of decolonial praxis under changing historical conditions.

Third, future research could engage more directly with the symbolic and cultural dimensions of political resistance that were only partially explored in this thesis. Beyond the institutional and territorial arenas, communities in Amapá continually reproduce decolonial practices through ritual, memory, and cultural expression. These include festivals, collective workdays, oral traditions, and commemorative ceremonies that reaffirm belonging and continuity in the face of dispossession. These cultural practices are not merely expressions of identity but acts of political assertion, through which communities inscribe their histories and worldviews onto contested landscapes. Decoloniality, as Mignolo (2007a) argues, is enacted not only through critique but through creative re-existence – by living otherwise within the structures of domination.

An in-depth study of these symbolic forms of resistance could illuminate how communities negotiate the contradictions of modernity and coloniality. It could explore, for example, how religious practices blend Indigenous cosmologies and Afro-descendant spiritualities to generate spaces of resilience; how community associations use song, narrative, or public ritual to maintain historical consciousness; and how these practices challenge the epistemic hierarchies embedded in state and academic representations of the Amazon.

Another promising direction concerns the relationship between local epistemologies and formal institutions. This thesis has shown that community leaders articulate complex analyses of power, race, and governance that remain largely excluded from policymaking spaces. Future research could investigate how these knowledges circulate (through education, advocacy, and legal mobilization) and how they encounter or reshape state institutions. Ethnographic work within bureaucratic or legal settings could reveal how certain knowledges are legitimized, translated, or silenced in the process of recognition. Such inquiry would deepen

the understanding of epistemic coloniality and point toward concrete mechanisms for epistemic justice in governance.

Finally, future scholarship might also explore the regional and global implications of Amapá's experience for broader debates on racial capitalism and decolonial transformation. The state's position as both peripheral and strategic – bordering French Guiana, containing significant extractive potential, and serving as a frontier of environmental governance – makes it a microcosm of the tensions that define the modern world-system. Comparative studies that connect Amapá's struggles to those of other Afro-descendant and Indigenous territories in Latin America could reveal shared patterns of resistance and distinct strategies of adaptation. Such work would continue the decolonial task of mapping how colonial structures persist across scales and how localized acts of refusal and creation contribute to reimagining global futures.

In summary, future research should seek to move beyond the documentation of conflict toward the exploration of how communities produce alternative orders of meaning, governance, and existence. The resistance observed in Amapá is not confined to legal battles or policy debates, it is woven through the cultural and epistemic fabric of daily life. Investigating these deeper layers of political and symbolic practice will be essential for understanding how decolonial futures are envisioned and enacted from within contexts still marked by coloniality. As Santos (2015) and Mignolo (2007a) both suggest, such inquiry must remain committed to the possibility of many worlds within one world, and to the recognition that these worlds are continually being built through struggle, memory, and imagination.

5.4. Final Reflection: Epistemic Disobedient Futures

The narratives, silences, and acts of resistance documented in this thesis confirm that colonial domination in Amapá has not vanished, it has evolved. Its persistence lies in the adaptation of racial and territorial hierarchies through the language of progress, security, and development. Yet the same processes that sustain exclusion also generate new forms of assertion and re-existence. The findings reveal a living dialectic between domination and endurance: communities continue to inhabit and transform spaces historically marked by dispossession.

The study has shown that imagining decolonial futures requires confronting the epistemic and institutional foundations of modernity itself. Following Quijano (2000) and Mignolo (2007a, 2011a), the dismantling of coloniality demands not only political transformation but the reorganization of knowledge. The community perspectives presented here challenge dominant definitions of progress and rationality, revealing that the struggle for land is also a struggle for epistemic recognition.

At the same time, this reflection acknowledges that decolonization is an unfinished project. New forms of domination emerge through state modernization and global capitalism (Fanon, 1986). The findings from Amapá demonstrate the persistence of these patterns, but they also illuminate the possibilities of transformation grounded in local action and historical consciousness. Ultimately, the experiences of Amapá offer both a caution and an invitation. They caution that coloniality remains embedded in contemporary governance; yet they invite us to recognize how, within these constraints, communities continue to generate alternative ways of living and knowing. The futures imagined from Amapá are decolonial because they reclaim the margins as spaces of invention and continuity.

Therefore, this thesis closes not with finality but with recognition: knowledge is situated, relational, and provisional. The voices that informed this research remind us that decolonial futures are not destinations but continuous processes of endurance and creation. As one participant (P1) observed, “*Tentam deturpar o que tu és, né? O que tu pensas, qual é o objetivo da tua luta, as pessoas têm que deturpar pra te derrubar.*” (They try to distort who you are, what you think, the purpose of your struggle... they must distort it to bring you down). Even in the face of distortion and discredit, communities continue to seek alternatives to rebuild, reinterpret, and reaffirm their place in the world. Their persistence affirms that resistance is not only opposition but the ongoing creation of life and meaning within, and beyond, the structures of coloniality.

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Appendix A: Codebook

Domain 1: Persistence and Reconfiguration of Colonial Structures in Amapá

(How have colonial structures of racial, spatial, and epistemic domination persisted and been reconfigured in Brazil's northern region, particularly in Amapá?)

Code Name	Definition	Example (Portuguese)	Data Source	Theoretical Link / Axial Code
Land Invasion and Dispossession	Encroachment on Quilombola and Indigenous lands by developers or individuals seeking long-term control, reflecting colonial logics of territorial domination.	“Você vê pessoas mesmo bandidas por trás... invadindo a área, coibindo as pessoas de irem caçar, pescar, os comunitários, os donos da área.”	Interview 1 (2024)	Coloniality of Power (Quijano, 2000)
State Complicity and Corruption	Institutional collusion and inaction that perpetuate land conflicts and environmental harm.	“Eu fico insistindo... mas não vai, não vai. Porque os caras ganham com isso... vereadores e secretários ricos.”	Interview 1 (2024)	Racial Capitalism (Robinson, 2000); Necropolitics (Mbembe, 2019)
Environmental Degradation	Damage to ecosystems and community health due to unchecked urban and industrial development.	“Esses conjuntos habitacionais... não se preocupam dentro do projeto... o esgoto vai direto pro rio.”	Interview 1 (2024)	Ontological Violence (Fanon, 1986)
Legal and Bureaucratic Violence	State mechanisms that delay titling and perpetuate legal ambiguity to maintain control over traditional territories.	“A gente pede vistoria, pede fiscalização, e ninguém vai.”	Interview 1 (2024)	Coloniality of Power (Quijano, 2000)
Institutional Distrust	Lack of confidence in government agencies due to repeated experiences of neglect and hypocrisy.	“A gente chama a SEMA, chama o DEMA, e ninguém vem.” “...o maior desafio é institucional nesse momento.”	Interview 1 (2024) Interview 6 (2024)	Coloniality of Power (Quijano, 2000)

Erasure of Race	Omission of racial identity in state documents and official narratives, concealing systemic inequality.	“Quando falam dos quilombos, falam apenas descendentes de escravos, não se fala sobre a nossa luta pelo reconhecimento das terras, manutenção da cultura e do ambiente... Não se fala sobre quem nós somos hoje.”	Interview 4 (2024)	Epistemic effects of colonialism (Mignolo, 2007a)
Institutional Silencing	Reduction of specific racial or gender identities to neutral categories like “populações tradicionais.”	“Eles falam em população tradicional, nunca falam em quilombolas.”	Field notes (2024)	Epistemic Disobedience (Mignolo, 2009)
Knowledge Hierarchies	Dismissal of local ecological and agricultural knowledge by state technicians and external experts.	“No geral, o discurso do Estado é que as comunidades precisam se desenvolver, contudo muitas delas são autossuficientes.”	Field Notes (2024)	Epistemologies of the South (B. de S. Santos, 2015)
Memory as Resistance	Attempts to preserve ancestral records and cemeteries as a way to claim historical continuity and identity.	“Eu pedi para que fosse disponibilizado o livro de catalogar as pessoas que estão no cemitério. Nunca foi feito isso.”	Interview 1 (2024)	Afterlives of Slavery (Hartman, 2007)

Domain 2: Quilombola Women’s Experiences and Resistance

(How do Quilombola women from Amapá experience and resist intersecting forms of racialized labour and territorial dispossession?)

Code Name	Definition	Example (Portuguese)	Data Source	Theoretical Link / Axial Code
Racialized Labor	Gendered and racialized patterns of work exclusion and undervaluation.	“Nós temos profissionais... Só precisamos de espaço”	Interview 2 (2024)	Coloniality of Power (Quijano, 2000)
Gendered Labor and Care	Women’s unpaid reproductive and community work as a form of survival and social cohesion.	“As mulheres são as que tomam frente das lutas diárias e repasse de conhecimento.”	Field Notes (2024)	Coloniality of Gender (Lugones, 2016)

Gendered Violence and Fear	Threats, intimidation, or reprisals against women involved in territorial defense.	“Algumas mulheres não quiseram falar por medo das represálias.”	Field Notes (2024)	Coloniality of Gender (Lugones, 2016) Ontological violence (Fanon, 1986)
Cultural Erosion	Decline in cultural practice transmission due to modernization and generational disconnection.	“Os jovens não querem mais aprender o Marabaixo... se a cultura não for repassada, ela pode ficar esquecida.”	Interview 2 (2024)	Afterlives of Slavery (Hartman, 2007)
Cultural Resistance	Maintenance of traditions, festivals, and rituals as political acts of continuity.	“Existe a busca por continuar celebrando as festas tradicionais; apesar do desinteresse dos mais jovens.”	Field Notes (2024)	Epistemic Disobedience (Mignolo, 2009)
Community Leadership	Women assuming leadership in community negotiations and mobilization.	“Eu fui lá fazer a vistoria com a empresa... cobrei da SEMA... ninguém faz nada.”	Interview 1 (2024)	Epistemic Disobedience (Mignolo, 2009)
Silence as Resistance	Strategic withholding of speech as protection against retaliation or co-optation.	“Algumas mulheres preferiram não participar da entrevista para não se expor.”	Field Notes (2024)	Epistemic Disobedience (Mignolo, 2009)

Domain 3: Decolonial Frameworks and the Afterlives of Slavery

(How can decolonial frameworks help us understand the relationship between racial capitalism, gendered violence, and the afterlives of slavery in northern Brazil?)

Code Name	Definition	Example (Portuguese)	Data Source	Theoretical Link / Axial Code
Racial Capitalism and Extraction	Relationship between racial hierarchies and economic exploitation through extractivist projects.	“Os grandes empreendimentos... não se preocupam dentro do projeto.”	Interview 1 (2024)	Racial Capitalism (Robinson, 2000)
Development as Violence	Understanding modernization as a continuation of	“Eles falam que é pra trazer desenvolvimento pro Norte.”	Interview 4 (2024)	Ontological Violence (Fanon, 1986)

	colonial domination.			
Alternative Knowledge Systems	Recognition of local and experiential knowledge as valid epistemologies.	“as comunidades precisam produzir, a agricultura familiar é um dos pilares dos quilombos, e muitos quilombos também são ribeirinhos, dependendo do rio para pesca”	Interview 3 (2024)	Epistemic Disobedience, Coloniality of Knowledge (Mignolo, 2002, 2009); Epistemologies of the South (B. de S. Santos, 2015)
Memory as resistance	Efforts to preserve cemeteries, ancestral records, and histories erased by institutions.	“Eu pedi para que fosse disponibilizado o livro de catalogar as pessoas que estão no cemitério. Nunca foi feito isso.”	Interview 1 (2024)	Afterlives of Slavery (Hartman, 2007)
Collective Resistance and Organization	Formation of community associations as forms of self-determination.	“A comunidade busca pressionar os órgãos responsáveis para garantir seus direitos à terra.”	Field Notes (2024)	Epistemic Disobedience (Mignolo, 2007a, 2009)

Appendix B: Ethics Approval

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THE UNIVERSITY OF
WAIKATO
Te Whare Wānanga o Waikato

Brenda Farias da Silva

Dr Adele Norris

Te Kura Aronui
School of Social Sciences

12 May 2023

Dear Brenda

Re: **FS2023-12: Exploitation of Brazilian women in the Guyana Region: Securitization, migration, and the sex market**

Thank you for submitting your revised application to the ALPSS Human Research Ethics Committee. We have reviewed the final electronic version of your application and the Committee is now pleased to offer formal approval for your research activities as included therein.

We encourage you to contact the committee should issues arise during your data collection, or should you wish to add further research activities or make changes to your project as it unfolds. We wish you all the best with your research. Thank-you for engaging with the process of Ethical Review.

Kind regards

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'Oleg Medvedev'.

Dr Oleg Medvedev, Convenor
Division of Arts, Law, Psychology & Social Sciences Human Research Ethics