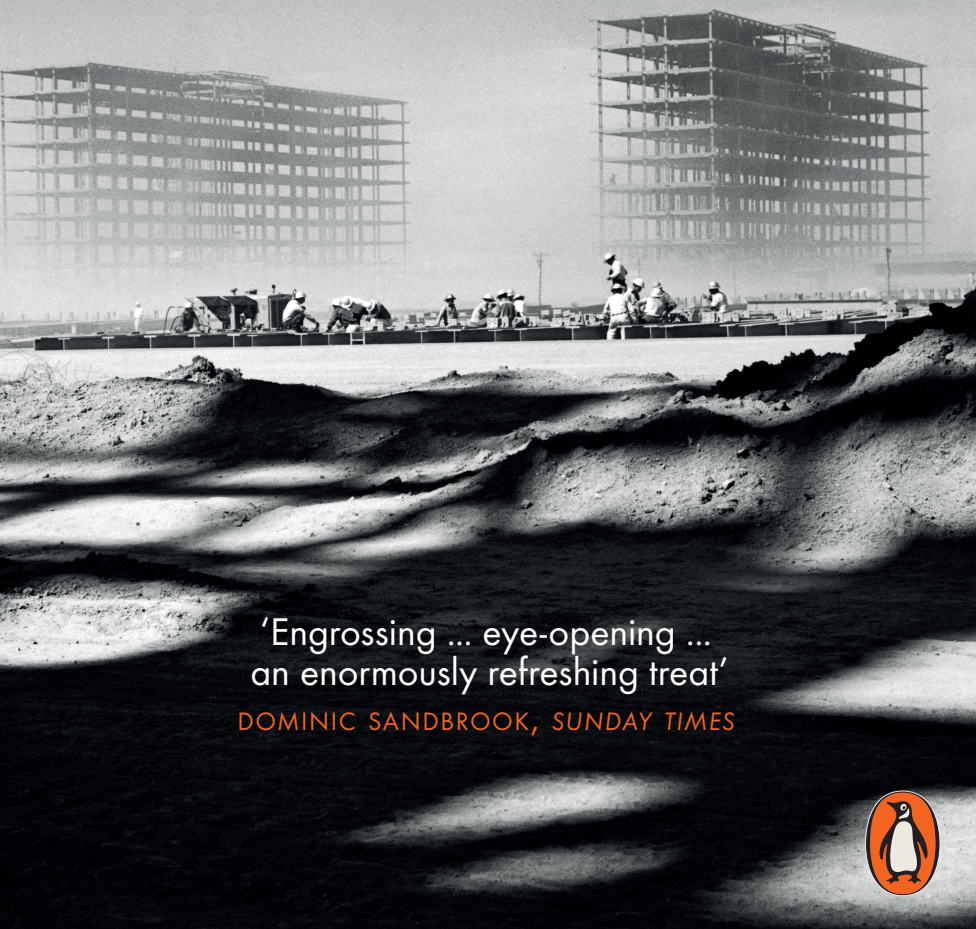


LILIA M.  
SCHWARCZ

HELOISA M.  
STARLING

# BRAZIL

*A Biography*



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LILIA MORITZ SCHWARCZ  
AND HELOISA MARIA  
MURGEL STARLING

Brazil: A Biography



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*For Luiz and Otávio, because, as Guimarães Rosa used to say:  
‘A book may be worth all that could not be written therein.’*



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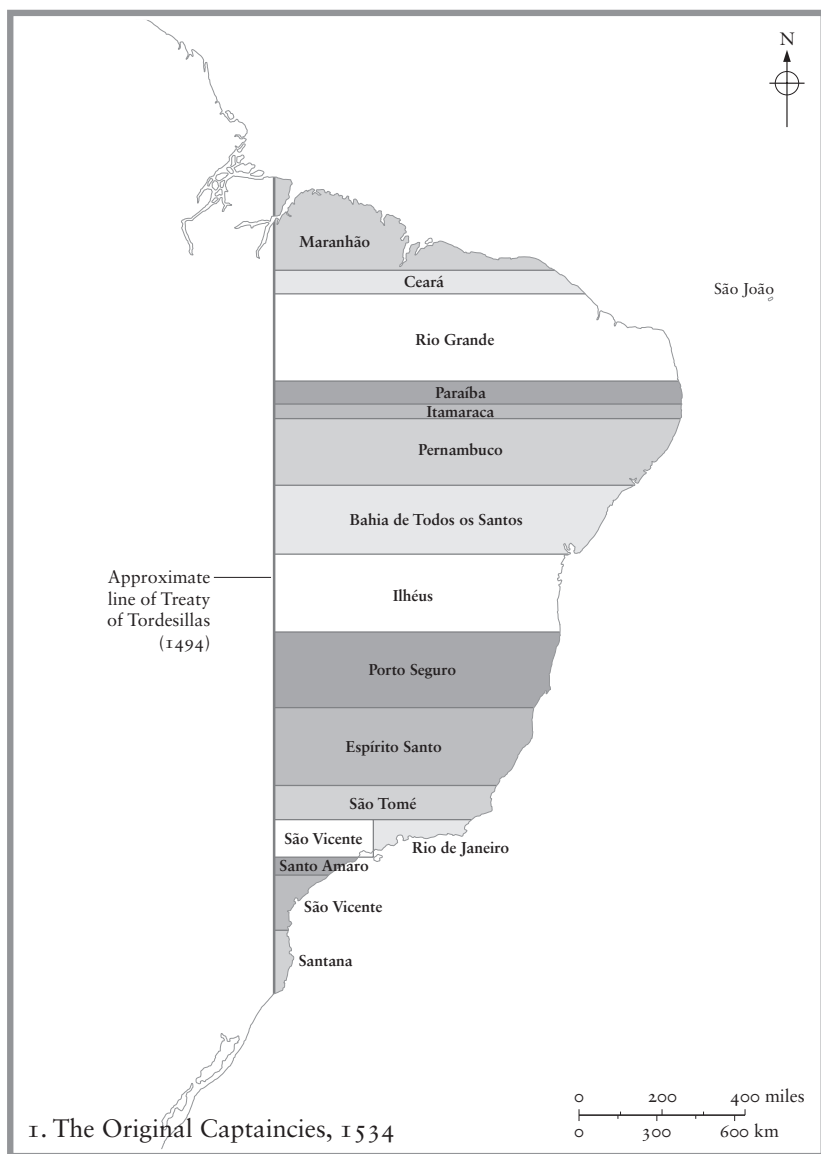
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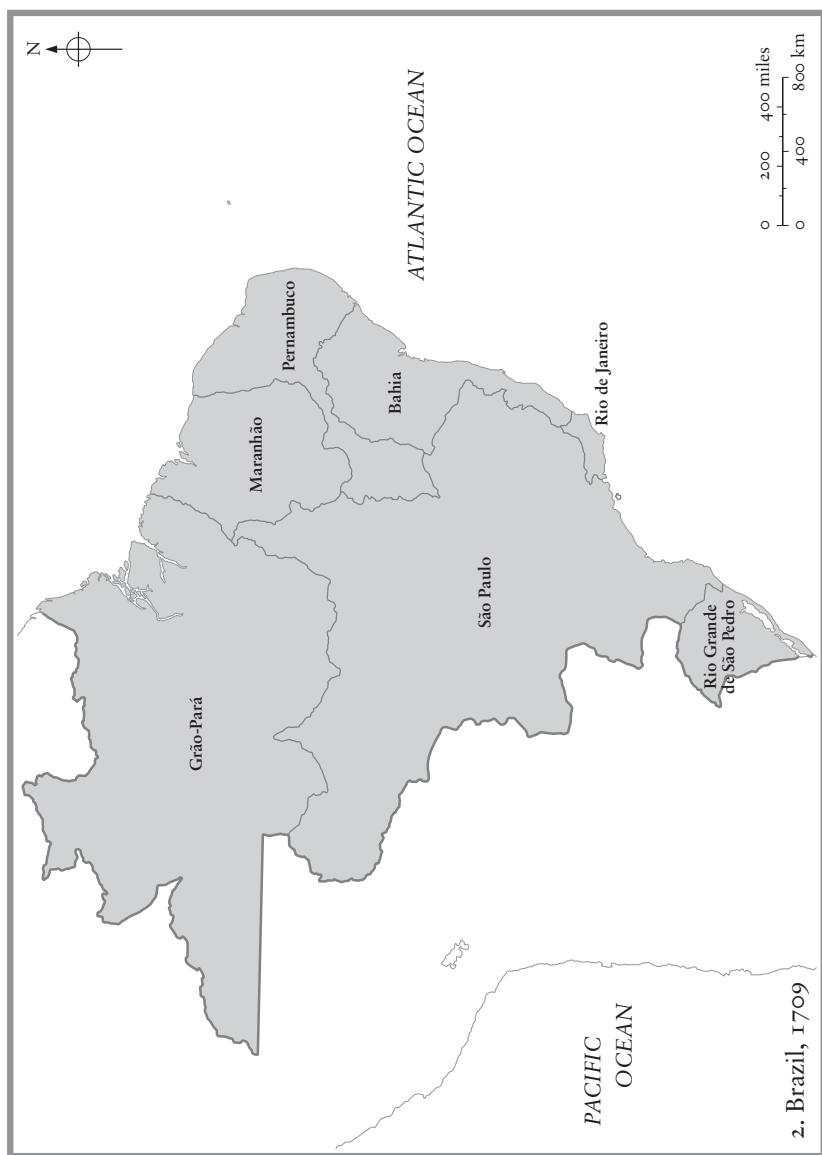
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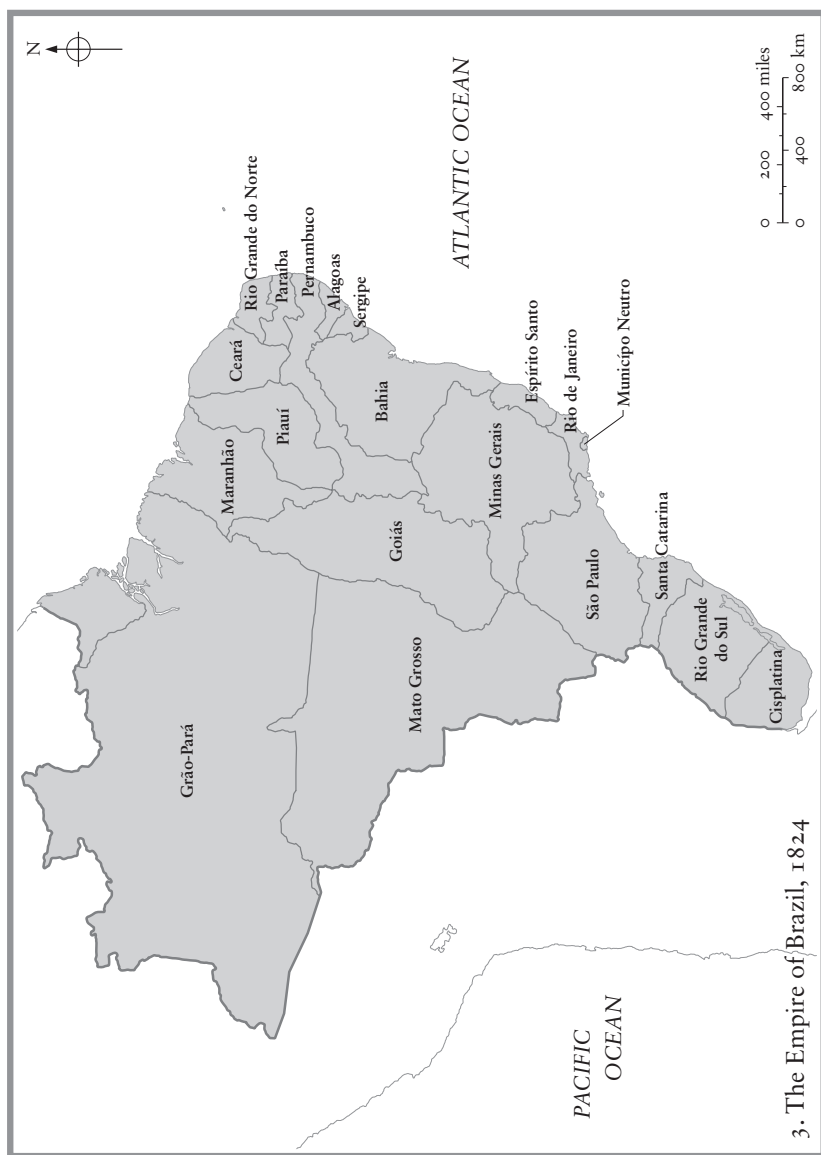
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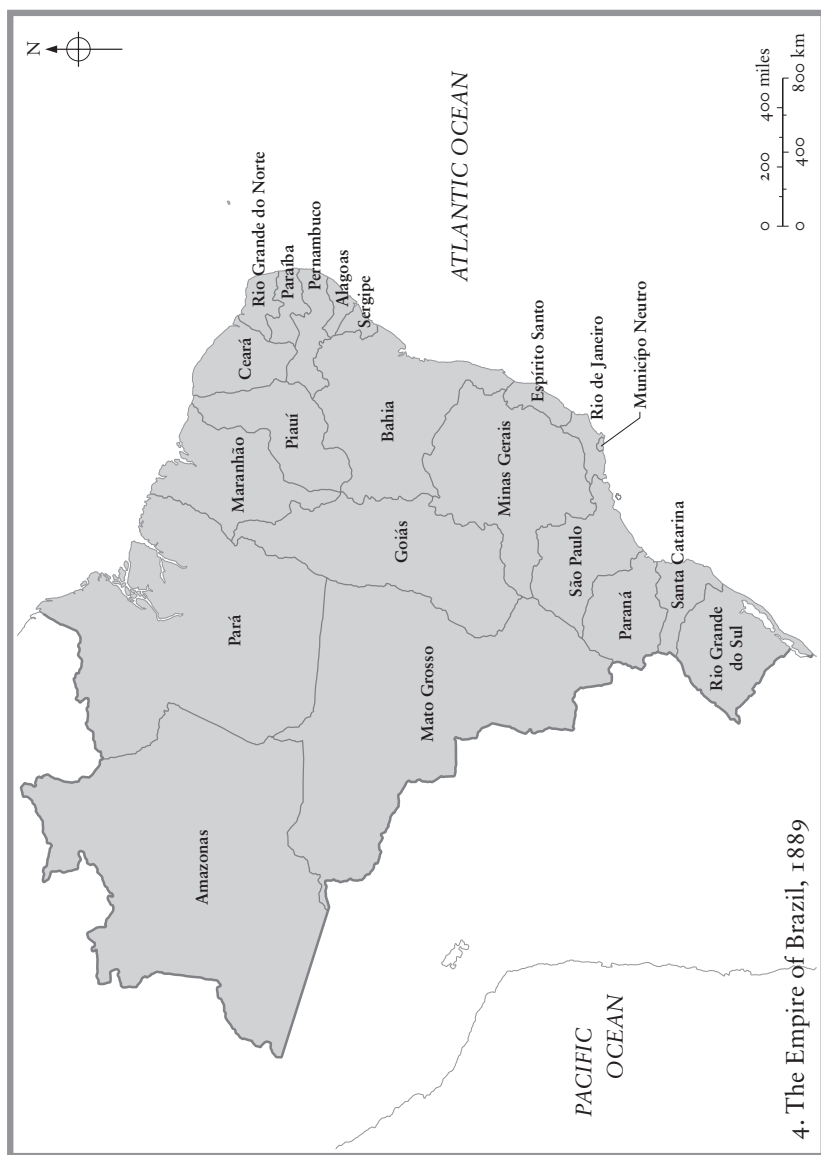


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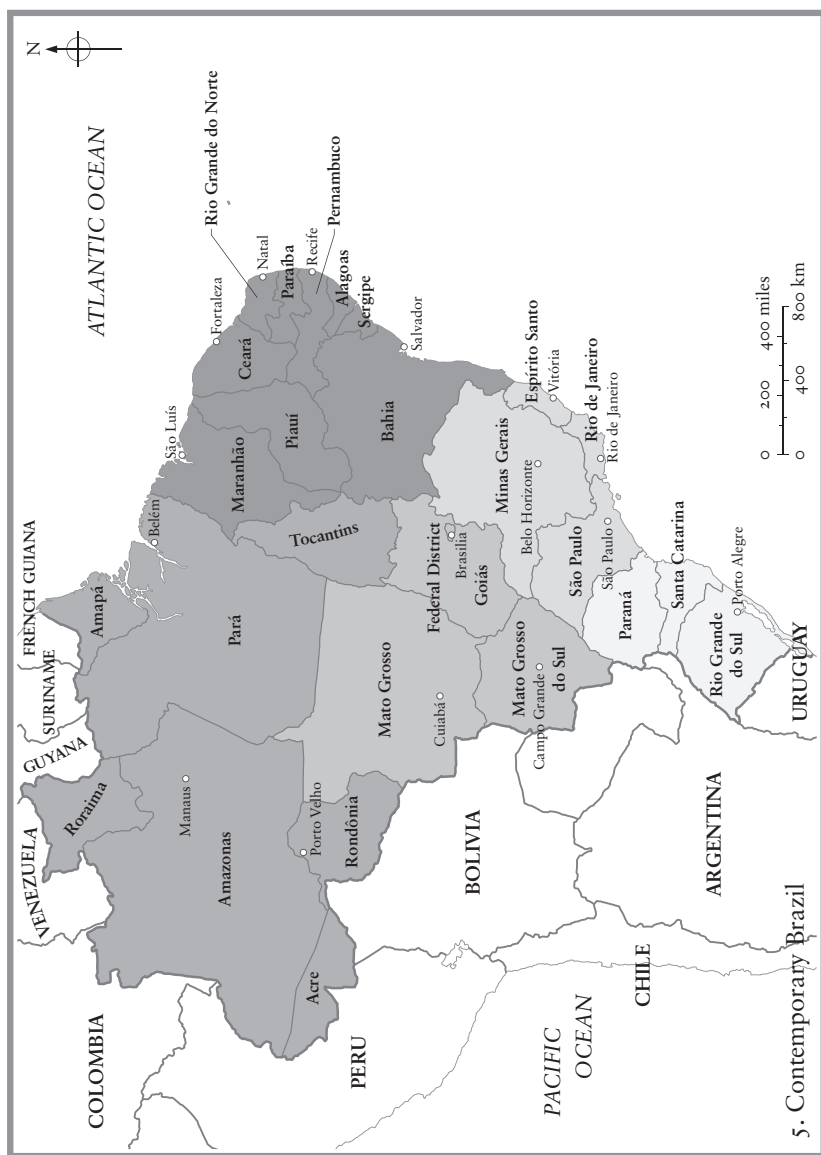








4. The Empire of Brazil, 1889







## Introduction: ‘Brazil is Just Nearby’

It's good to know the joyful reaction in the city [Rio de Janeiro] to the abolition of slavery, in 1888, was felt all over the country. It could not have been otherwise, as in everyday life the injustice of its origins was felt by all. Where I went to school, a state-run institution in Rua do Rezende, the children were delighted. I recall that our teacher, D. Tereza Pimentel do Amaral, a highly intelligent woman, explained to us what it really meant; but with the simplicity of a child, all that I could think was: free! free! I thought we could all now do as we liked; that from then on there would be no limits to the progress we dreamt of. But how far we are from that! Still so trapped in the cobwebs of prejudice, the rules and the laws! [. . .] These memories are good; they have a whiff of nostalgia and lend us a feeling of eternity. Inflexible time, the offspring and brother of Death, gradually kills aspirations, destroying our hopes, leaving us with only sorrow and our recollections of the past – often mere trifles, but which are always a consolation.

The author of this passage is Lima Barreto. Journalist, essayist and columnist of the city, he was one of the few Brazilian writers to define himself as black – both as a man and in his writing – and this despite living in a country where the censuses showed that the majority of inhabitants were black and mestizo. The passage does not appear to have been written for posterity. This emotional outburst was scribbled on the back of a piece of paper in the War Ministry, where the writer worked as a clerk; a government employee, relatively low in the hierarchy of civil servants.

His father, João Henriques de Lima Barreto, who had connections to the monarchy, was one of the first to lose his job under the new republican government; he found employment in a warehouse and was

subsequently put in charge of an asylum. In 1902 he was diagnosed as 'mentally insane' and forced to retire from his government post. Insanity, which at the time was thought to be a result of a racial degeneration resulting from miscegenation, was to pursue his son throughout his life; Lima Barreto was interned in the National Hospital for the Insane on two occasions, in 1914 and 1919. The words 'madness', 'despondency' and 'exclusion' frequently appear in the writer's work and to a large extent define his generation.

There seems to be nothing random or arbitrary about the passage. It reveals some of the persistent traits of Brazil's short history; at least, the history that begins in 1500 with the country's 'discovery', as it is referred to by some, though 'invasion' would be a more accurate term. Although these five centuries of the nation's existence have been marked by a wide diversity of events, in differing political and cultural contexts, certain stubbornly insistent traits can be observed. Among these has been precisely the challenging and tortuous process of building citizenship. As this book will demonstrate, there have been occasions when the public has demonstrated civic-mindedness and enthusiasm, for example when slavery was abolished in 1888, as mentioned by Lima Barreto. When Princess Isabel announced the long-awaited decree from the balcony of the *Paço Imperial*, people crowded into the square below. Although eventually enacted by the government, the law, known as the *Lei Áurea*, was largely the result of the pressure of public opinion. As important as it was, the law nonetheless did very little to integrate those Brazilians who had enjoyed neither citizenship nor rights for so long. It illustrates a recurring pattern. Many such acts were followed by political and social setbacks: projects that failed to produce an inclusive society; a Republic devoid of republican values, as described by Lima Barreto.

This is the reason why comings and goings, advances and setbacks are so much a part of Brazilian history, a history that might be characterized as 'mestizo', in a sense, like the Brazilian people. It is a history providing multiple, and at times ambivalent answers, one that cannot be interpreted in terms of the traditionally celebrated dates and events; nor can it be traced through objective considerations alone, nor in terms of a clear-cut evolution. Brazil's history is an amalgam generating different forms of 'memory'. It is 'mestizo' not only because it is a 'mixture', but also, clearly, a 'separation'. In a country characterized by

the power of the landowners – many of whom own immense estates, each the size of a city – authoritarianism and personal interest have always been deeply rooted, undermining the free exercise of civic power, weakening public institutions and consequently the struggle for people's rights. There is a popular Brazilian proverb, 'if you steal a little you're a thief, if you steal a lot you're a chief', as if to legitimize the notion – highly controversial and much discussed today – that the wealthy and powerful are exempt, citizens above suspicion.

There is a further trait which, as a social rather than a natural construction, is not endemic, but is nevertheless shockingly resistant to improvement and a constant presence in Brazilian history. The logic and language of violence are deeply embedded determinants of Brazilian culture. Violence has characterized Brazilian history since the earliest days of colonization, marked as they were by the institution of slavery. This history of violence has permeated Brazilian society as a whole, spreading throughout, virtually naturalized. Although slavery is no longer practised in Brazil, its legacy casts a long shadow. The experience of violence and pain is repeated, dispersed, and persists in modern Brazilian society, affecting so many aspects of people's lives.

Brazil was the last Western country to abolish slavery and today it continues to be the champion of social inequality and racism, which, albeit veiled, is equally perverse. Although there is no legal form of discrimination, the poor, and above all black people, are the most harshly treated by the justice system, have the shortest life span, the least access to higher education and to highly qualified jobs. The indelible mark of slavery conditions Brazilian culture; the country defines itself on the basis of gradations of skin colour. Whereas those who achieve success become 'whiter', those who become impoverished become 'darker'. But Brazilians' self-identity does not end with this porous sense of ethnicity, for there is racial inclusion in many of the country's best-known cultural activities: capoeira, candomblé, samba, football. Brazilian music and culture are 'mestizo' in both their origin and singularity. Nevertheless, the numerous processes of social exclusion cannot be ignored; they are reflected in the limited access to entertainment and leisure, to the employment market and to health services (affecting birth rate), and in the daily intimidation by the police, where racial profiling is the norm.

To a certain extent, this amalgam of colours and customs, the

mixture of races, has formed the image of Brazil. On the one hand, this mixture was consolidated by violence, by the forced importation of peoples, cultures and experiences into the country. Far from any alleged attempt at social harmony, the different races were deliberately intermingled. This resulted from the purchase of Africans brought to Brazil by force in far larger numbers than to any other country. Brazil received more than 40 per cent of all slaves that were brought from Africa to work on the plantations in Portuguese America – a total of around 3.8 million individuals. Today, 60 per cent of the country's population is made up of blacks and 'browns'; it could thus be ranked as the most populated 'African' country, with the exception of Nigeria. Furthermore, despite the numerous controversies, it is estimated that in 1500 the native population was between 1 million and 8 million, of which between 25 per cent and 95 per cent were decimated after the 'meeting' with the Europeans.

On the other hand, it is undeniable that the same mixture of races, unequalled in any other country, generated a society that was defined by mixed marriages, rhythms, arts, sports, aromas, cuisine and literary expression. It could be said that the 'Brazilian soul' is multicoloured. The variety of Brazilian faces, features, ways of thinking and seeing the country are evidence of how deeply rooted the mixture of races is, and of how it has produced new cultures born from its hybrid nature and variety of experiences. Cultural diversity is perhaps one of the most important aspects of the country, deeply marked and conditioned by 'separation' but also by the 'mixture' resulting from the long process of *mestiçagem*.

Although the result of centuries-old discriminatory practices, Brazil's mixed-race soul – born of the mixture of Amerindians, Africans and Europeans – provides for new perspectives. There is a multiplicity of meanings in the culture produced by a country that does not obey the established correlations between the dominator, on the one hand, and the dominated on the other – European and Amerindian, white and African. As Riobaldo Tatarana, one of Guimarães Rosa's most important fictional characters, once said, 'held captive inside its little earthy destiny, the tree opens so many arms' – so too, with its hybrid soul, Brazil has many arms. Brazil cannot be categorized, by way of blurring the most obvious cultural practices; the country is both a part of and distinct from the rest of the world – but always Brazilian.

And the country has many characteristics. Lima Barreto concludes his text with a sarcastic outburst: 'We keep on living stubbornly, hoping, hoping . . . For what? The unexpected, which may occur tomorrow or sometime in the future; who knows, a sudden stroke of luck? A hidden treasure in the garden?' This is Brazil's national obsession, which the historian Sérgio Buarque de Holanda wrote about in his 1936 seminal work *Raízes do Brasil*, a country on the lookout for the daily miracle, or some unexpected saviour. He called the trait 'Bovarism', using the concept in reference to 'an invincible disenchantment with our own reality'. Since then, the idea has been adopted by the *Carioca* (inhabitant of Rio) literati to describe the Brazilian addiction to 'foreignisms', to 'copying everything as if it were its own raw material'.

The term 'bovarismo' originates with Gustave Flaubert's *Madame Bovary*, and defines the altered sense of reality when a person thinks of himself or herself as someone else. This psychological state generates chronic dissatisfaction, produced by the contrast between illusions and aspirations, and, above all, by the continuous disparity between these illusions and reality. Now imagine this same phenomenon transferred from an individual to an entire community that conceives itself as something that it is not and is waiting for some unexpected event that will transform its dismal reality. According to Buarque de Holanda (and Lima Barreto), all Brazilians have an element of Madame Bovary.

At football matches, an iconic metaphor for Brazilian nationality, everyone waits for 'something to happen' that will save the game. People cross their fingers in the hope that some magical intervention will fall from the skies (alleviating malaise and solving all problems). Immediatism takes the place of planning substantive, long-term changes. The current fashion is for Brazilians to identify themselves as members of the BRICS, and to cling to the belief that the country has joined the ranks of Russia, India, China and South Africa because of the extraordinary economic growth of recent years, and with a greater degree of autonomy.<sup>1</sup> If Brazil has truly achieved such remarkable economic growth – and is really the seventh largest economy in the world, not to mention the country's enormous, and little exploited, natural resources – it should not be ignoring serious social problems in the areas of transport, health, education and housing which, although there has been considerable progress, are still woefully inadequate.

'Bovarism' is also implicit in a very Brazilian form of collective



evasion, which allows Brazilians to reject the country as it really is and imagine a quite different one – since the real Brazil is unsatisfactory and, worse still, citizens feel impotent regarding their ability to make changes. In the void between what Brazilians are and how they perceive themselves, nearly all possible identities have been explored: white, black, mulatto, savage, North American, European, and now, BRICS. The tropical version of Hamlet's 'To be or not to be' is 'To be is not to be'. Or, in the words of film critic Paulo Emílio Sales Gomes, 'the arduous construction of ourselves [that] develops in the rarefied dialectic between not being and being someone else'.

This concept also explains another local obsession: looking at ourselves in the mirror and always seeing something different. At times more French, at others more American; at times more backward, at others more advanced: but always different. In various phases of Brazilian history, this type of idealized construction of the country served to foment Brazilian nationalism.

At any rate, despite the ambiguities of the national discourse, colonial nations of the recent past, like Brazil, are obsessed with creating an identity that is comparable to an inflatable mattress. For these countries, national identity is always in question. We know, however, that identities are not essential phenomena and, far less, atemporal. On the contrary, they are dynamic, political and flexible representations, reactions to negotiations in given situations. This is perhaps the reason why Brazilians cling to the idea that this plasticity and spontaneity are an integral part of their national practices and ethos. From this viewpoint, Brazil becomes the land of improvisation where things always turn out well, and the popular proverb (with its ill-concealed certainty), 'God is Brazilian', can be understood. Whether by witchcraft, invoking the aid of the saints or through prayers and incantations, beliefs and religions intermingle for the desired miracle to materialize.

Brazilian Bovarism is implicit in another characteristic that defines nationality: 'familyism' – the deep-rooted custom of transforming public issues into private ones. A good politician becomes a 'member of the family' who is always referred to by his Christian name: Getúlio, Juscelino, Jango, Lula, Dilma. It seems no coincidence that during the dictatorship the generals were referred to by their surnames: Castello Branco, Costa e Silva, Geisel, Médici and Figueiredo. As Buarque de Holanda argued, Brazil has always been characterized by the precedence

of affection and emotion over the rigorous impersonality of principles that organize society in so many other countries. 'We will give the world a cordial man', as Buarque de Holanda said, not in a celebratory tone, rather regretting and criticizing Brazil's tortuous entry into modernity. The word 'cordial' derives from the Latin 'cor, cordis', semantically linked to the Brazilian word for 'heart' (*coração*) and to the supposition that, in Brazil, intimacy is the norm (even the names of saints are used in the diminutive), revealing an extraordinary lack of commitment to the idea of the public good and a clear aversion to those in power. Worse still, Buarque de Holanda's argument has been rejected in most circles, and his notion of 'cordial' widely misinterpreted. It was seen as a parody of Brazil's cordiality, a harmonious, receptive people who reject violence. It was not understood in the critical sense, as a reference to the difficulty in being proactive in establishing effective institutions. Another example of Bovarism is how lasting Brazil's self-image has been: a peace-loving country, one that rejects radicalism, despite the innumerable rebellions, revolts and protests that have punctuated Brazilian history since the outset. Brazil is and is not: an ambiguity far more productive than a handful of stilted official images.

Sound ideologies, therefore, can be compared to tattoos or an *idée fixe*; they appear to have the power of imposing themselves on society and generating reality. Hearing them constantly, Brazilians end up believing in a country where hearsay is more important than reality. Brazilians have constructed a dreamt-up image of a different Brazil – based on their imagination, happiness and a particular way of confronting difficulties – and have ended up as its mirror image. All this is well and good. But the country continues to be the champion of social inequality and is still struggling to construct true republican values and true citizens.

Once this internal dialectic has been recognized, the next step is to understand that it is not in fact exclusively internal. The country has always been defined by those looking on from outside. Since the sixteenth century, before Brazil was Brazil, when it still constituted an unknown Portuguese America, it was observed with considerable curiosity. The territory, the 'other' of the West, was either represented through what it *did not* possess – neither laws, rules nor hierarchy – or else by what it demonstrated in excess – lust, sex, laziness and partying. Seen from this angle the country would merely be at the margins of the civilized world, a gauche culture filled with uncouth people, who are

nevertheless peace-loving and happy. In advertising, and according to foreigners, Brazil is still seen as hospitable, with exotic values, and home to a type of 'universal native', since the country is apparently inhabited by an amalgam of 'foreign peoples' from around the world.

Although Brazil is undeniably blessed by a series of 'miracles', a temperate climate (sixteenth-century travellers called it 'the land of eternal spring'), an absence of natural catastrophes – hurricanes, tsunamis or earthquakes – and of institutionalized and official antagonism towards certain groups, it is certainly neither the promised land nor 'the land of the future'. There are those who have attempted to cast Brazil as representing an alternative solution to the impasses and contradictions of the West. Inspired by the idea of cannibalism, as witnessed by the first visitors, later developed by Montaigne, and even later reinterpreted in the twentieth century by Oswald de Andrade in his 'Manifesto antropológico' (1928), Brazilians have an obsession with reinventing themselves, with transforming failings into virtues and omens. Cannibalizing customs, defying conventions and upsetting premises is still a local characteristic, a ritual of insubordination for nonconformists that perhaps sets Brazilians apart, or at least keeps the flame of utopia alive.

Ever since the arrival of Cabral and his fleet of caravels, Brazil has been a paradise for some, an endless hell for others, and for the rest, a kind of purgatory on earth. Despite these characteristics being identified with the past, they are still alive and well. Around 1630, Vicente do Salvador, a Franciscan friar, considered Brazil's first historian, wrote in his short *History of Brazil*: 'There is not a single man in this land who is republican, who cares for or administers the public wealth; instead, it is every man for himself.'

Since the very beginning of the country's short history, of five hundred years or so, from the establishment of the first plantations in the territories that were later to constitute Brazil, the difficulty in sharing power and engendering a sense of common good was evident. However, despite Frei Vicente's comment, republican values do exist in Brazil. Inventing an imaginary construction of public life is a typically Brazilian way of avoiding the impasse generated in the interior of a society that has been a success in some aspects while a failure in others.

Thus Brazil's development was born of ambivalence and contrast. On the one hand it is a country with a high degree of social inequality and

rates of illiteracy, whereas on the other its electoral system is one of the most sophisticated and reliable in the world. Brazil has rapidly modernized its industrial park, and it has the second highest number of Facebook users in the world. At the same time vast geographical regions lie abandoned, particularly in the north, where the chief means of transport is by rudimentary sailboats. Brazil has an advanced constitution, which forbids any kind of discrimination, yet, in reality, silent and perverse forms of prejudice are deeply ingrained and pervade everyday life. In Brazil the traditional and the cosmopolitan, the urban and the rural, the exotic and the civilized, walk hand in hand. The archaic and the modern intermingle, the one questioning the other in a kind of ongoing interrogation.

No single book can relate the history of Brazil. In fact there is no country whose history can be related in linear form, as a sequence of events, or even in a single version. This book does not set out to tell the story of Brazil, but to make Brazil the story. In the words of Hannah Arendt, both the historian and her or his reader learn to 'train the imagination to go out on a visit'. This book takes her notion of 'a visit' seriously. It does not intend to construct a 'general history of the Brazilian people', but rather opts for a biography as an alternative form of understanding Brazil in a historical perspective: to learn about the many events that have shaped the country, and to a certain extent remain on the national agenda.

A biography is the most basic example of the profound connection between the public and private spheres: only when articulated do these spheres constitute the fabric of a life, rendering it forever real. To write about the life of this country implies questioning the episodes that have formed its trajectory over time and learning from them about public life, about the world and about contemporary Brazil – in order to understand the Brazilians of the past, and those that should or could have been.

The imagination and the diversity of sources are important prerequisites in the composition of a biography. A biography includes great figures, politicians, public servants and 'celebrities'; it also includes people of little importance, who are virtually anonymous. But constructing a biography is never an easy task: it is very difficult to reconstitute the moment that inspired the gesture. One must 'walk in the dead man's shoes', according to the historian Evaldo Cabral, to connect the public to

the private, to penetrate a time which is not our own, open doors that do not belong to us, be aware of how people in history felt and attempt to understand the trajectory of the subjects of the biography – in this case the Brazilian people – during the time they lived: what they achieved in the public sphere, over the centuries, with the resources that were available to them; the fact that they lived according to the demands of their period, not of ours. And, at the same time, not to be indifferent to the pain and joy of everyday Brazilians, but to enter into their private world and listen to their voices. The historian has to find a way of dealing with the blurred line between retrieving experience, recognizing that this experience is fragile and inconclusive, and interpreting its meaning. Thus a biography is also a form of historiography.

For similar reasons this book does not go beyond the year that marked the final phase of democratization after the dictatorship, with the election of President Fernando Henrique Cardoso in 1995. It is our view that the effects of the governments of Cardoso and his successor Lula are yet to be fully felt and that they mark the beginning of a new phase in the country's history. The present has been influenced by both presidents, and perhaps it is the task of the journalist to register the effects of their governments.

It is evident, then, that this book does not attempt to cover the entire history of Brazil. Rather, bearing in mind the issues mentioned above, it narrates the adventure of the construction of a complicated 'society in the tropics'. As the writer Mário de Andrade said, Brazil explodes every conception that we may have of it. Far from the image of a meek and pacific country, with its supposed racial democracy, this book describes the vicissitudes of a nation which, with its profound *mes-tiçagem*, has managed to reconcile a rigid hierarchy, conditioned by shared internal values, with its own particular social idiom. Seen from this angle, in the words of the songwriter and composer Tom Jobim, 'Brazil is not for beginners.' It needs a thorough translation.

# I

## First Came the Name, and then the Land Called Brazil

*Pedro Álvares Cabral, a young man escaping from tedium,  
found pandemonium; in other words he found Brazil.*

Stanislaw Ponte Preta<sup>1</sup>

### ON THE VICISSITUDES OF A NEW WORLD

It is hard to conceive the impact and the significance of the ‘discovery of a new world’. New, as it was uncharted on existing maps; new, as it was populated with unknown wildlife and plants; new, as it was inhabited by strange people, who practised polygamy, went about naked, and whose main occupations were waging war and ‘eating each other’. They were ‘cannibals’, according to the earliest reports, which were fanciful, exotic and brimming with imagination.

It was the Genovese explorer himself, Christopher Columbus,<sup>2</sup> who coined the term *canibal*, a corruption of the Spanish word *cari-bal* (‘from the Caribbean’). The term originated from the Arawak language spoken by the *caraíba*, the indigenous people of South America and the Antilles, and soon became associated with the practices reported by European explorers, who were disturbed by the anthropophagical<sup>3</sup> habits of the local people. It was also associated with the word *can*, the Spanish for ‘dog’, and with the biblical figure *Cam* (in English spelt ‘Ham’ or ‘Cham’). In the book of Genesis *Cam*, Noah’s youngest son, mocked his father’s nakedness as he lay drunk in his tent. For this Noah cursed him to be his brothers’ ‘servant of servants’.<sup>4</sup> Thus the seeds were sown for the Church’s future justification of the enslavement of black Africans – and, by association, the



Indians – both of whom were considered to be descendants of the cursed line of Ham.<sup>5</sup>

In the diary of his first expedition to the Caribbean (1492–3), Columbus, with a mixture of curiosity and indignation, comments on the fact that the island's natives were in the habit of eating human flesh, and uses the adjective *caribes* (or *canibes*) to describe them. It was on his second expedition to the Antilles (1493–6) that the term first appears as an adjective, *canibal*. The spreading of the news that the indigenous peoples of the Americas practised cannibalism would provide a convenient justification for the monarchy's new proposal: the implementation of slavery. In his letter to their Catholic Majesties Ferdinand and Isabella of Spain, Columbus declared that the natives were lazy and lacking in modesty – they covered their bodies in war paint and wore no clothes, using only necklaces, bracelets and tattoos to cover their intimate parts. The argument went that although the cannibals were devoid of the values of Western civilization, they could be put to good use as slaves.

In his letters, Amerigo Vespucci also mentioned the presence of cannibals in America. One letter, allegedly from Vespucci to Lorenzo di Pierfrancesco de' Medici,<sup>6</sup> which was printed in book form in 1504 under the title *Mundus Novus*, immediately became a great success and was published in various parts of Europe. Vespucci's observations had an even greater impact than Columbus's, as they described scenes of cannibalism the author had witnessed first-hand and were illustrated with graphic prints. Vespucci's persuasive arguments, accompanied by equally persuasive images, made a decisive contribution to the demonization of the indigenous peoples of the Americas. They were portrayed as a people with no social order or religious faith and with no notion of property, territory or money, ignorant of institutions such as the family and marriage.<sup>7</sup> His image of the New World was inextricably associated with a decadent people. They were seemingly another part of humanity, oblivious to the values of the Old World.

The news that arrived from this Portuguese part of the Americas, replete with tales of its paradisiacal natural abundance and the diabolical practices of its people, ignited the imagination of Europeans. The realization that an unknown, unfathomed territory existed marked the beginning of a new chapter in the history of humanity. The canon of Brazilian history begins with the achievement of the 'discoverers', who

not only founded the new Portuguese territory but also had a clear perception of its value. Paradoxically though, this official, metropolitan narrative would always be altered when indigenous peoples were included in the story – those apparently forgotten by humanity, impossible to classify, name or understand.

But if the tone of these descriptions was marked by surprised reactions – the logs described sea monsters, gigantic animals, warriors and cannibals – historians no longer contend that the Americas were discovered by chance. After Vasco da Gama established the sea route to the Indies in 1499, the Portuguese monarchy immediately planned a further expedition based on the information he brought back. This, clearly, was the best way forward for the kingdom of Portugal, a tiny nation located at the mouth of the Atlantic Ocean. The country had finally unified its territory after years of fighting against the Moors, who had occupied the Iberian Peninsula. The unification was completed by Dom Afonso III<sup>8</sup> with the reconquest of the Algarve in 1249. The unification, along with the development of its navy and of maritime instruments, placed Portugal in a privileged position to undertake the great explorations. And it is no coincidence that the first conquest by the Portuguese Empire, the longest-lasting colonial empire with domains on four continents, was that of Ceuta, on the West African coast, in 1415.

From the outset Portugal's impulse to expand was based on a combination of commercial, military and evangelizing interests. During the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, for example, the market for spices had motivated the Portuguese to discover new routes to the East. The term 'spice' referred to a group of vegetable products with either a strong aroma or flavour, or both. These were used to season and to conserve foods, but also in oils, ointments, perfumes and medicine. Their consumption began to increase after the Crusades, with tropical spices such as black peppercorns, cloves, cinnamon and nutmeg in highest demand in the fourteenth century. These spices were indigenous to Asia and commanded a very considerable price. They were used as currency, included in the dowries of aristocrats and royalty, in bequests, in capital reserves and in revenues of the Crown. They were also used for bartering – in exchange for services, in agreements, for meeting religious obligations and obtaining tax exemption – as well as for bribing high-ranking officials.

When the Ottoman Turks took Constantinople, on 29 May 1453, however, the spice routes came under Turkish control and were closed to Christian merchants. As a result, the Spanish and Portuguese embarked on exploratory expeditions to discover new routes, by land and sea, with the aim of monopolizing the spice trade. They attempted to circumnavigate the African continent, a hazardous venture that had never been undertaken before. Success would take a century, but the delay would prove advantageous. Portugal set up trading posts along the African coast, which became strategic locations for present and future colonization.

The route was consolidated with the arrival of the Portuguese in the East, and became known as the 'African Periplus'. Originally, the term implied a good omen: a long journey undertaken and a successful return. But with time, since language is always subject to the oscillations and moods of any given period, the term acquired a more negative connotation, associated with failed ventures and the 'curse of Sisyphus'. It was used to refer to all those who had undertaken adventures that had proved beyond their powers to complete, just as Sisyphus, in Greek mythology, had cheated Death, but only for a time. In Portuguese, a 'periplus' came to mean a journey without end that led to nowhere. But such scepticism proved to be unfounded. The new route generated extraordinary dividends and served as a symbol for Portugal's entry into the modern era. It was the departure point for the construction of an extensive and powerful empire.

Spain was also undergoing a process of colonial expansion. The Spanish kingdom, which had been unified as the National State in 1492, had set out to discover a new route to the East by travelling west. To prevent further battles in a Europe perpetually embroiled in conflict, on 7 June 1494 the Treaty of Tordesillas was signed, dividing 'discovered or yet-to-be discovered' territories between the crowns of Portugal and Spain. The agreement was the immediate response to the Portuguese Crown's challenge to a claim made by the Spanish Crown. A year and a half earlier the Spanish had arrived at what they believed to be the Indies, but was in fact the New World, officially laying claim to it for the Catholic Queen Isabella. Although no one yet knew where these lands would lead, through the Treaty of Tordesillas they now had an owner and a certificate of origin.<sup>9</sup>

There was a forerunner to the Treaty of Tordesillas: the papal bull

*Inter Caetera*, signed by Pope Alexander VI on 4 May 1493, which divided the New World between Portugal and Spain. In practice, this meant that all lands situated up to 100 leagues to the west of the Cape Verde Islands would belong to Portugal, and those further than 100 leagues to Spain. Fearing it could lose potential conquests, Portugal proposed a revision of the bull and managed to have it amended. The Treaty of Tordesillas, signed by both monarchies, defined the dividing line as the meridian located 370 leagues to the west of an unspecified island in the Cape Verde archipelago (a Portuguese domain), at the halfway mark between Cape Verde and the Caraíbas, discovered by Columbus. The treaty also stipulated that all territories east of the meridian would belong to Portugal, and all those to the west, to Spain. It was signed by Spain on 2 June and by Portugal on 5 September 1494, as if the world – real, or as they imagined it to be – could simply be divided into two, with no further dispute.

Brazil, for example, which did not yet appear on any world map, was already included in the agreement: the line established in the treaty cut vertically down the country from approximately the present-day location of Belém, the capital of the northern state of Pará, to the town of Laguna in the southern state of Santa Catarina. However, at the time Portugal showed little interest in exploring this putative territory, mainly because the profits from its trade with the East were sufficient to meet its needs. Nevertheless, a further expedition was organized in 1500, this time under the command of Captain-General Pedro Álvares de Gouveia, a member of the minor aristocracy who had inherited his name from the family of his mother, Dona Isabel de Gouveia. He later changed his name to Pedro Álvares Cabral, adopting the surname of his father, Fernão Cabral, commander of the fortress in the town of Belmonte. As is the case with the other major explorers, very little is known about him. In 1479, at the age of about twelve, he had been sent to the court of the Portuguese king, Dom Afonso V.<sup>10</sup> He was educated in Lisbon, where he studied humanities, and was brought up to fight for his country.

On 30 June 1484, when he was about seventeen, Cabral received the title of junior cavalier of the first order of nobility at the court of Dom João II<sup>11</sup> – a title of no great significance that was generally conferred on young aristocrats – and received an annuity from the Crown of 26,000 réis in recognition of his services. In 1494 he was promoted to

Knight of the Order of Christ, Portugal's most prestigious chivalric order. He received a further annuity of 40,000 réis, probably, as in the case of other young members of the aristocracy, as remuneration for the journeys he undertook to North Africa. Although no pictures of him have survived, Cabral is known to have been a man of sturdy build and tall, almost six feet three inches in height (the same as his father). There are accounts that describe him as learned, courteous, tolerant with his enemies and also vain, as was often the case with nobles who achieved such high-ranking posts. He was generally thought to be wise and canny, and despite his lack of experience, he was placed in command of the largest fleet that had ever set sail from Portugal, to lands that were as distant as they were unknown.

Very few documents survive that shed light on the criteria for choosing who was to command the expedition to the Indies. The decree appointing Cabral as captain-general mentions only his 'merits and services'. But it is known that the king was well acquainted with the members of his court, and that the Cabral family was famous for its loyalty to the Portuguese Crown. Cabral was also a member of the King's Council, and his appointment may have helped to resolve a complex political intrigue. There are those who see it as a deliberate manoeuvre to balance two factions of the nobility, because, despite his personal qualities, Cabral lacked the experience to command such an important expedition. It is interesting to note that more experienced Portuguese navigators, such as Bartolomeu Dias, Diogo Dias and Nicolau Coelho, were appointed as ship captains and sailed under Cabral's command.

The captain-general's salary was high: Cabral received 10,000 cruzados (the equivalent of 35 kilos of gold) and the right to buy 30 tons of pepper and ten crates of any other spice, at his own expense, and to resell them in Europe free of taxes. Thus, although the journey was extremely hazardous, it would ensure that on his return Cabral would be a very rich man, as, despite the high demand, the spices were extremely rare.<sup>12</sup> The captains received a thousand cruzados for every hundred barrels of storage space aboard, as well as six 'unencumbered'<sup>13</sup> crates and fifty 'quintais'<sup>14</sup> of pepper.<sup>15</sup> Sailors earned ten cruzados a month and ten 'quintais' of pepper, cabin-boys half of this, and swabbers a third. In addition there were the boatswain and the ship's guardian, who received the wages of 'one and a half sailors'. There were also priests aboard, who acted not only as spiritual guides

but also as doctors – as well as the inevitable prostitutes, often concealed among the crew. This very masculine world was not inclined to dispense with its women of ‘dubious repute’ who sometimes got pregnant on the high seas and gave birth to their children on-board.

The expedition crew was made up of around a thousand men. Seven hundred of these were designated as soldiers, although in fact they were untrained men from peasant families, many of whom had been press-ganged. And there was no lack of problems on this veritable floating citadel. A priest, Fernando Oliveira, who travelled on many such expeditions, gave the following cautious advice: ‘On the sea there are no shops, no comfortable lodgings on enemy territory; for this reason each man brings provisions from his home.’<sup>16</sup> Only the captain was allowed to bring chickens aboard – which were mostly used for feeding the sick – as well as goats, pigs and even cows. But the livestock was never shared with the crew, who generally went hungry.

On a journey without incident, the food on-board was barely enough to satisfy the sailors’ basic needs. The situation worsened considerably during the calms, or when, due to the ineptitude of the steersman, the ship sailed off course, unexpectedly prolonging the journey. Dry biscuits, present from the earliest days of navigation, were the main food item on-board. There was also a good supply of wine. The daily ration was a quarter of a litre, the same amount as for the water used for drinking and cooking. However, the water was often stored in unhygienic casks, which led to a proliferation of bacteria and outbreaks of diarrhea and other infections among the crew. The distribution of meat was highly controlled, handed out every other day; on the alternate days meals consisted of cheese or fish with rice, when available. Storage also presented a frequent problem. Since most of the food came on-board with the crew, infestations of rats, cockroaches and beetles were a common occurrence, all competing for the food with equal voracity. There were no bathrooms on these ships – small seats were suspended over the side, causing a permanent stench on deck.

With so many hygiene problems, illnesses were frequent during the crossings. Scurvy, caused by a lack of vitamin C (later known as gum or Luanda sickness), was among the most common, along with pleural and pulmonary diseases. As deaths occurred almost daily, the only solution was to lay the bodies out on deck, summon the priest to say a quick prayer, and cast them overboard.

During these journeys across uncharted waters, violence, theft, and every conceivable type of corruption abounded. Crimes, assaults and fights tended to increase in direct proportion to the degree of general uncertainty on-board ship. There were very few activities to alleviate the tension: card games, collective theatre, reading profane and religious books, and processions around the deck.

Strictly speaking, maritime exploration was a private enterprise. But it was also entirely financed by the royal family and closely supervised by the king himself. It required massive investment as well as representing enormous personal risk, which had to be highly remunerated to make it worthwhile. In return the monarchy reserved the right to control all territories conquered, to distribute lands and monopolize the profits. Thus the departure of such an expedition demanded a ritual commemoration.

The fleet that sailed from the Tagus at midday on 9 March 1500 was a very fine sight – thirteen vessels, probably ten sailing ships and three caravels. The year, marking the turn of the century, was promising, and the season was a good one for crossing the South Atlantic. The previous day the crew had received a resounding send-off with public celebrations and a Mass in the presence of the king. Ever since Bartolomeu Dias in 1488 had rounded the Horn of Africa, which he named the Cape of Torments in a deprecative reference to St Cosmas' disease<sup>17</sup> (fetid rains had stained the sailors' clothes and provoked abscesses on their skin) – and especially since Dom João II had changed the name to the Cape of Good Hope – the Portuguese saw themselves as the Lords of the Seas, protected by the blessings of Fortune.

After all, whatever its name, this cape offered the only route that connected the Atlantic and Indian Oceans. The world had never appeared so navigable to the Portuguese, or so small. Nevertheless, the Atlantic was 'an unknown sea', concealing every conceivable type of danger: monsters, torments, seas that ended in massive waterfalls. As described by Valentim Fernandes in an official statement dated 20 May 1503, the Atlantic was an 'unknown ocean'.<sup>18</sup> But the mysteries of the oceans were constantly being probed: during the nine years between Bartolomeu Dias's rounding of the Horn of Africa and the departure of Vasco da Gama's fleet in 1497, the ocean had become a laboratory for experimentation and lessons had been learnt. And so, although there were no certainties, things were not entirely left to chance. Cabral's

fleet headed straight for the Cape Verde Islands, avoiding the African coast to escape being trapped in the equatorial calms. Everything points to precision and the notion that the commander was following a recognized route.

On the morning of 14 March 1500 the fleet sailed past the Canary Islands and headed towards Cape Verde, a Portuguese colony off the West African coast, where they arrived on 22 March. The following day, one of the ships, with 150 men on-board and under the command of the experienced captain Vasco de Ataíde, simply disappeared without a trace. A pall of gloom descended on the crews, who now began to dread these unknown, virtually uncharted waters. In general the men knew very little about the purpose of the expedition. With only scanty information about these parts of the world, they developed inordinately fanciful notions about treasure and mountains of gold awaiting the explorers, but also about terrible monsters – any large fish assumed mythical proportions – and every sort of nameless danger.

In fact such losses were commonplace. According to Crown data, between 1497 and 1612, 381 of the 620 ships that sailed from the Tagus did not return to Portugal; of these, 285 remained in the East, 66 were shipwrecked, 20 were driven off course, 6 caught fire and 4 were seized by enemies.<sup>19</sup> Storms, excess cargo, bad conditions for navigation, the poor quality of the wood used for building the caravels – most of which could only withstand one long journey – were largely responsible for this litany of woes.

But despite setbacks, the Portuguese fleet, sailing southwest away from the African continent, crossed the equator on 9 April. They used a Portuguese sailing technique that consisted of describing a large arc, skirting the central area of the calms and thus taking advantage of the favourable currents and winds. The manoeuvre was a success. As early as 21 April, Pêro Vaz de Caminha<sup>20</sup> recorded ‘signs of land’: seaweed and debris in the sea. On 22 April, Cabral’s fleet sighted land to the west. At first they saw birds, probably petrels, then a large, rounded hill of considerable altitude, which they named ‘Monte Pascoal’ as it happened to be Easter week. They called the new land ‘Terra de Vera Cruz’.<sup>21</sup> The initial reaction was both wonder at this ‘new world, which this expedition has found’, and the desire to take possession, with the Portuguese creating names for everything they had ‘discovered’.

We have two surviving early descriptions of this new land, located in



what we now know as the state of Bahia.<sup>22</sup> They were both written between 26 April and 1 May. The Spanish astronomer João Faras, more commonly known as Mestre João, was the first person to describe the sky and the stars of the New World. He considered the stars to be entirely new, 'especially those of the Cross'. This was the first recorded European observation of the Southern Cross, the constellation that would become the symbol of Brazil. The other extant document is the famous 'Letter' addressed to the King of Portugal, which is regarded as a kind of 'birth certificate' for Brazil: the founding document that marks the origin of Brazil's history. The author was Pêro Vaz de Caminha, who had travelled with the fleet to record events. Already fifty years old when he was appointed for the task, Vaz de Caminha was a trusted servant of the Crown, having served as a knight in the courts of Dom Afonso V, João II and Manuel I.<sup>23</sup> He gave an exultant witness report of 'the discovery of Your New World which this expedition has found'. In the eyes of the crew and their spokesman there was no doubt that this was a new land that had just been 'discovered'. As a case of 'finders keepers', the idea was to register the property at once, even though they had no clear notion of what it was that they had actually found.

And what they 'found' was a supposedly 'new' human race. A number of bizarre theories began to circulate about the origin of the Indians. In 1520, Paracelsus<sup>24</sup> expressed his belief that they were not descended from Adam, but were akin to giants, nymphs, gnomes and pigmies. In 1547, Gerolamo Cardano<sup>25</sup> stated that they were a spontaneous generation that had emerged from decomposing matter, like worms or mushrooms. Vaz de Caminha reported what he saw:

And Nicolau Coelho signalled to them to put down their bows. They laid them down. But it was not possible to hear them or understand anything of use, as the waves were breaking on the shore. He only gave them a *biretta*, a linen skullcap that he wore on his head, and a black straw hat. And one of them gave him a headband made of birds' feathers, very long, with a crown of red and brown feathers, like a parrot's.

The exchange described here remains widely debated in Brazil: what was the tone of this seminal moment of conquest? Was it perceived as a 'friendly encounter', a case of give-and-take, despite the political, cultural and linguistic differences?

Vaz de Caminha was fascinated by these new people:

They are brown skinned, with a reddish complexion, with handsome faces and well-formed noses. They go about naked, without clothing. They feel no need to cover their private parts, which they show as readily as they show their faces. In this matter they are of great innocence.<sup>26</sup>

He was amazed by their ‘red skin and silky hair’, and by their beauty, both of body and of soul. This was the origin of the somewhat over-used cliché of the Brazilian ‘noble savage’, a trope frequently used by French explorers, and later adopted by Rousseau in the eighteenth century. But whereas for the Enlightenment philosopher the concept served as a useful foil in criticizing Europe and its civilization – and bore no relation to any direct observation – for the first arrivals in Brazil the perception was real. Here were good heathens who could be catechized and converted to the true faith. Thus, on Easter Sunday 1500 a wooden altar was erected for the priests to celebrate Mass. The captain-general displayed the flag of Christ – linking the prowess of men to the powers of the divine – ‘and a solemn, salutary sermon was given, narrating the story of Christ; and at the end, the story of our arrival and the discovery of this land, in the name of the Cross.’

Next, on the Friday, the first day of May, they searched upriver for the best place to raise a cross so that it could be seen from all around. Once the cross and the royal crest had been erected, the priest, Friar Henrique, celebrated Mass, which, according to Vaz de Caminha, ‘was attended by fifty or sixty of them, all on their knees’, in addition to the other members of the fleet. At the moment when the Gospel was read and everyone stood and raised their hands, Vaz de Caminha noted that the Indians followed suit. He was amazed when they actually took communion: ‘One of them, a man of about fifty-five, stood among those who were taking communion [. . .] and walking among them, speaking to them, pointed a finger at the altar and then up at the sky, as if they were a portent of good things to come: and so we took them to be!’

Vaz de Caminha was clearly entranced by what he saw, and his report became the source of another recurrent myth – that of a peaceful conquest, a communion of hearts united in religion. It was the start of a curious process by which Brazil came to be seen as a country without conflict, as if the tropics – by some miracle or by divine intervention – could melt tensions and avert war. While Europe was divided by wars

and immersed in bloodshed, in the New World, according to the Europeans, if wars existed they were only small internal ones. The first encounter was supposed to have been unequalled and between equals, however much time proved the opposite: a story of genocide and conquest.

By this time the Portuguese already saw themselves as the owners of the new land and the lords of its destiny, frontiers and names. Nevertheless, the discovery did not initially redirect the interests of the Portuguese, who only had eyes for the East. Thus, for some time, the vast new area was reserved for the future. But international competition, the menace of other nations and quarrels over the bilateral Treaty of Tordesillas did not permit this state of affairs to last for long. The Spanish were already occupying the northeastern coast of South America, while the British and the French, who rejected the division of the globe between Spain and Portugal, made incursions at various points along the coast. Francis I of France<sup>27</sup> commented tersely: 'I'd like to see the clause of Adam's will that divided the world between Portugal and Spain and denied me my share.'

By 1530 it was already evident to Dom João III<sup>28</sup> that the papal sovereignty legitimizing the treaty would not be enough to scare away the French corsairs who were settling with increasing frequency in his American domains. The solution was to create a number of colonizing fronts, basically independent, that frequently communicated more with Lisbon than between themselves. The administrative system adopted was that of hereditary captaincies, which the Portuguese had already successfully used in their colonies of Cape Verde and the island of Madeira. The concept was simple: as the Crown had limited financial and human resources, so it delegated the task of colonizing and exploiting vast areas of territory to private citizens, granting them tracts of land with hereditary rights.

In 1534 the Portuguese government began the process of dividing Brazil into fourteen captaincies that were granted to twelve men, known as *donees*. Since the interior of the country was completely unknown, it was decided to imagine parallel strips of coastline that stretched inland as far as the *sertão*.<sup>29</sup> All the beneficiaries were members of the minor nobility; seven had served with distinction in the African campaigns and in India, and four were high-ranking court officials. The system granted them jurisdiction over their captaincies with

supreme powers to develop the region and enslave the Indians. The extreme isolation, however, proved to be highly detrimental. So much so that in 1572 the Crown divided the country into two departments: the Northern Government, with its capital in Salvador, was responsible for the region that went from the captaincy of the Bahia de Todos os Santos to the captaincy of Maranhão. The Southern Government, based in Rio de Janeiro, was responsible for the region that stretched from Ilhéus<sup>30</sup> to the southernmost point of the colony. In this way territories within territories were created, regions that barely recognized each other as belonging to a single political and administrative unit.

Actually, once this strange world, along the route to the Indies, had been ‘discovered’, it was decided it should at least be named. For many years the Portuguese did not quite know what to make of this new territory, and there was plenty of indecision. To offset this, after 1501 the expeditions sent to explore the coast had started to name geographical features and to measure and classify latitudes, based on the premise that it really was a new continent. Despite their lack of interest in the territory – especially because, at the outset, they had failed to find the vast quantities of silver and gold that had gladdened the hearts of the Spaniards – they needed to give it a name.<sup>31</sup> In their letters both Mestre João and Vaz de Caminha called it *Vera Cruz* or *Santa Cruz*. But there was no general agreement; after 1501, at times the territory was called *Terra dos Papagaios* (Land of the Parrots), in a reference to the multicoloured birds that could talk (even though no one understood what they said), and at others *Terra de Santa Cruz* (Land of the Holy Cross). This latter was used by Dom Manuel I in the letter he sent to the King of Spain. It was also the name of the place where the first Mass had been celebrated, described at length by Vaz de Caminha and seen as the location of the military and Christian inauguration of the territory. According to the contemporary report of João de Barros, Cabral had dedicated the possession of Santa Cruz to the cause of the Holy Cross, and associated the celebration of the Mass to the sacrifice of Christ, transported to the land they had ‘found’. It should, therefore, be entirely dedicated to God, to whom the greatest service would be the conversion of the heathens.

The rumours and conflicting reports of the early days were followed by a growing awareness of the need to protect the new territory from foreign attacks. It had to be peopled and colonized and some sort of

economic activity had to be stimulated. Apart from parrots and monkeys, the only tradable product was a 'dye wood', well known in the East as a valuable pigment that could fetch high prices in Europe. Thus, shortly after Cabral's expedition, other Portuguese navigators set sail to explore the new territory and extract this native plant.

Brazilwood,<sup>32</sup> which grew abundantly along the coast, was originally called 'Ibirapitanga' by the Tupi Indians. Often growing as high as 15 metres, the tree has a large trunk, sturdy branches and thorn-covered pods. It was in high demand for making quality furniture, and for its reddish resin that was used for dyeing cloth. It is thought that about 70 million of these trees existed when the Portuguese arrived. In the years that followed, the species was decimated by Portuguese loggers, with the aid of Indian labour, which they bartered. As early as 900 CE the wood can be found in the records of the East Indies, listed among a number of plants that produced a reddish dye. Both the tree and the dye went by many different names: *brecillis*, *bersil*, *brezil*, *brasil*, *brazily*, all of which were derived from the Latin word *brasilia*, meaning a glowing red, 'the colour of embers'. The first recorded arrival of a '*kerka de bersil*' in Europe was in France, as far back as 1085. During Gaspar de Lemos's expedition in 1501, Amerigo Vespucci had noted a cargo of this beautiful wood.

In 1502 the colonizers were already starting to exploit brazilwood more systematically. Although it was not considered as valuable as the merchandise from the East, it generated considerable interest: indirectly, the Portuguese had gone back to the spice trade. The Portuguese Crown immediately declared it a royal monopoly, only permitting its exploitation via the payment of taxes. The first concession was granted in 1501 to Fernando de Noronha,<sup>33</sup> who was also granted an island, the island of São João, later converted into a captaincy that took the donee's name. Labour was provided by the Indians in exchange for trinkets. They cut down the trees and carried them to the Portuguese ships anchored near the shore; in return they received knives, pen-knives, pieces of cloth and other knick-knacks. The first ship carrying brazilwood to Portugal, the *Bretoa*, sailed in 1511, with five thousand logs, as well as monkeys, cats, a large quantity of parrots, and forty Indians, who excited great curiosity among the Europeans.<sup>34</sup>

In 1512, or thereabouts, with the product established on the international market, the term *Brazil* became the official name for Portuguese

America. But other names, or combinations of names, remained in parallel use. These included both *Terra Sante Crusis de lo Brasil* and *Terra Sante Crusis del Portugal*. Behind this divergence in terminology lay a more complex dispute, between the secular and the spiritual powers. The cross erected on that distant hilltop had experienced a short reign; it was the Devil who now held sway. Christian chroniclers deplored the fact that, as the shiploads of merchandise increased, material interests were replacing those of the Holy Cross in this new kingdom. João de Barros, for example, lamented that more importance was given 'to the name of a wood for dyeing cloth' than to 'that wood that gave its colour to the Eucharist by which we were saved, dyed in the blood of Christ that was shed upon it'.<sup>35</sup>

Thus began the struggle between the red 'blood of Christ' and the 'red dye' that would become increasingly associated with the Devil. This was further fuelled by the work of Pero de Magalhães Gândavo,<sup>36</sup> who was probably a copyist at the National Archive in Lisbon.<sup>37</sup> In his *História da província de Santa Cruz*, published in 1576, he called for a return to the original name, arguing that trying to extinguish the memory of the Holy Cross was the work of the Devil. It was an uphill struggle; colonization was well under way, with the colonizers increasingly linking the role of trade with the Church's religious and catechizing mission. Although the Devil might continue to be present, they argued their work was also that of the Lord. The new colony's contested name captures an ambivalence and discomfort that came to be reflected in the expression of deeper concerns about the place.

It was at this time that reports on the New World began to cease distinguishing between the land, its products and the native people. Sérgio Buarque de Holanda, in *Visão do Paraíso*,<sup>38</sup> recalls an ancient Celtic myth that could provide an alternative explanation for the origin of the name. According to the myth, there were islands in the Atlantic that were lost in space and time and covered in lichens and other dye-producing plants such as 'Dragon blood', both of which produced a red-coloured resin. The historian concludes that the name has its origins in the Irish expressions *Hy Bressail* and *O'Brazil*, meaning 'Island of Good Fortune'.

Islands are ideal places for projected utopias. The Irish 'Isle of Brazil' was originally a phantom island, lost in time, that re-emerged near the Azores in the fifteenth century. It was also associated with Saint

Brendan's 'Isle of the Blessed'. The paradise Vaz de Caminha described recalls the utopian 'Isle of Brazil'. This would also explain why the name *Obrasil* appears on a number of maps from the beginning of the sixteenth century. The Irish myths were part of a religious and Edenic tradition that greatly appealed to the cartographers of the period. The name first appeared in 1330, as the designation of a mysterious island, and in 1353 it was still present on an English map. At any rate, during the period of the 'discoveries' there was a clear association between the Indians, their longevity and Edenic living conditions, and these other mysterious lands. And the mystery was to remain untouched for a long, long time, just like the ambivalence regarding the (glowing coal) red brazilwood and the wood of Christ. Perhaps the best thing to do was to light one candle for God, and blow out another for the Devil.<sup>39</sup>

## HEAVEN OR HELL: NATURE AND NATIVES IN SIXTEENTH-CENTURY ACCOUNTS

Along with its chosen name, whether it be Brazil, Land of the Holy Cross, Land of the Parrots, or Portuguese America, there came a certain ambivalence, but there was also one certainty: the place had taken on the role of an 'other', both its nature and its natives.<sup>40</sup> And while its natural surroundings were seen as a paradise – an eternal spring inhabited by harmless animals – its peoples were increasingly becoming a cause for concern. Soldiers, commanders, corsairs, priests and the merely curious avidly traded florid stories. These fantasies built on the venerable tradition of travellers' extravagant accounts, tales going beyond what the eye could behold or what the intellect could accept, like those found in *Navigatio Sancti Brendani Abbatis*,<sup>41</sup> Aethicus Ister's *Cosmographia*,<sup>42</sup> Pierre d'Ailly's *Imago Mundi*,<sup>43</sup> *The Travels of John Mandeville*<sup>44</sup> and other writings popular in the early sixteenth century.<sup>45</sup>

In such traveller's tales, these wonderful regions were sometimes described as earthly paradises, with fertile plains and fountains of youth; at other times, they were portrayed as godforsaken terrains populated by misshapen monsters. Such was the insistence of the literature that these places were inhabited by men with four arms or one eye at

the centre of the forehead, by hermaphrodites, pigmies and enchanted mermaids, it is hardly surprising that in one of his first letters home, Columbus, relieved but a little disappointed, admitted to having seen no human monsters and that, to the contrary, the natives' bodies were very well formed.<sup>46</sup> Nevertheless, monsters were still depicted in drawings and maps and associated with the practice of cannibalism. This in turn led to philosophical and religious discussions about the nature of these pagan peoples. For some they were the descendants of Adam and Eve; for others they were ferocious beasts.

This kind of literature was to proliferate in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. In European thought, this meeting with America was to be the most grandiose achievement in modern Western history, considered with both trepidation and wonder. This explains in part why travel narratives recreated within the New World a myth that had once been held to be true: the presence of a heaven on earth. Still, the customs of the heathens were hardly compatible with a terrestrial paradise. Although the impact of negative images was perhaps on balance not as strong as the Edenic portrayals, nevertheless fantasies about the natives came close to depicting them as the inhabitants of an anti-paradise, or even hell. These people, with their cannibalism, witchcraft and uncontrolled lust, must be condemned.<sup>47</sup>

From the sixteenth century onwards this new frontier for humanity was the subject of numerous texts. Since the concept of authorship did not really exist, often one report was reproduced and expanded by another, reinforcing fanciful notions and spreading them wider afield. The first letter about the country, written by Pêro Vaz de Caminha in 1500, was to remain unpublished until 1773. However, Amerigo Vespucci's letters to Lorenzo di Pierfrancesco de' Medici mentioned not only the Land of the Holy Cross but also its inhabitants. These documents were based on the thoughts expressed in the first of Columbus's diaries, which in turn revealed the influence of Marco Polo's and Mandeville's travel narratives. The idea began to spread that heaven on earth and the fountain of youth were located somewhere close by, as were the brave female warriors, the Amazons, who dwelt there. The travellers of various nationalities who visited the country were already well acquainted with the writings of the Italian Pigafetta,<sup>48</sup> who in 1519 summarized his findings as follows: 'Brazilian men and women go about naked and live to be 140.'



It was only in the 1550s that a wider range of literature about Brazil began to appear: on the one hand, the Iberian writers whose focus was on colonization; and on the other, the 'non-Iberians', mainly the French, whose interest lay in reflecting on Native Man. Among the Portuguese texts, the best known was by the previously mentioned Pero de Magalhães Gândavo, Servant and Knight of the Royal Chamber of Sebastião I,<sup>49</sup> Secretary of the Royal Treasury and (probably) copyist of the National Archive, who made what was generally considered to be the most authoritative contribution to the debate that had begun with Vaz de Caminha and Vespucci. Was Brazil a heaven or a hell? Were its inhabitants innocents or degenerates? While Gândavo praised the fertility of the land with its temperate, hospitable climate, he was also one of the first to describe its people as a 'multitude of barbarous heathens'. In the 1570s he wrote his *Tratado da Terra do Brasil* and in 1576 *História da província de Santa Cruz*.<sup>50</sup> Both were works intended to encourage the Portuguese to emigrate to and invest in their American colony, much as the British had done in Virginia. Whereas the attention of the Portuguese was still focused on the East, that of the Spanish, English and French was now directed towards the New World,<sup>51</sup> albeit to different regions: Peru and Mexico were to become the America of the Spanish; Florida that of the English; and Brazil that of the French.<sup>52</sup>

Gândavo was effusive in his praise: 'This land is so delightful and temperate that one never feels either excessive heat or cold.' It was indeed the land of abundance and eternal spring. He was less encouraging, however, about the Indians of the land: 'The language of these people who inhabit the coast is simple to describe: it lacks three letters. There is no F, no L, no K,<sup>53</sup> something worthy of astonishment; there is therefore neither Faith, Law nor King, and thus they live without justice or order.'<sup>54</sup> The native peoples were encapsulated not by the values they had, but by those they lacked. Although the natural abundance was paradisiacal, the customs of the natives were, at the very least, strange: they lived in villages 'crowded with people' and used hammocks where 'they all slept together without the existence of rules'. What is more, according to Gândavo, they were 'extremely bellicose', killing and eating their prisoners 'more out of vengeance and hatred than to satisfy their hunger'. As the book progresses, the writer shows less and less sympathy for these 'savages'. 'These Indians are extremely inhuman and cruel, they are never moved by pity. They live like wild animals

without order or harmony, are very dishonest and give themselves over to lust and vice as if they possessed no human reason.<sup>55</sup>

Gândavo repeated these arguments in his *História da província de Santa Cruz a que vulgarmente chamamos Brasil*.<sup>56</sup> Here he describes 'natives of the land' at length; with their copper-coloured skin and straight black hair, their flattened faces and 'Chink-like' features. He insists that 'they live lazily and are fickle and erratic', and 'worship nothing, having no respect for their king or any kind of justice'. Their laziness and lustfulness were symbolized by the hammock, always present in engravings of the period, as if the Americans had awaited the arrival of the Europeans lying down. In the eyes of the Church, their rituals were idolatrous, full of practices such as human sacrifice; these were false religions, practised by these devil-worshipping peoples, in complete opposition to the message of salvation and sacrifice of the Son of God, who had redeemed mankind. Indigenous beliefs were regarded as a serious instance of retrogression; they were dangerous and perfidious for the moral state of these recently conquered peoples.<sup>57</sup>

While Portuguese accounts of the natives were generally unfavourable, they were extremely positive when promoting the territory's natural abundance; after all, they were often written with the intention of encouraging immigration. The travellers' journals left by the French, on the other hand, created more of a commotion. Although the question of 'lack of faith' was mentioned in the texts of Norman navigators who prospered from trading in brazilwood and bartering with the Tupi-nambá, the French in general seemed little concerned with the natives' lack of rules and religion. Pierre de Ronsard,<sup>58</sup> in his *Complainte contre Fortune* (1559), describes a Golden Age of America, where he wanted to settle, and 'Where the uncultured people wander innocently about, always naked; without malice, without virtues, without vices . . .'<sup>59</sup> Here the word 'without' refers to the presence of qualities rather than to a lack of them. The heathens of Brazil had captured the French imagination.

An example of this was a *fête brésilienne* that was held in Rouen in 1550, in the presence of the French king, Henri II,<sup>60</sup> and his wife, Catherine de' Medici.<sup>61</sup> The city planned a magnificent reception for the royal couple, erecting grandiose monuments, including obelisks, temples and a triumphal arch, to celebrate the New World. It had been half a century since the Portuguese had arrived in America, and presenting

‘the men of Brazil’ – the courageous Tupinambá who fought alongside the French – was the height of fashion. Fifty Tupinambá simulated combat on the banks of the River Seine observed by the local aristocracy. To make the display more impressive, 250 ‘extras’, dressed as Indians, joined the performers, who presented hunting expeditions, love trysts and scenes of war, as well as appearing loaded down with parrots and bananas.<sup>62</sup>

In contrast to such idyllic representations, a very different image – that of the Indians as cannibals – was emerging as emblematic of the way they lived. The spectre of cannibalism had haunted the European imagination since the Middle Ages, albeit with no specific location. The first place where the practice was known to occur was in Columbus’s Antilles; its people were still listed as such in Diderot’s *Encyclopædia*.<sup>63</sup> In 1540 an edition of Ptolemy’s *Geographia*<sup>64</sup> included a map by Sebastian Münster,<sup>65</sup> which had the single word ‘cannibals’ written across the whole of Brazil, from the Amazon Basin to the River Plate. The Indians were said to be ‘dogs who kill and eat each other’, evoking Renaissance images,<sup>66</sup> particularly that of Rabelais: ‘Cannibals, monstrous people in Africa who have faces like dogs and bark instead of laughing.’<sup>67</sup>

The French later provided two different interpretations by creating the crucial semantic distinction between ‘cannibalism’ and ‘anthropophagy’. Even though both terms referred to the custom of eating human flesh, in the case of the latter the practice was only adopted when the motive was highly ritualized *vengeance*. The idealization of the Brazilian Indians in eighteenth-century humanist France and by the Romantic Indianist School in nineteenth-century Brazil<sup>68</sup> was based on this concept, which emerged in sixteenth-century thinking.

Michel de Montaigne’s 1580 essay ‘The Cannibals’, one of France’s most celebrated humanist texts, and which uses the Tupinambá as a model, is a fine example of this strand of thought. The philosopher said the ideas for his essay had come to him after speaking to Indians who had settled in France after the *fête brésilienne* in Rouen. His essay is an exercise in relativity, in which he finds more logic in the Tupinambá methods of waging war than in those of the Europeans: ‘Now, returning to the subject, I don’t see anything barbaric or savage about these peoples; except that everyone considers barbaric that which is not practised in his own country.’ There have been many interpretations of

Montaigne's famous essay. Perhaps what is most important to keep in mind, however, is that he expressed a more laudatory view of the native peoples, especially against the backdrop of the religious wars that assailed Europe in the sixteenth century. Nevertheless, he concludes: 'In plain truth these men are very savage in comparison to us; of necessity, they must either be absolutely so or else we are savages; for there is a vast difference between their manners and ours.'<sup>69</sup> But here were the beginnings of a humanist vision that questioned not so much the Indians' values as those of the Europeans.

Philosophical considerations were far from the only interest. A large number of the French reports from the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries were more concerned with France's attempts to create a colonial settlement in Brazil. In flagrant disregard of the Treaty of Tordesillas, which they refused to accept, the French made a number of incursions into the colony, of which two were more lasting. The first project for a colonial settlement – France Antarctique – was undertaken by Nicolas Durand de Villegaignon, who disembarked in Rio de Janeiro in 1555 accompanied by a large number of soldiers and artisans. However, the following year Villegaignon wrote to John Calvin, one of the leaders of the Protestant Reformation, who had been his fellow law student in Orleans, asking him to send a contingent of believers of the new faith to control the rebellions that were undermining the colony. Thus in 1557 fourteen Calvinists arrived in Rio de Janeiro. It soon became clear that their presence only made the conflicts worse. When the antagonism came to a head the Calvinists were forced to flee the island in Guanabara Bay and take refuge among the Tupinambá.

Several accounts of the experience, describing the land and its people, survive. Villegaignon himself, who stayed in Brazil from 1555 to 1558, left a number of letters describing the region. In a letter dated 1556, signed N. B. (Nicolas Barré, one of the Calvinists sent from France), Villegaignon is full of praise for the natural beauty of Brazil but describes the 'Brazilian savages' with slight suspicion: 'They walk around naked with their bows and arrows, ready for making war.' The letters contain a mixture of religious and philosophical considerations as well as plans for exploring the country. Barré said he was certain they would find precious metals, 'because the Portuguese [had] found silver and copper fifty leagues upriver'.

These letters were to influence future reports, such as those of André

Thevet (1516–1590/2), a Franciscan friar who, after travelling around the East and some of the Mediterranean islands, disembarked in 1555 with Admiral Villegaignon to found the colony of France Antarctique. Thevet only spent three months in the colony in Guanabara Bay, alleging that he was ill and returning to France in June the following year. In Europe, where there was great curiosity about the New World, he saw an opportunity for a work combining humanism with a vogueish account of recent discoveries. In 1577 he published *Les Singularitez de la France Antarctique*,<sup>70</sup> which was highly successful within his lifetime. Thevet's text is long, rambling and frequently interspersed with rather self-serving observations intended to show his erudition. Despite its extravagant style, this is the first detailed description of Brazil's natural beauty and, more importantly, of the Tupinambá Indians, who, although they fought alongside the French, Thevet described as 'cannibals – naked and feathered'. Discussion of Brazil is found starting in Chapter 27, with a paradisiacal description of the land. Once again, however, Thevet has a very different opinion of the peoples. In fact, his comments on the Indians are on the whole distinct from those of a previous work, *Cosmographie*, where he sympathetically described them as 'these poor people, living without religion or law'. In *Les Singularitez de la France antarctique* he expresses outrage at 'their noxious religions, magic and witchcraft' and the never-ending wars between these 'unbelievably vengeful'<sup>71</sup> savages who practised the 'barbarity of cannibalism'.

Two other writers who lived among the Tupinambá during this period – one as an ally, another as an enemy to be devoured – were to end up as enemies of Thevet. Hans Staden, an artillery soldier from Hesse, was imprisoned by the Indians and narrated his experience in a book that was published in 1557 and ran to four editions in a single year. Jean de Léry's book,<sup>72</sup> *Histoire d'un Voyage Faict en la Terre du Brésil*, written in 1563 but only published in 1578, was equally well received. In the two books Brazil became famous as the 'other side of the world'. Both works were republished in France in 1592 as part of the *Great Journey* series, illustrated by Théodore de Bry, a goldsmith, engraver and Huguenot propagandist who had never been to the Americas but nevertheless became the most famous painter of the period to portray them.<sup>73</sup> What the eye could not see the imagination invented.

Jean de Léry's *Histoire d'un Voyage Faict en la Terre du Brésil*<sup>74</sup> ran

to five editions after its publication in 1578, and to a further ten, in both French and Latin, by 1611. According to the author, the aim of the book was to correct the ‘lies and errors’ contained in Thevet’s account. Léry, a minister of the Church during the initial phase of the Reformation, was a shoemaker and student of theology in Geneva when Villegaignon requested Calvinist reinforcements. In 1558, Léry set out to join the founders of France Antarctique with a group of Protestant ministers and artisans. He witnessed the disintegration of the French colony and during the rest of his time in Brazil he lived with the Tupi-nambá. It was the ‘difference’ of the Indians, rather than their ungodly practices, that interested this sixteenth-century traveller, who became the most widely known and imitated commentator on the newly discovered land of Brazil.

Opposing other reports, Léry shows that the wars waged by the ‘caraíbas’ were based on internal rules and that vengeance was a shared value among them: ‘There is a different manner of thinking here, very different from that of the fables that have been spun so far.’<sup>75</sup> Despite the enormous impact of the natural beauty of the country, with its parrots and monkeys, multicoloured birds, butterflies, giant turtles, caymans, armadillos and coatis, the impression the Indians left on him was even greater. He described how the ‘savages’ prepared flour, made bread, produced wine and dried meat.

Léry went to great lengths to understand the role of war and vengeance among the Indians and how their ‘rules’ prevailed over ‘gluttony’.<sup>76</sup> On his return to Geneva, he learnt of the Massacre of Saint Bartholomew’s Day, when, on 24 August 1572, Catholics murdered Protestants in France, initiating a brutal civil war that was to divide the country and immerse it in bloodshed.<sup>77</sup> Jean de Léry did not believe the wars waged by the Indians and their practice of cannibalism were motivated by the need for food. Rather, they represented forms of internal communication, and were symbolic of exchanges of values and goods.<sup>78</sup> Thus a new chapter in this story of conflicting opinions about the New World began.

To return to Hans Staden, the artillery soldier was to write two books, the first entitled *Two Journeys to Brazil* and the second *Brave Adventures in the Sixteenth Century among the Cannibals of the New World*. Staden made two journeys to South America – one on a Spanish ship and the other on a Portuguese ship. While he was working in a

small fort on the island of Santo Amaro,<sup>79</sup> one of the most important captaincies at the time, he was captured by the Tupinambá, who were allies of the French and enemies of the Portuguese. They forced him to live in captivity for ten and a half long years of hardship. During his struggle to avoid being eaten by the Indians – pretending to be a witch doctor or using his medical knowledge to help cure an epidemic that debilitated the group – he found time to note down the daily life of the village and the Tupinambá who lived there, people who, in his own words, haunted him ‘with their hideous customs’.<sup>80</sup>

Very little is known about Staden’s life, despite the fact that *Two Journeys to Brazil* ran to over fifty editions in German, Flemish, Dutch, Latin, French, English and Portuguese. The attraction of the book was that the author had been a captive of the Tupinambá, not to mention its lurid wood engravings, designed under his supervision. The account is straightforward with Staden explaining the tricks he used to avoid being eaten. The writer, who had witnessed a number of massacres, lived with the ‘savages’ and treated their diseases, is only released in the final chapters of his book, when he was rescued by French traders aboard the ship *Catherine de Vetteville*.

Hans Staden corrected a number of Vespucci’s observations, providing information about the family structure of the Indians, their sexual life, material culture, spiritual beliefs, and their methods of classifying animals, fruits and flowers. All this is described in colloquial language, including the practice of cannibalism and cutting up human meat. He ends the book with an uncompromising declaration: ‘All this I saw and witnessed.’<sup>81</sup> This was a way of conferring credibility on a book that might otherwise be construed as a fantasy. ‘Who is to blame?’ he asks, and concludes: ‘I have given you in this book sufficient information. Follow the trail. For those whom God helps, the world is wide open.’<sup>82</sup> At one level Staden was of course entirely right: the world had never been closed.

## A PORTION OF HUMANITY TO BE CATECHIZED OR ENSLAVED

There is still much controversy about the antiquity of the peoples of the so-called ‘New World’ (which was only ‘New’ because the Europeans

thought of their own civilization as 'Old'). Most traditional estimates consider their origins to go back 12,000 years, but more recent research puts this between 30,000 and 35,000 years. Very little is known of the history of these indigenous people, or of the innumerable peoples who disappeared as a result of what we now euphemistically call the 'encounter' between the Old World and the New. A massacre of genocidal proportions began at the time of a pacific first Mass: a population that was estimated at several million in 1500 was reduced to little over 800,000 – the number of Indians who live in Brazil today.<sup>83</sup> There are several explanations for this catastrophe. First, these peoples had no immunity to European diseases, and were attacked by pathogenic agents that included smallpox, measles, whooping cough, chickenpox, diphtheria, typhus, bubonic plague, and even what would today be considered a relatively inoffensive cold. It was the opposite of what took place in Africa, where Caucasians died by the thousands, as if there were some sort of invisible poison thread running through them. In the Americas, in contrast, the natives died. But the lack of immunity is not enough to explain entirely the massive death rate. This biological cataclysm only had the effects it did because it occurred within a specific context with specific social characteristics, which up until then had been in balance.

Colonization led to the exploitation of Indian labour, which was a major factor in the massive mortality rates. The colonists also aggravated the wars between Indian groups. Although these enmities had already existed, they were now fuelled by the colonizers, who made strategic alliances with indigenous groups, then broke them at will. This frequently led to Indians in the villages being allied to the Portuguese, whereas those in the unknown interior (*sertão*) became their enemies. These two groups – 'friendly' and 'savage' Indians – were defined by law. The village Indians, the allies, were guaranteed freedom in their villages and put in charge of maintaining and protecting the borders. The process of making contact with the 'friendly Indians of the villages' was always the same: first they were 'brought down' from their villages to the Portuguese settlements; then they were catechized, civilized and thus transformed into 'useful vassals'.<sup>84</sup>

The village Indians were also assigned the task of fighting in the wars waged by the Portuguese against groups of hostile Indians. The participation of both 'the villagers and the allies' – the latter, Tapuia



Indians – is mentioned in virtually all colonial war documents of the time. They formed a line of defence to protect the *sertão* and block the passage of strangers. It was this contingent that was mobilized to expel Villegaignon and his men, who in turn joined forces with the Tupi-nambá, the allies of the French. And thus, if ‘liberation’ – meaning catechism – was the ‘reward’ of the allied village Indians, slavery was the destination of the enemy Indians.

In this context, the Portuguese Crown revived the old concept of a ‘righteous war’ – ‘Guerra Justa’ – that could be waged against peoples who had no knowledge of the faith and therefore could not even be treated as infidels. There were a number of causes that legitimized a ‘righteous war’: refusal to be converted, hostility towards Portuguese subjects and allies, breaking agreements, and cannibalism. Cannibalism was an ‘offence against natural law’; war against it was considered both a right and a duty in order to save the souls of those who would be sacrificed or eaten.

At the time, a heated debate took place between two religious men – Bartolomé de Las Casas and Juan Ginés de Sepúlveda – over two ways of understanding the native people. Their difference of opinion generated distinct models of domination: for Las Casas, the natives were like herds that should be controlled; in Sepúlveda’s view, they were not yet human and should be forced to achieve humanity through baptism, and through work, to become men. Although war was considered a last resort by the Portuguese Crown, the settlers constantly resorted to it and used it as proof of the ‘enmity of these people’ and the ‘ferocity of the enemy’. The Crown itself was aware of abuses and made laws to control illicit enslavement, which did not, however, prevent the elimination of many indigenous peoples in what, according to European logic, were ‘righteous wars’. These wars, waged according to that logic, resulted in a random renaming of opponents, and the creation of both allies and enemies.

The concentration of the indigenous population in villages controlled by missionaries proved to be equally disastrous, as it led to the proliferation of diseases and epidemics. Catechism and civilization were central to the whole colonial project, the justification for confinement to missions near villages and for the use of Indian labour under a Jesuit administration. This system was first set in place by the Society of Jesus (Companhia de Jesus), founded by Ignacio Loyola in 1534 and a typical example of a

religious order born in the context of the Catholic Reformation. Shortly prior, Pope Paul III had issued a papal bull in which he recognized the Indians as men, made in the image of God, and thus deserving of catechization. In Europe the Jesuits were focused on the teachings of Catholicism, but the ‘discoveries’ saw them travelling the world, spreading the ‘true faith’ through catechism. They were eventually called ‘the soldiers of Christ’, and that is how they ended up, a veritable army of cassock-clad priests, fighting the Devil and at the ready to save souls.

As soon as Pope Paul III approved the foundation of the Order, the Jesuits set out for the Portuguese East, travelling as far as China and Japan. On the southwest coast of Africa they founded a Jesuit college in Luanda and translated Christian texts into Bantu. They arrived in Brazil in 1549 under the leadership of Manoel da Nóbrega, and by 1557 had established a plan to confine the Indians to missionary villages, which in effect meant transferring them to locations controlled by the Order. Missionary work in Brazil was seen as dangerous – after all Pedro Correia had been devoured by the Carijó Indians in 1554, and Dom Pero Fernandes Sardinha, known as Bishop Sardinha, had been eaten by the Caeté Indians in 1556 on the coast of the present-day state of Alagoas. The best thing to do was to indoctrinate these people, who, unlike the natives of the East, ‘lacked any faith or religion’. The Jesuits were instructed to achieve their conversion through kindness and good example, and to ‘adapt’ Catholicism to the local culture, adjusting terms and concepts to the realities of the region. An early example of this was the *Grammar of the Tupi-Guarani Language* written by José de Anchieta<sup>85</sup> in 1556, which became mandatory reading for virtually every citizen in the colony.

With so many conflicting aims, the enmity between the Jesuits and the settlers soon came to the surface. Whereas the latter were ever ready to enslave the Indians as a part of their ‘righteous war’ against them, the former tried to protect their newly converted Catholics, appealing to the Crown for more effective measures to do this. This pressure resulted in the Royal Charter of 1570, which forbade the enslavement of Indians, except when motivated by a ‘righteous war’. The king had to constantly arbitrate in conflicts, with the Jesuits accusing the settlers of greed, and the settlers accusing the Jesuits of wanting to control the country.

The Society of Jesus was, over time, to transform itself into a

veritable economic powerhouse. Although initially it depended on the generosity of the Crown, the Jesuits gradually grew rich, renting out houses, leasing land, and controlling the lucrative trade in spices that were cultivated in the villages they controlled. Their hegemony was such that in the eighteenth century the Crowns of Spain and Portugal banned the Order. The Jesuits were expelled from Portugal and its colonies in 1759, from France in 1762, from Spain and the Kingdom of Naples in 1767, until finally in 1773 Pope Clement XIV abolished the Order. It was only to be restored in 1814 in the wake of the sweeping changes created by Napoleon Bonaparte. But that is another story. At the time of colonial expansion the history of the Jesuits was inextricably linked to the Indian peoples.

## LONG BEFORE CABRAL

The colonial metropolises soon understood the strategic potential of the rivalries between indigenous groups, whether longstanding or recently provoked. For this reason, in the sixteenth century, the Portuguese made an alliance with the Tupiniquim while the French allied themselves to the Tamoios and the Tupinambá. Later, in the seventeenth century, the Dutch were to join forces with the Tapuia against the Portuguese. The Tamoio, the Tapuia, the Tupiniquim – whatever name the Portuguese had given the groups they encountered – had their own reasons for making these alliances, which they interpreted within the context of their customs. In the words of the Brazilian modernist poet Oswald de Andrade,<sup>86</sup> ‘Before the Portuguese discovered Brazil, Brazil had discovered happiness.’ Indeed, the native peoples already had their own societies, values, languages, customs and rituals.

When Christopher Columbus landed in the Antilles in 1492, the islands were densely populated by the Arawak-speaking Taino people, who were soon to be almost annihilated by epidemics and inhuman treatment. These indigenous groups, known as *kasiks* in Arawak (corrupted to *cacicazgos* in Spanish), were subordinated to a tribal chief or *cacique*. In America a centralized political system existed where the *caciques* were the supreme leaders with powers over the villages and districts, which were also hierarchically structured. Unlike European countries, however, there was no body of administrators and no

permanent army. All disputes were resolved by the chief, who summoned his warriors in cases of conflict.<sup>87</sup>

As this model began to expand across the colony, it was given the name *cacicado*. The term referred to settlements that had a regional centre, public works, collective and agricultural labour, dwellings of varying sizes, a commercial network for the exchange of produce, and technical procedures for burial. There were many regions with differing hierarchical structures, but all these societies did have a faith and the rule of law, despite their values being very different from those of the Europeans. The geographical divisions of the modern era, which led to the creation of distinct nation states, were also based on the logic of colonization and 'discovery', with no respect for pre-existing borders. Thus today these people are generically known as Amerindians, because, despite their linguistic differences, they were united by cultural ties and by the continent that was later to be called America.

The continent was named as a tribute to Amerigo Vespucci, the Italian merchant, navigator, geographer and cartographer who wrote about the 'new lands' to the west of Europe, and considered himself to be the first person to set foot in a land that had in fact been inhabited for approximately 35,000 years. Of this very distant past very little is known. It is known, however, that about 12,000 years ago milder temperatures led to the gradual separation of the two continents and to the ocean coming between them. For this reason the hypothesis most generally accepted is of a terrestrial migration from the northeast of Asia via the Bering Straits, from where the migrants gradually spread across the entire length of the American continent. A more recent, highly controversial hypothesis suggests that the first migrants arrived by sea and landed on the northeastern coast of Brazil. It is certain, however, that on the eve of the European conquest the differing social indigenous systems did not exist in a state of isolation, but were linked at both local and regional levels. There were also commercial networks connecting groups that lived in regions wide distances apart.

The first of these immense areas was formed by the Amazon basin. Aside from the more florid reports fantasizing about a lost Eldorado and a land inhabited by the Amazons, the sixteenth- and seventeenth-century chroniclers provide us with some valuable information. By all indications there were intermittent occupations along the banks of the Amazon river, villages interspersed between uninhabited stretches of

land. The villages varied in size and in the number of inhabitants. It is known that the largest of these extended along the river for as much as seven kilometres, and had a hierarchical system as well as political and ceremonial activities. The records also mention a wealth of natural resources, including an abundant supply of fish and agricultural products such as corn and manioc. In many of these villages the art of pottery was already developed, as in the Marajoara culture. Based on the island of Marajó, located off the coast of the present-day state of Pará, at the mouth of the Amazon river, it prospered from 400 to 1400 CE. Its political systems varied widely. Records show the prevalence of *cacicados*, or chiefdoms, and groups of descendants formed by matrimonial alliances. Contradicting the official version of Brazilian history, violence was very much present from the beginning of the 'encounter', with the colonizers seizing ports and sacking villages, where they were received by warriors armed to the teeth, with fleets of canoes and poisoned arrows.

Another area that is much studied today lies along the Xingu river, one of the main southern tributaries of the Amazon. In this region a multi-ethnic, multi-linguistic but culturally homogeneous society emerged. It was non-migratory, based on fishing and the cultivation of manioc. Abundant natural resources meant that a large population existed in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, which enjoyed regular interaction with other cultures, very different from the traditional image of these peoples as isolated groups who only made sporadic contact with outsiders. The political system of the Xingu people included a chief and different social groups with a remarkable degree of political autonomy.

There was also a third area, bordering the Amazon Forest to the south and east: the grasslands of the *cerrado*.<sup>88</sup> This was a vast area of scrubland dotted with bush, home to the Macro-Jê people. On that population fell a certain cultural myopia, distorted by the Andean viewpoint – with its great civilizations – but also by a lens of the Tupi-nambá, the Tupi-Guarani and the Portuguese who degraded these groups. Hence, for many years the Macro-Jê were described as 'barbaric people', who possessed neither villages, agriculture, transport nor ceramics.

Actually, it was the coastal Tupi-Guarani who named the people of the *sertão* Tapuias, thus obliterating their individuality. However, the

supposed marginalization of the Jê of the scrublands has been revisited in studies by major anthropologists such as Curt Nimuendajú, Claude Lévi-Strauss and more recently Eduardo Viveiros de Castro, among many others. The Jê are no longer seen only as nomadic hunter-gatherers, but have become studied and acknowledged as a people who possessed a sophisticated economy and cosmology. There are records of horticultural practice in the region going back millennia, as well as of the art of ceramics, known as *una*, present in the entire region from prehistoric times until the ninth century, when it was replaced by other traditional forms of ceramics, such as *aratu* and *uru*.<sup>89</sup> Villages laid out in circular form, characteristic of the central plateau, date from approximately 800 to 1500 CE. There the Indians cultivated corn and sweet potatoes. These villages consisted of between one and three circles of houses, sometimes called *ocas*,<sup>90</sup> with a circular communal area at the centre<sup>91</sup> where ceremonies and rituals were conducted. The population of these villages was larger than those of the present day, with between eight hundred and two thousand inhabitants. The structure of Jê society in Brazil was very different from that of the peoples of the tropical rainforest. They were travellers; they lived in large villages; their subsistence technology was simple and their body adornments elaborate. There were no supreme chiefs, although a certain hierarchical order existed alongside community institutions and imposing ceremonies.

Although the Jê, like the Amazonian peoples and Amerindians in general, did not leave the kinds of monumental constructions associated with those of the Andes that have become the benchmark for evaluating the indigenous people of the Americas, their cosmology was truly sophisticated. Anthropologists like Eduardo Viveiros de Castro and Philippe Descola borrowed a term from philosophy – ‘perspectivism’, employed by Leibniz and Nietzsche – to describe certain aspects of the Amerindian peoples’ cosmology. The concept is based on the idea that perception and thought result from a ‘perspective’ which alters according to the context and situation. This is a very complex cosmology, but can be simplified by examining two of its major premises: first, that the world is populated by many species, both human and nonhuman, all of whom possess consciousness and culture, and second, these species perceive themselves and each other in a very particular way. Each group sees itself as human and all the others as non-human, in other words, as animals or spirits. According to

Amerindian myths, at the 'beginning' all beings that were human became the animals of today. Whereas according to Western science, humans were animals who became humans, for the Amerindians all animals were previously humans. The consequence of this was a different interpretation of the interaction between humans and animals, all of whom are 'citizens' with social relations. This model also questions basic Western parameters such as 'nature' and 'culture'. For Westerners, there is Nature (which is a given and universal) and different cultures (which are constructed). For the Amerindians, on the other hand, there was one culture but different 'natures': men, animals and spirits.

In this interaction between 'natures' the shaman plays a vital role; he was the equivalent of a political, social and spiritual leader. An appreciation of this role is essential for understanding societies that do not discriminate between humans and nonhumans. He was the only one who could 'transport bodies' and had the powers to perceive these different states of being (human, animal or spirit). These Amerindian theories question our widely held prejudices which suppose that the Indians had 'myths', whereas we have 'philosophies'; that they had 'rituals', whereas we have 'sciences'. These are the vestiges of the legacy of the writings of sixteenth-century travellers, who saw as inferior what was in fact different. Taking seriously these groups that lived in America before the arrival of the Portuguese implies not only thinking of their history in our own terms, but also understanding that there existed and continue to exist other ways of comprehending the land we now call Brazil.<sup>92</sup>

In order to give a complete overview of these indigenous people, we need to mention the group that inhabited Brazil all along the coast at the time when the Portuguese arrived: from north to south, the coastline was occupied by a people widely considered homogeneous, the Tupi-Guarani. The group can be divided into two subgroups, based on linguistic and cultural differences. In the south, the Guarani lived in the basins of the Paraná, Paraguay and Uruguay rivers, and along the coast from the *Lagoa dos Patos*<sup>93</sup> to Cananeia, in the present-day state of São Paulo. The north coastline, from Iguape to what is today the state of Ceará, was mostly inhabited by the Tupinambá, some of whom also lived inland, in the area between the Tietê<sup>94</sup> and Paranapanema<sup>95</sup> rivers.<sup>96</sup>

As in the Amazonian cultures, the Tupi-Guarani lived from fishing and hunting. They also practised the traditional agricultural technique known as *coivara*, cutting down native brush, then burning the vegetation to clear the land for planting rotating crops. The staple food of the Guarani was corn, whereas the Tupinambá grew bitter manioc from which they made flour. Both groups benefited from the fluvial and maritime resources of the region, and were expert canoeists, a fact duly noted by sixteenth-century chroniclers. The wealth of natural resources provided sustenance for a large population. It is thought that the total population in the area inhabited by the Tupinambá was one million, or nine inhabitants per square kilometre. In the southern regions occupied by the Guarani the total population was one and a half million, or four inhabitants per square kilometre. In this region a particularly large number of Indians lived in villages established by Jesuit missionaries. They were often mobilized for war (especially in the case of the Tupinambá), or enslaved by the so-called *bandeirantes* (adventurous settlers, who ventured into unmapped regions in the pursuit of fortunes from slave-hunting and precious metals), for use on expeditions into the interior, during which large numbers of Guarani were captured from the sixteenth century on. As explained before, the term *sertão* was first employed by Vaz de Caminha to refer to the vast unknown interior of the colony, far from the sea. From the fifteenth century on, as the colony expanded, the word (originally used to designate regions in Portugal that were distant from Lisbon) was used to refer to areas about which little or nothing was known.

With time, however, the name came to indicate a symbolic space rather than a geographical one. Whereas ‘settlement’ referred to a location where order was imposed by the Catholic Church, *sertão* referred to vast areas where no such order existed – areas that were soon to be explored for the exploitation of their resources (wood, minerals and Indians). It was thanks to the alliances that the Portuguese made with Indian groups that they were able to conquer the interior of the continent. Piratininga<sup>97</sup> is a particularly significant example.<sup>98</sup> The introduction of sugar production from the middle of the sixteenth century – the subject of the next chapter of this book – led to a significant increase in the demand for labour to sustain the emerging economy, a situation that was exacerbated by the wars between rival groups of Indians.



In 1548, when São Vicente was founded, there were three thousand Indian slaves working along the coast of the captaincy, all available for work at the six local sugar mills. The conflict between the local sugar planters and the Jesuit missionaries, who arrived in the region in 1553, began during this period. The Jesuits demanded that the Indians from the interior should be settled in the missionary villages. The immediate outcome of this was the Freedom of Indians Act, passed in 1570, which forbade the enslavement of indigenous people except for in cases of a 'righteous war'. Thus, between 1580 and 1590, the expeditions that brought back large numbers of captured Indians from the interior were all conducted under the guise of 'righteous wars'.

Between 1600 and 1641 the Carijó Indians, part of the Guarani linguistic group living in areas to the south and southwest of São Paulo, became the main target. These 'hunting expeditions' reached a peak in the 1620s and 1630s, when, in flagrant disrespect of the law and in spite of the Jesuits' protests, they began to resemble paramilitary groups such was their size and the scale of resources at their disposal. *Bandeiras* – expeditions to the interior of the land – under the command of Manuel Preto, Antônio Raposo Tavares and Fernão Dias Paes, to mention only a few, decimated the local populations, creating considerable tension between the explorers, the Jesuits and the Crown.

The *Bandeirantes* were so heroically depicted in Brazilian history that their image was used by the state of São Paulo, as recently as the beginning of the twentieth century, to symbolize the 'adventurous and intrepid spirit of the region'. Whereas the benefits of their exploits were exalted – the fearless explorers of the 'dangerous *sertão*' and its wealth of mineral resources – the violence that characterized these expeditions, with the capture and enslavement of the Indians, was conveniently forgotten. The truth is that the vicious circle, set in motion during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, was brutally perverse. The lack of native labour on the coast led to more and more expeditions that penetrated further and further into the interior, resulting in the decimation of the Indian population from both epidemics and attacks by the explorers.

However, while many of these groups suffered a drastic reduction in numbers, during the sixteenth century the Tupi-Guarani sustained a remarkable political and economic system. Organized in villages each with a population of between about five hundred and two thousand,

they maintained close links with other groups with whom they had ties of kinship. Great Tupi-Guarani shamans, known as *karaí* or *karaíba*, travelled around the land healing and prophesying. It was within this context that the millenarist movements of the Tupi emerged, which foresaw the coming of a time without evil. After the arrival of the Europeans the movement would adopt a distinctively anti-Portuguese bias.

Besides this, some of the villages were allied with each other and formed multi-community groups. They had no regional centres or chiefs whose powers went beyond their village. Power was not hereditary; it had to be earned in battle. There were chiefs who became famous for their leadership in war, when they mobilized large military forces by bringing together a number of local groups. Jean de Léry, for example, cites a confrontation between the Maracajá and the Tupinambá, in which the forces of the latter totalled four thousand men. The aims of these wars were not, however, the customary ones: sacking villages and conquering their lands. They were motivated by 'vengeance' and intended to capture prisoners, whose destiny was not slavery but death. They were to be eaten in the *ocara*, the circular communal meeting place at the centre of the village.<sup>99</sup> All the reports from the time agree. No writer of the period fails to mention the wars and cannibalism practised by the Tupinambá. We now know these practices were central to the beliefs of these groups, which created lively systems of trade and cultural exchange but abhorred centralization and any form of overarching state.<sup>100</sup>

Prior to the arrival of the colonizers there was a vast contingent of peoples spread across the continent, with a large variety of social, economic and political systems, at local and regional levels. If Cabral's arrival was a disaster for these populations, there is no reason to describe the losses only in terms of lives, land and culture. There is no static history, and contact and changes continue to be made today. Amerindian practices, religions and beliefs have been gaining greater space as social actors within Brazil, despite still representing a largely ignored political voice. Although we know too little about their history, there is no reason to believe that they were passive subjects of indoctrination by the Jesuits. Padre Antonio Vieira – a Portuguese orator and philosopher of the Society of Jesus, and great defender of the 'rights of the Indians'<sup>101</sup> – attempted in one of his famous sermons to describe the natives he had met in Brazil. After lamenting the modest success of the

evangelizing mission, he went on to compare the difference between Europeans and Indians to the difference between marble and a myrtle bush. The Europeans, he said, were like marble: difficult to sculpt, but once the statue had been concluded, it remained intact forever. The Amerindians, on the other hand, were the opposite. They were like a myrtle bush: at first sight easy to sculpt, only to later return to its original form.<sup>102</sup> This was the reality that evangelization would have to face. Although the Amerindians appeared to accept the new religion without reacting, they were ‘inconstant’, or ‘worse, ill-disposed towards the new faith and laws’, always returning to their own social mores and cosmologies.

Nevertheless, five hundred years ago, the inhabitants of this immense territory – which had been given a name, but whose frontiers and interior were as yet unknown – seemed to encapsulate everything that was ‘New’: a new and strange form of humanity. To the public in Europe everything about these new lands was exciting and exotic: the people, the animals, the climate and the plants.

Padre Cardim’s treatise, *On the Climate and Land of Brazil*, was written between 1583 and 1601, translated into English in 1625 (anonymously), and finally published in full in Portuguese in the nineteenth century. Clearly, it took a while to catch on. However, as at the turn of the sixteenth century documents in circulation frequently alluded to one another, the priest’s comments may well have added fuel to the fire of public imagination, according to which ‘Brazil’, the Brazils, the Land of the Holy Cross, the Land of the Parrots, had now become the fascinating land of cannibalism. Padre Cardim made further exotic additions: after enumerating the wealth of Brazil’s natural resources, he went on to reveal the existence of mermaids and mermen, among other imaginary creatures indispensable to Portuguese writers of the time. Cardim concludes, to great effect: ‘This Brazil is another Portugal.’ It was, however, much more than that. Brazil was a different world.

## 2

# The Sugar Civilization: Bitter for the Many, Sweet for a Few

*He who beholds in the blackness of night those terrible furnaces perpetually burning [...] the noise of wheels, of chains, of people the colour of the very night, arduously toiling and all the while groaning, without a moment's rest or relief; he who beholds the thunder and chaos of this machinery of Babylon shall not doubt, though he has looked into the very depths of Mount Etna or Vesuvius, that he has seen the likeness of hell.*

Padre Antônio Vieira

## SO BITTERSWEET: A SUGAR CIVILIZATION

It is hard to understand how this land – located somewhere between heaven and hell – was to gradually become a major centre for sugar production, selling ‘sweetness’ produced by labour derived from the ‘infamous trade in human souls’. It is time to revisit this story, for no chain of events is simply natural – nor a mere gift from the gods. Our propensity to like places, products and sensations is learned, and sometimes these tastes were created or invented at some specific date in history; we identify them and they become familiar. Europeans created companies and colonial societies in the Caribbean and in Brazil; they also created sugar. Humans make food out of almost anything, but their choice and preparation of it varies considerably according to region, social class, generation and gender. Sugar was not only a *product*, but also a *producer* of codes and customs. And in the sixteenth century the invention of a desire for sweets was widely cultivated. It is true that fruits and honey had been used as sweeteners long before this,

but the new taste for sweets, its transformation into a universal need, occurred at a very specific time in the history of the Western world. It was only after 1650 that sugar, mainly cane sugar – previously the rarest of luxuries – became commonplace, a basic need.

Whereas honey has been known since the early days of human history, sugar, and especially sucrose – a substance extracted from sugarcane – appeared much later and has only been widely consumed for the past five hundred years.<sup>1</sup> In 1000 CE only very few people were aware of the existence of sugar, but by the seventeenth century the aristocracy and wealthy middle classes had become ‘addicted’ to it. It was adopted by Western medicine because it was thought to have healing properties, it penetrated the literary imagination of the time, and was a constant presence on the tables of ‘good society’.

The first known references to sugarcane come from New Guinea, dating back to around 8000 BCE. Two thousand years later it reportedly found its way to the Philippines, India and possibly Indonesia. References to actual sugar-making only began to appear with regularity after 350 CE, in India, becoming more frequent around 500 CE. The Arabs brought sugarcane to Europe with their invasion of Spain in 711. They established the art of sugar-making and the taste for different ‘types of sweetness’. In addition to its use in medicine and cooking, sugar began to be used to simply ‘sweeten’ everyday items such as tea, bread and pies. By that time, sugarcane plantations could be found in northern Africa and on a number of Mediterranean islands, most notably Sicily. But with the Crusades sugar consumption increased markedly, largely due to the expansion of the sugar trade between Africa and Europe.<sup>2</sup> From then on, sugar was on the list of precious trading goods – which included pepper, cloves and cinnamon. It became a staple for monarchs, essential to princesses’ dowries, to nobles’ wills, and so on and so forth.

The development of the spice trade and the routes along which the traders travelled have mainly been well documented. It is less clear, however, why these products became so popular and what led the rich and powerful of Europe to develop a taste for piquant foods, seasoned with pepper, smoked, aromatic, cured, oily, spicy, or, quite simply, sweet. The most convincing explanation is that before the arrival of these products food was in general dull and monotonous. Thus, more varied and exotic flavours, to satisfy even the most unusual tastes, were welcomed. Sugar was also easy to preserve. It was this combination that ensured its

place as an object of desire and power in the hands of kings and merchants. Before long it had become a staple, with investment in the production and sale of sugar increasing to meet the growth in demand.

This was the case for the Kingdom of Portugal, which saw in this market a solution to the problems it faced in both Africa and America. An additional factor that led to the Portuguese monarch's decision to promote sugar production was that the industry that had previously flourished in the Mediterranean, especially in Sicily and Moorish Spain, had begun to wane. And so, under the auspices of Prince Henry of Portugal,<sup>3</sup> the first sugarcane saplings were brought from Sicily and initially planted on the island of Madeira, which soon became the largest single producer of sugarcane in the West. By the early sixteenth century it was producing over 177,000 arrobas<sup>4</sup> of white sugar and 230,000 of Muscovado sugar,<sup>5</sup> as well as other inferior grades.<sup>6</sup>

But the growth of the sugar trade on the island was as swift as its decline. From there it rapidly spread to the Azores, Cape Verde and São Tomé. Initially it was the Genoese and Venetians who controlled the trade from these Atlantic islands. Around 1472, however, Flemish merchants, who by then controlled the distribution of commodities to the Portuguese market, took over the trade. For some time Portugal had been establishing commercial and financial ties with Genoese and Flemish bankers who provided them with access to credit for essential investments. The Netherlands, in fact, had taken an interest in Brazil long before the creation of the West India Company in 1621. There was considerable trade between Portugal and the Low Countries, with Dutch ships supplying Portuguese ports with merchandise from northern Europe – wheat, timber, metal and manufactured goods – as well as Dutch products, including fish, butter and cheese. On the return journey they carried cargoes of timber, rock salt, wine, spices and medicinal herbs from East Africa, to which, later on, they added sugar from Brazil. Not infrequently, under Philip II and III<sup>7</sup> of Spain, a country hostile to Protestant Holland, Spanish fleets blockaded the Portuguese ports to prevent Dutch ships from entering. But despite these temporary disruptions the trade continued.

After the decline of the plantations on Madeira, sugarcane production was to flourish in São Tomé. By this time slaves were already being used to work on the plantations. In 1516 alone 4,000 slaves disembarked on the island and by 1554 the local population consisted of 600

whites, 600 mulattoes and 2,000 slaves. With its proximity to the African coast the island later became an Atlantic market for the trafficking of slaves to the New World. When its sugar industry declined in the mid-sixteenth century, São Tomé turned entirely to the trafficking of slaves, receiving 'supplies' from Senegambia, Angola and Benin.

Sugar production in São Tomé turned out to be an excellent training ground for future activities in Brazil. Production methods, internal organization, the proportion of slaves to colonists – all the lessons learnt on the island – were assimilated and later applied. Even slave uprisings, especially in 1574, weighed heavily on the minds of the plantation owners as they headed towards the colony in America. Nevertheless, the Portuguese had learned from the experience. Although they had no precise idea of the extent of the territory of the New World, they knew the coastline relatively well and they understood the need for it to be populated, if only to prevent the foreign invasions that were starting to occur along the coast. On the other hand, by that time sugar, along with other spices, was fetching increasingly higher prices in an expanding European market.

Thus, combining business with pleasure – the need to populate the colony and the desire to make handsome profits – the policy of merely populating the territory was replaced by a new form of colonization, with a different purpose. Until that time Portugal had limited itself to selling the commodities it had found in its new domains (as it had done with brazilwood in the early days of the colony). But now the colonial enterprise aimed at achieving more substantial results, which required a production system that would serve the European markets on an ongoing basis. The need to populate the land went hand in hand with the desire to exploit it for profit. And nothing could be more profitable than the monoculture of sugarcane. Portugal had ample experience in its cultivation, as well as how to market and distribute it. Although the Crown was still very far from controlling the whole of its territory, it was clear that the abundant availability of land would attract large investments.

Thus the primary goal, rather than settling the population, became the large-scale production of specific products to be traded in Europe. A new type of tropical colony came into being, directed at the cultivation of crops that thrived in the temperate climate and for which there was constant demand in Europe. Their economies were entirely directed at supplying European, rather than domestic, demand, so that

at times there was not an ounce of sugarcane left for consumption in the colony.

At any rate, a system was developed based on huge landholdings – the plantations – specializing in the large-scale production of a single export crop. In this new modern era, economic survival required highly specialized production in dependent economies, a system designed to maximize the colony's resources and secure profits abroad. Sugar was ideally suited to all of these requirements, to the delight of European consumers with their insatiable appetite for the new powdered sweetness. As we know, demand can be created, and consumption is often dictated by fashion. Black tea, for example, which contains caffeine, was consumed as a stimulant in Asia, but in the West for its calming effects. It was taken at five in the afternoon in preparation for a good night's sleep.<sup>8</sup> Now sugar became the craze, no longer as a medicine, but as an extravagance: more sweetness, more flavour, more calories and more happiness.

## SUGAR ARRIVES IN BRAZIL

The earliest record of sugar and plans for its production in Brazil date back to 1516, when Dom Emmanuel<sup>9</sup> ordered hoes, axes and other tools to be distributed to 'those who were to populate Brazil', and that 'a capable and skilful man be found to establish a sugar mill there . . .'<sup>10</sup> As can be seen, the idea was to profit from the new land before it could become a problem. This was, after all, the 'whole point of colonization': populate the new land, but always with Lisbon's interests in mind.

Although premature, the monarch's plans would slowly consolidate. An expedition under the command of Martim Afonso de Sousa left Portugal for Brazil in December 1530 with the first saplings of sugarcane aboard. They were planted along the coastline of São Vicente, where Martim Afonso built the first sugar mill in 1532. It became known as the *Engenho do Governador*. A few years later it was sold to a Flemish merchant and renamed the *Engenho São Jorge dos Erasmos*, the ruins of which exist to this day. In 1534 the king, Dom João III,<sup>11</sup> established the system of hereditary captaincies. He divided the coastline of his American colony into fifteen segments, which he donated to twelve Portuguese aristocrats to administer. Martim Afonso received



the captaincy of São Vicente where the sugarcane plantations thrived. In general, however, the outcome was disappointing: some of the captaincies were never even colonized, while others suffered from isolation and attacks by the Indians.

In fact, ever since the beginning of the Brazilian colonization, indigenous groups had tried to resist Portuguese domination, either by fleeing or by taking up arms. The latter strategy provided the Europeans with the pretext to wage a so-called 'righteous war' to enslave them. But, since they were on their 'home turf', opportunities for individual flight were innumerable, and preventing the slaves from escaping proved to be truly difficult. Although rare, there were also records of occasional uprisings, in which the Indians murdered their owners and escaped en masse.

Towards the end of the sixteenth century these uprisings became a clear indication that the contrasting cultures and economies were set on a collision course. The Portuguese called this type of collective slave, and mainly indigenous, revolt *Santidade*.<sup>12</sup> Behind these uprisings lay a messianic cult that promised an end to slavery and white rule and the coming of a future when peace would reign. As the process of colonization progressed, these prophecies of a time without evil had become explicitly anti-Portuguese in spirit. Indians began launching attacks on the sugar plantations and taking in runaway slaves.

The most important of these insurrections erupted in the *Recôncavo baiano*<sup>13</sup> – the *Santidade de Jaguaripe* in the 1580s.<sup>14</sup> The insurgents combined elements of Tupinambá ritual, which promised an earthly paradise, with Roman Catholic symbols that held out the promise of future redemption. Despite the expeditions the Portuguese sent against them, the group continued to grow. In 1610 the governor of the wealthy captaincy of Bahia reported the group to be 20,000 strong. In 1613 the Portuguese began a war of extermination against the *Santidades*, and all references to them cease after 1628.<sup>15</sup>

The few regions that were successful under the captaincy system combined sugarcane production with (at least an attempt at) peaceful coexistence with the Indians. Sugarcane was planted in all the captaincies that had been colonized – from São Vicente to Pernambuco – with saplings brought from Madeira and São Tomé. Mills were erected in Porto Seguro<sup>16</sup> and Ilhéus in the captaincy of Bahia, as well as in São Vicente. The efforts of Martim Afonso de Sousa to introduce the

cultivation of sugarcane were so successful that by the end of the sixteenth century more than a dozen sugar plantations had been established in the *Baixada Santista*.<sup>17</sup>

However, the difficulty of obtaining labour was considerable. Among the causes of this were the Jesuits' increasingly ostentatious protection of the Indians, and the frequency with which the latter managed to escape. Other important factors were the substantial investments required and the constant need to stave off foreign invasions. The outcome was that only two of the captaincies were successful: Pernambuco and São Vicente. But not even the thriving sugar plantations of the latter were to last. With the departure of the donee, who returned to Portugal in 1533, the captaincy of São Vicente was governed directly from Lisbon and became the target of a series of foreign attacks. In January 1615 the Dutch admiral Joris van Spilberg delivered the *coup de grâce*: he invaded the shores of São Vicente (now the state of São Paulo) and proceeded to raid, sack and then torch the emblematic and once imposing *Engenho São Jorge dos Erasmos*. With such constant setbacks and so few incentives, its owners thought it best to abandon the venture.

These events marked the beginning of the migration of sugarcane production to the northeast, and the consequent dramatic increase in the volume of exports to Europe. Areas of fertile alluvium soil in the region, known locally as *massapê*, were found to be ideal for the production of sugarcane. Many years later, in 1930, Gilberto Freyre<sup>18</sup> was to describe it in poetic fashion: 'It's a gentle soil [. . .] The gentleness of the *massapê* contrasts with the terrible, wrathful creaking of the dry sands of the scrublands [. . .] The *massapê* is noble and resistant. It has depth.'<sup>19</sup> Freyre, in his usual style, presents the soil as predestined for the plantation of sugarcane, and thus for nurturing the distinctive culture of Brazil's northeast. And in fact he was right: the *massapê* did have the right characteristics for the successful cultivation of sugarcane. The hot climate of the region, the high humidity, and the vast network of natural waterways for transporting the product to the coast, in addition to its relative proximity to Portugal – the favourable winds and shorter distance greatly curtailed the journey – turned sugarcane into the champion of the Portuguese Empire. The centre of gravity shifted. The attention and strategic measures of the Portuguese Empire were no longer directed at India, but at Brazil.

The first sugar mills began to operate in Pernambuco in 1535, under

the direction of the owner of the captaincy, Duarte Coelho. From then on their numbers grew: 4 plantations in 1550; 30 in 1570; and 140 by the end of the sixteenth century. The production increased both numerically and geographically, spreading across the entire region, southwards to Bahia and northwards to Paraíba and Rio Grande do Norte. But it was in Pernambuco and Bahia, above all in the region of the Recôncavo, that sugar production really prospered. Thus began the golden years of Brazilian sugar production. By the end of the sixteenth century production had reached 350,000 arrobas<sup>20</sup> a year, with the colony virtually monopolizing the market. Sugarcane became an intrinsic part of the identity of Brazil: the entire colony was directed at its production and the Crown established it as a royal monopoly.

However, the sugar trade very soon became dependent on Dutch cargo ships transporting goods to the northern hemisphere.<sup>21</sup> It is even arguable that the sugar boom in Brazil was only possible due to the commercial and financial know-how of the Dutch, who were also the main providers of the capital indispensable for the establishment and expansion of the country's sugarcane industry. What is known for certain is that the use of Dutch ships grew steadily year by year as they were faster and better equipped than Portuguese ones. They disguised themselves as Portuguese vessels and thus accounted for most of the traffic between Brazil and Europe.

The Portuguese had no alternative. No matter how hard they tried to control every stage of the operation, command of the trade in sugar was to escape their hands, or rather, those of the owners of the land where the crops were produced. The major importers were located in Amsterdam, London, Hamburg and Genoa,<sup>22</sup> and they had the power to establish prices. Thus Brazil's sugarcane economy became increasingly international, and, in its own way, globalized.

## ANOTHER BRAZIL: THE FRENCH AND DUTCH

Between the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, as soon as the other European countries found out that another American colony had been 'discovered', the Brazilian coast became a target for frequent invasions. First by Algerian and Moroccan pirates on their way from the island of

Madeira to Lisbon, and then by French, Dutch and English corsairs, who patrolled the coast on both sides of the Atlantic, attacking any ship carrying sugar cargo. Vessels that set sail from Brazil loaded with merchandise also fell victim to pirates. Between 1588 and 1591 alone thirty-six of these ships were captured.<sup>23</sup> The Portuguese caravels were small and light, weighing between 80 and 120 tons, and with their small crews they became an easy prey. The Jesuit writer Padre Vieira referred to these ships as 'cowards' schools', since their only act of defence was to flee – a rarely successful tactic, since they were usually so overloaded with cargo. In 1649, in an attempt to reduce the vulnerability of their maritime transport, the Portuguese passed a law obliging the vessels to travel in fleets. From then on the caravels, now larger and heavier, were escorted by galleons that were lighter, faster and well equipped with artillery.

Pirates were not the only problem the Portuguese had to face. In defiance of the Treaty of Tordesillas, as referred to in Chapter 1, on two occasions France attempted to establish a colony in Brazil. The first attempt – France Antarctique – was led by Nicolas Durand de Villegaignon, who disembarked in Rio de Janeiro in 1555 with an extensive group, and stayed there for three years. Although his stay was short, it was to have broad repercussions. From the writings of André Thevet and Jean de Léry to those of Montaigne, Indian civilization was held up as a model, more as a criticism of European civilization than from any real knowledge of Brazil's indigenous peoples.

France constantly fought against Portugal to gain control of the trade with the Tupinambá and Tupiniquim. After the failure of France Antarctique, the French returned in 1612, this time invading São Luís in Maranhão, where they attempted to establish the colony of Equinoctial France.<sup>24</sup> The adventure was hardly new for the French, whose experience of the region dated from several years prior. In 1594, Captain Jacques Riffault had set out on an expedition to Brazil that ended in failure. However, part of the crew stayed behind in the Portuguese colony, including Charles des Vaux, who later returned to France and convinced Henry IV of the need for a colonial campaign. Shortly afterwards he set out on an expedition to the 'Island of Maranhão'.<sup>25</sup> By this time the French had already established an outpost on the island of São Luís (Upaon-Açu) and gained the confidence of the local Indian population, even learning their language.

Equinoctial France was created with the support of the French

monarchy and the collaboration of the Queen Regent, Mary of Medici, who granted the concession for the establishment of a colony south of the equator, stretching fifty leagues on either side of the fort that had been constructed on the 'Island of Maranhão'. She also appointed Capuchin missionaries to evangelize the Tupinambá in the region. The colony was founded in March 1612, under the command of Daniel de la Touche, an aristocrat who had become famous eight years earlier for exploring the coast of Guiana. With three ships and five hundred settlers on board he set out in the direction of what is today the state of Maranhão. When they arrived in Equinoctial France they founded a settlement that they named Saint Louis, after King Louis XIII. On 8 September 1612, Capuchin friars conducted the first Mass, symbolically claiming the location as a Christian domain.

The territory they occupied was vast, stretching from the coast of Maranhão to the north of the present-day state of Tocantins. The French also controlled almost all the eastern part of Pará and a large amount of what is today Amapá. They established several settlements, including Cametá, on the banks of the Tocantins river, and others around the mouth of the Araguaia river. Portugal's reaction was proportional to the size of the invasion. They gathered their troops in the captaincy of Pernambuco from where they marched on the settlement of Saint Louis. The expedition ended with the capitulation of the French on 4 November 1615. Portuguese settlers then occupied the area and introduced the cultivation of sugar. The French, however, did not give up. Their next attempted colonization was at the mouth of the Amazon river, from where they were once again expelled by the Portuguese. In 1626 they colonized the territory of what is today French Guiana, where they finally met with success. Although its capital city Cayenne was founded in 1635, the French only acquired control of the region in 1674; the region has been administered by the French state ever since.<sup>26</sup> Nonetheless, after 1615 the French made no further attempt at establishing colonial settlements in Brazil.

If the French attempts at colonization were circumstantial, those of the Dutch were very different. Relations between Portugal and Holland had never been easy, and they were seemingly destined to confront each other directly in the New World.<sup>27</sup> With the end of the Avis dynasty in 1580, the succession crisis in Portugal came to a head, and the throne passed to the Spanish Crown, during the period now known as the

Iberian Union. During the period known as the 'Philippine Dynasty' it was not only the two Crowns that were shared, but also the respective colonies of Spain and Portugal. Although the 'Iberian Union' is a term that was coined by modern historians, it appropriately describes the situation in which Portugal not only came under Spanish rule but also 'acquired' Spain's enemies, which included, of course, the Netherlands.

The Netherlands had only recently become independent; previously the country had been a part of the Habsburg Empire that was ruled from Spain. Since Spain refused to recognize Dutch independence, relations between the two countries were strained. Holland and the Low Countries, previously allies of the Portuguese, now became enemies. And with the new status quo the Dutch felt justified in invading Portugal's wealthiest colonies. After all, as an ally of Portugal, the Dutch had previously controlled the commercialization and refinement of sugar from Brazil; they would now, at least theoretically, have to relinquish them.

They did not delay. In 1595 the Dutch pillaged the African coast and, in 1604, launched an attack on the city of Salvador, then Brazil's capital city.<sup>28</sup> They were confident they could count on the inexperience of the local military defence and imagined (wrongly as it turned out) that after conquering the city the Portuguese inhabitants would accept them. They were, however, in doubt as to whether their military forces would be able to defend the vast extent of the colony's entire coastline.<sup>29</sup> Apart from these strategic considerations, the Dutch relished the prospect of the profits they could make in Brazil. They also thought that a Dutch conquest would weaken the Spanish Crown, and consequently the Iberian Union. The plan was simple: attack the capital, the head of the colony. However, this first assault in 1604 failed, and it would be some time before the Dutch tried again.

After relative tranquillity for several years, tensions rose again for Portugal. In 1621 the Dutch West India Company was founded, an event that was to alter the status quo and mark the end of the truce between the two countries. The company was financed with state money as well as by private financiers, and its principal aims were to take over sugar production areas in Brazil and control of the supply of slaves from Africa: two highly complementary activities. As Padre Antonil,<sup>30</sup> one of the most important chroniclers of Portuguese America, stated at the beginning of the eighteenth century, the slaves were 'the hands and feet' of the sugar-mill owners, and without them there would be no sugar.

The population of Salvador was aware of Dutch intentions and expected an attack. Since the end of the truce, a recommencement of the conflict between Spain and the Netherlands was thought to be highly plausible and it seemed likely that it would spill over into Portuguese America. The next Dutch attack on the capital came on 9 May 1624, on which occasion they held the city for twenty-four hours. According to the historian Charles Boxer, 'such was the panic, and so generalised, that neither whites nor Indians were of any use at all, each looking for a safe place to hide without even thinking of fighting back'.

However, the Dutch didn't manage to go beyond the limits of the city. Led by Matias de Albuquerque – the new Portuguese governor of the colony – and by Bishop Marcos Teixeira, the so-called 'good men' organized the resistance and prevented the farms from being taken. They used guerrilla tactics until the arrival of a surprisingly large contingent of reinforcements from Portugal – 56 man-of-wars, 1,185 pieces of artillery and 12,463 men from Castela, Portugal and Naples – who managed to prevent the expansion of the invasion. Portugal was determined not to lose its richest colony; after suffering prolonged fighting, ambushes and going without food, the Dutch surrendered. They had been in Bahia for almost a year. There was to be another attack in 1627, but on that occasion the Dutch force was smaller and the city was better fortified. The Dutch seemed more interested in sacking the city than invading it, to the extent that they took 2,654 crates of sugar (approximately one-sixth of the annual production of the *Recôncavo*), as well as leather, tobacco, cotton, gold and silver.<sup>31</sup>

But the Dutch refused to give up. They set their eyes on the prosperous captaincy of Pernambuco, which at that time rivalled Bahia in wealth. With its 121 sugar mills the captaincy had awakened the interest of the directors of the Dutch West India Company.<sup>32</sup> In addition, the journey from Salvador to Luanda took thirty-five days, whereas from Recife it took only twenty-nine, a difference that the Dutch would have been well aware of.<sup>33</sup> They launched the attack in early 1630, with sixty-five vessels and 7,280 men. Olinda, the capital, fell on 14 February.

The first reaction from Madrid, when it heard of the catastrophe, was to send an order to Lisbon to pray 'that a greater evil be avoided'. The Inquisition was told to redouble its efforts and apply harsher punishments, as the event could only be understood as 'punishment from God', who must have been angered by the freeing of the Jews and

heretics. But the prayers did not do the job and a resistance army had to be formed. At the same time a guerrilla campaign – the *guerra brasílica* – was organized. Nevertheless, between 1630 and 1637 the Dutch consolidated their control of the region between Ceará and the São Francisco river. At this time a local plantation owner named Domingos Fernandes Calabar became notorious in Portugal and Brazil for his treachery. Calabar left the Portuguese forces and joined the Dutch, using his knowledge of the local terrain to facilitate the enemy's advance. In the end he was arrested and executed. Today he is still seen as a paradoxical figure in Brazil: a hero for some, a villain for others. Traitor of the Portuguese interests or defender of another Brazil: a Dutch Brazil.

Rather than casting the deciding vote, it would be wiser, perhaps, to describe the period of peace that followed the wars of resistance. Although the Portuguese continued fighting in the interior, abandoning the cities and fortresses to the enemy, the Dutch were already certain of their victory and began to invest in the colony they had conquered. The Council of Nineteen, which governed the West India Company responsible for the administration of Dutch Brazil, invited a young army colonel to become governor-general from 1637 to 1644: the German count Johann Moritz von Nassau-Siegen, who was thirty-two at the time. When Nassau arrived in the captaincy the situation was extremely disheartening: the sugar mills were destroyed and abandoned and the population terrified and dismayed, both at the destruction that had been wrought and at the idea of being ruled by a foreign conqueror.

With the aim of reinvigorating the economy and gaining credibility, Nassau had the abandoned sugar mills sold on credit, the owners having fled to Bahia. He re-established the slave traffic to the region (the Dutch had invaded a number of slave markets in Africa); provided credit for the purchase of factories and equipment; and solved the food supply crisis by obliging landowners to plant 'the bread of the country' – manioc – in proportion to the number of slaves they owned. A Calvinist, the count decreed freedom of religion, was tolerant towards the Catholics and, according to documents of time, also towards the so-called 'Crypto-Jews', the New Christians,<sup>34</sup> who until then had practised their religion in secret. Traders of Jewish origin were active in Recife, which, in the 1640s, boasted two synagogues. Nassau also encouraged artists, botanists and academics to come to Pernambuco.

The few depictions of Dutch Brazil were painted by artists invited by



Nassau to Pernambuco during this period. Since the majority of Portuguese paintings were religious in nature, intended for churches, artists such as Frans Post (1612–1680) and Albert Eckhout (1610–1666) are essential references for this period. Post was only twenty-four when he arrived in Brazil, a member of Nassau's retinue. Very little is known about him, except that he was born in 1612 in the city of Leiden, where there was a concentration of important artists who had been trained at the local university. He painted innumerable views of ports and fortifications, and appears to have been enchanted with the placid tropics of Pernambuco, Maranhão and Bahia. With the dearth of pictures of daily life of the time, his paintings have become part of the Brazilian imaginary, as if they faithfully depicted Dutch Brazil of the seventeenth century. But they do not. Whereas in Holland most of the painters illustrated family and urban scenes, Frans Post preferred Brazilian landscapes. Cloudy skies, magnificent waterfalls, isolated houses, boats on paradisiacal rivers, exotic fruits and animals – all depictions of the harmonious, uncharted tropics.

Albert Eckhout also visited Nassau's Dutch captaincy, where he concentrated on depicting the Indians and fruits of the region. Initially seen as a reliable, ethnographic source, the details of this Dutchman's paintings actually reveal a number of folkloric elements. The artist gave his viewers what they wanted to see: 'the exotic practices of these cannibal people'. This must have been the reason why, in a painting of a tranquil Tapuia couple, Eckhout insisted on including the hands and feet of their dead enemies, deposited in baskets which the couple carried on their backs, in an obvious allusion to cannibalism and the stories that surrounded it. In addition to Eckhout and Post, Zacharias Wagenaer (1614–1688) left a rich legacy of drawings representing a dance of the African cult of Xangô, the sugar mill at Maciape and the slave market in Recife.

The importance of the name Nassau goes beyond the incentives he gave to the arts and commerce. The count undertook far-reaching improvements to the city of Recife, which the Dutch elevated to the capital of the colony, replacing Olinda. Near to the rundown area of the port, Nassau constructed the *Cidade Maurícia*, designed by the architect Pieter Post; a tropical replica of the Dutch capital, built on a grid system intersected by canals. The new town greatly improved the precarious hygiene and housing conditions of the population, estimated

at around 7,000. This is the town that appears as Mauritz-Stadt on the maps and panoramas included in the work of Gaspar Barlaeus, published in Amsterdam in the year 1647. The governor also built palaces, a Calvinist temple, and installed Brazil's first observatory (which registered a solar eclipse in 1640). He went on to pave some of the streets and create a sewage system. He ordered that all the streets be covered with sand to prevent flooding. The operation had to be repeated twice a day, or risk a fine of six florins. The same fine was charged to anyone who 'threw rubbish on the streets'<sup>35</sup> or sugarcane bagasse<sup>36</sup> into the rivers or reservoirs, as it prevented the proliferation of freshwater fish, which was the basic diet of the population. Nassau also ordered the construction of three bridges, the first ones of major proportions to be built in Brazil.

Maurice of Nassau created a large 'recreation garden' in Recife, which was also an orchard for rare plants, with 852 orange trees, 5 lemon trees, 80 sweet lime trees and 66 fig trees. Seven hundred coconut palms were planted specifically as habitat for animals brought from all over the world. These included many types of birds: Alagoas currawongs,<sup>37</sup> parrots, peacocks, pigeons, turkeys, ducks, swans and guinea fowl. There were also spiders, tortoises, coatis, anteaters, howler monkeys and marmosets, large cats including tigers and pumas, goats from Cape Verde, sheep from Angola, as well as fish, for which two breeding tanks were built. The park was used as a kind of laboratory by the scientists who were part of Nassau's retinue. Among these was the doctor Willem Piso – who studied the natural environment, the tropical climate and disease – and the botanist and cartographer Georg Marcgrave. In his palace the count built up a collection of curiosities that included bows, arrows, spears, hammocks, indigenous ornaments made from feathers, furniture made from jacaranda and ivory – all of which were made in Brazil.<sup>38</sup>

Nassau was extremely popular in Brazil, nicknamed 'The Brazilian' due to his fascination with the colony. Nonetheless, he was pressured by the Dutch authorities to return to Europe in 1644, the same year that marks the beginning of the decline of Dutch Brazil – a colonial project conceived to last forever.

The following year the so-called *guerras brasílicas* against the Dutch started once again. These wars that were known as 'The Reconquest' were to continue until 1654, with Portuguese and Brazilian troops once

again joining forces to expel the 'invaders'. The terms *coloniseres* and *invadors* are indicative of the mood and the local temperature. During peacetime, the Dutch had been referred to as 'colonizers'; now they once again became 'intrusive invaders'. The international situation was also extremely complex: in 1640 the Portuguese had risen up against the Spanish Crown and restored the Portuguese monarchy. John IV,<sup>39</sup> the first monarch of the House of Bragança, was placed on the throne and acclaimed by the *Cortes*.<sup>40</sup> Although this marked the end of the Iberian Union, relations between Portugal and Holland continued to be hostile; the peaceful relations between the two nations that had existed before 1580 were not to be re-established. The Dutch had occupied a considerable part of Brazilian territory and gave no indications that they intended to leave. A revolt was organized in Pernambuco under the leadership of André Vidal de Negreiros and João Fernandes Vieira, one of the most prosperous landowners in the area, and they were joined by the Afro-Brazilian military leader Henrique Dias and the Indian Filipe Camarão.

The two battles of Guararapes, fought between 1648 and 1649, ten kilometres south of Recife, are seen as a sort of cornerstone for the creation of the Brazilian nation, above all in Pernambuco. The story was further elaborated by future generations, glorifying the multi-ethnic people of the region who had united to fight for Brazil's emancipation. With time the term 'Reconquest' acquired an emotive force, and even today the event is celebrated by Portuguese and Brazilians as a triumph of 'the just'.<sup>41</sup> Most of the time history is written by the winners, and, in this case, the Dutch were the losers. Today we know that, in addition to Calabar, many sugar-mill owners, cane-cutters, New Christians, black slaves, Tapuia Indians, poor mestizos and others among the poorest classes supported the Dutch. The forces that confronted the Dutch in no way demonstrated a united front made up of the country's three races: Indians, blacks and Portuguese.

The wars continued for several years: while the insurrectionists occupied the interior, the Dutch maintained control of Recife. The uprising of the Brazilians was not, however, the only reason for the collapse of the Dutch: the West India Company itself was in crisis and could no longer find investors. Besides the lack of funds, there was also a culture shock: while the Portuguese tended to be dogmatic about religion, and rather unorthodox when it came to politics and

economics, the Dutch were the exact opposite. They were tolerant in religious practices, but extremely harsh when dealing with landowners in debt. In the end, after so many years of conflict, the resources required for financing the military operation in Brazil were simply no longer forthcoming.

The Dutch finally capitulated in 1654, when a Portuguese squadron arrived and blockaded Recife. The Portuguese resistance movement, which became known as the 'War of Divine Freedom', concentrated on making alliances throughout the region, especially with landowners who were discontent with the high taxes demanded by the Dutch. On 6 August 1661, with the intervention of the British monarchy, the details of the Treaty of The Hague were finally agreed: the Portuguese would keep all the invaded territories in Africa and America and would pay the Dutch compensation of four million cruzados. The Brazilian government introduced a tax to help pay for it; to have an idea of how long a shadow was cast by this tax, it remained in force until the nineteenth century (although the sum had been fully paid off long before). The Pernambucans were indignant at the idea of having to pay for a war that they had won. Perhaps the seeds had already been sown for the future uprisings that were to take place in this state, most ferociously in the nineteenth century.<sup>42</sup>

But, at least for the time being, peace had been re-established and the captaincy of Pernambuco could get back to the laborious task of producing sugar. The war against the Dutch was just one example of the warlike atmosphere in Brazil during this period, 'everyone against everyone'. In addition to the fear of another foreign occupation, there was also the smouldering anger of the Amerindians and the enslaved Africans.<sup>43</sup> In such a society every citizen carried a weapon and never laid it down.

## IN THE LAND OF FORCED LABOUR

Brazil had now established a major enterprise based entirely on the monoculture of sugarcane. Other minor activities developed around the plantations, such as the production of subsistence food – especially manioc – and cattle-raising. Cattle were indispensable for the cultivation of the land, the grinding and transportation of sugarcane, as well