

History and Heritage of Slavery and the Atlantic Slave Trade in the South Atlantic

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Since the 1980s, an increasing number of historians started exploring Brazilian archives to develop studies on slavery in Brazil. This change occurred after several years during which it was assumed that following the 1890's decree issued by the Minister of Finance Ruy Barbosa most Brazilian archives on slavery were burned, supposedly condemning Brazilian slavery to oblivion. Especially after 1988, the year of the centennial of abolition of slavery, numerous studies on slavery in Brazil and the Luso-Brazilian slave trade, examining new demographic data and a myriad of primary sources including baptism, marriage, and death records, have been published not only in Portuguese, but also in English and French.¹ These works have provided many examples of how enslaved men and women developed agency and had never been merely passive victims, as argued in most previous studies published by the members of the Escola de Sociologia de São Paulo in the 1960s and 1970s. Moreover, both in Brazil and in the United States, Brazilian slavery historians started giving particular attention to the internal dynamics of West and West Central African societies and their impact on the development of the Luso-Brazilian slave trade and Brazilian slavery.² Through studies highlighting the cultural and religious practices transferred from Africa to Brazil, these scholars also brought to light the trajectories of enslaved Africans and former slaves who were able to resist and to negotiate places of freedom in the Brazilian society.³

The development of this new scholarship on Brazilian slavery arose in a context of growing importance of Afro-Brazilian political and cultural activism promoting connections with Africa through the arts, religion, and popular culture. Although references to Africa existed in Bahia's carnival as early as in the nineteenth century, after the 1970s they became much more visible with the creation of carnival groups or *blocos* including the Ilê Aiyê and many other musical groups such as Olodum and Timbalada.⁴ In Rio de Janeiro, even though this Africanization was not as visible as it was in Bahia,

especially since the 1980s, a growing number of schools of samba celebrated Africa and Afro-Brazilian characters in its parades.

In the 1990s, along with the re-emergence of Afro-Brazilian civil rights movement, commemoration activities also emphasized Afro-Brazilian history. Since November 20, 1995, the two hundredth anniversary of the death of Zumbi of Palmares, the leader of the most important Brazilian runaway slave community, has been celebrated in numerous cities as the National Day of Black Consciousness. By choosing to commemorate the death of an Afro-Brazilian fighter instead of celebrate May 13, the date of the passing of the Golden Law abolishing slavery, Afro-Brazilian groups started replacing the old paternalistic vision of history with a new self-assertive perspective which was not dissociated from the new trends in the historiography of Brazilian slavery emphasizing agency. Pressured by this movement, the following fifteen years were marked by the creation of governmental organizations to promote racial equality and affirmative action, which mainly consist of quotas for admission of Afro-Brazilians in public universities as well as quotas for Afro-Brazilians in the public service. Along with these political demands, since 2003, the Brazilian government approved several laws recognizing Afro-Brazilian culture. First, the teaching of African and Afro-Brazilian history and culture became mandatory in primary and high school levels after the passing of the Law 10.639/03. Second, that same year the article 2 (paragraph 1) of the decree 4877/2003 approved by the then President of Brazil, Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva established that *quilombola* communities were no longer only those created by fugitive slaves, but extensive to the rural and urban groups identifying themselves as Afro-Brazilians, sharing a common identity, and whose history was connected to slavery and oppression.⁵

Afro-Brazilian religions were also part of this process of official recognition. After 1986, when the Candomblé temple Casa Branca do Engenho Velho, was added by the IPHAN (Instituto do Patrimônio Histórico e Artístico Nacional) to the National Historical Heritage list, several other Candomblé temples—including the Ilê Axé Op— Afonjá, Axé Yamassê, Gantois, Alaketu, Bate-Folha, and the Casa das Minas in Maranhão—were respectively recognized as national historic landmarks. Like Candomblé temples, *quilombo* remnant communities also contributed to promote the heritage of slavery and cultural practices inherited from enslaved populations of African descent, including *jongo* and *capoeira*, which in 2008 was listed as intangible national heritage as well.⁶

This recognition of African heritage and its contribution to Brazilian culture in the public sphere, has led historians and anthropologists to give greater attention to the formation of Afro-Brazilian religions and cultural traditions.⁷ By basing their investigations not only on oral histories and eth-

nographic methods, today these scholars are also looking at archival sources in order to elucidate the role of various historical actors who played an important role for the transmission and dissemination of African heritage in Brazil.

As part of the new historiography of slavery focusing on the connections among Brazil, West Africa, and West Central Africa, and the growing recognition of Afro-Brazilian cultures and religions, the six articles gathered in this special issue explore the history of Brazilian slavery and slave trade as well as the Atlantic formation of Afro-Brazilian heritage. The first paper “Fragile Liberty: The Enslavement of Free People in the Brazil-Uruguay Borderlands, 1846–1866,” by Karl Monsma and Valéria Dorneles Fernandes, explores the complex process involving the slaving frontiers of Rio Grande do Sul and present-day Uruguay, which by 1840, unlike Brazil, had already abolished slavery. Examining a range of primary sources in a region usually neglected by historians of slavery, the authors show not only the various strategies employed by *riograndense* slave owners to keep black workers under enslavement, but also how in this context many black free workers were exposed to re-enslavement.

The second article, by Douglas Libby discusses the multiple ways the populations of color of Minas Gerais identified themselves from the middle of the eighteenth century until the end of the nineteenth century. Relying on census data as well as parish and notary records, Libby shows how the terminology identifying legal status, color, and nationality were associated and employed in a fluid fashion in Minas Gerais during this time period.

The third paper, by Mariana P. Candido, expands the analysis of Brazilian slavery by incorporating it to the broad context of the Luso-Brazilian slave trade. Whereas most studies focused on the African presence in Brazil, and the presence of Brazilians in West Central African and West African ports like Luanda and Ouidah, Candido sheds light on the role of Brazilian-born merchants, administrators, and soldiers, by emphasizing the various roles they played in the development of the slave trade in Benguela, the second largest West Central African port after Luanda.

Lisa Earl Castillo’s paper “The Alaketu Temple and its Founders: Portrait of an Afro-Brazilian Dynasty,” examines the contacts between West Africa and Bahia, by cross-referencing archival and oral sources in order to reconstruct the first fifty years of a family that founded one of Brazil’s oldest Candomblé temples, the Alaketu. Examining the temple in the context of a social network of freedpeople in Bahia, Castillo shows that its founders were simultaneously involved in Catholic brotherhoods. Although the paper shows that the archival sources confirm the oral tradition, it also indicates that the Alaketu temple was created earlier than what was established by the oral sources.

The fifth paper, “Pierre Fatumbi Verger: Negotiating Connections Between Brazil and the Bight of Benin” explores the relations between the ethnographer and photographer Pierre Verger (1902–1996) and his Aguda informants of Dahomey (present-day Republic of Benin). Although these relations were also constructed and idealized, and sometimes based on an essentialist vision of West African survivals in Brazil and of Brazilian culture in the Bight of Benin, the correspondence shows that Verger’s relations with his informants were based on a genuine interest in reconstituting the connections between Bahia and Benin.

This special issue closes with the paper “The Contours of Quilombola Identity in the Sertão,” by Mary Lorena Kenny. Based on extensive fieldwork and a large array of interviews with members of Talhado’s *quilombola* community, the paper discusses a number of difficult and unsolved issues that encompass the formation of the public identity of a *quilombola* group in this region of Brazil’s Northeast *sertão*. Kenny argues that although government public discourses on these communities convey an idea of cultural unity and absence of distinct racial experiences, the population of Talhado is challenging this vision by constructing a *quilombola* identity that articulates race and class.

The various papers in this special issue provide a glimpse into several different paths for further work on the history and heritage of slavery in Brazil. Monsma’s and Fernandes’s article points to the need of comparative studies on emancipation and the importance of South American border zones, in particular the Rio de La Plata region. Libby’s work suggests the need for further work on how racial categories were constructed in various regions of Brazil, by contributing to the understanding of how these racial and social classifications survived in the present and how they differ from the existing categories of other slave societies in the Americas. Candido’s paper underscores the continued exchanges between Brazil and Benguela. The paper contributes to the understanding of the Portuguese colonial system in the South Atlantic, by showing how diverse the Luso-Brazilian administration between the seventeenth and the nineteenth centuries. Castillo’s paper not only brings to light numerous primary sources that help to illuminate Alaketu’s history, but is also innovative by its methodological approach cross-referencing oral tradition and written sources. Araujo’s paper provides elements to better understand the work of Pierre Verger, by also contributing to elucidate his relations with his various West African informants. The paper explains the ways these men and women influenced his research interests, and how over the years Verger gradually became an important source of information for the Aguda families as well. Kenny’s paper shows that only extensive fieldwork among the numerous Brazil’s *quilombola* communities can provide a complex picture of the processes of

identity-building among the populations of African descent who claim the status of remnants of *quilombos*.

Notes

1. On the changes in Brazilian historiography of slavery since the 1960s, see Stuart Schwartz, *Slaves, Peasants and Rebels: Reconsidering Brazilian Slavery* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1995), chapter 1, “Recent Trends in the Study of Brazilian Slavery,” 1–38, and Eduardo França Paiva, “Revendication de droits coutumiers et actions en justice des esclaves dans les Minas Gerais du XVIIIe siècle,” *Cahiers du Brésil Contemporain* 53–54 (2003): 11–29.

2. Among others see Luiz Felipe de Alencastro, *O trato dos viventes: formação do Brasil no Atlântico Sul, séculos XVI e XVII* (São Paulo: Companhia das Letras, 2000), James H. Sweet, *Recreating Africa: Culture, Kinship, and Religion in the African-Portuguese World, 1441–1770* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2003), Walter Hawthorne, *From Africa to Brazil: Culture, Identity, and an Atlantic Slave Trade, 1600–1830* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010), and Roquinaldo Ferreira, *Cross-Cultural Exchange in the Atlantic World Angola and Brazil during the Era of the Slave Trade* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012).

3. See João José Reis, *Slave Rebellion in Brazil: The Muslim Uprising of 1835 in Bahia* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993), João José Reis, Flávio dos Santos Gomes, and Marcus Joaquim de Carvalho, *O Alufá Rufino: Tráfico, Escravidão e Liberdade no Atlântico Negro (c. 1822–c.1853)* (São Paulo: Companhia das Letras, 2010), James H. Sweet, *Domingos Álvares, African Healing, and the Intellectual History of the Atlantic World* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2011), Mariza de Carvalho Soares, *People of Faith: Slavery and African Catholics in Eighteenth-Century Rio de Janeiro* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2011),

4. On the references to African in nineteenth-century Bahian carnival, see Kim D. Butler, “Africa in the Reinvention of Nineteenth Century Afro-Bahian Identity,” *Slavery & Abolition* 22, no. 1 (2001): 135–154, and Wlamira Ribeiro de Albuquerque, “Esperanças de Boaventuras: construções da África e africanismos na Bahia (1887–1910),” *Estudos Afro-Asiáticos* 24, no. 2 (2002): 215–245.

5. On these definitions, see Mary Lorena Kenny, “The Contours of Quilombola Identity in the Sertão,” in this issue.

6. *Jongo* is an Afro-Brazilian dance and music manifestation, found particularly in Brazilian South East region. See Silvia Hunold Lara and Gustavo Pacheco, ed. *Memória do Jongo: As Gravações Históricas de Stanley J. Stein: Vassouras 1949* (Rio de Janeiro: Edições Folha Seca, 2007) and the film documentary *Jongo, Calangos e Folias: Música Negra, Memória e Poesia* (2008), by Hebe Mattos and Martha Abreu, <http://ufftube.uff.br/video/9RBAHO8O6474/Jongos-Calangos-e-Folias-M%C3%BAsica-Negra-Mem%C3%B3ria-e-Poesia>. Several recent studies have focused on capoeira, including Carlos Eugênio Líbano Soares, *A capoeira escrava e outras*

tradições rebeldes on Rio de Janeiro, 1808–1850 (Campinas: Editora da Universidade Estadual de Campinas, 2001), Matthias Röhrig Assunção, *Capoeira: The History of an Afro-Brazilian Martial Art* (London: Routledge, 2005); T. J. Desch Obi, *Fighting for Honor: The History of African Martial Art in the Atlantic World* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2008), and Maya Talmon-Chvaicer, *The Hidden History of Capoeira: A Collision of Cultures in the Brazilian Battle Dance* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2007).

7. Recent book-length studies on Candomblé in Brazil include Rachel E. Harding, *A Refuge in thunder: Candomblé and Alternative Spaces of Blackness* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2000), James Lorand Matory, *Black Atlantic Religion Tradition, Transnationalism, and Matriarchy in the Afro-Brazilian Candomblé* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2005), Lisa Earl Castillo, *Entre a oralidade e a escrita: A etnografia nos candomblés da Bahia* (Salvador: Editora da Universidade Federal da Bahia, 2008), Beatriz Góis Dantas, *Nagô Grandma and White Papa Candomblé and the Creation of Afro-Brazilian Identity* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2009), Stefania Capone, *Searching for Africa in Brazil: Power and Tradition in Candomblé* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010), and Luis Nicolau Parés, *A formação do candomblé: história e ritual da nação jeje na Bahia* (Campinas, SP: Editora Unicamp, 2006).