

## SLAVERY

Professor João José Reis  
Univerisade Federal da Bahia

The class today is about slavery. But we can't talk about slavery in a country like Brazil. What is slavery? It fixed itself for so long and it covered so much territory that it's impossible, within a class period to cover the whole subject.

So, I am going to focus specifically on the matter of slavery resistance in Brazil. Of course, with a few passages on the aspects of slavery that are important to understand it. In this first class, I want to make it clear that slavery resistance wasn't one of those movements whether individual or collective against slavery. Things like escapes formation of quilombos or rebellions.

There was also what the historians call the every day resistance, or daily resistance. Here, we could say that slave resistance was everything the slave used to do and that damaged slavery. Many times, the slave could do things that would go in support of slavery but which were inconsistently a challenge to it. A classical example is in Brazil's case, distinguishing Brazil, for instance from the United States situations in which slaves owned slaves. This was something in favor of slavery but it challenged the true meaning of slavery.

Or the slave being only a slave and not being a slave and a master at the same time. As for the daily resistance we understand it as a small resistance, really tiny that slaves developed challenging the master, faking illnesses, for example or sabotaging production doing what in Brazil we call "limp body" not doing their duties, things of that kind. We can also call daily resistance what we call "small escape". A type of escape where the slave doesn't run away to be out of master's reach definitely.

He doesn't run in search of freedom, we could say but he runs to negotiate better terms within the system. It's what we call a short escape. Many times the slave doesn't run away not even to negotiate. He runs away to go to a party to spend a weekend away from where he lives and then he returns. He certainly receives an adequate punishment. But he considers it's worth being punished

for a escape, for a short moment of freedom. Things get more serious when escape turns into a permanent escape. Slaves escaped individually simply not to come back any more many times leaving their place of residence the city, the village, where they lived to go to another region, city or village not to come back ever again. That was very common all through the 19th century with the growth of the free and freed Negro population.

It was possible for a slave to be lost, mixed up with this population of free and freed Negroes. Even more dangerous for the slavery system as a whole was the individual escape that added up to other escapes forming the quilombo. Quilombo was the name given, in Brazil to the formation of groups of runaways. Those quilombos, traditionally in slavery bibliography were understood as groupings isolated from society.

They were usually located on the top of a mountain in places in uninhabited forests. And they kept a type of alternative society. But that's a traditional vision. There were quilombos that really isolated themselves. They were hidden in the forests. They were located on mountain tops. Palmares, for example, was a quilombo of difficult access. It was the biggest of all in the Americas with a community of runaways that would have counted a population of 12,000 people.

Palmares was located, for a good part of its history. It lasted about a hundred years throughout the 17th century. Its history covers the 17<sup>th</sup> century completely. During its first decades, it was a really isolated place. With the development of a "plantation" economy, sugar-yielding Palmares comes out of the isolation. It starts some relationship with society. Whether when the Palmarinos, inhabitants of Palmares would leave to plunder the properties next to where they lived or to kidnap other slaves, slaves, mostly. But also in terms of specific relationship with the neighbors from the free society. They also had some relationship with dealers who would take products to Palmares to be exchanged for products that the quilombolas produced.

Which means, not even Palmares which is considered as a more recurrent model of a quilombo was a totally isolated community. Most quilombos were less isolated than Palmares. But these quilombos were also smaller than Palmares. Today, Brazilian historiography shows that all big cities like Rio de Janeiro, Recife, Salvador were surrounded by small quilombos very short-lived ones since they were close to police repression. But they were always present. And they kept a relationship with people from

the city like tavern keepers, dealers whom they'd sell their products to. They'd sell their labor force to the farmers. They'd keep intense relationship with free society and with the slave society.

Since there was a very strong relationship between quilombo and slaves who remained in the senzalas. as the slave quarters were called in Brazil. Sometimes, the quilombola including had family relations with the slaves. These slaves from the senzalas visited the quilombos often just like the quilombolas would visit the slaves from the senzalas. The quilombos, on the other hand exactly due to this relation that guaranteed the survival of many quilombos didn't stand against the slavery society in a way as if wanting to destroy it.

Some historians say that the quilombos tried to reproduce in the slavery society, the African society which was a society where slavery didn't exist. As if it were a kind of nostalgic society of the African past. That is a condition absolutely disputed because the quilombolas changed their lives a lot more than they could really have brought a frozen African life to Brazil.

Anyway the quilombo wasn't a contesting movement of the slavery system. Although, of course many quilombos lived in war with the slavery system. As it was the case, for a long time of the quilombo dos Palmares. There was a short time in the 1670 decade, when Palmares quilombolas tried. They really made a deal with colonial authorities. But it was a deal that wasn't fulfilled by either part. As a whole, a quilombo wasn't an open movement of contestation. Slavery rebellions were.

Slavery rebellions were movements that could have the dimension of slavery contestation. Because even the rebellions we can divide in two models. At least two models. The first ones were rebellions meant to negotiate or correct a particularly damaging aspect of the slaves' lives. For instance, to punish a really cruel foreman. Or even to assassinate a very cruel master. There was, in Bahia at the end of the 18th century, a movement of slaves which mixed rebellion with quilombo formation. A very interesting mixture. It happened on a sugar plantation region a region where sugar cane was planted. I'm sorry. It happened in a specific mill. The region where it happened wasn't specifically typical.

This happened in Ilhéus where the manioc was planted. With which the famous manioc flour was produced an important part of the slaves' diet. In Ilhéus, in the Santana mill, slave rebellion takes place where slaves take over all of the tools from the mill and enter the forest, on the land of the mill. And there they write a peace treaty establishing conditions under which they'd go back to work. I mean, it's a rebellion made to negotiate better terms within slavery itself. We could daringly call these "reformist rebellions" because they aimed at remodeling slavery.

Other rebellions were definite. Because they contested slavery. And they were really after an alternative society although in none of the cases we really know what the rebels wanted or what they understood as alternative society. Slave rebellions were particularly intense at the end of the 18th century. This was connected to an intensification of slavery in Brazil in part as a result of the Haitian Revolution which started in 1791 and basically lasted one decade. This revolution destroyed the society of plantations a society of sugar mills, coffee farming for exportation. It transformed the region, which was one of the most flourishing and richest European colonies in the Caribbean into a society of peasants. In short, it withdrew from the international market all products that were offered for this market. Especially sugar and coffee.

Due to that, Brazil developed because the market opened up for Brazil, particularly in the Northeast where sugar cane was more intensely produced. As a consequence, too, slave traffic was aggravated. And here we should talk a little about slave traffic. Brazil was the country that imported the largest number of slaves in the Americas. From about eleven million imported slaves, forty six percent or more than five million slaves were brought to Brazil. The second place goes to slaves transported in English ships. 28%.

Brazil, and Portugal, of course, answer for 46% and England, 28%. A distant second place. These Brazilian slaves came from all African regions especially from Angola. They belonged to various groups. For instance the ones who came from Angola were divided in subgroups which were called Catões, Imbembo, Quiloa, Monjolo. In general, there were three major groups which were Angola, Benguela, Cabinda, and Congo.

In general, this was related to the port of boarding. But once in Brazil through these denominations Angola, Benguela, Cabinda, and Congo. There were others. These were the most important ones. And slaves would build their own distinctive identities also called Afro-Brazilian identities. Other slaves came from the Gulf of Benin. And I'd like to call your

attention to illustrations number two a map of Africa and number three which shows slave ships routes.

Another great region was the Gulf of Benin. This was a region that supplied most of all Bahia. Bahia had a sort of slave importation control then as of the middle of the 18th century. It's in this period that slavery is intensified in Brazil. Slaves coming from these regions spoke lorubá or Guibê Haussá, Lupê, etc. Mainly slaves from the Guibê language who were here called Gegês and the ones from the lorubá language, here called Nagôs.

And in third place the Haussá. These slaves came from regions in the 19th century, where there were very intense internal conflicts. In 1804, a "Jihad" was declared, a Muslim saint war in the Haussá country. A war commanded by the Fulanis who made up for 20% of the population from the Haussá territory. That Jihad resulted in the formation of a powerful caliphate called Socotô.

The first phase of this war, from 1804 to 1809 exactly when the state of Socotô was formed. It was a war of Islamic reformation a war in which the leaders from the "Jihads" struggled against other Muslims considered less orthodox and it resulted in the victimization of many thousands of slaves, sold in the port of Benin. And these came to Bahia. Other wars took place in the lorubá territory wars connected to the downfall of the Oió empire.

Oió was the most powerful African kingdom. It had frontiers with the Haussá territory. The Jihad movement contaminated the Northern part of the lorubá territory and it hit the center of Oió. Then we also have a Muslim dimension in the conflicts of the lorubá territory. But not just a Muslim dimension. Civil wars that had nothing to do with Islamic expansion also took place in this period or during the first half of the 19th century. Those conflicts brought about thousands of slaves who came to Bahia. It was those slaves who promoted a great number of rebellions in Bahia, many of them in the region of the mills. I call your attention to the map of Brazil where you can locate Bahia and the area in the map where you find the Recôncavo where sugar was produced in Bahia. In this area, many rebellions took place but also in Bahia's capital, Salvador and its surroundings.

Many of those rebellions were led by Muslims but not all of them. The most important of them took place in 1835 in Salvador. It was an urban rebellion that also intended to take the movement into the Recôncavo. The investigation that followed that rebellion produced

a lot of documents that allow us a very detailed view of the movement. This movement was commanded, led by Muslims but not just Muslims took part in it. Those rebels organized themselves in Muslim cells which were like small schools, many times in open air where they'd memorize and learn the Koran or practice Arabic handwriting.

These cells were also of use to organize the 1835 movement. There were about 600 rebels who, in the early morning of January 25th, 1835 went out on the streets wearing Malei amulets which they believed to protect them against soldiers bullets. I have examples of the Malei amulets on illustrations 37, 38, 39, 40. One of the interesting aspects of this movement was that it was ritualized in terms of Islam. For instance, it took place at the end of the Ramadan, Ramandan or the holy month. I suppose that it really took place during one of the festivals that concludes the Ramadan which is the "lailad-al-kadr", or Night of Glory.

Really, a Malei amulet which is the illustration of number 38 brings the Koran surah called Night of Glory. And the Koran surah reads as follows "We reveal the Koran in the Night of Glory. I wish you knew what the Night of Glory is. Better than a thousand months is the Night of Glory! In this night, angels and spirit have license from Allah to come down with their decrees. This night is of peace until day breaks." This is a nice Koran poem that talks about the moment when angels came down to reveal the Koran to Mahomet, or Mohammed.

That movement like all others was defeated brutally repressed. Not as brutally as other slave rebellions were repressed in the Caribbean and in the United States. During the fight, about 70 people were killed. And during the repression that followed the fight or during police investigation that followed, etc. more than 300 slaves were heard. Slaves and freed, since not only slaves took part, freed too. All of them, however, were Africans, born in Africa. None of the slaves born in Brazil took part. More than 300 slaves were interrogated.

Due to that investigation we have a radiography of African lives in Bahia. And there were hundreds sentenced to whipping. There were slaves who were sentenced up to 1,200 whips. A real torture. They were sentenced to brutal torture. These whips were ministered in daily doses of 50. Others served their time in prison. The freed or rather, ex-slaves who were submitted to court but acquitted those were deported back to Africa. Four were

sentenced to maximum penalty. This movement shows that ideology behind slave movements was mostly African ideologies or at least brought from Africa.

Not only Islam took part as ideology for this movement. There is a case in 1826 also in Bahia, of a movement from a quilombo where there was a candomblé iorubanas' or iorubás' orixás religion. So candomblé also took part in slaves' rebellions. In other places of Brazil there were also cases where we find strong presence of African religions, while ideology or at least, if I may say so, a rebellion technology. I remember now the 1832 rebellion in Campinas, a coffee region in São Paulo. During this rebellion's inquiry it was discovered that slaves were using "witchcraft", or rather leaves and drinks that would be used by the rebels. This rebellion never took place, it was suffocated at the moment of conspiracy. Those drinks would be used to protect the body of these slaves against soldiers who would repress the movement. They had the same function as Muslim amulets.

Nevertheless, slaves weren't totally alienated from secular ideologies and abolitionist ideologies. But slaves born in Africa weren't as affected by that type of ideology. Slaves born in Brazil were much more influenced by them. It was very common in the period of independence when many "Crioulo" slaves as the slaves were called at that time in Brazil they understood that movement of national liberation as if it were a sign that abolition could eventually take place.