

CHAPTER FIVE

A "Great Arch" Descending *Manumission Rates, Subaltern Social Mobility, and the Identities of Enslaved, Freeborn, and Freed Blacks in Southeastern Brazil, 1791–1888*

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In April 1848, a plan for slave rebellion centered on Vassouras, in the Paraíba Valley, Rio de Janeiro's coffee-plantation hinterland, was discovered and quelled. The sources on the conspiracy reveal that it was linked to a political-religious movement similar to the community "cults of affliction" for healing social ills and for "governance" documented in the old Kingdom of Kongo region, a major provider of slaves for Brazil's southeast (Rio de Janeiro, São Paulo, Minas Gerais, and Espírito Santo). These sources also suggest that the planned rebellion had a considerable impact later that year on debates in the Brazilian parliament over the suppression of the Atlantic slave trade, which still flourished, although outlawed since 1831. In short, the definitive abolition of this commerce by parliament in 1850—almost passed in 1848—may have reflected internal slave pressure, predicated on African values, not just the threat of British intervention.¹

My research on this subject throws light on the formation of slave identity in the plantations of Rio de Janeiro and São Paulo from circa 1794, when export agriculture and bonded labor acquired new vigor in the Southeast, to abolition in 1888. My results point to a slave consciousness, formed from a common experience and culture, which was radically opposed to that of the masters (Slenes 2007a, 2007b). This argument, consistent with recent research on slave rebellion in southeastern Brazil, counters other work that emphasizes slave strategies of assimilation and the absence of a

unified identity in the *senzala* (slave quarters), reflecting significant possibilities of "black" (black and mulatto) social mobility into and within free society.² To define what is at stake, therefore, I begin by outlining present debates regarding the frequency of manumission, the degree of social mobility among freeborn and freed blacks (groups subject to legal distinctions during most of the period studied), and the construction of patterns of social race over the long term, which are closely linked to discussions about slave (and black) identity formation.

Taking the long view, studies on Brazilian slavery have moved through the same paradigms as those on American bonded labor, clearly responding to changes in the north, but always within the crucible of local debates (Slenes 1999, chapter one). Gilberto Freyre, in his classic *Casa grande e senzala* (1980), developed arguments similar to those of the American historian Ulrich B. Phillips (1929, 1966) about the patriarchal nature of slavery and the close relations between masters and slaves, but he did so in a way that gave his work recurrent appeal among his compatriots.³ Using, as Phillips had not, a nonracist idiom that valued African culture, he stressed as an explanation of the Brazilian case (in contrast to the American, with its legacy of lynching) the supposedly innate openness of the Luso-Brazilian character, libido, and church to non-European "Others," even while recounting stories of masters' cruelty toward their slaves.⁴ The "São Paulo School of Sociology" (Florestan Fernandes 1966 especially) reacted to what it saw as Freyre's apologetics for Portuguese colonialism and the planter class; taking its cue from E. Franklin Frazier (1939) and other American opponents of Phillips, it portrayed slavery as so harsh and bondpeople's institutions, particularly their families, so broken by slavery, that blacks were no more than anomalous victims, incapable of effectively challenging the slave regime or achieving social mobility after emancipation.

Contesting the São Paulo school, João Reis (2003), Silvia Lara (1988), Sidney Chalhoub (1990), and others found decidedly nonanomalous bondspeople in the archives who made life difficult for slave owners and authorities, sometimes in rebellion, more often in subtle, yet subversive ways. In doing so, these historians were influenced by researchers such as Sidney Mintz and Richard Price (1992), Eugene Genovese (1974), and Herbert Gutman (1976), as well as by Brazilianists who anticipated or accompanied the new scholarship in the United States directed against Frazier's legacy (Dean 1976; Slenes 1976; Schwartz 1985; Stein 1985). Above all, they applied the insights of Gutman's "mentor," the historian of the English work-

ing class E. P. Thompson (1968; 1974; 1978b). The “rebellious” culture of Thompson’s eighteenth-century “plebeians,” hidden behind outward deference toward “patricians,” had particular resonance for Brazilian scholars at that historiographical moment and in the context of apparent working-class passivity under Brazil’s recent military dictatorship (Lara 1995; Chalhouh and Silva 2009). For one following this literature, James Scott’s *Domination and the Arts of Resistance* (1990)—important for the reflections in this book—seemed like a valuable systematization of the lessons from Thompson and from the paradigm shift in slave studies in the 1970s.

Yet, Scott’s “summing up” came at a time when slave studies were moving beyond uncovering “day-to-day” and “hidden” resistance and moving toward exploring the complexities that the full recognition of working people’s “agency” poses for studying their behavior and social identity. In Brazil, these complexities are nowhere more apparent than in the extensive new bibliography on the slave family. It is now clear that, contrary to the opinion of Fernandes, there was a strong presence of nuclear, extended, and intergenerational slave families on southeastern plantations. But if this shows that slaves “resisted” a dehumanization previously believed to be inherent in New World slavery, what is its deeper meaning? Was a slave community with substantially homogeneous African roots thereby strengthened, such that bondpeople acquired a deeper will to confound their masters, even as kin ties made them more vulnerable and less voluntaristic? (Slenes 1999; confrontation was discouraged, but the disposition to “resist” was heightened). Or were owners thereby more able to impose their rule on quarters that were divided ethnically and avid for the “peace” bestowed by new kinship ties? (On resistance pacified, see Florentino and Góes 1997.) Or did the family, given high manumission rates for creoles (blacks born in Brazil) and access to land for freeborn and freed blacks, encourage Brazilian-born slaves to aim at working their (and their loved ones’) way out of bondage, while distancing themselves from African co-workers? (On resistance deflected towards amoral familism and group infighting, see Mattos 1998.) Explicit in all these formulations are questions that go beyond slaves’ immediate intentions, to probe the context in which they, their masters, and others took considered action. Just as historians of free workers are asking why “class consciousness” occurred in some cases but not in others, so too are historians of slaves raising queries about the configuration of antipathies, alliances, and social identities in and outside

the senzala, rather than taking it for granted that bondpeople simply resisted.

The issues of manumission and of the fate of *libertos* (former slaves) have become central to research in this area. Many historians now portray the Brazilian slave system as peculiarly open to upward mobility—the movement of bondpeople out of slavery and of freeborn and freed blacks into the ranks of small landholders and even of small slave owners—and thus also characterized by competitive tensions within the senzala. This proposition about manumission and mobility sometimes takes the form of a neo-Freyrean argument (relatively static, largely culturalist, but recognizing the oppressive nature of slavery), with bonded workers, however, joining masters as agents (Paiva 2001; Góes 2003, 2007; Florentino 2007). This formulation is facilitated by Freyre’s (1980) characterization in 1933 of Brazilian slavery as violent, even while integrative, and also by his willingness to admit, if not emphasize, that bondpeople had cultural resources of their own permitting self-interested action.⁵ It also builds on recent work that repudiates the São Paulo school’s characterization of Freyre as simply an ideologue of the elite who hoodwinked readers with his “myth of racial democracy.” To have resonance, it is argued, a “myth” must be in tune with “principles [widely] considered fundamental to the making of the social order” (Fry 2005, 164). For many neo-Freyreans, substantial manumission and mobility under slavery, whether expressing slave-owner sensibilities or a more diffuse national culture, are precisely what established the dominant social chords that (to their ears) still echo long after the death of forced labor. The argument has implications for contemporary social policy; some of the scholars who thus position themselves regarding slave society have spoken out against so-called race-based affirmative action in university admissions as something that would replace historical Brazilian harmonics with dissonant tones from America (see, for instance, Florentino 2007 and Góes 2007.)

On the other hand, the argument from manumission and mobility has resulted in decidedly non-Freyrean studies, particularly by Hebe Mattos (1998, 2000, 2008): non-Freyrean in the sense of focusing on changing social conditions and struggles over time as the determinants of “political” outcomes and cultural patterns. This work is both support and challenge to my own research. Mattos proposes something akin to a “great arch” explanation for the configuration of social race in Brazil from the colonial

period to the early twentieth century. In *The Great Arch: English State Formation as Cultural Revolution* (1985), P. Corrigan and D. Sayer — taking their inspiration and metaphor from E. P. Thompson (1978a, 257) — characterize the “bourgeois revolution” in England as a long-term social and cultural transformation, not dateable to a particular political upheaval. Arising from continual conflict and negotiation among diverse social groups, this “state” — characterized in brief by the inclusive, polysemic ideal of “English liberties” — achieved consent by distributing rewards to a broad spectrum of power contenders. While Mattos does not frame her study with reference to Corrigan’s and Sayer’s work, her argument regarding slavery and the formation of social race in Brazil bears similarities to it. Yet, her great arch has a pronounced downward movement. (In my use of the metaphor I stress the arch’s shape, not just its span.) Thus, a polysemic name for its ideal, “racial democracy” (“ethnic democracy,” in Freyre’s words), when finally used with some frequency in the 1940s, referred to a curve that no longer “soared” as it did at independence (in the free sector of Brazil’s slave society) and that would continue descending in the decades that followed.

With her focus on Brazil’s southeast, Mattos argues that slavery and notions of race were molded, up to circa 1830–50, by three conditions that were strikingly different from those prevailing in the United States. First, there was the continual introduction of large numbers of enslaved Africans. Second, there was the high manumission rate among creoles and even among partially acculturated Africans, reflecting slave owners’ policies of dominion. Masters favored bondspersons who demonstrated strategies of accommodation and assimilation, even rewarding them within slavery, in part to divide the senzala politically. Third, there was the existence of abundant territory, such that freeborn and freed blacks had significant possibilities of access to land (as valued clients of large landowners, if not as proprietors themselves) and even to slaves. (On urban Rio, see also Faria 1998 and Frank 2004.) This was in a society — like the American South — where a substantial minority of households had bondspersons and most masters were small slave owners (Schwartz 1982). The result of the combined agency of all groups within this context was the formation, by the late eighteenth century, of a relatively large population of freeborn and freed blacks in which many effectively held land and a politically significant percentage owned slaves (Luna and Costa 1980, 1982; Klein and Paiva 1996; Barickman 1999; Libby and Paiva 2000; Luna and Klein 2003).

Increasingly, then, bondspersons, even Africans, could imagine themselves or their children approaching or entering freedom and then moving upward; thus, there was no general formation of a “slave identity,” nor even of a black identity that embraced Africans and their descendants of various hues, whether freeborn, libertos, or enslaved. Indeed, there frequently was tension in the senzala between creoles and Africans.

Reflecting political realities in the broader society, continues Mattos, the constitution of 1824, which defined voting rights, did not create racial barriers to citizenship, in contrast to most of the states in the American union. A growing population, however, combined with expanding plantation agriculture and higher land prices, made “negotiated” squatting or independent farming increasingly difficult for freeborn blacks and former slaves in the decades following independence. Then, too, higher slave prices toward the end of the African trade and particularly after its suppression limited libertos’ access to bonded labor (see Frank 2004). They also reduced slaves’ chances of purchasing freedom. Furthermore, after 1850, many creole slaves, particularly those brought from other parts of Brazil through the internal slave trade, suffered restricted access to rewards from slave owners, in effect taking the place of the previously discriminated Africans (see also Slenes 2004).⁶

The geographic mobility conferred on former slaves by abolition and by subsequent labor competition among elites provided immediate benefits to libertos, particularly in Rio. Yet, the policies of the republican state (since 1889) and Brazil’s severely unequal development during the twentieth century further exacerbated black-white social disparities (Andrews 1991, 1992; Teles 2004; Rios and Mattos 2005; Gomes and Cunha 2007). Nevertheless, despite (or because of) the clear downward movement in Brazil’s great arch from circa 1830, blacks in the postabolition period, many still remembering a time when their position in free society was more favorable, actively pressed for the creation of a nonracialized society. In doing so, they anticipated, and in some ways even influenced, Freyre’s formulation in 1933, but with their own goals in mind (Mattos 1998; on the role of blacks in articulating a positive image of a mixed-race identity for Rio and Brazil in the 1920s, see T. Gomes 2004). The result, one might say, was not myth but a contested field of discourse (a common battleground) about past and future.

It will be clear by now that the argument I wish to advance about slave mobility and identity formation in the plantation context, particularly

from 1791–1850, is fundamentally different from that of Mattos. Yet, in the end, it strengthens her notion of a great arch, even while suggesting revisions to it. I approach my subject from the vantage point of a new paradigm in research on slavery, one developed concomitantly in Brazil and the United States from insights by historians of Africa into the processes of cultural continuity and change in that continent and the diaspora (see, among others, Craemer, Vansina, and Fox 1976; R. F. Thompson 1981, 1984; and Thornton 1988, 1991, 1998a). João Reis (1986, more emphatically in the expanded 2003 edition), Mary Karasch (1987), Mariza Soares (2000), and I (Slenes 2000, 1999, 2007b) have all stressed the ability of the enslaved (in Africa, the Middle Passage, and Brazil) to make active use of their cultural heritage—in some cases to negotiate their entry and acceptance into a new creole society, in others to reaffirm or invent their continuity with the past, often together with companions of different origins.⁷ On the plantations of the southeast, I believe it was largely the latter, the firm assertion of roots in Africa, which took place as a result of the circumstances that bondspersons confronted. A common experience, perceived as harshly oppressive, induced plantation slaves (like the rank-and-file *Cabanos* discussed in Marcus de Carvalho's essay in this book) to move toward an identity based on "class." As a result, they highlighted certain shared cultural characteristics, and even "domesticated" (reinterpreted in their own terms; see John Monteiro's chapter in this book) cultural elements of European origin, as markers of this new identity (Barth 1969), in a process that combined class- and ethnogenesis.

Dale Tomich (2004) has called the increased vigor of the slave trade and slavery in Brazil and Cuba, after the fall of plantation production and the retraction of the market for people in Saint Domingue (since 1791) and in the British Caribbean (following the end there of the transatlantic human commerce in 1808), the "second slavery." It is possible that Brazilian manumission rates at the onset of this transition increased (if, indeed, they moved inversely to a downward trend in real slave prices), but recent research suggests that, if they did, they subsequently declined. Manolo Florentino (2005, 341–42) notes that in the city of Rio slave prices rose much more between 1825 and 1835 than slave rental rates and concludes that bondspersons increasingly had to hire themselves out for more hours to buy their freedom. Work by Douglas Libby and Afonso Graça Filho (2003), documenting a steep decline in the presence of freed people in São

José d'El Rey in southern Minas Gerais between 1795 and the 1830s, raises the possibility that this change began earlier and was more general.

Whatever the case, recent demographic studies suggest that, from the point of view of slaves in the southeast, there were two polar experiences in bondage, existing before this second slavery but perhaps made more divergent by it. On the one hand, small properties abounded, with significant proportions of creoles among adults (people aged fifteen or more). On the other hand, there were also large properties, with a highly Africanized, "newly recruited" labor force.⁸ In the former, manumission seems to have been much more common. One indicator of this comes from later official population statistics and data on freedoms from 1872 to 1875, available for nearly all Brazil. These provide fairly accurate yet lower-limit estimates for manumission rates (Slenes 1976, 486–94). In the province of Rio de Janeiro, the annual rate from these data was more than twice as high in "non-plantation" as in "plantation" counties: 5.4 versus 2.5 per 1,000 (compare the estimate for all the American South of only 0.45 per 1,000 annually in 1850; Fogel and Engerman 1974, 1:150).⁹ It is likely that this difference reflects contrasts in *average* holding size—and thus underestimates the real divergence between rates in small and large properties.

Indeed, recent studies of manumission in wills and inheritance proceedings, which have linked individual freedoms to slave evaluation lists for various places and times in the southeast, suggest larger contrasts. Seven regional and temporal analyses of owners who freed slaves in wills show that small holders released far more people this way, proportionally, than large ones.¹⁰ (Manumitting testators owning one to twenty slaves freed from 21.7 percent to 41.7 percent of their bondspersons, whereas those with forty-one slaves or more freed from 1.8 percent to 6.8 percent.) Equally importantly, four analyses that calculate the percentage of bondspersons freed in the wills of all deceased owners, dying testate or intestate, reach similar, if less extreme, conclusions. In the plantation county of Campinas, western São Paulo, at the height of the second slavery (1836–45), the death of "small owners" (those having one to twenty slaves) resulted in the manumission by will or during probate of 6.5 percent of the bondspersons possessed by these deceased. This was twice the 3.3 percent released at death by "large owners" (with 41–100 slaves) and over six times the 1.0 percent freed by "very large owners" (with over 100).¹¹ These figures, multiplied by two (estate divisions of slave master and mistress), approximate "genera-

tional" rates; assuming twenty years per generation (an underestimate), we obtain upper-limit annual manumission rates of, respectively, 6.1, 3.2, and 1.0 per 1,000.

More microhistorical research is needed on manumission, particularly work that also links bondspersons freed at baptism, and by "writs of freedom" (*cartas de liberdade*) registered in notarial books, to lists of slaves in censuses and inheritance proceedings. (Data from Campinas [Ferraz 2010] suggest that the registered *cartas* and the manumissions in wills are only slightly overlapping sets of about the same size.) Still, one study that does this for baptismal manumissions shows that small owners freed far more infants, in proportion to the number of slaves they owned at death, than large holders. And the only study that does such linkage with both baptisms and writs of freedom (as well as with manumission in wills) similarly finds that large owners freed few slaves through baptism or *cartas*, indeed, fewer than they did on their deaths.¹² This research is suggestive since the "social logic"—to be discussed later—that I believe led small owners to show more "largesse" than grander ones when manumitting in wills, should also have caused them to be more favorable to other types of freedom. Thus, I suspect from the data currently available that the manumission rate in large properties was generally higher than that in all the post-1830 American South, where owners' rights to free their workers were usually restricted by law; yet, the door to freedom in such properties probably was not open wide enough, even for creoles, to have a significant "outward-turning" effect on slave identity. Indeed, for the slaves themselves, surely the more relevant measure of deprivation was the experience of bondspersons in small properties, which must have made the large holdings seem like closed systems offering little chance of freedom.

To be sure, the plantation environment was a complex one, providing possibilities for significantly improving one's lot *within* slavery (Slenes 1976, chapter ten; Góes 2003). Thus, I do not argue that slaves turned their backs on the freeborn and freed sector, nor that competitive tensions in the senzala were absent. Yet, the new manumission studies suggest that incentives within plantation slavery did not lead to a broad channel toward freedom, but to a bottleneck, whose restricted rewards would not have been sufficient to turn individual tensions into group animosities—unless, that is, there were other strong reasons for division in the quarters. It becomes imperative therefore to examine the similarities and differ-

ences in the cultural traditions that Africans in Brazil's southeast brought with them.

Of the new Africans brought to southeastern Brazil, about 93 percent between 1790 and 1811 and 75 percent between 1811 and 1850 came from western Central Africa (the area from Gabon to northern Namibia, from the Atlantic to the Great Lakes).¹³ This is important, for it is now clear—thanks especially to historian Jan Vansina's work—that the region is a single "culture area" (Craemer, Vansina, and Fox 1976; Vansina 1989, 1990, 2002, 2004). It is bound together not only by its Bantu linguistic heritage, but also by its peoples' "common view of the universe" (for instance, a special reverence for the spirits of the "first comers" to one's territory [Klieman 2003]) and their "common political ideology," the latter including "assumptions about roles, statuses, symbols, values and . . . the very notion of legitimate authority" (Vansina 1989, 341). Then, too, Bantuphone peoples in eastern Central Africa (responsible for about 18 percent of the enslaved sent to Brazil's southeast between 1811 and 1850) tend to share broadly similar cosmological assumptions with those in the western Central region regarding the etiology of disease and misfortune. Thus, both groups frequently seek therapy (to restore "health") in cults of affliction (Janzen 1982, 1992; Van Dijk, Reis, and Spierenburg 2000).

In addition to these broad commonalities, one may also identify specific traditions that especially configured the encounters between Central Africans in the New World. Even in the mid-nineteenth century, when the "slaving frontier" extended deep into the continent, a substantial proportion of forced migrants to the Americas from western Central Africa were drawn from closely related societies in the "Atlantic zone," polities on or relatively near the coast, largely transformed into "slave societies" and slave exporters by their strategic position as suppliers of the Atlantic trade (Miller 1988, chapter five; Slenes 2002, 2007a, 2007b). Thus, the Ovimbundu (in the Benguela highlands), the Mbundu (in Luanda's hinterland), the Kongo (in the lower Zaire basin and northern Angola), and neighboring groups inland accounted for a large core group in the senzala.¹⁴ The proportion from the "old" Atlantic zone (the area of the three groups mentioned) seems to have been particularly great among bondspersons leaving from "Congo North" (the mouth of the Congo and Zaire River and points up the coast) and from Benguela, because of continual raiding and warfare in the respective immediate hinterland (Thornton 1997; Candido 2006).¹⁵

The case of Congo North is particularly important, because it accounted for more than 40 percent of bondpeople who entered southeastern Brazil from western Central Africa between 1811 and 1850 (more than from Benguela or from Luanda and its associated ports). Probably half of these were from (but not necessarily native to) the Kongo culture area in the lower Zaire basin (Koelle, 1963, cited by Curtin 1969, 256, 295–96; Thornton 1997).

The slave trade provoked intense cultural exchanges within Africa. Even persons from the far interior shipped directly to Brazil usually learned one of the commercial pidgin languages (based on Kikongo, Kimbundu, or Umbundu, respectively the tongues of the Kongo, Mbundu, and Ovimbundu) on their way to the coast. Others who spent some time as slaves in the coastal societies before being sold into the transatlantic trade must have acquired further notions of the languages and cultures of these areas. Still others who were born of slave women bought from the interior would have been fully “fluent” in Kongo, Mbundu, or Ovimbundu culture, yet also would have had some knowledge of their mothers’ traditions (and thus could have served as go-betweens for newly arrived people from the African interior, both in their home societies and in the Brazilian senzala). Finally, if Joseph Miller’s model is correct, the influx of slaves from the broader Atlantic zone (if not from farther afield) into the Kongo and Mbundu areas was so large that it probably had a cumulative cultural impact on the very coastal societies to which the newcomers were accommodating themselves.

Central Africans moved further toward the formation of a common culture in the Middle Passage, as they discovered affinities in vocabulary and cosmology across their closely related languages (Slenes 2000). Similarly, after they arrived in Brazil they continued to draw upon common elements of a widespread Atlantic-zone tradition (indeed, a western-central African tradition) that, in the closed plantation context, could easily have supplied identity markers for the senzala. I focus here on the belief in tutelary territorial spirits. The Kongo and Mbundu have long attributed to these spirits virtually the same characteristics (Slenes 2002, 2007b; Thornton 2002) and similar notions are widely diffused among other groups (Boulanger 1974, 60–63; Klieman 2003). I document that these beliefs crossed the Atlantic, in a study of three black religious movements (Slenes 2007b): the *Cabula* in northern Espírito Santo, recorded in 1900; a religious practice with anti-

slavery overtones in São Roque, western São Paulo, documented in 1854; and the slave cult conspiracy of 1848 in Vassouras.

The ritual vocabularies of the Brazilian movements are clearly of western Central African origin, showing a strong resonance with Kimbundu and Kikongo (the Cabula and the 1848 lexicons) or clearly originating in Kikongo (the São Roque wordlist). Furthermore, the morphology of their rituals is similar to the well-documented community cults of affliction in the Kongo, variously named Bakhimba, Ndembo, or, more commonly, Kimpasi. In Brazil, as among the Kongo, the cults included both men and women among their initiates and priests and were characterized by ritual death and rebirth through possession by named spirits. In the case of the Kongo, these were local territorial genii. It is likely that the Brazilian movements also cultivated local spirits (not those of their adepts’ origins), since this was the common practice among migrant groups in Central Africa. For the Kongolese (indeed, for many other Bantu groups), such local genii were responsible for the well-being or misfortune of people within their “jurisdiction,” irrespective of lineage or origin, and thus needed to be properly propitiated. Especially powerful in these genii’s ranks were the spirits of the most ancient inhabitants of the land (Klieman 2003). In Brazil, this would have meant the “first-comers” among Brazilian Indians. Thus, it probably is not a coincidence that the subsequent Macumba and Umbanda religions, clearly derived from the earlier Brazilian cult tradition, given their ritual vocabulary, confer special powers on *Caboclo Velho* (old Indian of the forest) spirits.

The discovery of Kimpasi-like cults in southeastern Brazil confirms the argument that a large core group of people from the Central African Atlantic zone, with a particularly strong Kongo and “near-Kongo” component after 1810 (I include here Mbundu), formed the cultural matrix of the senzala on the plantations of Brazil’s southeast, one that could attract and accommodate other Bantuphone migrants, including the “Moçambiques.” Indeed, the strong similarities between the three Brazilian cults and the fact that they were far flung within the southeast mean that essentially the same religious tradition was spread everywhere in the region’s senzalas.

This religious tradition was also a political one. The bibliography on Central African community cults of affliction presents them not just as manifestations of spiritual concerns but as institutions of “governance.” Specifically in the case of the Kongo, “in regions where strong chiefships

or external government existed, the [Kimpasi, or 'sacred medicine'] cults could cross-cut these mutually-exclusive polities." In areas "where such forms of centralized government were absent, the cult elite could take over many governmental functions" (Janzen and MacGaffey 1974, 96).

In addition to being a response to severe community crisis, the cults of affliction provided a way for power holders to justify their stewardship (Janzen and MacGaffey 1974, 96-97; Janzen 1982). Yet, there is another side to this story, as attested by the discomfiture that Kimpasi movements in the middle and late seventeenth century caused the Kongo political elite (Hilton 1985, 197-98) and by the role these cults played as cradle to the "Antonian" movement's intervention (1704-6) in a struggle for succession to the Kongolese throne (Thornton 1998b; Slenes 2008). In short, Kimpasi also could mobilize discontent to hold the "stewardship" of those in power to account. Given the character of these cults in Central Africa, one may conclude from their presence in Brazil that slaves drew upon their past, not just to create new norms and consecrate their lives in the new environment, but also to put in place their own political institutions, aimed at mediating conflicts among themselves and diagnosing the broader causes of affliction.

I turn now to the plan for rebellion in 1848 in Vassouras (Slenes 2006, 2007b). The conspiracy was formulated at the apogee of British pressure on Brazil to abolish the slave trade. Its discovery mobilized government authorities at the highest level. The "president" (governor) of Rio province sent to the provincial legislature a dossier of documents for evaluation from local authorities. The committee assigned to that task expressed no doubt in its secret report about the connection between English pressure and the slaves' movement. One may discount the authors' paranoia about direct action by secret British agents, but accept as plausible their identification of other vectors of revolution: traveling hawkers who brought goods to the plantations and "free" Africans, liberated from slave ships intercepted by the British, who had been put by the government into the custody of employers in the interior under conditions akin to slavery. Such people brought the news of contention between Britain and Brazil to the senzala and may have helped spread the conviction that it was time to "seize the day."

If the cult of 1848 was a Kimpasi-like society, then the history of the Brazilian abolition of slavery may have to be rewritten. In a speech to Parliament in 1852, no less a figure than Eusébio de Queiroz, the minister who

presided over the passage of the law of 1850 ending the slave trade, attributed great political significance to this conspiracy. In his evaluation, "public opinion" at the end of the 1840s had turned against this commerce; yet, it was necessary that "signs of a grave nature . . . [in] Vassouras [and other places] produc[e] a terror that [was] salutary, because it provided the opportunity for that opinion, contrary to the traffic, to develop further and make itself felt."¹⁶ Indeed, Parliament, meeting in secret sessions, almost approved a bill in late 1848 that was very close to that passed in 1850.

For subsequent years, the evidence suggests that the African (or African-creole) pressure of Kimpasi-like movements continued to have a significant political impact. Maria Helena Machado (1994, chapter three) has shown that slave revolts in São Paulo in 1882-83 were led by charismatic "sorcerers," men who, as had the Kikongo-speaking leader of the cult of 1854 that I analyzed, organized secret societies, used divining mirrors and figurines of Saint Anthony in their rituals (the saint himself probably reinterpreted within a Central African matrix, as had occurred before in the Kongo), and promised to make rebelling slaves invincible.¹⁷ These thinly documented movements, when put in the context of the "thickly described" Kimpasi-like groups of 1848, 1854, and 1900, offer strong circumstantial evidence that Kongo, near-Kongo, or Atlantic zone community cults of affliction were still active in the 1880s as key institutions underlying slave resistance.

If plantation slaves in the nineteenth-century Southeast turned "inward," drawing upon a common Central African culture in delimiting their identities, one would expect to find evidence of this in the sociology of slave revolts. The documentation available on the movements of 1848 and the 1880s does not permit a study of the social profiles of those involved. The sources on three other conspiracies and revolts, however—one in a county in southern Minas, the others in Vassouras and Campinas, and all in the 1830s—have permitted such analysis. In none of these cases were significant divisions found among Africans, between Africans and creoles, or between different occupational groups (M. F. Andrade 1998-99; F. Gomes 2006, chapter three; Pirola forthcoming). The southeast would appear to be strikingly different from Bahia, where ethnic divisions, particularly between Africans and creoles, have consistently been found.

If mobility out of large slaveholdings was rather limited, and if bondspeople in the nineteenth-century plantation context tended to form an identity in radical opposition to that of their masters, then clearly one part

of Mattos's great-arch explanation can no longer be accepted. Yet, the overall movement of the curve she projects is confirmed by my research, even if some important adjustments must be made to it. I limit myself here to two comments. First, restricted mobility out of the nineteenth-century plantation senzala should be considered together with the reduction of opportunities for the free poor. The reduction of opportunities was probably more severe than even Mattos postulated, given recent studies showing the sometimes high proportion of blacks among small slave owners before the mid-nineteenth century. São José d'El Rey in 1795 may not have been unusual among small-holding areas in Minas at that time; 44 percent of its owners holding one to five slaves were freeborn or freed blacks (Libby and Paiva 2000), something that surely discouraged a polarization of identities into "Afro-descendant" and "white" categories. Rising slave and land prices, however, in combination with more rapid growth in the free population than in the slave population, particularly after 1850, could only have meant that freeborn and freed blacks—indeed, the free poor in general—were increasingly deprived of a crucial opportunity for mobility that the slave system had made available to them. The combination of restricted mobility for slaves and freeborn blacks and libertos may have led many in all three groups toward closer association, both in culture and in identity formation. Significantly, the São Roque cult of 1854 attracted "free" people, perhaps particularly the freed. Likewise, the episodes of 1848 and 1854 were led by a liberto. Then, too, the *jongos*, black challenge songs of slave origin in the Paraíba Valley and central western São Paulo, still contained complex metaphors of recognizable Central African (particularly Kongo) origin in the mid-twentieth century, which links them to the Macumba and Umbanda religions of that time, as well as to the nineteenth-century cults of affliction (Slenes 2007a). It is difficult to imagine how this could have occurred if slaves and free blacks had not already felt affinities with each other before abolition. It may well be that the danger presented to the elite by the conspiracy of 1848 went beyond the limits of the senzala to include an increasingly significant proportion of the free poor. In any case, I suspect that by the end of the slavery period there was (in the plantation areas) more of a shared sense of an oppositional black consciousness drawn with African markers—a common African Brazilian identity—than had been present at independence.

My second comment is on the arch's apogee at the end of the eighteenth century. There is no question that overall manumission rates in

Brazil were high, from an early date; after all, at least three-fourths of Brazil's black population (blacks and mulattos) in 1872 were freeborn or freed, compared to 6 percent in the U.S. South in 1860 (Graham 1999, 31). If rates were "low" in large plantation properties, then this means that they were very high indeed in small holdings, which abounded in the Brazilian slave system in the colonial period and even in the nineteenth century. Libby's and Paiva's study (2000) of São José d'El Rey in southern Minas in 1795—based on a census that systematically indicates the social status, enslaved, freeborn, or freed, of everyone included—may provide a window into Brazil's small slaveholding sector at precisely the high point of the arch's curve.

The freed in this parish formed an extraordinarily high percentage of the "ever-enslaved" (slaves plus freed) of both sexes and all origins in the higher age groups: 24 percent of forty-year-olds and 36 percent of sixty-year-olds.¹⁸ Among ever-enslaved creoles, these figures were, respectively, 56 and 70 percent (or 62 and 77 percent for creole women). For African-born women they were, respectively, 17 and 52 percent. While some will rightly object that one cannot leap directly from these data to conclusions about people's chances for manumission during their life course (conceivably many of the freed were in-migrants to the parish or wrongly classified freeborn blacks), these percentages are nonetheless consistent with the predictions of the models I developed to analyze manumission over time in a closed cohort initially aged ten (Slenes 1976, 489–94)—that is, if one uses not the "national" annual manumission rate from 1872–75 (6 per 1,000), but a figure (12 per 1,000) close to the levels prevailing in the provinces with the highest rates.¹⁹ While this does not prove that the data for São José portray the experience of a closed age cohort from birth (or from arrival in Brazil at around the age of ten or older), it does indicate that such a result would be historically plausible. In any case, even if the correct percentages for freed people among the survivors of initial cohorts reaching ages forty and sixty were half of those indicated here (thus corresponding to the predictions of my models using a 6 per 1,000 manumission rate), they would still point to the same conclusion: that slaves in small holdings, particularly the Brazilian-born, had significant, realistic hopes of getting themselves or at least some members of their families (especially women) out of bondage by the time the beneficiaries reached forty. Surely, identity strategies in such a context, where assimilative projects were not quixotic, would have been very different from those in large properties.

A key question that remains is why smaller holdings were more “friendly” to freedom. One possible answer is that greater contact between masters and slaves in this context, combined with less cultural distance between the two poles, there being proportionally fewer Africans present (Márcio de Sousa Soares 2009, 92), was more conducive to the development of patron-client ties and thus to manumission. This, however, is an argument that emphasizes workers’ negotiations for masters’ favors without attention to the two sides’ relative powers of persuasion. An alternative answer may have to do with the vulnerability of “peasants” transformed into first-time small slave-owners, an important subset of small proprietors before 1830 or 1850. These people were surely at a disadvantage in the struggle to obtain workers’ “consent,” particularly in a society where a rigid color line had not emerged to socialize the cost of slave control. Lacking such “wages of whiteness” to track down runaways, small owners also faced a situation in which only a few fugitives could break them. One thinks here of the unmarried West African (Mina) freedwomen, active in petty commerce in Rio de Janeiro and São João del Rei (Minas Gerais) before 1830, who manumitted most of their slaves, largely also West African females, in *cartas* and wills (Faria 1007).

In sum, high manumission rates in small holdings could (partly) be the result of “favor” forced; many small owners may have obtained their workers’ reluctant consent (to stay on and indeed “work”) only by convincing them that the chance of freedom later, for themselves or family members, outweighed the potential, not negligible costs (Chalhoub 2010) of trying to escape from the system. Still, in terms of day-to-day politics, the “hidden transcripts” of both sides in this context—“hidden transcript” is James Scott’s term (1990) for what subalterns and superalterns say about each other privately to their peers—would surely have been more ambiguous, less deeply antagonistic, than in situations of highly polarized power and limited worker horizons.

The complex interlinking of the many Brazilian “slaveries” and “slave societies” suggested in this essay, particularly with respect to the processes of identity formation inside and outside the *senzala*, is still speculative. This is an interim report that tries to fit work in progress into a broader picture. Yet, I believe my analysis has considerable interest, for it offers a potential solution to seemingly intractable debates in Brazilian historiography. It may also provide a way to reconcile the divergent existing images

of Brazil’s construction of social race. If the hypothesis, here revised, of Brazil’s great arch holds up under scrutiny, then clearly the country once offered considerable hope (relative to other New World slave societies) for a nonracialized conception and practice of citizenship. Moreover, the long experience of tough, yet necessarily subtle, face-to-face bargaining by slaves in small holdings with superalterns who were not radically different in power, color, or caste (in stark contrast to the relations between plantation slaves and their owners or between bonded workers in small properties and their “master-race” overlords in the United States) may well lie at the origin of a culture of interpersonal politics on the field of “race” still marked (especially to foreigners’ eyes) more by “cordiality” than confrontation, despite the steep descent of the arch over the last two centuries.²⁰ The approach taken here may make it possible to perceive what truly is at stake—what has already been lost and what may yet be lost—if that descent is not reversed.

Notes

- 1 On British pressure, particularly its increase in 1848, see Bethell (1970, 291–92).
- 2 “Black” is a translation of the Portuguese *negro*, as it is used increasingly in Brazil to encompass the census categories of *preto* and *pardo* (“black” and “brown”). I translate *pardo* as “mulatto,” but the term in the nineteenth century also included many phenotypical *pretos*, freeborn or freed, who had distanced themselves socially from slavery.
- 3 See Slenes (1999, 62, note 54), for a comparison of passages from Freyre and Phillips.
- 4 Freyre became more conservative over time, increasingly stressing social harmony in Brazil’s slave society (compare Freyre 1971).
- 5 Freyre (1980, 65, note 55; added in 1946) sides with Melville Herskovits against Frazier (albeit confusing their identities), recognizing the African values of slave families.
- 6 On increasing public and private discrimination against blacks during the century, see Spitzer (1989), Graham (1999), Grinberg (2002), Chalhoub (2010).
- 7 The polarization (African cultural continuity versus creolization) expressed by Lovejoy (1997) and Price (2003) is not helpful.
- 8 In São Paulo province, 1829, the adult African to creole ratio was 302:100 in holdings with over forty people, compared to 165:100 in holdings with ten people or less (calculated from data in Luna and Klein 2003 and in a personal communication from Herbert Klein).
- 9 Calculated from *matricula* (registration) data from 1872–75 on slave population

and manumission for Rio's counties (Directoria Geral de Estatística, *Relatórios* [1877, 1878], citations in Slenes 1976, 707).

10 On Rio das Velhas mining-farming *comarca* (region), Minas, from 1720–84, see Paiva (2001, 175); on Campos, a Rio plantation county, from 1735–1807 and 1807–30, see Márcio de Sousa Soares (2009, 91–92); on mixed farming in Porto Feliz, São Paulo, from 1788–1878, see Guedes (2008, 192); on Campinas, from 1836–45 and 1860–71, see Ferraz (2010, 131–32); on coffee-producing Juiz de Fora, Minas, and slave owners in three nineteenth-century families, see Freire (2009, 321).

11 On Rio das Mortes comarca, southern Minas, from 1716–89, see Paiva (2001, 176); on Juiz de Fora, the same families and period, see Freire (2009, 323); on Campinas, from 1835–46 and 1860–71, see Ferraz (2010, 131–32). Salles (2008, 291, 307, note 26) gives similar data for Vassouras, 1836–88, regarding people freed during inheritance, not in wills.

12 On São João del Rei, Minas Gerais, from 1750–1850, see C. Silva (2004, 151); on Juiz de Fora, same families and period, see Freire (2009, 310).

13 For data on the slave trade, see Florentino (1997, 222–23, 228–29, 234) for 1790–1831; Karasch (1987, 12–15, appendix A) for 1831–50 (including Africans transhipped from Brazil's northeast).

14 These are modern “umbrella” names for, in each case, peoples with closely related languages and cultures but probably (during the slave trade) without a common identity.

15 According to Candido, the great majority of slaves from Benguela were natives of groups later denominated “Ovimbundu.”

16 Eusébio de Queiroz Coutinho Mattoso Camara, speech to Chamber of Deputies, July 16, 1852, reproduced in Malheiro (1976, 2:210).

17 On Saint Anthony, see the work of Slenes (2008).

18 My calculations, here and following, are derived from data in Libby and Paiva (2000, 106, 110, 114).

19 In my models with a 12 per 1,000 manumission rate, 13 to 33 percent of survivors from an original slave cohort aged ten would be free when they were forty years old, and 29.4 to 52 percent would be free when they were sixty; that is, double my calculations based on a 6:1,000 manumission rate (Slenes 1976, 491).

20 See Fry (2005, 167–78).

PART TWO

Resisting through Religion and for Religion

This section, taking up Ortner's point that “casualness about religion” was a significant defect of the classic resistance literature (1995, 181), foregrounds religious belief within discussion of different forms of resistance. As these chapters demonstrate, shared religious belief, symbols, and practices created deep social and cultural rootedness within communities, which could justify and inspire resistance in diverse circumstances. The chapters on Brazil highlight the need to understand how religions maintain their social bases and adjust to challenges, while also indicating how, as discourses of religious resistance were appropriated into structures of political power, the sites and meanings of religious resistance shifted. The chapters on Mexico argue that nonviolent, civil strategies of resistance, be they formally organized, spontaneous, group, or personal, were fundamental to the successful thwarting of state attempts to contain religion within the realm of private belief and cloistered practice.

Patricia Pessar's analysis of republican-era backlands millenarian movements in Brazil once again explains rebellion as a response to the breaking of established social pacts, highlighting not only the political changes and the growing capitalist transformation of the backlands, but also the efforts of the Catholic Church's ultramontane faction to “strip rural inhabitants of the symbols, identities, and practices that had been sustained over the centuries in folk Catholicism” (125). Millenarian ideas began as a technology of colonial rule, so these movements responded to a hegemonic crisis triggered by elites' abandonment of earlier ideologies by throwing these ideas back in their faces in an effort to restore the moral foundations of economic and spiritual security. The irony deepens

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