

The Manumission of Slaves in Brazil in the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries

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Freedom was, quite naturally, a dream cherished by every Brazilian slave. The desire for manumission – a more reliable route to freedom than the path of flight or revolt – was based on the experiences of other slaves in Brazil, a country open to all sorts of social adaptation practices. Consequently, the charters of liberty granted by masters and registered in notarial records have proved a rich source for the study of certain aspects of slavery itself.¹ The similarity between the title of the present article and that of the 1979 work *To Be a Slave in Brazil*² reflects the fact that since the publication of that book, other authors have added to the bibliography on the subject of manumitted Brazilians, thus confirming the important role of this social group whose close connections with the slaves themselves were described in my previous study. In their experience of life, the manumitted slaves regularly encountered pitfalls that served as constant reminders of their skin color. Moreover, the daily lives of African blacks on the market, who at the time were merely African captives shipped to Brazil in various stages of youth and various degrees of adaptation to their slave status – along with the experiences of *creole* slaves (that is, those born in Brazil), of *free-able* slaves in the process of attaining freedom, of *freed* slaves, of children and grandchildren of manumitted slaves (who were therefore born free) – must all be understood not only in the context of their legal status but also and especially in the light of their subtly nuanced lives.

On 13 May 1888, all Brazilian slaves were manumitted when the Imperial Princess Regent signed the “golden law” abolishing slavery. True, abolition came late to Brazil, considering the wide-

spread processes of osmosis, contagion, and revolution by which the nineteenth century saw decrees abolishing slavery propagated virtually everywhere, in patterns and variations that will fuel the imaginative quests of historians for a long time to come. Brazil was therefore among the last nations to officially eliminate slavery. This abolition was the culmination of a lengthy series of legal efforts, among which the 1871 “law of the free womb,” which freed the newborn children of slaves upon delivery³, was a sort of charter of national liberty for the children of female slaves; up until that time, the prevailing principle was *Partus sequitur ventrum*: even if the father was a free man, the child would be born a slave, the only exception applying to children fathered by the master; these were freed after their father’s death as long as he had recognized the child as his. Because of the complex conditions stipulated for the total manumission of the child, this “law of the free womb” was never completely enforced. However, it clearly exposes all the ambiguity that had always been concealed in the individual charters of liberty. It is thus fitting to seek an understanding not only of the legal deed of manumission itself, but also of what interests drove masters to grant manumission and what impelled slaves to request it. Only in this light can we weigh the importance and the specificity of the role of manumitted slaves in slave-owning Brazilian society and also, perhaps, in the formation of the Brazilian national temperament.

The Charters of Manumission

Brazilian archives contain thousands of *cartas de alforria* or charters of freedom recorded in books of *notas e escrituras* kept by notaries, to which legal records of all kinds were consigned in chronological order. Many such notarial records have been lost, but many others have reached us. For example, the judicial section of the state archives in Salvador de Bahia de Todos os Santos, the first capital of Brazil, has preserved 1100 volumes ranging from 1664 to 1911, a nearly complete series, with all sorts of deeds drawn up in certain notarial offices of the city. Wills, inventories, and even labor contracts are there, along with letters of manumission, precious

sources for understanding not only the legal aspects of manumission but also, and especially, what it reveals about social relations in a society that was quite adaptable and open to compromise.

In fact, manumission could be granted in solemn formality or casually, directly or indirectly, tacitly or implicitly; by a deed between living persons, or by a will either certified by a notary or written in private. It could even be accomplished without any written document, with witnesses testifying, if necessary, that manumission had been granted. Most often, however, there was a written deed signed by the master or by a third party representing him if he were illiterate, which was frequently the case since slave-owners included a broad range of social classes. The custom of recording charters of freedom was established in order to avoid disputes, which became increasingly frequent as the number of manumitted slaves grew and as the judicial system evolved, transforming a purely commercial master-slave relationship into one that recognized slaves' privileges, which little by little came to be seen as slaves' rights. Thus, between 1850 and 1871, the number of suits for liberty initiated by slaves against their masters at the high court in Rio, was three times the number in the twenty preceding years.⁴ Between privileges and favors granted to a slave in his work life and the promise of manumission there was a whole progression whereby a slave was transformed from the condition of a voiceless object, an apparently anonymous tool adapted to a single task, to that of a responsible subject with sensitivity, dignity and awareness of his own value. The relations between masters and slaves were thus fundamentally changed in a movement that accelerated over time, thanks in part to the powerful lure offered by the charter of manumission. The slave poured all his wit, art, and skill into exercising a patient and efficient wisdom that would, he hoped, lead him from the lost mythical past, through the difficult present, towards a future of idealized liberty.

Over the course of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, notarial records all over Brazil contain increasing numbers of letters of manumission, but in the current state of research, attempts to estimate demographic figures for manumitted slaves in relation to the total population of Brazil meet with nearly insurmountable difficulties because of the scarcity and unreliability of census and

other data. The first complete census of Brazil's population was not conducted until 1872.⁵

Charters of freedom were usually worded according to pre-existing models. Only in the 1850s did they begin to be simplified. In general, they provided magnificent occasions for masters to flaunt their generosity. In any case, they contain very valuable information as to the name of the manumitted slave, his country of birth, and his color; these are followed by the name of the owner, that of the slave, and the slave's maternal filiation – only on rare occasions is there an indication of both maternal and paternal filiation, and rarer still are cases mentioning only paternal descent. Remarks of a more personal nature follow, furnishing precious data on the social ties that bind a slave to his master, on their mutual gratitude to each other, on the purchase price and means of payment, if the manumission is obtained at a cost. Wills and inventories emphasize the monetary value assigned to the slave and his trade if he has one, estimate his age, and sometimes go so far as to judge his virtues and faults.

In Brazil, manumission was a practice as old as slavery itself. It had always been limited by legal or economic barriers, or else, on the contrary, promoted and supervised in order to prevent certain excesses or to meet specific needs. Let us examine some of the regulations that convey the complexity of the situations and show how the legislation sought to protect both owners and slaves.

A slaveholder was prohibited from manumitting a slave when the first master had stipulated in the original bill of sales that the slave was never to be freed. If a charter of freedom was prejudicial to the interests of the master's creditors, no manumission could take place, even when the slave had already made payments toward his freedom. In such cases the slave would forfeit his deposits.

A testator was no longer permitted to rely solely on his "*Tiers Disponible*" to free slaves; if he did so, and if the fraud were proven by his heirs, the manumission was considered null and void. Similarly, it was impossible to free slaves pledged as security or mortgaged, for these were considered as transferable goods just like any other possessions. A child, or the guardian of a minor, did not have the right to free a slave, nor did anyone possessing a slave in usufruct; a patient declared insane; a married woman,

except on her deathbed; or a slave who owned another slave – for it was not infrequent that a slave, though not considered a person in the eyes of the law, “owned” one or more slaves of his own.

In contrast, in the nineteenth century, slaves who had been brought from Africa in violation of the 1831 decree abolishing the slave trade were, when discovered, seized and given freedom. Also, if the husband in a married couple were free, the law liberated his legal spouse. Any foundling child was presumed free. A slave who found a diamond of more than twenty carats was manumitted: the state would confiscate the stone and pay the master an indemnity. Any slave who belonged to the brotherhood of Saint Benedict and who paid his ransom was freed, as was a slave who crossed the border, even if he returned to Brazil. Military service meant manumission for the slave who became a soldier, and a master might well prefer to send one of his slaves to take his place in the army.

If in the course of probate proceedings, a slave who was the indivisible property of several masters was freed by one of them, the other co-owners of the slave were obliged to do the same. When a slave offered his master the sum required for manumission – something that frequently occurred with slaves who worked in the street plying various trades for the benefit of their masters, for these slaves were also authorized to accumulate a personal profit – the master would be hard put to refuse a letter of manumission. Indeed, the slave could not take his own case to court, but he could seek the assistance of a guardian or protector to defend him before the judges.

Finally, the legislation had the foresight to declare even that any slave who died and was revived was a free man, a Christian perspective that served as the subject for many a homily.

This inventory, which only summarizes a tentacular array of legislation, clearly illustrates how the deed of manumission, from the moment it was promised and again from the moment it was signed, harbored certain contradictions and ambiguities.

To be manumitted in Brazil was to experience an adaptation to circumstances in a society that was not rigid. Affective bonds and regulations both played a role in tensions that were expressed by priceless flights of fancy lurking behind the moralistic surface of

legal conformity that characterizes the texts of the charters of freedom.⁶ Quite often we need only scratch the surface of the texts in order to seize the true master-slave dialogue and to understand the true cost of a manumission, even if it is offered at no charge and claims that the newly freed person will be “free as if he were the son of a free man.” Laws and ordinances were not always enforced, and ultimately the candidates for manumission were far more interested in actual practices than they were in regulations, of which they were generally ignorant. As a result the restrictions, conditions and explanations inserted in the charters constitute life histories in miniature, and are capable of revealing much more about the conditions of manumission than a whole body of legislation, however copious it may be.

To what sort of slave would an owner grant freedom? Or, to frame the question from the point of view of the slave seeking manumission, how could he gain his freedom, what price would he have to pay in cold hard cash, in patience, in palaver, in procedures and compensations, in alliances of all stripes? To be manumitted was to have earned one’s freedom by dint of one’s own efforts or through the efforts of one or more protectors. In any case, it was never a solitary undertaking. In a 1766 will, Felix de Andrade dos Reis declared: “Among my belongings is a young girl, the daughter of my son-in-law Ignacio de Souza, whom I bought for 70,000 *reis* from Jérônimo Ferreira, who had bought her at the auction of the possessions of the fathers of the Society of Jesus and their fazenda in Campinas. My little girl is named Clara de Jesus de Andrada Souza; she is a mulatto and I grant her freedom for the sum of 70,000 *reis* received from her father.” Thus, it was the father of the girl who paid the child’s ransom to his father-in-law; the grandfather was willing to free her – but not for free.

Family, godfathers, and godmothers, whenever they could, would fly to the aid of a relative whose master seemed disposed to grant freedom. When a charter had apparently been granted at no charge, the master would adduce a thousand and one arguments, as varied as they were far-fetched, and his generosity was most often more superficial than profound: in 1786, Mariana Pires de Miranda freed the creole slave Joana because of the “loyalty and love with which she has served [me] for so long and because

she succoured [me] in my illnesses, which [my] husband never did." Who knows what labors the faithful Joana performed in the capacity of nurse, housemaid, and even breadwinner, over the long years?

The "many years" that preceded these manumissions always numbered more than ten, and few charters, very few indeed, have anything to say about the future of the manumitted individual. Given that the working life of a slave lasted between ten and fifteen years for a rural laborer and perhaps fifteen to twenty years for an urban slave,⁷ and that the life expectancy of a slave at the time was about forty years – a figure that was comparable to that for free men – the period between a promise of freedom, the granting of the deed, its registration and the slave's full accession to liberty becomes one of the essential features of this contract. In general, one or two years already passed between the date the charter was granted and the date of registration. This period could even stretch out to thirteen, twenty, or thirty years. If, and this was often the case, the letter of manumission contained conditions, the manumitted slave was more like the *homo liber* of Roman law than a truly free man, for the deed of manumission either explicitly or implicitly left him with certain obligations towards his former master or towards any person designated by the master, such as an heir. The manumitted slave was the manumitted slave of his former owner, whose name he often bore; he was expected to display his gratitude in a thousand and one ways: visits, services rendered, and friendly relations which, moreover, were not one-way, for the former master himself would maintain an attitude of efficient and vigilant paternalism towards his former slave.

In any case, a manumission, whether obtained at no charge or for a price, could be revoked; revocation even became easy when certain drastic conditions were mentioned in the charter, but the grounds invoked by slave-owners could also be utterly subjective: "ingratitude," for instance, is mentioned as one such motive in title 13 of book 4 of the *Philippine Ordinances* of 1603.

Two years before the abolition of slavery, the state of São Paulo went so far as to decree that any newly manumitted slave had to serve his former master "faithfully" for five more years following the granting of his charter of freedom. Many manumissions pro-

vide for the slave to be freed only after a fixed term; an owner's post-mortem manumission often became effective only after the former master's wife had also died: the slave would have to serve the widow unless she remarried.

If Luzia Nunes de Affonseca, the widow of Joao de Sà Freire, freed her *mestiza* slave Maria "because not only [is she] certain that she is the daughter of [her] former master, but also because she always served [him] loyally and because having been raised as [his] own daughter [she] feels love and affection for him," many manumissions, instead of being granted in the spirit of warmth and generosity that characterizes this one, often turned out to be merely tantalizing. Was it worthwhile to sacrifice one's blood and sweat to obtain the good graces of a master whose generosity was insincere or offered only with overt or hidden costs? Was to be freed truly to be free?

To Be a Manumitted Slave in Slave-Owning Brazilian Society

True, the freed creole, that is, a person born in Brazil, became a Brazilian citizen; the same did not apply to the manumitted African, who remained a foreigner. As yet no study has been made of the naturalization of manumitted Africans.

Manumitted slaves were reinvested with the rights to family, to property, to inheritance; we know that already, as slaves, they could exercise *de facto* "rights" that were not recognized by law. Once they were freed, the contradictions between theory and practice continued. For example, the newly "free" individual, however free he may be, as if born of a "free womb" – this wording appears in many charters of freedom – could enter or remain in the army only as a soldier of the rank and file. Exceptionally, in the northeastern part of the country men were recruited for black militias and mulatto militias, in which all ranks were open to men of color. However, society as a whole surrounded itself with barriers as protection against the black men it set free. It excluded them by law from certain public offices, from the clergy, and from all headquarters positions. Naturally, there were wide variations in

actual practice: for a man of color, social success or the acquisition of a fortune were passports for advancement to all levels of society. It would seem – though the contrary can also be true in some cases – that the more mixed-race the population, the easier it was to ignore skin color; Brazilians coined an expressive phrase, *branco da terra* (“native white”) to describe someone who had managed to rise above the anonymous *mestizo* masses to scale the hierarchy of wealth and power.

The never-ending succession of regulations and *alvarás* could not succeed in preventing the manumitted slaves, and especially their sons, from enjoying their freedom to the fullest – even if, theoretically, a man of color was supposed to set himself apart by wearing sober clothes, even if a mulatress who could wear taffeta-lined clothes or silk stockings did not have the right to wear garments showing ornamental braid or gold or silver buttons, which were reserved for whites. True, a free man of color was allowed to be conveyed only in an open litter, since the luxurious palanquins draped with curtains to protect the rider from rain and mud were the prerogative of white men ...

All of this means that the assimilation of freed slaves was not to occur seamlessly; in fact, it was to take place in the most varied ways throughout the immense land of Brazil, so rife with contrasts and contradictions in its demographic and economic conditions.

The history of freed rural slaves is still largely a matter of ignorance. In northeastern and central Brazil, they mingled with a relatively sparse population of small farmers, sometimes sharecroppers. Whites of European origin generally refused to work the land with their own hands. A freed man who obtained the right to remain on his master's land was assured of a future, for he would have enough to eat and could sell his surplus. And yet, in social and economic terms, he would continue to be part of a straitened, closed world that revolved around his former owner. The latter was naturally happy to retain a hold over his manumitted slave, who would remain dependent on him: the former master would become the buyer for the freed man's products or would serve as the middleman for outside buyers. The land bound such a manumitted slave to a virtual serfdom in which he was more or less subject to the former master's bidding, depending on the condi-

tions of the charter of liberty or on the master's character. The sugar mill masters of the Northeast thus refused to allow free immigrant colonists to settle there, because manumitting their own slaves served their purposes quite well and even made it possible for them to recover the initial expense of buying the slave.

In the South, on the other hand, the situation was more complex. Competition from European colonists left the manumitted slaves in a more precarious position. They vied for the same work; sometimes immigrants were treated like slaves, and conflicts frequently arose. Foreigners often succeeded in pressuring a manumitted slave to sell his little plot of land and take refuge in town, where he joined a population of laborers eking out a living with odd jobs.

The prospects for manumitted slaves also varied when it came to finding work in town, partly as a function of the town's location in the north, northeast, center, or the south of Brazil. The economic situation, which fluctuated over time, clearly played an important role for the manumitted slave, who was competing with slaves who enjoyed the full protection of their masters; the freed slave was faced with the problem of finding the support and alliances that were necessary in order to maintain the delicate balance between the world he had left and the one he wished to create. In the South of Brazil, with a primarily white population, the freed slave continued to align himself with the slaves. He was the first to suffer from a crisis on the labor market, for in breaking the ties of slavery, he had also forfeited his security in exchange for a dream of liberty that did not put food on the table. In the nineteenth century, (quite late, it is true) when slave labor became abundant in the white province of São Paulo, manumission was no easy matter for black slaves, who were so useful in the coffee fields and so precious because of the abolition of the slave trade in 1830. White society imposed countless obstacles to the assimilation of blacks. In São Paulo, the terms *Senhor*, *Senhora*, and *Dona* were used only for whites, never for blacks, even manumitted blacks. Freed black slaves in São Paulo therefore became highly dependent on their former owners, becoming clients who sought to efface any trace of their origins.

In contrast, in the towns of the Northeast such as Minas Gerais, Rio de Janeiro, or Salvador de Bahia, where the population was

primarily mixed-race, with blacks, Indians and whites in varying proportions depending on the region, the manumitted slave of African origin found effective support networks and alliances. Evidence based on freed slaves' wills and on census data show that nearly all of them managed to marry women of the same color, remaining faithful for at least one generation to the world of their ancestors.

Indeed, the child of a manumitted slave was, in principal, never questioned as to his origin; however, it was often indicated in a notarial deed. In their daily life, freed slaves in the Northeast and in Minas mixed with a population in which confusion as to an individual's color was the rule. But the two models that contrast society in the Northeast with that in the South crudely exaggerate the multiplicity of complex realities to be found in the immense and varied land of Brazil. They merely explain why manumitted slaves were apparently able to climb the social ladder more frequently in Bahia than in São Paulo.

The following two examples of insertion into society or successful individual advancement show that material wealth was not the only asset that counted in Brazil, where all social ties – blood relations, godparents, connections with former masters and other former slaves in the community, as well as religious ties – were resources that could help guarantee successful integration into a new life.

Cypriano das Chagas, a manumitted African slave in Salvador who was married to Anna Luisa de Bethencourt, died in 1856. He had no children; the inventory of his possessions lists no furniture, jewels, or clothing. A very devout man, he commended himself to the Virgin, "Mistress of the Heavenly Gates," and requested that his body be carried by six poor men, each of whom would be given alms of one thousand *reis*. Ten slaves were listed, including three women and four children. The three men, who like him were Africans of the "Gege" nation, were to be freed upon paying his widow 650 thousand *reis*; while lower than the average value of a slave, this price furnished Anna Luisa with a small nest egg. The newly manumitted slaves were requested to watch over her and to offer their help should the need arise. In order to ensure their compliance, they were offered in usufruct a cob-walled

house that they would inhabit at no cost. Cypriano also owned two other houses. His generosity was calculated so as to perpetuate the mutual dependence of his widow and his former slaves. These freed slaves would remain “clients” of Cypriano’s wife, whom they would serve in case of need.

Another resident of Bahia, Felix de Sant’Anna, a barber by trade, was also an orchestra conductor. A Creole (that is, born in Brazil), he was the son of an African slave mother and an unknown father. He served four different masters, the penultimate being a Benedictine monk and the last Captain Felis da Costa Lisboa, from whom he purchased his freedom. Felix de Sant’Anna was married twice, but neither wife bore him a child. However, a daughter, Maria de Carmo, was born before his manumission. Like her mother she remained a slave in the service of the wife of Felis da Costa Lisboa. In his will, the manumitted Felix de Sant’Anna decided that Maria de Carmo would be freed and would upon her father’s death (he died on Christmas day in 1814) receive a large inheritance in slaves, furniture, silver, and money; but she would have to be married as soon as possible, thus passing from a master’s power to that of a husband, as Felix de Sant’Anna (like the rest of the society in which he lived) thought well and good. Moreover, the person charged with finding Maria de Carmo a husband was the wife of her father’s former master, who had also raised the child. This stipulation is evidence of the excellent relations that the freed man – however wealthy and apparently independent he had become – had managed to maintain with the family that had set him free.

In general, manumission did not break established ties, and formed one more link in a continuous chain. Such was the case with a midwife manumitted in 1755 on the condition that she remain to ply her trade on the sugar cane plantation; and with a manager, manumitted in 1789, who stayed put to run the *fazenda* as he had done while he was still a slave. Such conditions attached to the manumission of skilled individuals were legion: they revealed the degree to which the master himself was dependent on his freed slave. Dependencies, or rather interdependencies, were knitted together, intertwined and unraveled in a nexus of financial interests and affective ties. The bonds of work were part

of a patriarchal system comprising very subtle interplay. A widow who sent her slave into the streets to sell confections she had prepared herself virtually depended on this slave for her source of livelihood. The street vendor was expected to bring back a certain sum to her owner; however, she could also keep for herself a certain amount of supplementary earnings she might bring in. Once she had acquired a sum sufficient to purchase her liberty, she would free herself. Out of convenience or habit, the manumitted slave would continue to serve the former owner if the latter so desired; or if the owner could do without her services without suffering materially, the freed slave would remain grateful to her former master and would express this gratitude by a multitude of services rendered.

The freed slave who was able to maintain the ties and protective support that enabled him to buy his liberty in the first place therefore was in a better position to become integrated into society; an individual's integration was aided both by the master's network and by that of the slaves and manumitted slaves, all of whom may have participated in one way or another in the manumission.

But as a social group, did the manumitted slaves always serve as an example to the slaves? Was this group always an ally of the masters? Whom did it serve – the black community or that of free men, these latter being the models that had to be understood and often graciously assisted in order to attain one's dream of freedom?

Brazilian historiography has often hesitated to put this social group in its rightful place, because this place is intrinsically an ambiguous one. Certain rebellions mounted by slaves against masters were aimed equally against freed slaves and owners, cast as the common enemy. In other cases, manumitted slaves joined forces with slaves against masters. In the limited scope of this essay, it is impossible to describe in detail each of the slave rebellions that bloodied certain regions of Brazil up through the years preceding the abolition of slavery. Despite the loss of black lives some revolts must be considered victorious, if only for terrorizing masters and setting off the famous "Haitian syndrome" which continued through 1888. Nevertheless, rebellions by the group of slaves failed because, nearly always, there was a lack of cohesion and unity in their struggles for power. The slaves as a group did

not manage to put aside the differences between creole and African, between mixed-race and black, between black and free mulatto, and even differences among the descendants of African nations traditionally hostile to one another.⁸ A manumitted creole was in general more likely to find common cause with his masters than was a manumitted African, though this was by no means always the case.

To take up once again the example of Bahia in the nineteenth century, three quarters of the manumitted slaves who left wills bequeathed a few thousand *reis* to their former owners.⁹ While this proof of loyalty is a credit to the manumitted slave as to his former master, it by no means indicates that the manumitted slaves, as a social group, existed only in relation to the group of free men, in which only the children and particularly the grandchildren of the manumitted could hope to become truly integrated.

In an attempt to trace this integration, let us consider certain aspects of family life among manumitted slaves; let us also seek to discover whether their religious life differed from that of free men, and to what extent their daily lives still bore the imprint of their African past, never completely out of mind.

Indeed, if slaves – actually creole slaves above all – were little by little able to spread the notions of a “just” slavery and a “good master” by discussing the ways these masters dominated their slaves and by driving the wedge of manumission into the institution of slavery, how could the group of manumitted slaves go about expunging the memory of slavery and, further, bring life styles, traditions, work habits or new forms of social relations to the society this group was entering?

Marriage patterns and family life among manumitted slaves are often difficult to distinguish from those of the social model within which they moved. Indeed, as manumission proves better than anything else, the manumitted slaves sought to imitate, at least in appearance, the habits and customs of the dominant society. In reality, even if Brazil is considered an agricultural country, the structure of monoculture and slavery, with its hypertrophied and multifunctional “extended family” and all its dependents (as Gilberto Freyre has so tellingly described, and as a whole body of literature based on anachronisms has so roundly denounced),

existed only in the sugar cane or coffee fields.¹⁰ The regions where extractive activities prevailed, the lands where subsistence agriculture on relatively small land areas was developed, the urban centers or small market town – all these exhibited quite a variety of family typologies in which illegitimacy and bastard children were as marked a feature of manumitted slaves' lives as of free men. If we are to believe the example of Bahia,¹¹ on the basis of thorough examination of abundant sources beginning in the eighteenth century, a full understanding of the manumitted family requires that we not rely exclusively on the Western concept of "family," for the African experience of most of the manumitted slaves had its roots in cultural domains where polygamy, fratrilinearity, patrilocality and very extended family ties formed the basic principles of social organization among the creoles and their descendants. Naturally, some of these habits were transformed by redefinitions and evolutions; the European model was prestigious and the Catholic religion dominant. However, certain African traditions persisted in a distorted form. For example, the African woman was able to carve out a truly independent domain in Brazil, in contrast to the traditional African patriarchy. Raising her children alone, faced with distant or absent genitors, without any blood relations to rely on, surrounded by members of diverse ethnic groups and required to live and move in accordance with "Western" social rules, the manumitted woman sought and found the support network she lacked, whether in her nation of origin or among Africans or their descendants with whom she was thrown into contact by her daily life. Single life was common among the manumitted. Free unions show a widespread practice of endogamy among manumitted Africans, who rarely sought union with mulatto creoles. A desire for "whitening" began only in the second generation. Marriage, which often occurred late among manumitted slaves, was generally undertaken for the purpose of living together rather than in order to have children. In any case the group of manumitted slaves followed a twofold familial model: the legal family and the natural family – the same model that prevailed among free society. Another similarity between the free and the manumitted was the elective family status that played a fundamental role in mutual support networks and everyday assistance: the terms father,

mother, brother, sister, cousin, uncle, and aunt were used in Brazil to designate persons with whom no blood or marriage relation existed. These elective or "honorary" ties, along with spiritual ties such as godparentage, were as strong, as solid, and as binding as relations based on blood.

It is thus clear that various attitudes exhibited by the community of manumitted slaves reflect both sides of the tensions fermenting in the Brazilian community as a whole. Indeed, it is far too simplistic to contrast the manumitted African – a "foreigner" – and the Brazilian creole, whether freed from the first generation or only recently liberated, to the children and grand-children of manumitted slaves. Evidence from police records shows that free Africans boasted of their creole children and their impeccable professional lives.

However, these Africans and their descendants, like the slaves they used to be or from whom they had descended, lived and transmitted two structures, two worlds that were inextricably united inside them: it is only to our narrow view that they appear incompatible or contradictory. If the freed African placed such a high price on gestures and rites and on the vast domain of the spirit and religion, and consulted both witch doctor and physician alike, his sons, oblivious to their ancestral heritage because of their fascination with the white man's world, still remembered (whether intentionally or unwittingly) their tutelary *orisha* and the words to their childhood lullabies or the rites of a celebratory feast. Praying to the Virgin Mary in no way impeded the worship of ancestors from beyond the seas, whose glory was handed down in tales told by the elders. It was impossible to subsist on a European diet alone; even the whites themselves had learned to savor the delights of African fare concocted and shared by the slaves. The five million slaves shipped to Brazil over the course of three centuries to work the soil, with no hope of returning to their native land,¹² brought with them their ways of living and seeing the world, cherished like embers beneath the ashes of servitude. The group of manumitted slaves was a rich compost that preserved, revived and adapted traditions whose distinct flavors persisted, redolent of lost liberty.

The society of masters had no problem dipping into this African stew to adopt convenient African phrases – first used in order to

command and train a slave, then adopted as apt or amusing expressions. But when it came to religion, refusal and acceptance became a thornier issue, at least on the surface and not always in the same ways if we compare traditionally European society with that of the slaves' descendants.

The religious behavior of all people in Brazil was centered around the worship of saints in a relation that was at once individual, familial, and collective, and in which superstition played an important role. Daily life was organized around religion, and slaves stood at the entrances to churches and participated in evening prayers and Catholic holidays. In the country, chiefs, nearly always found among the most disinherited, came forward to lead others in worshipping the saints and making pilgrimages. In the cities, the population was divided among various religious brotherhoods defined either on the basis of color or according to wealth and social prestige. Travelers in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries were impressed by the zeal and enthusiasm of the blacks in external manifestations of adherence to the Catholic religion, but oral tradition and wills increasingly reveal the importance of *irmandades* and of the brotherhoods as places for keeping African heritage alive. The Brazilian *irmandades*, founded for worshipping a saint of the Church, were survivals of old Portuguese trade guilds, whereas the third orders were attached to religious orders. Alongside the *irmandades* that were exclusively reserved for whites and those restricted to blacks, mulatto *irmandades* gradually came into being, such as, for example, that of Good Jesus of the Cross or that of Our Lady of Boqueirao.

Most of these associations did not take into account social hierarchies based on wealth, but rather relied on the criterion of color or, sometimes, that of ethnic origin. Free men, manumitted slaves, and slaves could all hold the same offices and enjoy the respect of all members, in such a way as to ease social frictions and create solid bonds. A manumitted slave never forgot the assistance given him by an *irmandade* in obtaining manumission, and he counted on the group to ensure a decent burial.

On the surface, their religious unanimity prevailed in popular milieus. In reality, tendencies to continue the practice of Afro-Brazilian cults or Islamic worship are quite difficult to detect up to

the nineteenth century, because these forbidden practices remained clandestine, even if the Catholic Church often considered African cult ceremonies to be a ludic expression of superstitions and magical beliefs typical of “primitive” societies. The Church, ever conscious of its mission, felt capable of dispelling the false beliefs under which their members of color labored – even when these flocks were fervent Catholics.

Participants in Afro-Brazilian cults were found among slaves and manumitted slaves, among the thousands of men and women living precariously from hand to mouth as small tradespeople, always bordering on poverty. Only the Africans of Islamic heritage,¹³ a small minority, stood out for their proselytism; the other members of African society adhered rather to the cult of *orisha* for the Yoruba, the cult of *vodun* for the Ewe or other religions of western Africa. These cults were constantly reshaped and adapted to conditions imposed by white society; they were as complex and structured, as dynamic and compelling, as Catholicism. For the manumitted slave, their pragmatism might win out over certain abstract promises offered by the Catholic Church, and they offered the security and the mutual assistance of a community, without any particular commitment in return and without demanding a renunciation of the officially sanctioned religion. Christian religion and African religion coexisted like two volumes in space. Both belonged to the daily life of the manumitted slave, as they had belonged to the daily life of the slaves. For as long as the law and the Church prohibited the African cults, they were practiced in secret. The freedom to practice Afro-Brazilian cults was not officially granted until 1950.¹⁴ Long before that date, however, these cults were tolerated; their structures were already in place for the developments that have been witnessed in present-day Brazil.

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Whether male or female, the manumitted slave was in any case an individual of will and courage. The ability to conquer – or, for Africans, to reconquer – one’s freedom was a first victory; moving from the condition of slave to that of manumitted slave was a character-building psychological shock. Freed slaves retained habits acquired from slavery such as austerity and careful work,

modest assets upon which to base their entry into a community that ultimately refused to recognize them as full citizens, even if their everyday life was precisely identical to that of their freeborn neighbors who might live next door in utter licentiousness. Free men and manumitted slaves attended the same churches and often participated in the same *irmandades*. Illiteracy was equally prevalent in both groups. All of them had a sense of and a taste for the mysteries of this world and felt the need for mutual support.

If some manumitted slaves took part in rebellions or in social unrest, it appears not to have been for reasons of maladaptation to the society that had freed them; most likely the experience of a life of labor under duress, combined with the bitterness of unkept promises, sowed in their hearts a rebelliousness that was at a loss for any other means of expression.

Manumitted slaves often married relatively late and as a result often had fewer children than free men of comparable economic status; however, as their numbers increased with the halt in the slave trade (1850) and the disintegration of the slave-owning system, they came to form a truly distinct social group whose freeborn sons were able to appropriate the values of the masters' society or to redefine their own values.

"Whitening" is a fascinating topic of study in relation to the group of manumitted slaves. Brazilian society had imposed this value on the second or third generation of manumitted slaves, despite the existence of white masters, mixed-race masters, and black masters, whose behavior was a function not so much of color as of personality.

Until the 1970s, it was as if Brazilian society, unable to hold on to its white-society characteristics, was forced in daily practice to transgress the self-imposed strictures of "purity of blood" that it had always managed to overstep. In this sense, when the group of descendants of manumitted slaves was gripped by the ideology of whitening, it was only a reflection or a projection of the desires of all of Brazilian society.¹⁵ Racial mixing and manumission, closely connected to each other, were what set Brazil apart in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. But since they recalled bitter memories of slavery, they carried with them a series of attitudes for which the group of manumitted slaves served as catalysts.

Thus the first-generation manumitted slave who lived with a manumitted African or creole of his own skin color, and who suffered the scorn of free men who were whiter than he was, would find it easy to understand his children and grandchildren in their decision to erase as quickly as possible the blot of black enslavement. Likewise, he could fathom their desires for advancement and the clientage that he himself had known, and would understand their predilection for the administrative functions that were denied him; still, he may have felt ever so slightly jolted by their disdain for working the soil or other manual labor.

In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the descendants of manumitted slaves were far more numerous in the northeast of Brazil than in the south. As a result, slavery and its manumitted sons have sometimes been blamed for the ills associated with a sleepy lack of industriousness in this region. Surely this is an error in perspective, since the social group of manumitted slaves is, in its internal evolution, fully reflective of the society that surrounds it.

The manumitted slave was the mirror of his master; he was the model of the slave. The lifestyle to which his descendants aspired was none other than the masters'. Slave-owning society turned back upon itself, caught in traps of its own making; by their efforts to integrate and adapt themselves, the descendants of manumitted slaves threw themselves body and soul into speeding up this process.

Translated from the French by Jennifer Curtiss Gage.

Notes

1. Present studies are for the most part focused on the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. For the two preceding centuries, it is virtually impossible to find positive corroboration. The earliest research began with the period 1750-1850. See Katia de Queirós Mattoso, *A propósito de cartas de Alforria: Bahia, 1779-1850*, A.H. 4 (São Paulo, 1972) pp. 23-52.
See also Stuart Schwartz, "The Manumission of Slaves in Colonial Brazil: Bahia, 1684-1745," *Hispanic American Historical Review* 54, 4 (1974), pp. 606-635. The conclusions reached in Schwartz's study remain valid.
2. *To Be a Slave in Brazil*, trans. Arthur Goldhammer (Rutgers University Press, 1986). For the French edition: *Etre esclave au Brésil, XVIe-XIXe siècles* (Paris, 1979; 2nd ed., 1995); for the Brazilian edition: *Ser escravo no Brasil*, trans. James Amado (São Paulo, 1982).
3. Katia M. de Queirós Mattoso, *O filho da escrava (em torno da lei do ventre livre)*, R.B.H./ANPUH 8, 16 (1988): pp. 37-55.
4. Hebe Maria Mattos de Castro, *Das cores do silêncio. Os significados da liberdade no sudeste escravista. Brasil sec. XIX* (Rio de Janeiro, 1995), pp. 191-227.
5. On the problems encountered in research on Brazilian demography, see for example: for São Paulo: Maria-Luiza Marcilio, *La ville de São Paulo. Peuplement et population, 1750-1850* (Rouen, 1968); for Bahia: Katia de Queirós Mattoso, *Bahia, século XIX, uma província no Império* (Rio de Janeiro, 1992), pp. 67-119; *A propósito de cartas de Alforria: Bahia, 1779-1850* (see note 1 above); on the price paid by slaves to purchase their freedom: *A carta de Alforria como fonte complementar para o estudo da rentabilidade da mão de obra escrava urbana (1819-1888)*, in *A Moderna História Econômica*, coord. Carlos Manuel Pelaez e Mircea Buescu (Rio de Janeiro: APEC, 1976), pp. 149-163.
6. One among countless examples concerns the supposedly automatic manumission of the enslaved wife of a free man: out of the 16,403 charters of freedom examined in Bahia, we have not encountered one referring to the payment of a charter to free an enslaved husband. In only a few cases does a husband free his enslaved wife: in 1806, Pedro Alexandrino de Souza Portugal, the owner and master of the sugar mill Engenho São Gonçalo, freed his creole slave Felipa, "because of her marriage to Bartolomeu de Costa Pinto, a mulatto man, a manumitted slave, who will sacrifice his salaries, earned in his double capacity as manager and accountant of his sugar mill, in order to give 60,000 reales per year for two years ..." This payment was in violation of the law, which was supposed to manumit the spouse of a free man automatically. Is it because the "free" man was himself a manumitted slave?
7. Luis Lisanti, *Della Importazione degli Schiavi nel Brasile coloniale (1715)*, paper presented at the *2e Symposium d'Histoire Economique et Sociale de l'Amérique Latine, XIe Congrès International des Américanistes* (Rome, September 1972). For more recent revisions of these figures, see Pedro Carvalho de Mello, *Estimativa da longevidade de escravos no Brasil na segunda metade do século XIX*, REE 13, 1 (1983) pp. 151-179; or Herbert S. Klein, *African Slavery in Latin America and the Caribbean* (Oxford, 1987) and also his recent clarification in "La traite atlantique: nouvelles interprétations," forthcoming in *Traites et esclavages* (Paris, 1997).

8. For a history of Brazilian revolts and rebellions, see, for example, Decio Freitas, *Palmares, a guerra dos escravos* (Porto Alegre, 1973); José Alípio Goulart, *Da fuga ao suicídio: aspectos da rebeldia dos escravos no Brasil* (Rio de Janeiro, 1971).
9. Katia de Queirós Mattoso, *Testamentos de escravos libertos na Bahia no século XIX. Uma fonte para o estudo de mentalidades* (Salvador, 1979).
10. Katia de Queirós Mattoso, *Família e sociedade na Bahia do século XIX* (São Paulo, 1988).
11. This example has been corroborated by studies of other regions. For example, for Minas Gerais, see Iraci del Neroda Costa, *Minas Gerais: Estruturas populacionais típicas* (São Paulo, 1982); for Bahia, see Maria Ines Cortes de Oliveira, *Oliberto, o seu mundo e os outros* (São Paulo, 1988).
12. Returns to Africa were rare but not unheard of: see Manuela Carneiro da Cunha, *Negros estrangeiros. Os escravos libertos e sua volta à África* (São Paulo, 1985); and the fine novel by Antonio Olinto, *Mãe d'Água* (Rio de Janeiro, 1982).
13. João José Reis, *Slave Rebellion in Brazil: The Muslim Uprising of 1835 in Bahia*, translated by Arthur Brokel (Baltimore, 1993).
14. The clandestine practice of Afro-Brazilian cults has not yet been studied in and of itself. For Bahia, the first record of these practices comes to us from a police report dated 1785; see J. J. Reis, "Magia jeje na Bahia: a invasão do Calundu do pasto de Cachoeira, 1785," in *Revista Brasileira de História* 8, 16 (1988) pp. 57-81. However, newspapers published in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, as well as police reports, contain plentiful data on these practices, formerly considered superstitious and barbaric.
15. As the end of the twentieth century approaches, Brazilian society shows a tendency toward "blackening." Population projections predict a white minority starting in 2010. See, for example, George Reid Andrews, *Blacks and Whites in São Paulo, Brazil* (Madison, 1991).