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Slavery, Freedom, and the Relational City in Abolition-Era Recife

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INTRODUCTION

This chapter tells the stories of three young people, living on the cusp of freedom during Brazil's last decade of slavery. Anísia, thirteen in 1883, was born free to a mother who later married an enslaved man.[1] Guilherme, twenty in 1886, was legal property until Brazil's final abolition but sought his own freedom through negotiation, refusal, and flight.[2] Esperança, fourteen in 1883, was born enslaved and grew up manumitted but unfree, raised and taught letters by the same woman who had sold her mother south.[3]

Anísia, Guilherme, and Esperança all suffered horrific physical and symbolic violence, perpetuated by people who elsewhere donned the mantle of benevolent emancipation. Their stories unveil the malleability of Brazilian slavery in its last gasp but also place in sharp relief the limitations and contradictions of Brazilian freedom.[4] In Recife, as in

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[1] Instituto Arqueológico, Histórico e Geográfico de Pernambuco (IAHGP), Manuel do Valle, 1883 (criminal case).

[2] IAHGP, Pedro Osório de Cerqueira, 1886 (criminal case).

[3] Museu da Justiça of Pernambuco, Herculina Adelaide de Siqueira, 1883 (criminal case).

[4] On the possibilities, limits, and contradictions of freedom in the last years of slavery, see S. Chalhoub, *A força da escravidão*; W. Albuquerque, *O jogo*; W. Filho, *Encruzilhadas*; H. Mattos, *Das cores*; M. Machado, *O plano*.

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much of Brazil, the jagged legal border between captivity and manumission marked territory riddled with private power and violence. What did legal emancipation mean when private and corporatist logics contested and controlled the law? How did intimacy structure exploitation, within and outside slavery's bonds? How did dependency open avenues for advancement even as it cemented inequality? How did the stigma of slavery elide with racial subjugation?

Such questions must find answers in the lives of the people for whom they mattered most. Yet they also demand a broader perspective: lives like Anísia's, Guilherme's, and Esperança's cannot be disentangled from their place and time, nor from the broader historical processes they helped to propel. Recife – Brazil's third-largest city and an urban magnet for the Brazilian Northeast – was a striking hybrid in the late nineteenth century: one of a handful of Atlantic cities where radical transformations in global paradigms of urban life overlapped significantly with legal bondage.[5] In Recife – as in Rio, Salvador, Havana, and New Orleans – both slavery and its undoing molded urban modernity, and the cities thus forged call into question many of the central tenets of North Atlantic urban history. Slavery and the struggle for freedom shaped social geographies, the balance between public and private power, the strategies necessary for urban survival and social advancement, the relationship between urbanity and equality, and the nature of urban violence. The resulting urban fabric had a very different relationship with phenomena such as liberalism, citizenship, equality, and the rule of law than idealized formulations of the "sociological modern" might suggest.[6]

As Anísia, Guilherme, and Esperança navigated the juncture of slavery and freedom, their lives, their city, and the historical construction of urbanity were intimately entwined. In this chapter, I probe those linked histories, beginning with Recife's belle-époque self-construction and a few reflections on the sticky normativity of urban historical templates.

[5] For an earlier period of Recife's history as a city shaped by slavery, see M. Carvalho, *Liberdade*. For Brazilian comparisons, see M. Karasch, *Slave Life*; L. Algranti, *O feitor ausente*; S. Chalhoub, *Visões da liberdade* and *Cidade febril*; S. Graham, *House and Street*; Z. Frank, *Dutra's World*; J. Reis, *Divining Slavery* and *Rebelião escrava*; R. Graham, *Feeding the City*; M. Nishida, *Slavery and Identity*. For comparative nineteenth-century perspectives, see C. Aguirre, *Agentes*; J. Cañizares et al., *The Black Urban Atlantic*; G. García, *Beyond the Walled City*; R. Johnson, *Slavery's Metropolis*; M. Fuentes, *Dispossessed Lives*; C. Cowling, *Conceiving Freedom*; C. Townsend, *Tales of Two Cities*; L. Harris and D. Berry, *Slavery and Freedom*; K. Mann, *Slavery and the Birth*.

[6] On the sociological modern and its many states of exception, see J. Adams et al., *Remaking Modernity*.

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I continue with an analysis of Recife's history as a "slave city," permeated and contoured by the structures, experiences, and struggles of slavery and manumission.[7] I end with Anísia's, Guilherme's, and Esperança's lived experience of that city, illuminated through a close recounting of the three crimes that marked their lives.[8] Throughout, two questions resonate. What kind of city did slavery make? And how did an urbanity shaped by slavery limit the scope of urban freedom?

RECIFE, MODERN CITY

In May 1900, twelve years after abolition, a locally prominent Portuguese-born "merchant and man of letters" named Antônio Joaquim Barbosa Vianna published a historical guide to his adopted city of Recife.[9] There was nothing special about the book. Like countless other literary boosters, Vianna outlined "the history of our capital from its most primitive days" and also "stud[ied] it with much discernment in our own times from a political, aesthetic, religious and commercial perspective."[10] Echoing English chronicler Henry Koster, Vianna introduced Recife as it would have appeared from the deck of a transatlantic steamer, apparently "emerging from the water" as the vessel approached its port.[11] Vianna then condensed four centuries of urban history to a series of legal, military, and technical benchmarks, emphasizing the Dutch engineering that had first rescued Recife – "the American Venice" – from its tidal mudflats; the bridges and landfill that had created continuous terrain from an aquatic archipelago; the erection of churches and monumental buildings; the ways in which foreign observers such as Koster had recognized the city's material

[7] The idea of a "slave city" can be usefully juxtaposed with Sidney Chalhoub's notion of the "cidade negra," constituted by Black practices of freedom; the two coexisted in every Brazilian metropolis.

[8] The concept of the "slave city" derives from Ira Berlin's classic iteration of the distinction between a "slave society" and a "society with slaves" (I. Berlin, *Many Thousands Gone*, p. 8). My conceptualization of the "slave city," however, differs in emphasis from Berlin's distinction. A "slave city" is not necessarily a city in which slavery is the inescapable and dominant mode of labor, "at the center of economic production," but it is one in which the nexus of most social, economic, political, and spatial relationships (including those of family and gender) is rooted in the institution of slavery and the processes and struggles of enslavement and manumission that were integral to it in the Brazilian context. This differs from Virginia Meacham Gould's narrower use of the term "slave city" in reference to New Orleans (V. Gould, "Henriette Delille," pp. 271–285). For an interesting discussion of similar issues in a different Latin American context, see S. Bryant, *Rivers of Gold*.

[9] A. J. Barbosa Vianna, *Recife*. [10] Review from the *Jornal Pequeno*, May 4, 1899, p. 2.

[11] A. J. Barbosa Vianna, *Recife*, p. 13; H. Koster, *Travels in Brazil*.

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progress; and Recife's nineteenth-century adoption of street pavement, water piping, and port improvements. If there was still much to do, it was "only a matter of time and good will"; Recife would soon be "a great city, hygienic and elegant."[12]

To illustrate, Vianna invited his reader to metaphorically board Recife's "americanos" or "bonds" – the four tramlines that traversed Recife's tiny urban core.[13] Vianna's tour signaled the infrastructure of economic and urban progress: sugar warehouses and ports; rail stations and iron bridges; water, sewer, and gas works.[14] Multiple landmarks embodied modern governance: the governor's palace, the central courthouse, the "magnificent" model prison, military installations, the school inspection board. The sinews of well-regulated economic life extended throughout the central city: banks and commercial associations, fashionable shops, factories, the newly built municipal marketplace, sanitized slaughterhouses. There were public charitable institutions, including hospitals, orphanages, and a beggar's asylum; Recife also boasted multiple pedagogical institutions, from religious and technical schools to selective preparatory schools to institutes of scientific research and one of Brazil's two original law schools. Multisecular Catholic churches had pride of place, but so did a masonic temple and multiple markers of secular associative and cultural life: the stately Santa Isabel Theater; the Institute of Archaeology, History and Geography; the Portuguese Reading Room. There were five newspapers, a telegraph office, a chic "International Club," and an ever-expanding system of parks and plazas suitable for public promenades.

In this initial synoptic excursion, and in the subsequent 200-page *Almanac*, Vianna did not mention slavery. There was no trace of non-European heritage. Indeed, people were scarce, beyond lists of prominent politicians and "men of letters"; it was left to the reader's imagination to fill the streets. In the name of this imaginary urban public, Vianna celebrated Recife's achievements and urged all Recifenses to "come together with the patriotic intention of elevating and strengthening" their beloved city, so that it might achieve the "great, truly great" status it was destined for.[15]

Yet Vianna's sanitized Recife, empty of inhabitants and especially of women and Afro-descendants, was not the only depiction that circulated

[12] A. J. Barbosa Vianna, *Recife*, p. 22. [13] A. J. Barbosa Vianna, *Recife*, pp. 25–39.

[14] This technique was echoed in a pioneering propaganda film about Recife from the 1920s: Falangola and Cambière (Pernambuco Film), *Veneza Americana* (1925). For a cogent analysis of the film, see L. Araújo, "Os encantos."

[15] A. J. Barbosa Vianna, *Recife*, p. 238

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in the belle époque. Recife was a minor destination on the commercial and touristic circuits of the Atlantic world, commemorated in troves of postcards.[16] Some dutifully documented Vianna's progressive wonderland: there were artfully tinted representations of tramlines running past tall, Dutch-style rowhouses, the Santa Isabel Theater abutting a public promenade, the majestic façade of the central railway terminal. But travelers' appetites for picturesque novelty could also prick the boosters' bubble. One missive, mailed in 1904, showed a busy commercial street lined with tall buildings and crosscut with tramlines and electric wires. Among the pedestrians, a lone gentleman in a top hat seems to observe an urban scene to which he does not fully belong: brown- and black-skinned barefoot street vendors, one carrying a basket on his head, crowd the carefully paved street; the only visible vehicles are open-air wagons, propelled by mules. Not a single woman occupies this public place. The scrawled inscription indulgently recounts the inhabitants' recalcitrant relationship with modern times, explaining that, while Recife's city fathers have tried to rename the street after a locally born vice-president of the Republic, "the people" insisted on still calling it the "Rua da Imperatriz," eleven years after the Empire's demise.[17]

Those barefoot Black street vendors, with their stubborn love for a deposed empress, recalled Recife's slavocratic past and had no place in Vianna's city. Neither did the workers in a 1906 postcard image: a row of Afro-descendant washerwomen, dressed in white, beating and scrubbing soiled cloth in the tidal flats of a Recife river.[18] And the inhabitants of Vianna's Recife certainly did not live in the row of mud and palm homes denominated "negerhutten," "negreries," "negroes-houses," or "choupoinas dos negros" on another missive.[19] On a final postcard, a top-hatted gentlemen who might have occupied Vianna's public sphere seems displaced on a street, beaten from hard earth and called "the Rua Sete Mocambos" ("Street of Seven Shacks"). He converses in a doorway with a Black woman in a Victorian ankle-length dress; elsewhere, a barefoot man in a straw cap talks with a roughly clad boy, and baby pigs root for food.[20]

It would be easy to dismiss such images as errata, holdovers from another era that still inhabited the margins of a city rapidly evolving

[16] The postcards discussed here are archived at the Fundação Joaquim Nabuco (Fundaj), colecção Josebias Bandeira.
[17] Fundaj, colecção Josebias Bandeira, image JB-000917 (1904).
[18] Fundaj, colecção Josebias Bandeira, image JB_000489.
[19] Fundaj, colecção Josebias Bandeira, image JB_001006.
[20] Fundaj, colecção Josebias Bandeira, image JB_000494.

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toward Vianna's carefully curated modernity. And yet, during these same years, some of the very pioneering maps and censuses that marked Recife's modernization – the very documents that signaled the city's entry into transnational circuits of urbanity, where places and populations were knowable – indicated that this was far from the case.[21] A 1906 map, prepared by engineer Douglas Fox, showed the bold outlines of urban modernity: rectilinear streets, rail lines, monuments, stone buildings. Yet subsequently annotated copies still preserved in the city's engineering archives mark swampy neighborhoods of "negro" cabins, called *mocambos*, filling in the voids and blank spaces of the original map.[22] In 1905, public health official Octavio de Freitas estimated that the thousands of *mocambos* in Recife were "the main dwellings of the poorer classes."[23] Recife's pioneering 1913 census (the first in Brazil to count informal dwellings) affirmed his point; 66 percent of the city's dwellings were either improvised shacks or auto-constructed wattle and daub homes.[24] While the cinematic tramcar city certainly existed, it was interspersed and overwhelmed by a very different urban and social reality, one in which Black people, the spaces they inhabited and created, and the relationships they forged with the classes who had owned their ancestors shaped the city as surely as did any vision of "modern" progress.[25]

"THE CITY" IN THE URBAN CANON

Vianna's selective urban portrait of Recife was not unique. In the field of urban studies, sage deconstructions of history's grand narratives have been both abundant and relatively futile.[26] Empirically, both scholarship and common sense tell us that cities are enormously heterogeneous, both internally and across time and space. Historians and social scientists have long argued that real cities are forged by geographical accident, socioeconomic contingency, and political expediency, rarely

[21] On early censuses of Recife, see B. Fischer, "From the Mocambo."

[22] *Mocambo* is a kimbundu word for self-constructed huts or shacks that was also used in Brazil to mean *quilombo*, or runaway slave community. See J. Lira, "Hidden Meanings," as well as B. Fischer, "A ética" and "From the Mocambo." On the *mocambos* on early maps, see T. Francisco, "Habitação popular," pp. 52–56.

[23] O. Freitas, *O clima*, p. 50.

[24] Estado de Pernambuco, Municipio de Recife, *Recenseamento (1913)*, p. 82.

[25] On race and the *mocambos*, see B. Fischer, "A ética."

[26] J. Robinson, *Ordinary Cities*; J. Ferguson, *Expectations of Modernity*.

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tracking the overdetermined narratives that once tethered their emergence to variants of economic, political, or social modernization. Across many continents, urban novels and ethnographies have dwelled in the blank spaces of standard mental maps of urbanity, documenting the emotional, sensorial, extra-official, extralegal relationships, rifts, and systems that create the stuff, if too seldom the science, of cities. In the abstract, it seems almost absurd to argue against normative mirages of urbanity that have already been disrupted and dispersed.

Yet there is a stickiness to the grand urban paradigms, a stubborn, constant return to the notion that "the city" – as a physical place and an object of study – is ultimately a site of both rupture with a retrograde past and normative convergence on an idealized future. Perhaps this is because so many of the grand modernizing narratives of the North Atlantic have claimed the city as their stage. Cities have been theorized as the sites of democracy, citizenship, public law, and state bureaucracy; they catalyzed commerce, industry, consumption, and technology; they nurtured lettered culture, public spheres, and artistic sea changes; they produced individualism and anomie but also class consciousness, racial resistance, gendered emancipation, and sexual liberation. Underlying all of this is the notion that cities are exciting because they are laboratories of forward movement, the sites where the dreary temporal sequences of human life become "history" through rupture and transformative change.

Thus, the roads that lead to urbanity might be motley, but their destination – urbanity itself – still announces itself through familiar landmarks. Physically, "cities" are serviced and sanitized; their streets are paved and mappable; their safe and solid buildings enjoy access to electricity, water, and sewage; residents are mobile and connected, whether through telegraph and telephone lines or wireless networks. Legally, cities are legible and regulated; their expansion is contained by the rule of law, their cadastral maps are clean, their laws are written to be enforced, their inspectors and police forces keep order or impose the state's overbearing gaze. Culturally, cities constitute and broadcast taste, distinction, and creativity, broadcasting innovation to a global stage, whether in the form of steel-framed skyscrapers or street art. The idea of the city still evokes a string of sociocultural forms and values – anonymity, liberal individualism, egalitarianism, freedom, participation in a vibrant public sphere. At some abstract level, all of these signs and symbols still converge on normative hopes for urbanity as the embodiment of progressive transformation – what Mike Davis calls "cities of light, soaring toward

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heaven" – even if cracked cement, convoluted politics, and flagrant flouting of urban "norms" evoke continuity, disjunction, or decline.[27]

Historians, especially outside of the North Atlantic, have a peculiar role in this urban convergence narrative. Individual works of urban history or historical anthropology – Kirstin Mann's *Slavery and the Birth of an African City*, Partha Chaterjee's *The Politics of the Governed*, or James Ferguson's *Expectations of Modernity* – pull on the loose strings of urban convergence, suggesting the ways in which urban futures are also shaped by threads of continuity with heterogeneous pasts. But in general, even decades after Dipesh Chakrabarty's call to "provincialize Europe," most urban histories still adhere to well-circuited scripts and methods.[28] Particular objects of study periodically glare and fade: historians might focus on technological modernization or urban planning, city cinema or hip-hop, bureaucratic rationalization or rights to the city, the formation of working classes or the ethno-racial dimensions of urban space, consumerism or financialization, gendered emancipation or moral surveillance. But the overwhelming emphasis is still on the creation and diffusion of historical scripts that circulate across urban borders, emphasize abstract and idealized forms of urbanity, and are built methodologically from the sorts of questions, categories, documents, processes, and logics that indicate rupture and "modernity."[29]

In this process of urban history-making, intense multivalent imperatives are at play. Even in the North Atlantic, but especially outside of it, scripts of urban rupture and convergence have long held normative power for policymakers: they shape history on the ground as well as in the abstract. For a booster like Vianna, living on the perceived edges of belle-époque globalization, it was vital to construct a version of Recife's past that pointed toward a modern, Europeanized future – not only because he shared that urban vision but also because he believed that his city's fate depended upon its ability to participate fully in the civilizational and economic circuits of transnational modernity. Intellectuals often find themselves in a similar bind: transnational conversation and the cosmopolitan respect that come with it involve the deployment of "universal" categories and methods, which require the translation of local histories into narratives that are recognizable from the perspective of other historical realities. Historians must thus

[27] M. Davis, *Planet of Slums*, p. 19. [28] D. Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe*.

[29] On the relationship of modernity and rupture, see E. Clemens, "Logics of History?"; J. Adams et al., "Social Theory."

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play a constant double game, at once describing the historical processes they perceive and linking them to the transnational historical canon.

The urban history that has emerged from this process is substantially incomplete. We understand far more about performative and revolutionary politics than we do about the quiet but vital interactions that structure incremental change. We know much more about the "global city" than we do about vernacular citybuilding.[30] We can trace the urban impact of laws and institutions but remain relatively ignorant about informal networks and orders. We have a vivid imaginary involving the development of the "public" sphere of the lettered city but perceive only fleetingly the circuits of community, politics, and culture that lie beyond its edges. Taken together, these tendencies flatten, blur, and decenter the urban histories of women, people of color, and the urban poor; they also render invisible the ways in which such understudied urban currents shape broader historical processes.

This is especially evident in relation to the urban history of slavery and emancipation, in part because abolition and the movements that lead toward it appear as such significant moments of historical rupture. Cities have been constructed as magnetic spaces of release: when slavery ends, freedom begins, and freedom is heavily associated with the emancipatory currents of urban modernity. Freedpeople mark their liberty by claiming citizenship, entering the public sphere, moving freely, severing the bonds of personal dependence, claiming cultural autonomy and horizontal solidarity – in short, by deconstructing the worlds that slavery made and entering an "urban" space where they act and are acted upon as "modern" subjects. In Brazil, studies of those processes have yielded moving and significant insights into the *cidade negra*, into Black contributions to the making of the Brazilian working classes and the Brazilian public sphere, into Black agency in the forging of Brazilian nationalism and national culture.[31] Yet this approach has its limitations. It is highly gendered, illuminating a public world in which women were largely marginalized; it can also significantly obscure Brazil's urban "afterlives of slavery" and discourage research on the subterranean structures and

[30] Though the phrase "global city" can be attributed to Saskia Sassen's book of the same name (1991), the concept has older roots, arguably to the very origins of urban history as a discipline.

[31] See for example F. Fernandes and R. Bastide, *Brancos e negros*; S. Chalhoub, *Visões da liberdade*; R. Rolnik, *A cidade* and "Territórios negros"; Z. Frank, *Dutra's World*; C. Castilho, *Slave Emancipation*; M. MacCord, *Artífices da cidadania*; A. Negro and F. Gomes, "Além de senzalas."

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relationships that limited the emancipatory potential of both freedom and urbanity in Brazilian cities.[32]

A few of these urban histories less examined are especially salient if we wish to think more deeply about the urban afterlives of slavery in Brazil, particularly their gendered dimensions. One traces the circuits that continued to bind the rural and urban worlds well beyond slavery. Another emphasizes the intimacy of Brazil's urban inequalities. A third explores relational power (power derived from and structured by personal relationships) and its ability to permeate Brazil's liberal institutions. And a final history highlights urban informality. None of these is in any sense novel in the landscape of Brazilian social thought; the first three have structured iconic iterations of national self-understanding since Euclides da Cunha, Gilberto Freyre, and Sérgio Buarque de Holanda.[33] Yet themes of rural connection, unequal intimacy, and relational power often emerge in Brazilian historiography as features of a temporal, geographic, and normative other – forged in the rural or slavocratic past, symptomatic of stunted development and incomplete modernization, existing in frank opposition to an urbanism forged from liberal modernity. In the case of informality, we see precisely the opposite: it is portrayed as a contemporary urban distortion without a knowable history, unconnected to the deepest currents of Brazil's national evolution.[34]

In the narratives that follow – of the city and of Anísia, Esperança, and Guilherme – I sketch moments lived out in a modernizing city where rural connection, unequal intimacy, relational power, and informality framed and constrained freedom's emancipatory potential; an urban world where *mocambos* and barefoot pedestrians revealed as much about the future as they did about the past. My intention is to dive deeply into the historical junctures where vivid struggles for varying degrees of urban freedom

[32] S. Hartman, *Lose Your Mother*. On Caribbean iterations of these limitations, see M. Fuentes, *Dispossessed Lives*. Writing about Bahia, Walter Fraga has brilliantly demonstrated that the ways in which enslaved Brazilians achieved freedom had a deep impact on the social and political strategies they used to occupy it; his work resonates with that of scholars such as Gregory Downs, who has explored the ongoing significance of dependency after US emancipation. Sandra Lauderdale Graham's *House and Street* and Henrique Espada Lima's recent writings on labor and freedom are excellent examples of work exploring the limits of free labor in Brazilian cities: see H. E. Lima, "Freedom, Precariousness," and E. Lima and F. Popinigus, "Maids, Clerks."

[33] E. da Cunha, *Os sertões* (1st edition, 1902); G. Freyre, *Sobrados e mucambos* (2nd edition, 1951) and *Ordem e progresso* (1st edition, 1959); S. Buarque de Holanda, *Raizes do Brasil* (1st edition, 1936).

[34] For development of this theme, see B. Fischer, "A Century."

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produced continuity rather than rupture, in hopes of exposing some of the raw historical threads that stretched unbroken from Recife's slave past to its experience of urban modernity. My focus is intensely local and experiential; if Vianna wished us to see the city as it might have appeared to a streetcar tourist in search of Progress in 1900, I aim to recapture something of what Recife might have looked like to an enslaved or Afro-descendant person in search of urban freedom in the 1880s. But my intention is not strictly microhistorical: I highlight the continuity and intersectionality inherent in these urban struggles for freedom not because they were unique but rather because they open windows on global dynamics that shape modern cities far beyond Recife's tidal floodplains.

RECIFE: REEF, ARCHIPELAGO, SLAVE CITY

Recife is, as the name suggests, an aquatic city – less solid land than low-lying archipelago, riddled with swamps and tidal rivers, only rising definitively above sea level several kilometers from the Atlantic shoreline. For nineteenth-century observers, the city had "the appearance of being built on water"; everywhere, the sky and sea stretch uninterrupted to the horizon, broken only by "the coconut palms' fragile grace."[35] Aquaticism could also have a drearier significance: good land was scarce, bad land flooded, with predictable complications for transportation, communication, and even the definition of solid property. In the late nineteenth century, 400 years after initial European colonization, Recife's extensive municipal territory comprised a tiny continuous urbanized core and a web of suburbs, sugar plantations, and hamlets, linked precariously by dirt roads, railways, and rivers.

Recife had evolved as a port city, as a military and bureaucratic bulwark, and as a node of rural power and wealth. Cattle, cotton, slaves, and sugar passed through it; patriarchs and their sons crossed paths and cemented loyalties and enmities in its churches, educational institutions, marketplaces, and government chambers. The streets (and rivers) belonged to a different population: free artisans, freedpersons making ends meet as laborers, dependents, or vendors, and enslaved men and women, feet bare, moving but constrained as slaves *de ganho*, captive free agents.[36] The city's population was sparse – 116,000 in 1872, 146,000 in

[35] H. Koster, *Travels*, p. 2; J. Nabuco, "Ramalho Ortigão no Recife," *O Paiz*, November 30, 1887.

[36] On continuities in this picture – and especially rivers – see M. Carvalho, *Liberdade*.

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1890 – and many (slave and free, destitute and powerful) still circulated regularly among rural plantations, suburban Big Houses, and urban neighborhoods.[37] Recife was the capital of Pernambuco, larger than São Paulo and the most powerful urban magnet in the Brazilian Northeast. But it was a city deeply entwined with its hinterland and closely integrated in webs of hierarchy and dependency, more the hub of a regional network than a citadel of liberal modernity.

Recife had been built on sugar and slaves, and that fact marked its economy, its population, its social geography, its power structures, and its urban character. From its heights in the early seventeenth century, under a brief period of Dutch occupation, Recife and its sugar economy had ebbed and flowed (but mostly ebbed). The nineteenth century saw considerable expansion in the volume of sugar production, and the 1880s marked something of a resurgence: Imperial subsidies for centralized sugar mills went disproportionately to Pernambuco, and the value of sugar milled in Pernambuco was more than 70 percent higher between 1886 and 1890 than it had been between 1871 and 1875.[38] But problems of supply, transport, and foreign competition ensured that the surge was brief. And even at its height, sugar prosperity was of a very particular kind. It correlated with high slave prices but not with better wages for free labor; it eventually encouraged concentration of landed wealth; it did very little to encourage linkages that might have promoted deeper levels of economic development; it failed to develop transportation and port capacity beyond a scant and dysjunctive railway system; and it required little of its workers beyond raw strength and the specific delicate skills of sugar processing.[39] In the 1880s, sugar was Recife's economic engine and dominated Pernambuco's provincial finances. But the economy thus created showed little dynamism and few opportunities for ascension in a free labor market.

Recife's urban form was thus quite different than that of cities that grew from manufacturing or commerce. Recife's commercial dominance, status as

[37] Population numbers for 1872 and 1890 are confused by the fact that the municipal boundaries changed between the two censuses, making independent municipalities of three of Recife's parishes. The numbers given are for the municipality as it was defined in 1872; if we use the restricted 1890 boundaries, the appropriate population figures are 92,052 for 1872 and 111,556 for 1890. For both censuses, two Brazilian cities were larger: Rio with 275,000 (1872) and 523,000 (1890) and Salvador at 129,000 (1872) and 174,402 (1890). São Paulo was considerably smaller, with 23,000 in 1872 and only 65,000 in 1890. Brazil, Diretoria Geral de Estatística, *Recenseamento de 1872* (v. 9) and *Synopse* (1890), p. 90.

[38] P. Eisenberg, *The Sugar Industry*, p. 15.

[39] P. Eisenberg, *The Sugar Industry*.

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the seat of provincial government, and law school all ensured that the Northeast's most powerful families would maintain a strong urban presence. But most of those families were more prominent than rich, and what wealth existed was more effectively controlled than expanded. In 1873, 13 percent of the municipal population was enslaved, working in a wide variety of settings, from the cane plantations of Recife's western expanses to semi-free contract labor in Recife's urban core. That percentage had dropped sharply since mid-century and would drop to around 4 percent before abolition: some able-bodied slaves were being sold south, families ripped apart to feed Brazil's more dynamic coffee economy, and others had been voluntarily freed or promised freedom to encourage loyalty and productivity.[40] Overall, 70 percent of Recife's population was illiterate in 1872. Despite well-publicized initiatives granting tax exemptions to industrial entrepreneurs, only 9 percent of the laboring population was occupied as urban "workers," an expansive category in which factory labor figured lightly. Only 3 percent of Recifenses were "artisans," who tended toward greater skill and political independence.[41] Fewer still belonged to the barely emerging professional and bureaucratic classes. Commerce involved rudimentary basics and imported consumer goods; in both realms, a small class of mostly Portuguese immigrants sat at the top ranks, their dependents and some free Brazilians staffed the middle, and free Afro-descendants dominated street-selling. Most male workers were categorized as undifferentiated day laborers or servants; most women worked in domestic tasks or street-vending.[42] The "free" labor market was constrained in a variety of ways. Vagrancy laws, the threat of military recruitment, and the specter of re-enslavement forced men and women to seek fixed patrons and protectors; the importance of private referrals to the labor market forced all workers to insert themselves into patriarchal hierarchies.[43]

Slavery and the sugar economy also profoundly shaped Recife's demography. By the 1870s, generations of piecemeal manumission – at once a form of labor discipline and a right hard-won by the enslaved and their relatives – had done their work. The free Black population already greatly outnumbered the enslaved, and 59 percent of all Recifenses were Afro-descendant. But "freedom" almost always entailed incorporation into vertical patriarchal networks that greatly restricted effective autonomy,

[40] C. Castilho, *Slave Emancipations*, p. 25; P. Eisenberg, *The Sugar Industry*, pp. 158 and 165.
[41] M. MacCord, *Artífices*. [42] M. Silva, "*Domésticas criadas*."
[43] M. Carvalho, *Liberdade*; P. Beattie, *The Tribute*.

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and those networks shaped the urban fabric far beyond the edges of slavery. Recife attracted relatively few of the migrants who helped to loosen such structures in other cities; foreigners comprised only 7 percent of the population in 1872, and of those nearly 1 in 10 was born in Africa. But it did attract many migrants from surrounding provinces, sons of provincial patriarchs jockeying for advancement and influence within a dense network of personal and political alliances.

Among aristocratic families and their ranks of slaves and dependents, circulation between the countryside and "the city" was a constant, its circuits etched by personal connections, its rhythm determined by life-stage, health, affective ties, and economic or political exigency. Even within the city, people circulated and moved surprisingly frequently: *sobrados* (aristocratic townhouses) were never static places. Those movements hinged on personal and familiar logics and only rarely responded to free markets in land, labor, or housing. Circulation often originated in mortality and sheer need: deadly disease was still a constant, relatively independent of social status; orphans and widows became a malleable and mobile class of domestic dependents; and superstition and sorrow could move even aristocratic families to mobility.[44] Only in the small urban core – the central neighborhoods of Recife, Santo António, and especially São José – did free artisans and workers establish something that more resembled the relatively independent poor workers' neighborhoods of Rio or Buenos Aires.[45]

Recife's topography ensured that its communities were more tentacular than continuous outside of the urban core. But slavery and the vertical patriarchal networks that grew from it created remarkable heterogeneity across the entire archipelago; decades after streetcars and steam railways had made urban social differentiation possible, segregation was rare.[46] In the urban core, some well-to-do families continued to share intimate space with their unequals and to rub shoulders with poorer neighbors, each with its retinue of dependents – slaves, servants, fictive and blood kin, boarders. These unequal intimacies often subsisted within aging *sobrados*

[44] One of the most eloquent descriptions of these dynamics can be found in F. Melo and G. Freyre, *Memórias de um Cavalcanti*. The logic of orphan circulation revealed in that work and in the archives of Recife's Santa Casa greatly resembled those discussed by Nara Milanich in Chile (*Children of Fate*) and Ann Blum in Mexico (*Domestic Economies*).

[45] M. MacCord, *Artifices*; S. Chalhoub, *Trabalho lar*, *Cidade febril*; and *Visões da liberdade*; J. Scobie, *From Plaza to Suburb*; L. Johnson, *Workshop of Revolution*.

[46] This was in sharp contrast to the US experience and to contemporaneous developments in Buenos Aires as described by James Scobie.

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(townhouses), where the descendants of once-prosperous rural families hung on to a modicum of aristocracy by taking in paying renters. Outside of the urban core, in the bourgeois neighborhood of Boa Vista or the gentile suburbs of Graça and Madalena, households were larger, but heterogeneity persisted, with slaves, servants, *criados*, and dependents living in the same compounds as lawyers, commercial brokers, and politicians. In Recife's distant outreaches, still more rural than urban, *engenhos* (sugar mills) anchored small communities of intimate unequals. Across the archipelago, wealth, dependency, and bondage moved together, a phenomenon that can be seen in simple statistical correlations as well as anecdotal evidence; again, only the urbanized core showed signs of more significant racial and class differentiation.[47]

Social heterogeneity and the continued importance of vertical social networks had multiple intangible impacts on Recife's urban evolution. In combination with the inconstancy of Recife's social geography, they produced striking degrees of vertical social intimacy and recognition. In Recife's urban archipelago, individual communities were small and interconnected: this was still in some sense a "face-to-face community," where no one was anonymous when they ventured into urban public space.[48] Emblematically, before the early twentieth century, police often failed to ask for specific addresses when interrogating witnesses and defendants, because everyone could be found if need be. And individuals were recognized – seen – as part of a larger, known social network, points in the dense web of vertical social ties that situated every individual and shaped their prospects for sociability, mobility, and advancement. This rarely implied the kind of harmonious coexistence that Gilberto Freyre famously idealized; slavery and weak public institutions ensured that the hierarchies of interdependence were enforced with violence, coercion, and exploitation, whether implied or exercised outright.[49] But poor and marginalized people were not anonymous individuals in Recife, even in the eyes of the wealthy. Everyone was part of someone's network of power and dependency, either immediately recognized as such or sure to make the

[47] The most interesting result of a simple correlation of census statistics by neighborhood indicates a very low correlation between whiteness and freedom (indicating that slaves lived with mostly white masters). One of the highest correlations, which reinforces McCord's earlier arguments, is between literacy and artisan status, indicating that artisans tended to know how to read and tended not to live in households with large numbers of illiterate dependents.

[48] I borrow this specific use of the term from S. Dawdy, *Building the Devil's Empire*, p. 23.

[49] For a critique of the conflation of intimacy and harmony in a different context, see S. Hartman, *Scenes of Subjection*.

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connection known as soon as they needed to get something done. In the absence of effective public institutions or opportunities for advancement, no one was autonomous. Even in its late-nineteenth-century form, the city was still a space where the lifeblood pulsed from the private sphere, even in ostensibly public contexts.

Against this backdrop, Recife was quickly acquiring the signs and symbols of North Atlantic urban modernity. In the 1860s it became the first city in Brazil (and perhaps the world) to use steam locomotives – *maxambombas* – for municipal transportation. Sewers, running water, pavement, and gas illumination provided creature comforts; new shopping districts, cafes, landscaped parks, theaters, and public buildings came to symbolize the public elegance of the urban core. Law students debated Italian positivist criminology and German legal theory; sugar barons mechanized and modernized; a few factories sprung up; boosters advocated sanitation and slum clearance. After 1870, as slave prices quickly spiked and the 1871 Free Womb Law forecast slavery's institutional expiration, manumissions accelerated and slavery's imprint on the urban landscape began to fade: by 1887, there were only some 2,036 enslaved people in the municipality, down from no fewer than 15,136 in 1872.[50] As Celso Castilho has documented, the politics of abolition and republicanism expanded Recife's public sphere and evoked ideals of citizenship, freedom, and equality that linked Recife to revolutionary spaces across Brazil and the Atlantic world.[51]

For Gilberto Freyre, whose characterizations of nineteenth-century Recife remain iconic, all of this indicated that Recife's heterogeneity was quickly giving way to the ecological succession and social distance predicted by the early Chicago school of sociology.[52] Public spaces were setting the pulse of urban life, no longer simply the channels that linked private worlds but rather powerful arenas of public culture and power. For Freyre, the social world of the *engenho* (sugar plantation) and *sobrado* (townhouse) was disintegrating as freed slaves claimed their independence in nascent shantytowns (*mocambos*) and wage labor markets and commercialism began to cut the bonds of vertical hierarchy, sentiment, and vertical interdependence.[53]

[50] Figures from C. Castilho, *Slave Emancipation*, pp. 27 and 147. The 1872 figure may be a low count, because it is based on the census rather than the 1873 slave census.

[51] C. Castilho, *Slave Emancipation*.

[52] See especially G. Freyre, *Mucambos do nordeste*, p. 23, and *Sobrados e mocambos*, p. 783.

[53] G. Freyre, *Sobrados e mocambos* and *Ordem e progresso*.

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But there is every reason to think that Freyre lamented prematurely the demise of private, relational power. Recife became linked to a transnational urban ideal in these years, but that ideal's imprint was as inconstant as the city's topography. Slaves walked paved streets with bare feet; tramways passed through swaths of swamp and cane; *quilombos* (maroon settlements) grew strategically near rail stations. Manumission and abolition were achieved on the basis of relational power. Seemingly liberal institutions, as Sergio Buarque de Holanda argued eight decades ago, proved welcoming homes for patriarchal logics.[54] Recife's orphanage favored children with a letter of recommendation for scarce beds; Recife's police delegates, public prosecutors, and judges followed logics of loyalty as well as law.[55]

Even the *mocambos* – the shacks that came to symbolize Recife's informal city, and for Freyre the quintessential symbol of freedmen's desire for independence and the city's increasing social segregation – were from their origins deeply embedded in webs of relational power. *Mocambos* were ubiquitous, part of the city from the start, the majority of urban domestic structures as late as 1913.[56] But they were built not only on resistance but also on sufferance: they occupied ceded land, outside the strictures of the law, at the whim and by the rules of individuals with the material and political resources to create zones of exception in Recife's urban landscape. Already in the nineteenth century, *mocambos* were concentrated heavily in some neighborhoods, especially Afogados and Arraial. But they might appear anywhere; in the backyards of *sobrados*, on the borders of old *engenhos*, on the swampy banks of tidal rivers, in the abandoned interstices of Recife's archipelago. Everywhere, they created zones of private power, where cheap housing came at the price of loyalty, rent, and subordination. It is no accident that many of Recife's poor communities, like many of Rio's favelas, still bear the name of their founder or boss – the Alto Jose do Pinho, the Alto do Pascual, the neighborhood of Mustardinha.[57]

[54] S. Buarque de Holanda, *Raízes*.

[55] These conclusions are based on a sample of 165 substantial criminal case records dating from 1859 to 1900 (held in the IAHGP and the Museu da Justiça) as well as two sets of records held in the Arquivo Público Estadual Jordão Emerenciano (APEJE): a complete run of police logbooks between 1872 and 1900, and the Records of the Santa Casa.

[56] Brasil, Pernambuco, *Recenseamento (1913)*.

[57] In this way, Recife's *mocambos* shared much with Rio's early favelas; see B. Fischer, *A Poverty of Rights*, part IV. For a somewhat later journalistic account of these kinds of relationships, see the anonymous article entitled "Mostardinha – senhor feudal de um povoado de lama," from the *Folha do Povo*, Recife, July 23, 1935.

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So it was, in general terms, that sugar and slavery imprinted their legacy on Recife, creating dense networks of relational power, altering the meaning of economic and institutional change, forging a distinct urban form in the southern reaches of the Atlantic world. But what did it mean to live in such a place? What did mobility and liberation signify in this urban context? How did their pursuit intersect – or not – with North Atlantic urban ideals such as equality, individuality, citizenship, and public accountability? For historians seeking answers to such questions, a city like Recife presents specific methodological difficulties. Precisely because the city's lettered classes frequently aspired to European forms and ideals, newspapers and literary sources tend to emphasize Recife's intersection with the North Atlantic; likewise, maps, almanacs, censuses, and governmental studies overwhelmingly emphasize normative features of urbanity, obscuring categories and experiences that do not conform. To unearth experiences thus silenced, the remainder of this chapter follows a generation of social and cultural historians to the moldy archives of Recife's criminal justice system, where life stories and sociocultural networks can be painstakingly reassembled and cross-referenced with civil registries and print periodicals. The resulting stories of captivity, freedom, and violence immerse us in the intimate, relational logic of a slave city in its waning days, placing in sharp relief the ways in which legacies of inequality would persist and deepen in the post-emancipation period.

STORIES

Anísia

We begin with a tale about the racial and gendered limits of freedom. Anísia Maria da Conceição was born in 1870 in Boa Vista, an urbane residential and commercial neighborhood that anchored Recife's law school and many prestigious public institutions. Anísia was the *filha natural* (natural daughter) of Antônia Maria da Conceição, a free woman and resident of the parish; no father was listed. Anísia's birth certificate declared her "white," and her godparents were João Rodrigues de Miranda and his sister Francisca Xavier Rodrigues de Miranda, both labeled *solteiros* (single). João would go on to manage the Companhia Telefónica de São Paulo, and their brother became a municipal judge; their father, Francisco, had been a police official, traveled frequently to the south of Brazil, and was remembered in the papers upon his death in 1899 as an "excellent citizen and dedicated father." Whether Francisco or one

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of his sons, enslaved workers, or servants was Anísia's father we'll never know: whatever protection they promised at her birth had evaporated by her adolescence.

We wouldn't know anything about Anísia if she had not run into trouble at the age of thirteen. She was living at the time with her mother Antônia, who worked as a cook for an English railroad engineer named William Elliot.[58] Antônia lived with her partner, a freedman called Severino, in the neighborhood of Arraial, a still-rural suburb and local transportation hub dotted with small-time farms and *mocambos*. Antônia was illiterate, a single mother, probably a light-skinned Afro-Brazilian. She had clearly managed, through deft manipulation of the narrow opportunities and connections available to her, to find good work and do well enough by her daughter that the girl knew how to read and did not work as a servant. In the slave city of Recife, this signified real social mobility for someone of Antônia and Anísia's racial and social station.

Anísia's good fortune may have changed with adolescence: it certainly went south in July of 1883, when she ran away with Manoel do Valle, an employee of the port works and the adopted son of a prominent lawyer and Liberal Party political activist named Manoel Henrique Cardim.[59] Anísia claimed that Manoel promised to marry her and to set her up in her own house in the nearby neighborhood of Casa Forte. Anísia left her mother's home with Manoel, known as "Neco"; several neighbors – an illiterate washerwoman, a servant, a small-time businessman who referred to Anísia only as a *mulatinha* (a dismissive term for a person of mixed African and European heritage) – testified that they'd recognized him. The servant, who worked with Antônia, said that Anísia's mother had done everything in her power to safeguard her daughter's virtue.

[58] There were two William Elliots who lived in Pernambuco in 1883, father and son. Anísia's mother presumably worked for the father and his wife, who had lived in Pernambuco since 1879 while Mr. Elliot was in charge of constructing a branch of the Great Western of Brazil Railway in Pernambuco. Elliot, whose peripatetic career took him to Russia, India, Argentina, Uruguay, Mexico, and Brazil as well as various European locations, completed the Great Western line and left Pernambuco for Buenos Aires in 1883, shortly after this case began. He would only return to Recife briefly in 1891 to construct one of the city's first large cotton mills, only to die of yellow fever shortly thereafter. See Institution of Civil Engineers (Great Britain), *Minutes*, pp. 371–373.

[59] Do Valle refers to himself as Cardim's *enteado*, and Cardim calls do Valle an orphan for whom he serves as *padrasto* and "tutor," indicating a kind of adoption rather than step-parenthood. Cardim appears in multiple cases stored in Recife's judicial archives, sometimes as an avid defender of freedom suits brought by the enslaved. See, for example, the case brought by the enslaved Elias in 1883, a mere three months before Anísia's case (Museu da Justiça de Pernambuco).

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Manoel set Anísia up in the home of one of his neighbors and the two had sex. Antônia, desperate, scoured the adjoining neighborhoods of Arraial, Casa Forte, and Poço de Panela for her daughter with the aid of Mrs. Elliot, finally enlisting the police. Anísia, fearing detection, took refuge at "Doutor" Cardim's compound, and he personally reunited the devastated mother and her rebellious daughter at the police station. Antônia pressed charges against Manoel for kidnapping and deflowerment: Anísia, forced to undergo a gynecological exam, was declared "semi-white" and definitely not a virgin. The public prosecutor advanced the charges: it that point, it looked as if Anísia's story might end – as some deflowerment suits did – with a forced marriage to a higher-status man.[60]

Do Valle was not, however, an average feckless seducer, and the court system he worked within operated on a highly personalistic logic. In the months that followed, Dr. Cardim and his lawyer systematically destroyed both the case and the racial and sexual reputations of the women who had brought it. First, at the trial phase, the police witnesses disappeared or recanted their testimony. A servant in the house where Anísia briefly stayed went further, claiming that Anísia had actually been raped by her mother's lover (a former slave!), that another man had gone around the neighborhood brandishing a bloody shirt and claiming he'd also had sex with her, and that she (the witness) had only given her original testimony because the police subdelegate had threatened her. A police officer who had not testified in the investigative phase of the case repeated the gossip, adding for good measure that Anísia was now living as a prostitute. No one was called to defend Anísia – not her mother, not her mother's employer, not a relative or godparent or protector.

More blows came from Manoel's lawyer and from a former police delegate and political ally of Dr. Cardim. The lawyer, Luíz Rodrigues Ferreira de Menezes Vasconcelos de Drummond, penned an elaborate defense. The whole story was, Drummond claimed, a political intrigue, manufactured from scratch by the police subdelegate of Arraial (a Conservative partisan named Joaquim Maximiano Pestana, supposedly known for his "rash and arbitrary acts").[61] Pestana aimed to damage Dr. Cardim, who was his political and personal enemy. According to Drummond, when Dr. Cardim found Anísia in his home, he had fulfilled

[60] For comparison, see S. Caulfield, *In Defense*.

[61] Pestana left the *subdelegacia* (subdelegation) of Poço de Panela shortly after, when he was appointed first *supplente* (alternate) for the post of local police delegate in the newly created district of Apipucos (*Jornal do Recife*, August 31, 1883).

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his patriarchal duty, bringing her to the local police station. But Pestana had used his judicial powers as police subdelegate to strike at Dr. Cardim; Pestana allegedly threatened Anísia and her mother with jail, promised to marry Anísia to Manuel, and forced them to "swear on the cross" that Manoel had kidnapped and deflowered Anísia. For good measure, Drummond spent pages applying the minute "science" of hymenology to prove that Anísia had lost her virginity long ago, and he added (as a side note) that police subdelegate Pestana had "satisfied his own sensual pleasures" with Anísia over the course of the inquisition.

In the final phase of the trial, Dr. Cardim personally asked that the judge speak with the former police official of the region, a political ally of Cardim's named João Baptista da Ressurreição. In 1882, Ressurreição claimed, he had heard rumors that Anísia – then twelve – had been beaten and deflowered by her mother's lover, Severino. Ressurreição claimed that Anizia's grandfather had been driven to his death by this rumor, not only because of the beating and deflowerment but also because Severino was a freed slave, and Anísia's sexual union with him was thus an especially devastating dishonor. What's more, Ressurreição was later present at Arraial's public slaughterhouse when a young man named "Augusto something" ("son of Francelina, who lives in Arraial") started bragging that he had had sex with Anizia the night before, brandishing "a shirt with signs of blood and 'nodules' from that same copulation." It was also "public knowledge" in the neighborhood that Anísia's mother had found her in the act of having sex with the "caboclo José de tal," who lived on the lands of "Capitão Vianna," a local notable. In sum, as these facts showed, Anísia's "moral conduct was terrible … due, no doubt, to the bad education and bad behavior of her mother, who began to be Severino's lover even when he was enslaved, and consented to the concubinage of Anísia's sister with Severino's brother Damião, who was of his same condition."[62]

The judge acquitted Manoel, who went on to live his life unfettered. Joaquim Maximiano Pestana, the police subdelegate who had sparked the inquiry, a Conservative and monarchist as far as the record reaches, continued to provoke strong feelings. A provincial newspaper editor nearly murdered him in 1886, and he took part in an ostentatious ceremony freeing his last slave five days before abolition.[63]

[62] For an analysis of the racial dimensions of Anísia's case in the context of other deflowerment suits in late-nineteenth-century Pernambuco, see M. Santos, "Moças honestas."

[63] *Jornal do Recife*, October 19, 1886; *Jornal do Recife*, May 8, 1888.

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Dr. Cardim continued his illustrious career, both in Recife's courtrooms and as a prosecutor, orphan protector, and councilman in the nearby hamlet of Bom Jardim. In 1885, when famed abolitionist Joaquim Nabuco finally headed to Parliament after being denied office in two contested and corrupt elections, Cardim was one of hundreds of dignitaries who turned out as Nabuco took an elaborate victory lap by train through Recife's neighboring villages and towns.[64] In the hamlet of Bom Jardim, Nabuco personally pressed freedom papers into the hands of one of Cardim's household slaves as she served them dinner (one assumes the food kept coming).[65] Over the following years, Cardim was ostentatiously fêted as he freed multiple slaves, one of the last (rather conveniently) in February 1888 when the slave in question was being tried for attempted murder.[66]

Anísia and Antônia, meanwhile, disappear from the historical record. One would like to think that Anísia's racial and sexual humiliation was brief; that too much free choice and free movement did not permanently curtail her life as a free person.[67] Maybe she was the same Anísia Maria da Conceição who briefly flashed through the newspapers as orator for a carnival club in 1896 or who married Eustaquio Luiz da Costa in 1899. But she could also have been the Anísia who was arrested as a *gatuna*, or thief, in 1891.[68] The name is too common to tell.

Guilherme

Anísia Maria da Conceição ran against the limits of urban freedom, losing to the relational logic of the courts her sexual honor, her racial status, and the benefit of the law's protection. Guilherme, who had no last name, strained the confines of urban male slavery. On September 25, 1886, Guilherme appeared in the Boa Vista police station, accompanied by the famed abolitionist José Mariano. Guilherme had been whipped terribly, and his unhealed wounds had begun to turn gangrenous. Debates regarding the lash raged in 1886, in Recife and across Brazil. Mariano perhaps saw Guilherme's case as capable of opening new paths to freedom; just a few months earlier, Joaquim Nabuco had exposed similar cases of

[64] See C. Castilho, *Slave Emancipation*, p. 134 for a description of the celebrations.
[65] *Jornal do Recife*, July 4, 1885.
[66] *Jornal do Recife*, January 18 and February 5, 1888; *Diário de Pernambuco*, May 6, 1888.
[67] On women, movement, free choice, slavery, and freedom, see S. Camp, *Closer to Freedom*; K. McKittrick, *Demonic Grounds*; S. Hartman, "Anarchy of Colored Girls."
[68] *Jornal do Recife*, "Club das Enchadas," March 3, 1896; *A Provincia*, January 8, 1891.

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cruelty in the Rio papers in order to advance the abolitionist cause.[69] Mariano's bet at first seemed to pay off: the Liberal police delegate opened an intricate criminal investigation, carried out first in Boa Vista and then in São Lourenço. The story that emerged from the investigation ran as follows.

Guilherme was twenty-one in October of 1886, described as *crioulo* (Brazilian-born), one of the last few thousand slaves in Recife. His mother, Felizarda, may have been freed.[70] Guilherme – young, muscular, and born several years before the Free Womb Law – was sold to a new owner in early 1886. Felizarda lived in Boa Vista, and Guilherme's old master was a merchant in the city. Guilherme's new owner, Tenente Coronel Pedro Ozorio de Cerqueira, was a forty-year-old *senhor de engenho* from the suburban expanse of São Lourenço, part of a small group of ambitious planters aggressively pushing for centralized mills and foreign investment in Pernambuco's cane country.[71] He had recently purchased a plantation called Camorim, and Guilherme – who may not have ever cut cane in his life as an urban slave – was human fuel for that modernizing vision.

It did not prove a good match. Cerqueira showed some ambivalence about the terms of slave ownership; like most of the slaveholding class, he had already freed several people and promised to free the rest if they were loyal for five years. In the flux of Recife's last abolitionist surge, the enslaved could translate ambivalence into bargaining power, and Guilherme only departed for Camorim on the condition that he could visit his mother in central Recife every Sunday. Those visits stretched regularly to two or three days, and even when he was at the *engenho*, Guilherme refused to work. He complained that Cerqueira would not let him rest when he was sick, and he may have told his companions that he would like to break a knife in the belly of the overseer. In June 1886, perhaps having heard rumors of abolitionist clubs, safe houses, and secret routes to the free state of Ceará, Guilherme ran away.[72]

[69] For a summary of debates on the lash in Recife, see C. Castilho, *Slavery Emancipation*, pp. 141–142; in Castilho's doctoral dissertation he references press stories about Guilherme's case (p. 193).

[70] She is described by Guilherme's owner as a "*moradora* [resident] on the Caminho Novo" (the street later known as Conde da Boa Vista); slaveowners generally would not usually use that word (and omit an owner's name) for an enslaved person.

[71] P. Eisenberg, *The Sugar Industry*. The ruralization of urban-born slaves after the end of Brazil's slave trade in the 1850s remains considerably less studied than the interregional trade between the Northeast and the southern coffee regions.

[72] On emancipationist and abolitionist networks in Recife, see C. Castilho, *Slave Emancipation*.

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Like many runaways in greater Recife, he didn't go far. For a few months, Guilherme sought refuge in Recife, working odd jobs, some days earning nothing. He eventually fell into the protective network of noted abolitionist José Mariano, who lodged Guilherme and eventually helped him flee to a fiercely secretive runaway community in the "Matas dos Macacos," a jungled expanse that intersected with the Great Western rail line that ran northwest from Recife's city center. The place was likely near the site of the famed Catucá *quilombo*.[73] It was also close to Camorim, where Guilherme had been enslaved, and to a neighboring *engenho* where Guilherme was able to sneak under cover of night and convince two enslaved friends – one male, one female – to join him. All three stayed on in the Matas dos Macacos, working occasionally on plantations owned by abolitionist sympathizers, swearing to kill any outsider who penetrated their territory.[74]

But some slave hunters could pass as captives, and one such small-time *capitão de mata* (bounty hunter) began to frequent the *quilombo* in September.[75] He memorized the runaways' faces and left the *quilombo*, riding from plantation to plantation in search of owners who would pay for information on their runaways. Cerqueira paid, and Guilherme was captured, returned to Camorim, placed in the stocks, and brutally whipped with a five-pronged leather instrument called the *bacalhau*. According to Guilherme, Cerqueira ordered the whipping and watched it, refusing even to give Guilherme water as he bled through his mouth from the violence. Cerqueira denied the story, in testimony and in the newspapers, attributing the beating instead to a subordinate who had disobeyed his orders. Regardless, Guilherme and another slave broke free from the stocks, escaped once more to the Matas dos Macacos, and then found their way to José Mariano and the possibility of judicial protection from slavery's worst brutalities.

It wasn't impossible that things would go Guilherme's way. Just months before, a Recife judge named José Manuel de Freitas had sparked vociferous debate by refusing to apply punishment by the lash.[76] But the public prosecutor assigned to the case was Conservative and ruled that the

[73] On Catucá, see M. Carvalho, "O Quilombo," pp. 5–28; see also M. Carvalho, *Liberdade*, chapter 8.

[74] For a useful summary of contemporary *quilombos*, see F. Gomes and M. H. Machado, "Atrevessado a liberdade."

[75] According to Marcus Carvalho, it was not uncommon for Afro-descendant men to serve as slave catchers in early nineteenth-century Pernambuco (M. Carvalho, *Liberdade*).

[76] C. Castilho, *Slave Emancipation*.

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investigation be carried out in São Lourenço. The witnesses were fellow planters, sharecroppers on the Camorim plantation, employees of Cerqueira's, and the *capitão do mato*. Their written testimony repeats, practically word for word, the same far-fetched but exculpatory facts: Cerqueira had gone with his fellow plantation owners to a meeting at the Engenho Central that day and had instructed a worker to simply hit Guilherme with the *palmatoria* (paddle); unable to find the paddle, the employee – not the overseer – had instead whipped Guilherme; the wounds had not been deep, and neither Cerqueira nor his overseer was ever known to hurt his slaves. The wounds, Cerqueira claimed in the papers, had probably been reinflicted by Mariano's associates in order to force Guilherme's freedom. Cerqueira used his connections in Recife to order a new medical exam, which found Guilherme heavily scarred but cured. The police took him from Recife and sent him back to Camorim and to slavery. The prosecutor concluded that there had been no crime.

Another slave from Camorim was tried for attempted murder in 1887 after attacking the same "peaceable" overseer who had allegedly whipped Guilherme.[77] Whether or not Guilherme cheered him on – whether or not Guilherme survived his last years of slavery, whether he finally found work, protection, and freedom in Recife's streets – we'll never know.

Esperança

Esperança was freed in the city but never experienced liberty. Instead, she was confined and brutally murdered in an old *sobrado* on a prominent downtown street, the Rua da Aurora. The likely murderer, Dona Herculina de Siqueira, the daughter of a Liberal rural *coronel*, was probably the woman who had both inherited the girl as a slave and voluntarily freed her. Herculina strangled Esperança with her bare hands after ordering a male slave to suspend the girl from the attic beams as punishment for supposed theft.

The killing happened, it seemed, for no real reason. Esperança, fourteen or fifteen at the time of her death in 1883, had been a favored slave: *parda*, literate, some said spoiled. Dona Herculina had freed her *gratuitamente* (without recompense), though she had also sold Esperança's mother to the south of Brazil. Dona Herculina enslaved a few people – an elderly woman born in Angola named Martha, a younger woman named Luiza, a young man named Vitorino who worked *de ganho* (for

[77] *Jornal do Recife*, March 20, 1887.

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hire), and his brother, an eighteen-year-old named Felisbino who was, like Esperança, held in high esteem. The enslaved and servants alike lived on the *sobrado*'s attic floor, next to the kitchen; the lower levels were occupied by Herculina, two of her sisters, a few of their slaves and dependents, and three boarders from the nearby law school. It was a crowded place, full of married women whose husbands seemed absent, owned by an aristocratic family but decadent enough that Dona Herculina needed the boarder's rent.

Esperança doesn't seem to have been happy in Herculina's household. She grudgingly completed her household tasks, fought with Felisbino, sometimes spat at passers-by on the street. Herculina and her sisters frequently accused her of stealing, and one of Herculina's in-laws claims to have regularly heard Esperança scream from beatings so terrible that relatives asked the *senhora* to ease up. But Esperança, though free, did not or could not leave, even to join a great aunt who still lived nearby and kept attuned to her welfare: there is, in fact, no record of Esperança ever setting foot outside of the *sobrado*.

So it was that on October 30, 1883, a Tuesday, Herculina's sister complained that Esperança had stolen a bit of cloth. Herculina ordered Felisbino to punish Esperança, as she often did; he dragged her to the attic kicking and biting and suspended her from the crossbeams by her wrists and ankles. She screamed in pain and protest; someone, almost certainly Dona Herculina herself, strangled Esperança to stifle her cries, leaving deep fingernail wounds gashed on her throat. She died within a few hours. The doctor who issued the death certificate – a family friend of Herculina's – said the death had resulted from cholic and labeled Esperança "preta" (literally "Black," but connoting enslavement). Herculina then sent Esperança to be buried in a slave's grave.

That might have been the end of the story, were it not for a chain of not-so-chance encounters on Recife's dark streets. Felisbino, sent to get water from a public fountain, told Esperança's great aunt of the murder. She told a friend, and through connections the story made it to a combative abolitionist police delegate named José Climaco de Espirito Santo. He quickly tracked down Esperança's body at the morgue and verified the signs of her violent death. Luiza confirmed Felisbino's confession, detailing Herculina's orders and her role in the strangling. Herculina and a long string of her friends, relatives, and boarders told different stories, all exculpatory but so contradictory that Climaco refused to believe them. He took the very unusual step of imprisoning both Felisbino and Herculina, accusing both of murder: Herculina, almost uniquely for

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a woman of her family status, spent more than a month in prison before finally receiving a writ of habeas corpus after a vigorous press campaign. She gained freedom because no free person gave witness to the crime; Felisbino remained in prison largely because he was enslaved.

A judge tried both Felisbino and Herculina and advanced the trial to the final jury phase. But the case against Herculina gradually loosened. She disappeared, first claiming illness, then staying secretly with her sister, then fleeing from Recife in the middle of the night with two men dressed as if they were from the backlands. Rumor had it that Herculina had gone to her family property in Pesqueira. The enslaved Luiza, who had testified against Herculina, also disappeared, and various rumors circulated about her fate. Freed and sent to Ceará? Died of smallpox in the Pedro II Hospital? Spirited to the backlands? Dona Herculina's two other captives equivocated, casting blame on Luiza. The proceedings ground nearly to a halt. Finally, on February 20, 1885, a jury found Felisbino guilty and sentenced him to eighty lashes and four months with an iron around his neck. Herculina, still absent, seems never to have been tried at all.

The verdict sparked fury in the papers. On February 27, an anonymous comment raged at the perceived offense to Recife's honor and the integrity of its justice: who would believe that a brutal whipping could be administered in the "civilized capital of the Empire's second province"? "Can a tribunal be taken seriously when it condemns a machine, an automaton, a blind follower of orders, a miserable *mandatório*, when everyone knows that the audacious authority placed herself far from the law's action, and took refuge in places where justice cannot reach?"[78] Abolitionists – including the famed Ave Libertas society – immediately jumped in to fund Felisbino's appeal and seek his freedom. In that latter aim they failed.[79] But remarkably, on October 26, the judicial appeal succeeded, and the high court upheld the new verdict on December 17, 1887. Felisbino had spent years in prison and was still enslaved, but he would not be whipped and could be released to his owners in the midst of the last throes of abolitionism. The great abolitionist lawyer who achieved this feat? Luiz Drummond – the same man who had, a few short years before, together with his fellow champion of the enslaved Dr. Manoel Henrique Cardim, buried Anísia in racial and sexual dishonor.[80]

[78] *Diário de Pernambuco*, "Collaboração," February 27, 1885. According to Celso Castilho, this would have been an early salvo in a cycle of debates about the use of the lash in Pernambuco that stretched through 1886.

[79] On the Ave Libertas, see C. Castilho, *Slave Emancipation*.

[80] *Jornal do Recife*, October 27, 1886.

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CONCLUSION: AFTERLIVES OF A SLAVE CITY

What can we learn from Anísia, Guilherme, and Esperança about slavery in the city and about the city that slavery made? In relation to slavery, these cases sound cautions about any easy association of urbanity and full emancipation. Recife was, at least in part, a space of imagined and actual degrees of freedom, where enslaved people could sometimes attain greater control over their work, their time, their homes, and their bodies.[81] In the relative intimacy of homes and small workplaces, manumission seemed more attainable, and many of the enslaved worked autonomously, *de ganho*. Rarely, the brand of slavery itself could fade in the urban crowd, especially among men. All of these hopes and desires were evident in Guilherme's initial foray to freedom or in Antônia and Esperança's life stories.[82] Such hopes surely ratcheted higher during the heyday of Recife's abolitionist movement, amidst a cascade of high-minded speeches, performative emancipations, public homages to prominent abolitionists, emancipationist rallies and cultural events, and steadily expanding channels to freedom. As Celso Castilho and others have shown, activists often elided abolition and citizenship and claimed the public sphere as its amphitheater. It is tempting to grasp at the truly emancipatory strains of those movements and possibilities, to see in abolitionist-era Recife the roots of rupture and convergence on deeper, more egalitarian, and more public freedoms.

Yet our stories strip those hopes away, largely because they occurred in a city where personal power networks permeated the institutions of government and the notion that formal freedom denoted equality, autonomy, or anonymity was almost inconceivable. In Esperança, Guilherme, and Anísia's world, the intimacy of urban work proved deadly, autonomous employment was hard to come by, and runaways didn't stay anonymous for long. Degrees of freedom could be lost as well as won; a single sale transformed an urban slave into a rural one, formal freedom could connote conditions no different than domestic slavery, a string of racial and sexual slurs could turn a white daughter into a mulatta prostitute. Only a strong protector, who by his very presence eroded freedom's meaning, could ward against such fates. Similarly, the performance of emancipationism – or even abolitionism – often had little to do with full freedom, much less equality. One could imagine our protagonists rallying

[81] S. Chalhoub, *Visões da liberdade*; F. Filho, *Encruzilhadas*.
[82] For limits on this freedom and doubts about its scope, see M. Carvalho, *Liberdade*.

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for José Mariano, or whispering rumors about underground railways, or listening hopefully to the echoes of abolitionist rallies through open windows; we surmise that many like them did just that. But we know for sure that every one of our villains, from Cardim and Drummond to Cerqueira and Dona Herculina, had both personally freed slaves and taken part in the public performance of emancipation – ceremoniously manumitting favored captives to the rapt praise of local journalists, defending powerless slaves in court, denouncing the *barbarie* that slavery inflicted on owners and slaves alike, giving ostentatious speeches on Joaquim Nabuco's selfless dedication to the cause. In Recife, the ethos and logic of inequality encompassed both those who sought freedom and those who believed it was theirs to grant.

The limits of urban emancipation thus underlined freedom's precariousness. But Anísia, Guilherme, and Esperança's stories also reveal the deep and durable logics of an urban form that grew entwined with bondage. In idealized formulations – caricatures, really, but meaningful all the same – cities often represent a stage in a positivistic historical progression: from agriculture to manufacturing, from relational power to liberal governance, from unfree labor and patriarchal dominance to the triumph of market logics and an egalitarian public sphere. But in Recife, as in so many actual cities, – north and south – urbanity meant something quite different. There, the rural and the urban were locked in patterns of symbiotic circulation, and the city derived its power from its ability to serve as a nexus of rural economies and social relations. In Recife, private spaces anchored a discontinuous urban landscape; public space was simply the intersection of the private worlds represented by Dona Herculina's *sobrado*, Cerqueira's *engenho*, and Dr. Cardim's household compound – or even Guilherme's *quilombo* and Antônia's *mocambo*. Within and among those private spaces, everyone – slave and free – was enmeshed in relations of intimate dependency, and nearly everyone's social world was known or discoverable: anonymity was never more than a step or two removed from recognition. Intimacy served as the conduit for information and rumor, within and across social scales; unequal intimacies facilitated urban survival, mobility, and opportunity, just as they regulated passage through degrees of freedom. Relational logics permeated public institutions and shaped the public sphere, limiting liberal visions of egalitarian individualism even when that public sphere was overtaken by the tides of abolition.

What did freedom look like, lived in such a relational city? What did urbanity look like, forged with such unequal freedoms? Did the city that

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slavery made eventually dissipate, opening space for the liberal, egalitarian, individualistic "city"? Gilberto Freyre, writing between the 1920s and the 1950s, believed regretfully that he was witnessing just such a sea-change.[83] Recife, like many Brazilian cities, spent much of the twentieth century literally and figuratively razing its colonial and slavocratic pasts. *Sobrados* became tenements and then rubble; centenary trees made way for broad avenues; the spaces of wealth and poverty began to disentangle. In our own times, thirteen decades after the events recounted in this chapter, Recife has navigated both modernity and post-modernity: factories have grown and shrunk; boulevards have become thoroughfares; elegant belle époque avenues have fallen into decadence while shiny globalized malls have risen from Recife's mudflats. *Mocambos* have become favelas, Big Houses have become luxury highrises. Recife has protagonized some of the most progressive strains of Brazilian politics, from communism to agrarian reform, liberation theology, the pedagogy of the oppressed, and the right to the city.

But amidst all of the trappings of urban modernity, the building blocks of the slave city are still striking: banal private violence, racialized inequality, unequal intimacy, rural–urban continuums, the discontinuity of public and urbanized space, the powerful logics of relational and private power. These urban continuities – and their utter legibility far beyond Brazil's borders – suggest the need for an alternate modernizing narrative rooted in the slave city and the informal, relational webs that sustained it.

[83] This is most clearly argued in G. Freyre, *Sobrados e Mocambos*.

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