

FLEEING INTO SLAVERY: *The Insurgent Geographies of Brazilian Quilombolas (Maroons), 1880–1881*

On July 26, 1880, Benedito, the most notorious *quilombola*, or maroon, in São Mateus, the northern region of Espírito Santo province, Brazil, disappeared from the public prison in a flamboyant escape.¹ After his drunken guards fell asleep, Benedito placed a cleaning bucket on top of his cot and employed it as a stepping-stone in tandem with a rope made from his bedsheet to scale the back wall enclosing the cell. He leapt to the other side, opened the back door, and slipped out noiselessly. Rendering the situation even more preposterous to those who discovered him gone were the handcuffs that lay on the floor smeared with sheep fat, which he had used to slip his hands out without forcing the locks. The slave of a local female landowner, the 24-year-old had fled from his mistress's family years before, becoming a quilombola with a

The author would like to thank the editor and the two anonymous reviewers of *The Americas* for their comments. Research for this article was funded by the New York University MacCracken Fellowship, the Warren Dean Fellowship, and the Tinker Foundation. An earlier version of this article were presented at the African Diaspora Workshop Series at New York University (2008). The author would especially like to thank Flávio dos Santos Gomes, Michael Gomez, Barbara Weinstein, Sinclair Thomson, Tanya Huelett, Toja Okoh, and Jonathan Bogarín for their comments, and the staff of the National Archives in Rio de Janeiro, the State Public Archive of Espírito Santo, and the Cartório 1° de São Mateus for their invaluable assistance.

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS:

AN—Arquivo Nacional, Rio de Janeiro. Unless otherwise specified, all documents marked AN/CA are derived from the Appeals Court document series 20, #24, Cx 23, Gal. C. After the initial mention of the entire document title and date, subsequent citations include the name of the person interrogated, or the witness, and the folio number.

APEES—Arquivo Público do Estado de Espírito Santo, Vitória

BN—Biblioteca Nacional, Rio de Janeiro

CRL—Center for Research Libraries

CPSM—Cartório 1° de São Mateus, Espírito Santo

ARCHIVAL NOTATIONS:

Cx = Caixa; Mc = Maço; Fl. = Folha; Gal. = Galeria; Ser. = Serie; Liv. = Livro

1. The term *quilombola*, always ending in “a,” is both an adjective, signifying the condition of a maroon or fugitive slave, and a noun, denoting male and female maroons. A *quilombo* is an actual settlement of maroons; sometimes they are called *mocambos*. I use the terms ‘quilombo’ and ‘maroon settlement’, and ‘quilombola’ and ‘maroon’, interchangeably in this article.

growing list of well-publicized activities under his belt, including homicide.² The police delegate investigating the incident grimly acknowledged that re-arrest would be difficult. Not only was there a chronic lack of officers, but the quilombolas rarely acted alone. He was certain that Benedito would be impossible to capture because he was likely protected by a local *quilombo* (maroon settlement) in the city district—and possibly by many others.³

The story of Benedito offers a glimpse into the complex world of marronage, slavery, and freedom in the last years of slavery and the Brazilian empire.⁴ This article reexamines the practice of marronage by way of the quilombolas' claims on the spatial and social geography of late nineteenth-century Brazil. The primary goal is to investigate why and how enslaved women and men chose to flee and create *quilombos* in the last decade of slavery in Brazil, and how their choices expressed their evolving identities as free people in the new nation. Although it was long considered to be an "African," largely colonial-era form of slave resistance that eroded with the creolization of the enslaved population, marronage as practiced by the São Mateus quilombolas was by no means a "restorationist" effort to preserve or re-create an African-based community separate from slave society. Rather, it was one in which the quilombolas sought to live as free agents while deeply enmeshed in that society's midst.⁵

2. The sources vary as to his exact age. The estimate of 24 is based on the record of his sale on January 22, 1872, which states that he was "more or less 16"; he would have been 24 or 25 in July 1880. CPMS Tabellionato Liv. 4 Fl. 90.

3. Aglínio Requião to Chief of Police, August 2, 1880. APEES Polícia Ser. 2 Cx 436 Mc 666 Fl. 38.

4. The only major work on Benedito and his enslaved contemporaries in São Mateus is by the local popular historian Maciel de Aguiar, who interviewed elderly former slaves in the 1960s and created a book out of their remarkable stories. See Maciel de Aguiar, *Os últimos zumbis: a saga dos negros do Vale do Cricaré durante a escravidão* (Porto Seguro, Bahia: Brasil-Cultura Editora, 2001). A brief scholarly article about Benedito's involvement in the 1884 slave conspiracy is Robson Martins, "Em louvor a 'Sant'Anna': notas sobre um plano de revolta escrava em São Matheus, norte do Espírito Santo, Brasil, em 1884," *Estudos Afro-Asiáticos* 38 (2000).

5. The scholarship on Brazilian quilombos and mocambos has a long and rich history. Early studies by scholars of the New World Negro such as Edison Carneiro, *O quilombo dos Palmares*, 3rd ed. (Rio de Janeiro: Civilização Brasileira, 1966), emphasized their counter-acculturative force, in which quilombos represented a total rejection of slaveholding society that made them guardians of a more "African" culture but rendered them ahistorical. These works also elevated Palmares into a quilombo paradigm that for many years overshadowed other examples. This culturalist view was echoed in Eugene D. Genovese, *From Rebellion to Revolution: Afro-American Slave Revolts in the Making of the Modern World* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1979), which saw maroon communities as restorationist and "pre-political" since they predated the Age of Revolution. Brazilian Marxist historians, including Clóvis Moura, *Rebeliões da senzala: quilombos, insurreições, guerrilhas*, 2nd ed. (Rio de Janeiro: Conquista, 1972), rebuffed these culturalist interpretations but still argued that only by placing themselves outside the structures of a slave-based economy could quilombos exert any influence on its transformation and undoing. More nuanced analyses about quilombos, their intent, and their relationship to the larger society emerged with Stuart Schwartz's landmark discovery of a list of demands authored by a group of quilombolas in late colonial Bahia: Stuart B. Schwartz, "Resistance and Accommodation in Eighteenth-Century Brazil: The Slaves' View of Slavery," *Hispanic American Historical Review* 57:1 (1977); this was followed by the equally important "Rethinking Palmares: Slave Resistance in Colonial Brazil," in *Slaves, Peasants, and Rebels: Reconsidering Brazilian Slavery* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1992). The collection *Liberdade por um fio: história dos quilombos no Brasil* (São Paulo: Companhia das Letras, 1996), edited by two of Brazil's leading historians on slavery, João José Reis and Flávio dos

Through these avenues of inquiry, the article also examines how marronage was intertwined with a key phenomenon of nineteenth-century Brazilian nation-building that has received little attention: internal colonization. Though far removed from the indigenous territories of the Amazon, São Mateus and its surrounding hinterland had been a refuge for the indigenous and for small groups of African-descended people during much of the colonial period.⁶ Circumstances changed in the postcolonial era when the region became the locus of aggressive development spearheaded by government agents and individual fortune-seekers. The national elite blamed the region's largely black and indigenous population for its alleged backwardness and justified its colonization in the name of progress. Its economy, however, remained highly dependent on slave labor late into the nineteenth century owing to a chronic labor shortage, and slaveholders steadfastly opposed abolition even as the rest of the nation was forced to acknowledge its impending reality. Amid intense conflicts over the control of Brazil's fast-vanishing hinterlands, the enslaved fled their masters and created quilombos. Government-authorized expeditions targeted quilombos and "hostile" Indian groups repeatedly throughout the nineteenth century, and fleeing slaves had to contend with masters, Indians, missionaries, and settlers. At the heart of these clashes was the question of who had a claim on the Brazilian nation, and on what terms.

The São Mateus quilombolas confronted the exclusion from citizenship experienced by enslaved people throughout postcolonial Brazil, and they had little opportunity to escape legally from slavery even late into the century, given the staunch proslavery interests in the region and the diminishing hinterland into which to disappear. They thus decided to flee *into* São Mateus, rather than away from it, by living as de facto free people within the social and spatial geography of the region in which they were legally enslaved, in a practice I call "insurgent geographies."

Santos Gomes, is essential to any reader interested in recent directions in the study of quilombos from a multidisciplinary perspective. Gomes' innovative work presents quilombolas as enmeshed within the very fabric of slave society and focuses on the web of social relations through which they challenged slave society from within. While he engages with the idea of quilombolas and quasi-citizenship, gender does not figure prominently in his analyses. Of his numerous publications, some notable examples are Flávio dos Santos Gomes, *Histórias de quilombolas: mocambos e comunidades de senzalas no Rio de Janeiro, século XIX* (Rio de Janeiro: Arquivo Nacional, 1995), which also provides an excellent historiographic analysis on pp. 17–39; *A Hidra e os pântanos: mocambos, quilombos e comunidades de fugitivos no Brasil (séculos XVII–XIX)* (São Paulo: Polis: UNESP, 2005). Also relevant to quilombo studies is the recent work on present-day *remanescentes de quilombolas* (quilombo descendants) that interrogates the relationship between history, memory, and contemporary identities, the most notable being Jan Hoffman French, *Legalizing Identities: Becoming Black or Indian in Brazil's Northeast* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2009).

6. For the history of the adjacent region of northern Minas Gerais as a "safe haven" for indigenous and some African-descended people in the colonial period, and its unraveling beginning in the mid-eighteenth century, see Hal Langfur, *The Forbidden Lands: Colonial Identity, Frontier Violence, and the Persistence of Brazil's Eastern Indians, 1750–1830* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 2006).

As such, for the quilombolas, marronage signified not only an act of slave resistance, but also a political expression. In the face of the postcolonial Brazilian government's social and spatial "subalternizations and marginalizations" of the hinterlands and its people, the quilombolas' decision to live and act as free agents with the rights of citizens cannot be appreciated under the rubric of slave resistance alone.⁷ While few scholars today would argue that marronage was a "pre-political" act, circumscribing it within the field of master-slave relations does not sufficiently recognize its larger significance as a political expression of citizenship against a nation-building project that was premised on the territorial and social subjugation of the hinterlands and their enslaved residents.⁸

This article is based on the testimonies of 11 Brazilian female and male quilombolas who were Benedito's peers, and on related sources that involve more than 50 of their suspected collaborators and neighbors. The testimonies provide insight into their daily lives with a vividness of detail rare to accounts of marronage, not only in Brazil but throughout the Americas.⁹ The article begins by

7. Mabel Moraña, Enrique D. Dussel, and Carlos A. Jáuregui, *Coloniality at Large: Latin America and the Postcolonial Debate* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2008), p. 9.

8. My understanding of popular politics is inspired by Latin Americanists such as Steve Stern and Gil Joseph, who have engaged with peasant consciousness and peasant politics, as well as by Robin Kelley's work on African American working-class politics, which he argues is "not separate from lived experience or the imaginary world of what is possible; to the contrary, politics is about these things." He moreover "reject[s] the tendency to dichotomize people's lives, to assume that clear-cut 'political' motivations exist separately from issues of economic well-being, safety, pleasure, cultural expression, sexuality, freedom of mobility, and other facets of daily life." Such an approach helps us understand quilombola and slave politics as rooted in their lives under slavery, which in turn informed their ideas about proto-citizenship. See Steve J. Stern, "New Approaches to the Study of Peasant Rebellion and Consciousness: Implications of the Andean Experience," in *Resistance, Rebellion, and Consciousness in the Andean Peasant World, 18th to 20th Centuries*, ed. Steve J. Stern (Madison: University of Wisconsin, 1987); Gilbert M. Joseph, "On the Trail of Latin American Bandits: A Reexamination of Peasant Resistance," *Latin American Research Review* 25:3 (1990); and Robin D. G. Kelley, *Race Rebels: Culture, Politics, and the Black Working Class* (New York: The Free Press, distributed by Simon & Schuster, 1996). The quote is from p. 9. Laurent Dubois, *A Colony of Citizens: Revolution & Slave Emancipation in the French Caribbean, 1787–1804* (Chapel Hill: Published for the Omohundro Institute of Early American History and Culture, Williamsburg, Va., by the University of North Carolina Press, 2004), is the most elegant discussion of slaves as political actors in the Age of Revolution; an important counterpoint focusing on royalism in the same period is Marcela Echeverri, "Popular Royalists, Empire, and Politics in Southwestern New Granada, 1809–1819," *Hispanic American Historical Review* 91:2 (2011).

9. My gratitude goes to Flávio dos Santos Gomes for informing me about these sources. Regarding their analysis in this chapter, I recognize that slave testimonies are almost without exception created in a climate of terror and coercion, engendering what Aisha Finch has called an "archive of violence." Whoever utilizes such sources must account for the fear and need for self-protection that underlay the words of the individuals subject to interrogation. Finch recognizes the difficulties of utilizing slave testimonies, yet offers a compelling argument for their use; A. Finch, "Insurgency at the Crossroads: Cuban Slaves and the Conspiracy of La Escalera, 1841–1844" (Ph.D. diss., New York University, 2007). Such circumstances notwithstanding, these testimonies offer rare, invaluable personal narratives by men and women quilombolas for whom such written records remain virtually nonexistent, especially given that Brazil, like many of the other slave societies in the African Diaspora outside of the United States, does not have a tradition of slave narratives. The testimonies are undoubtedly filtered through the lexicon of the authorities and the scribe, but I have decided to treat the language as much as possible as that of the quilombolas and slaves themselves, albeit through my own translation into English. Dismissing these testimonies for their unreliability will only compound the violence to which the enslaved have already been subject. The quilombolas arrested by the police in August 1881 were

exploring the highly complex and contradictory social and economic networks that bound quilombolas, slaves, freedpeople, and slaveholders together. These networks were essential to the quilombolas' insurgent geographies, which they wove by fleeing into São Mateus. The article then presents the contingent nature of quilombos, focusing on the variety of motivations and internal tensions that belied their apparent unity, in order to delineate the relationship between individual goals and a larger maroon politics. The final section focuses on the gendered aspects of marronage and freedom through the specific experiences of women quilombolas, who have received comparatively little attention in the historiography. The article ultimately investigates how enslaved people employed marronage as a political practice to stake their own claims on Brazil's postcolonial terrain.

A COASTAL HINTERLAND

São Mateus and the neighboring *comarca* (judicial district) of Barra de São Mateus, today encompassing a quiet coastal town and a small city upriver in the northernmost region of Espírito Santo province, at the border of southern Bahia and northern Minas Gerais, became a commercial entrepôt beginning in the second half of the eighteenth century, as it was auspiciously located midway between the principal ports of Salvador and Rio de Janeiro (see Figure 1).

The region was more closely tied both politically and economically to northern Minas and southern Bahia than to the distant provincial capital, and even as the nineteenth century dawned São Mateus did not experience the economic and population growth that was then taking place in Brazil's centers.¹⁰ In 1824 the total population was 5,313, with the enslaved African-descended population comprising nearly one-half at 2,654. In 1872 the combined population of São Mateus and its neighboring parishes of Barra de São Mateus and Itaúnas was 8,170, including 2,793 slaves, 2,728 free blacks and *pardos*, 141 *cabôclos*, and 2,488 whites. These numbers did not include the significant unacculturated

initially questioned between early August and early September, followed by an interrogation in late September. Other testimonies are dated up to three years later, depending on when the individual was arrested and the date of the court proceedings. Testimonies of witnesses and suspected collaborators were taken between August and September 1881.

10. The region of São Mateus was annexed in 1763 by the then-separate captaincy of Porto Seguro, incorporated after independence into the province of Bahia, and was reverted to Espírito Santo province in 1822; however, it maintained its allegiance to Bahian causes long thereafter. See Yuko Miki, "Insurgent Geographies: Blacks, Indians, and the Colonization of Nineteenth-Century Brazil" (Ph.D. diss., New York University, 2010), pp. 34–36. The only English-language historical study of southern Bahia and the then-Bahian region of São Mateus is B. J. Barickman, "'Tame Indians,' 'Wild Heathens,' and Settlers in Southern Bahia in the Late Eighteenth and Early Nineteenth Centuries," *The Americas* 51:3 (1995).

indigenous population.¹¹ The low population density in the early nineteenth century was an effect of crown policy, which had sealed the region off from settlement during the colonial period to prevent the smuggling of gold and precious stones to the coast. Also inhibiting population growth was the highly recalcitrant indigenous population, who had often fended off prior settlement attempts. The Portuguese generically labeled these varieties of Indian groups as Botocudo, due to the *botoques*, or disks, which some of them placed in their lower lips.

In the early nineteenth century, the indigenous population in the captaincy of Porto Seguro, which then included São Mateus, was estimated to be 3,650. Their numbers would plummet over the ensuing decades through physical violence and discursive disappearance as they were forced onto increasingly smaller tracts of land and through the de-Indianizing efforts of acculturative regimes set in motion by settler expansion and government policy.¹² These frontier regions have been largely overlooked by historians of modern Brazil, who have overwhelmingly focused on the coffee regions of the center-south or the sugar-producing regions of the Bahian Recôncavo. Only recently has there emerged an important body of work focusing on regions settled primarily in the postcolonial period. These works point to the importance of slavery in these frontier regions that were not part of either end of the “black wave” and to the astonishingly frequent confrontations between settlers, quilombolas, slaves, and indigenous populations well into the nineteenth century. This research forces us to reconsider the privileging of selected regions and economies as representative of Brazilian history in general.¹³

11. The 1828 figures are from a report by Ignacio Accioly de Vasconcellos to Lucio Soares Teixeira de Gouvêa, “Mappa Estatístico da Comarca de Porto Seguro,” April 23, 1828, BN Manuscritos, 11,4,003 n.1. For the 1872 statistics, see Brazil, Directoria Geral de Estatística, *Recenseamento da população do Império do Brasil a que se procedeu no dia 1 de agosto de 1872* (Rio de Janeiro: A Directoria, 1873), microform. Pardos were a mixed-race category of people of varying degrees of African and white ancestry, and often indigenous as well. Cabôclos, first appearing in the census in 1872, included people of mixed indigenous and white ancestry, as well as acculturated Indians. Government and settlers alike had a deep interest in “disappearing” Indians, partly by discounting them in the census or calling them cabôclos, as this would make way for the seizure of “empty” lands that in reality were indigenous territory. A precise population count for São Mateus in the 1880s is unavailable; the total slave population of Espírito Santo in 1884 was 20,216, the largest concentration in the southern, sugar-producing areas of the province. Robert Edgar Conrad, *The Destruction of Brazilian Slavery, 1850–1888* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1972), p. 291.

12. The Botocudo were the best-known group, but there were others, including the Maxacali and Camacã. An in-depth historical and ethnographic study of these groups can be found in Maria Hilda B. Paraíso, “O tempo da dor e do trabalho: a conquista dos territórios indígenas nos sertões do leste” (Doctoral diss., Universidade de São Paulo, 1998). For an excellent study of the settlement of northern Minas Gerais at the turn of the nineteenth century, see Langfur, *Forbidden Lands*. The ideas of the frontier and the backlands figure prominently in both Langfur’s and Paraíso’s works. Another essential work examining Botocudo history from the late colonial period to the twentieth century in northern Minas Gerais is Izabel Missagia de Mattos, *Civilização e revolta: os Botocudos e a catequese na província de Minas* (Bauru, São Paulo: EDUSC; ANPOCS, 2004).

13. The *onda negra* or “black wave” refers to the internal slave trade from the Northeast to the coffee plantations of the center-south in the second half of the nineteenth century. Those on the receiving end were frequently alarmed by this new influx of slaves, who they found to be particularly rebellious. Frontier regions

FIGURE 1
São Mateus and the Surrounding Region in the 1880s



Source: Tim Parsons and Yuko Miki.

such as São Mateus, however, were “beneath” this tide and do not fit into this well-established narrative of Brazilian slavery. For the black wave idea, see Celia Maria Marinho de Azevedo, *Onda negra, medo branco: o negro no imaginário das elites—século XIX*, Coleção Oficinas da História, vol. 6 (Rio de Janeiro: Paz e Terra, 1987). Among the important works examining slavery and indigenous history in nineteenth-century frontier regions are Barickman, “Tame Indians”; Mary Karasch, “Slave Women on the Brazilian Frontier in the Nineteenth Century,” in *More than Chattel: Black Women and Slavery in the Americas*, eds. David Barry Gaspar and Darlene Clark Hine (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1996); Paraíso, “Tempo da dor”; Mattos, *Civilização e revolta*; Langfur, *Forbidden Lands*; and Mary Ann Mahony, “Creativity under Constraint: Enslaved Afro-Brazilian Families in Brazil’s Cacao Area, 1870–1890,” *Journal of Social History* 41: 3 (2008).

Undeterred by inhospitable conditions, migrants in search of new economic opportunities—and a small but constant stream of government officials—made several, if uneven, attempts at developing the borderland region in the decades following independence. As settlement grew, São Mateus became a leading exporter of *farinha de mandioca* (manioc flour), a dietary staple, to Bahia and the rest of Brazil. Properties were scattered around the outskirts of the town and into the interior, where some of the largest holdings occupied indigenous lands. Although slave labor was the main force behind agricultural production, Indians were also employed late into the century as their lands were lost to missions and settlers, roads and railroads, and as slave labor became increasingly scarce after the promulgation of the 1871 Free Womb Law.¹⁴ Slave rebellions and quilombola activity intensified after the 1871 law set the wheels of gradual abolition in motion. Although it is difficult to obtain a comprehensive view of the slaveholdings in São Mateus due to the lack of systematic, well-maintained inventories, in the first half of the 1880s they ranged from small holdings of just one to three slaves, to nearly 100. What matters for our purposes is that the larger slaveholders, whether owning 30 or 100 slaves, were intent on profiting from the economic development of the region and displayed remarkable cohesion when it came to suppressing any threats to their human property. They imprisoned and threatened the lives of the first abolitionists who appeared in São Mateus in 1884, and they tortured slaves who were found seeking abolitionists' help.¹⁵

In the 1870s the region's development accelerated, based on the twin pillars of agricultural growth and the securing of a coastal outlet for the wealth of landlocked Minas. The most prominent example was the 1882 opening of the Bahia-Minas railroad linking northern Minas to the coast at southern Bahia. The nation's leaders viewed postcolonial territorial integration and economic progress as being intimately tied to the colonization of the *sertão*, or hinterlands. In spite of its long coastline, São Mateus and its environs were considered an unruly backwater, due to the incessant activity of rebellious Indians and slaves that had constantly mired colonization efforts.¹⁶ The development of

14. On the development and economy of São Mateus, see Eliezer Nardoto and Herinea Lima, *História de São Mateus*, 2nd. ed. (São Mateus, Espírito Santo: Editorial Atlântica, 2001); Gabriel Augusto de Mello Bittencourt, *Café e modernização: o Espírito Santo no século XIX* (Rio de Janeiro: Livraria Editora Cátedra, 1987), pp. 56–71.

15. São Mateus does not have an official archive, and inventories are held by the local notary office, which does not have climate control or a designated conservationist. As a result, most of the documentation is unfortunately in extremely poor condition and the inventory holdings very haphazard. The intense conflicts between São Mateus slaveholders and abolitionists are discussed in Miki, "Insurgent Geographies," chapt. 6, especially pp. 323–353.

16. Although the term *sertão* is most often associated with the arid hinterlands of the Brazilian Northeast, owing to Euclides da Cunha's monumental *Os Sertões (Rebellion in the Backlands)* of 1902, the term was used more widely to describe unsettled regions, with a connotation of backwardness or lawlessness. Thus the

these lands was therefore a highly contested process that brought government officials, colonists, missionaries, quilombolas, slaves, and Indians into daily conflict while also engendering an intricate network of social relations.

These networks were at the heart of the quilombolas' insurgent geographies. The political dimension of this practice within the context of Brazil's postcolonial territorial colonization can best be understood in light of Edward Said's idea of a "rival geography," which describes the geographical practices of colonized people in their opposition to imperial conquest. Stephanie Camp adapted Said's concept to examine how enslaved people in the antebellum South of the United States creatively reconfigured the spaces of the plantation and slave society.¹⁷ Camp's method resonates with Flávio Gomes' *campo negro* (black field), a network of quilombolas, slaves, and free people in Rio de Janeiro in which a kaleidoscope of social actors engendered an alternate claim on a geography defined by slavery.¹⁸ By understanding the quilombolas' flight in terms of what Jonathan Crush has called the "hidden spaces occupied, and invested with their own meaning, by the [post]colonial underclass," this article argues that their insurgent geographies were a political practice through which they reimagined their lives as free people within the very geography in which they were intended to remain enslaved.¹⁹ The remaining pages of this article explore how they did this.

THE ENTANGLED WORLDS OF FREE, SLAVE, AND QUILMBOLA

On July 5, 1881, nearly a year after Benedito's dramatic prison break, a young slave woman from São Mateus named Marcolina was on horseback en route to

indigenous lands of the Bahia-Espírito Santo-Minas Gerais borderlands are often referred to in the sources as "sertão." The seeds of the "unruly" idea could arguably be traced back to the late sixteenth century, when the Indians and fugitive slaves in the area took advantage of lax control on the frontier to establish millenarian religious communities known as *santidades*. For *santidades* as a threat to colonial rule, see Alida C. Metcalf, *Go-Betweens and the Colonization of Brazil, 1500–1600* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2005), chapt. 7, and especially p. 223.

17. Edward W. Said, *Culture and Imperialism* (New York: Knopf, 1993); Stephanie M. H. Camp, *Closer to Freedom: Enslaved Women and Everyday Resistance in the Plantation South* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004). According to Camp, geographers have utilized Said's concept to describe resistance to colonial occupation. She defines rival geography as "alternative ways of knowing and using plantation and southern space" and its fundamental characteristic as the "movement of bodies, objects, and information." See p. 7 for a more general discussion about colonization and geography.

18. Gomes employs this concept, defined as the "social and economic, beyond the geographic, territory in which different social actors who are not limited to blacks or slaves, circulate," frequently in his works. A good place to start is Flávio dos Santos Gomes, "Quilombos do Rio de Janeiro no século XIX," in *Liberdade por um fio: história dos quilombos no Brasil*, eds. João José Reis and Flávio dos Santos Gomes (São Paulo: Companhia das Letras, 1996). The definition is on p. 19.

19. I follow Hebe Mattos's argument that enslaved people's ideas of freedom and citizenship expressed their notions of belonging to Brazil. These ideas were shaped under slavery, through a transformation of customary rights and privileges into laws guaranteed by the Imperial government; Ana Lugão Rios and Hebe Maria Mattos de Castro, *Memórias do cativo: família, trabalho e cidadania no pós-abolição* (Rio de Janeiro:

her master's farm just south of the town center, when she was startled by the sudden appearance of a black man in the road. Dressed in denim pants and a coarsely woven shirt with a rifle in hand, he approached Marcolina with "libidinous ends," threatening to kill her if she did not comply. Marcolina attempted to flee but collapsed when a bullet pierced her upper left arm. Her pained gaze captured the sight of two other men dressed and armed similarly to the first. Alarmed by her screams for help, the men ran toward her master's farm and disappeared. Although she stated to the police the next day that she did not recognize her assailants, Marcolina was certain that they were quilombolas. As news of the attack spread, the townsfolk began uttering the name of the most notorious quilombola in town: had Benedito struck again? Investigation into the attack on Marcolina brought into relief the highly complex networks constituting São Mateus' slaveholding society. The presumed social divisions between slave and slave-owning, slave and free, were exposed for their remarkable ambiguity; residents began whispering and pointing fingers at free individuals who were rumored to be helping fugitive slaves.

Marcolina had good reasons for identifying her attackers as quilombolas rather than common outlaws. She stated, as many others eventually would, that it was widely known by both free and enslaved people in the town that her master's neighbor, Francisco Pinto Neto, tolerated the presence of a quilombo on his very grounds that counted about 11 male and female members. Corroborating her testimony was an employee of the municipal council, according to whom the existence of the quilombo on Pinto Neto's grounds had in fact been public knowledge for years.²⁰ Marcolina's master, Bernardino d'Araujo, added that the quilombolas had established themselves on Pinto Neto's grounds at least eight years before; just a few years back, he had encountered two of them on the road heading toward his farm.²¹ The slaves on this quilombo were notorious for stealing livestock, manioc, and other property.²² Equally striking was the fact that such quilombos were hidden in plain view on the town's properties, and that the quilombolas themselves opted to create a settlement within the easy reach of local law enforcement. Why had nobody said or done anything for all

Civilização Brasileira, 2005), pp. 49–50. The quote, to which I have added the "post," is from Jonathan Crush, "Post-colonialism, De-colonization, and Geography," in *Geography and Empire*, eds. Anne Godlewska and Neil Smith (Oxford, England, and Cambridge, Mass.: Blackwell, 1994), pp. 336–337.

20. "Auto de inquirição sumaria do Alferes Antonio José de Oliveira Pinha" (hereafter Antonio Pinha), August 6, 1881, AN/CA, Fl. 21.

21. "Auto de perguntas feitas a Bernardino Alves d'Araujo" (hereafter Bernardino d'Araujo), September 20, 1881, AN/CA Fl. 102.

22. "Auto de exame e corpo de delicto na pessoa de Marcolina escrava de Bernardino Alves Pereira d'Araujo," July 6, 1881. APEES Policia, Ser. 2 Cx 71 Mc 264, Fls. 174-177; copy with slight alterations in AN/CA, Fls. 14v-18v; "Auto de perguntas feitas á informante Marcolina" (hereafter Marcolina), August 6, 1881, AN/CA, Fls. 22v-23.

these years? This section investigates how such a quilombo was realized through a complicit network of enslaved and free people—a network that enabled the quilombolas to exercise freedoms that eroded their legal status as slaves.

Arguably, the most problematic aspect of this case for the police was not merely the rumor that the quilombolas had been residing on Francisco Pinto Neto's plantation for years, and with tacit public knowledge, but that they also received his protection, and some goods, in exchange for the labor they provided in his fields.²³ These so-called “slave hiders” (*acoitadores de escravos*) were a constant source of headache for the authorities. Individuals who were discovered giving shelter, aiding, or employing the labor of fugitive slaves were aggressively investigated and severely punished, and yet slave hiders were hardly eradicated, much like the quilombolas themselves. The practice had a long history in Brazil, having persisted and even flourished in spite its prohibition in the Philippine Ordinances of 1603.²⁴ In fact, three men aside from Pinto Neto would also be accused of aiding the quilombolas in the same police investigation.

Slave hiding was a problematic practice that blurred the borders separating slave owners from slaves, free from unfree, citizen from outsider. Although a slave owner himself, Francisco Pinto Neto reaped financial gain by colluding with the quilombolas, who were legally both criminals and others' property. In doing so he gained an expanded work force that he did not have to purchase nor fully maintain; he was not unlike some local residents who employed acculturated Indians under conditions hardly distinguishable from slavery. Pinto Neto was a small-scale slave owner who only had three slaves. Quilombola labor exercised a powerful allure for such individuals with little economic girth. João Reis has noted a similar utilization of fugitive slave labor by manioc farmers in southern Bahia in the early nineteenth century, which contributed to tensions with other residents.²⁵

23. Antonio Pinha, AN/CA, Fl. 20; “Auto de perguntas feitas a Josepha, escrava de Americo Assenço de Barcellos” (hereafter Josepha), August 5, 1881, AN/CA Fls. 12-12v; “Auto de inquirição sumária de Liberato da Silva Catarina” (hereafter Liberato Catarina), August 6, 1881, AN/CA Fl. 23v.

24. On this widespread practice in Brazil, see for example José Alípio Goulart, *Da fuga ao suicídio: aspectos de rebeldia dos escravos no Brasil* (Rio de Janeiro: Conquista, 1972), pp. 55–64; Gomes, *A Hidra e os pântanos*. João José Reis, “Escravos e coiteiros no quilombo do Oitizeiro, Bahia 1806,” in *Liberdade por um fio: história dos quilombos no Brasil*, eds. João José Reis and Flávio dos Santos Gomes (São Paulo: Companhia das Letras, 1996), offers a very similar practice of slave hiding in the early nineteenth century, but in his example the quilombolas also had their own *roças* (kitchen gardens) for food cultivation, unavailable to their counterparts in São Mateus. Kathleen Higgins' study of eighteenth-century Minas demonstrates that many free people, despite the threat of severe punishment if caught, engaged in commerce with fugitive slaves, many of whom panned for gold on their own. Kathleen J. Higgins, *'Licentious Liberty' in a Brazilian Gold-Mining Region: Slavery, Gender, and Social Control in Eighteenth-Century Sabará, Minas Gerais* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1999), pp. 191–192.

25. Inventory of dona Maria Francisca Leite da Conceição, wife of Francisco Pinto Neto, CPSM Processos Box 96 (1886), Fl. 21. By June 21, 1886, Pinto Neto's slave inventory contains only one individual,

Equally convenient to Pinto Neto was the quilombolas' partial self-sufficiency, based on hunting and regular thefts of manioc and occasionally livestock from neighboring farms. There is no evidence that the quilombolas were allotted land on which to practice cultivation. Since frequent relocations did not permit them to grow their own food, let alone a surplus, they offered their labor in exchange for shelter, munitions, and food.²⁶ This reciprocal arrangement is evidence that the quilombolas, while not economically independent, did not lead an entirely "parasitic" existence, either. They enjoyed freedom from their masters' control

Ignacio, who appears in this article. He manumitted a woman named Marcolina in 1885; the last of his three slaves was João Carretão, who soon joined the maroons. Concerning such "senhores de poucos escravos" (masters of few slaves), typical among manioc farmers in the Bahian Recôncavo, Bert Barickman has questioned whether their lives differed radically from those of their neighbors who owned no slaves, arguing that in such cases, distinctions were blurred between peasant and slave-based agriculture. Barickman states that the ownership of a few slaves helped reduce, but not free, a farmer and his family from house and field work. See B. J. Barickman, *A Bahian Counterpoint: Sugar, Tobacco, Cassava, and Slavery in the Recôncavo, 1780–1860* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1998), pp. 152–153; on small-scale slaveholding, see Ricardo Alexandre Ferreira, *Senhores de poucos escravos: cativo e criminalidade num ambiente rural, 1830–1888* (São Paulo: Editora UNESP, 2005). For slave hiders who used quilombola labor in Rio das Contas, southern Bahia, see Reis, "Escravos e coiteiros," pp. 350–351.

26. Slave provision grounds have been widely studied by scholars of both the Americas and the Caribbean, the practice being particularly widespread in the U.S. South and the British and French West Indies. The general consensus among scholars is that the practice eased the financial burden of slave nourishment on the masters while giving slaves access to markets and property through surplus production. The enslaved also accrued the ability to negotiate for semiautonomous social space and time. Barickman has argued that in Bahia, although the practice existed—and even originated—in Brazil, it was not as widespread nor did it give birth to the lively slave markets ubiquitous in the Caribbean. On the other hand, Flávio dos Santos Gomes has suggested that quilombolas often practiced cultivation on their settlements and sold their produce in local economic networks, creating one of the foundations of proto-peasantries in late nineteenth-century Brazil, a view echoed by Walter Fraga. However, the sources analyzed in this article have made no suggestion of regular cultivation practices—though every quilombola and slave questioned, with the exception of two women, was involved in agricultural labor. A good overview can be found in the essays in *The Slaves' Economy: Independent Production by Slaves in the Americas*, eds. Ira Berlin and Philip D. Morgan (London and Portland, Or.: Frank Cass, 1991). For the Caribbean, see for example Sidney Wilfred Mintz, *Caribbean Transformations* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1989), pp. 131–250; Dale W. Tomich, *Through the Prism of Slavery: Labor, Capital, and World Economy* (Lanham, Md.: Rowman & Littlefield, 2004), especially chapt. 8, "Une Petite Guinée." For Brazil, see Flávio dos Santos Gomes, "Roceiros, mocambeiros e as fronteiras da emancipação no Maranhão," in *Quase-cidadão: histórias e antropologias da pós-emancipação no Brasil*, eds. Olivia Maria Gomes da Cunha and Flávio dos Santos Gomes (Rio de Janeiro: FGV Editora, 2007); B. J. Barickman, "A Bit of Land, Which They Call Roça": Slave Provision Grounds in the Bahian Recôncavo, 1780–1860," *Hispanic American Historical Review* 74:4 (1994); and Walter Fraga Filho, *Encruzilhadas da liberdade: histórias de escravos e libertos na Bahia, 1870–1910* (Campinas, São Paulo, Brazil: Editora UNICAMP, 2006). For the U.S. South, see Dylan C. Penningroth, *The Claims of Kinfolk: African American Property and Community in the Nineteenth-Century South* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2003). Penningroth takes the argument further by contending that the negotiation for time was of greater importance than that for land. Finally, it should be acknowledged that the fact that the quilombolas did not have their own cultivation does not mean that the practice was nonexistent among slaves. For instance, another suspected slave hider and African-born freedperson, Manoel Tapa, possessed a home, a manioc field, a farm, farinha-processing equipment, and livestock at the time of his death in 1888. While he may have accrued all his property subsequent to his manumission, it is possible that Tapa accumulated enough wealth to purchase his own freedom with the production of farinha while a slave, an avenue evidently not chosen by the quilombolas. Tapa was the ex-slave of São Mateus resident João Bento Jesus de Silveiras, along with João Carretão, concurrently Francisco Pinto Neto's slave and go-between, and he continued to maintain close ties with the enslaved; he also did not elect to move far away from where he had been enslaved. CPSM Processos Box 98, Inventory of Manoel Joaquim da Vitória, known as Tapa, August 2, 1881.

and a greater mobility than plantation slaves. At the same time, their semi-itinerant lifestyle and consequent lack of access to cultivable land obliged them to create labor exchange arrangements with slave holders, offering us a different kind of maroon economy than one based on independent cultivation and sales of their products.²⁷

Yet collaborating with quilombolas was a risky choice, for several reasons. First, although hiring them probably garnered Pinto Neto some security against depredation, he was literally arming fugitive slaves who resided in close proximity, making himself and his family easy targets in the event of an insurrection. It was historically not uncommon for slave owners to arm their own slaves in order to defend their property *against* maroons and other potential threats, but arming maroons was an entirely different matter.²⁸ Second, by protecting others' slaves, Pinto Neto was pitting himself against other slaveholders, although it was self-interest and not abolitionist sympathy that lay at the root of his actions. In fact, none of the testimonies reveal any antislavery sentiment, even as late as 1881. Regardless of intent, however, his actions menaced the basic division of slave and slaveholder, a threat that could not be ignored in light of surging antislavery activity throughout Brazil. Slave hiding would indeed acquire new meaning in three years' time, in 1884, when a burgeoning group of local abolitionists would be accused of harboring, and then being found with, fugitive slaves on their properties, including Benedito. These relationships, initially formed as opportunistic labor exchange agreements between the quilombolas and their employers, thus harbored the capacity to transform into explicitly anti-slavery movements in the turbulent 1880s.

27. The argument of a "parasitic" maroon economy relies on a presumed antagonism between maroons and planters and implies an overall economic damage maroons are assumed to have inflicted on their so-called victims. The example of people like Francisco Pinto Neto, who benefited from quilombola labor, obliges us to avoid such stark and historiographically constructed categorizations. For the "parasite" argument, see for example Stuart B. Schwartz, *Slaves, Peasants, and Rebels: Reconsidering Brazilian Slavery* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1992), pp. 108–109, although Schwartz himself recognizes the mutual economic relationships practiced in Palmares on p. 24. On the other hand, quilombos' independent economy and their commercial practices in Brazil are discussed in Schwartz, "Resistance and Accommodation"; Reis, "Escravos coiteiros"; and Gomes, "Roceiros, mocambeiros."

28. It is not known where Pinto Neto acquired these weapons. Arming slaves was a common practice throughout the African diaspora from the early colonial period, despite its obvious risks. Black slaves and Indians were commonly employed as fugitive slave hunters, and both were often sent to participate in domestic and international wars for a sovereign that hardly recognized them as citizens and subjects. Some took advantage of the opportunity to flee their masters and sometimes win their manumission. On the topic of arming slaves, see *Arming Slaves: from Classical Times to the Modern Age*, eds. Christopher Leslie Brown and Philip D. Morgan (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006). Higgins notes that in colonial Minas, slaves were commonly armed by their masters to protect the land and serve as bodyguards, and that when they fled, they took their weaponry along. See Higgins, *Licentious Liberty*, p. 190. A discussion of colonial authorities arming slaves and Indians against each other in Brazil can be found in Stuart B. Schwartz and Hal Langfur, "Tapanhuns, negros da terra, and curibocas: Common Cause and Confrontation between Blacks and Natives in Colonial Brazil," in *Beyond Black and Red: African-Native Relations in Colonial Latin America*, ed. Matthew Restall (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2005).

Third, the quilombolas negotiated and were remunerated for the labor they provided in Pinto Neto's fields, whether in cash, shelter, goods, or arms, a practice that destabilized their legally enslaved status. This was not the only situation in Brazil in which slaves received pay for extra work. In his study of the Bahian Recôncavo, Walter Fraga has shown that the enslaved regularly performed extra work on their days off, especially in the 1870s and 1880s, either in their own gardens or for hire. They considered such labor their right and took advantage of the opportunity to accrue the funds to purchase their freedom.²⁹ The practice was also present in São Mateus, where slaves customarily took their Saturdays off. What the quilombolas did was stretch this customary right until every day of the week became available for extra work, leaving no days left for their own masters.³⁰ Since they were not owned by their *hiders*, the quilombolas were able to negotiate their labor conditions in ways that were antithetical to their legal status as slaves, who by law were "things" that did not possess the capacity to negotiate labor relations.³¹ For example, one of the quilombola women recounted that she left her *hider* because of disagreeable work for what she considered too little pay, a clear example of what she understood to be her rightful share.³² By performing remunerated labor exclusively for their own gain, the quilombolas, though legally enslaved, were working as *de facto* free people.³³ Finally, one of Pinto Neto's slaves testified that he had seen Benedito on the grounds. Harboring the city's most notorious fugitive slave and criminal may have won accolades from some of the enslaved, but certainly did not make Pinto Neto popular among authorities and other slaveholders.³⁴

Enslaved collaborators were also essential to the quilombolas' insurgent geographies. The perilous nature of his endeavor made Francisco Pinto Neto eschew direct interaction with the quilombolas and relegate the task to one of his own

29. Fraga Filho, *Encruzilhadas da liberdade*, pp. 42–46.

30. I have yet to find sources documenting the number of slaves able to purchase their manumission.

31. A perceptive discussion of the conundrum posed by the existence of slaves hired out by their masters (*escravos de ganho*)—who were not the same as slaves who hired themselves out for extra work, but similar nonetheless in their capacity to negotiate and work for others—and its incompatibility with the liberal Civil Code is offered in Keila Grinberg, *Código civil e cidadania* (Rio de Janeiro: Jorge Zahar, 2001).

32. For more on *escravos de ganho*, see João José Reis, "The Revolution of the Ganhadores': Urban Labour, Ethnicity and the African Strike of 1857 in Bahia, Brazil," *Journal of Latin American Studies* 29:2 (1997). Barickman writes about the practice in rural areas; "A Bit of Land," pp. 670–671. Moreover, as Sidney Chalhoub has argued, an essential aspect of slaves' ideas of freedom was the right to their earnings (*pecunio*) that was included in the 1871 Free Womb legislation. See Sidney Chalhoub, *Visões da liberdade: uma história das últimas décadas da escravidão na corte* (São Paulo: Companhia das Letras, 1990).

33. "Auto de perguntas feitas a Rufina, escrava de José Joaquim de Almeida Fundão Jr." (Rufina hereafter), September 3, 1881, AN/CA, Fl. 81v.

34. "Auto de perguntas feitas a Ignacio, escravo de Francisco Pinto Neto" (Ignacio hereafter), July 30, 1881, AN/CA Fl. 7v.

slaves, João Carretão, who acted as a go-between to provide them with goods and shelter.³⁵ A fellow slave on the plantation, Ignacio, recounted that João Carretão was universally recognized by Pinto Neto's slaves to be the quilombolas' supplier of goods, gunpowder, and shot. João Carretão would eventually make the decision to cross over the elusive barrier of slave and quilombola entirely, joining the latter, fathering a child with one of the quilombola women, and deserting the farm, to his owner's likely dismay.³⁶ Ignacio also purchased goods for the quilombolas on occasion and had visited the quilombo twice, once to see his friend. There were many arms, he recalled. But rather than transporting the goods to the quilombo directly, Ignacio delivered them on a road connecting the town to the outlying fields. When asked why he had not informed the police of the quilombo, Ignacio responded that although he told his master, he did not tell the authorities out of fear of the quilombolas.³⁷

From the stories of João Carretão and Ignacio, a complex map of the networks tying the enslaved and the quilombolas begins to emerge. Since the latter worked for Francisco Pinto Neto on his fields, they must have spent the day side by side with his slaves on a regular basis. If they had not previously known each other, interaction in the fields would have generated—if not friendship or camaraderie—at least some sort of familiarity. As such, we must allow for the possibility that Ignacio's "fear" of the quilombolas was actually a subterfuge. Among the slaves of the *fazenda* (farm) were individuals who did not escape themselves, but willingly aided those who had, while others like João Carretão made the decision to join the quilombolas themselves. With limited access to foodstuffs, weapons, and other essential items, these go-between slaves—and the masters who allowed or willingly participated in such interactions—were essential in ensuring the quilombolas' survival. At the same time, daily interaction with the quilombolas gave slaves a tangible experience of life away from the master's control. Such fluid interactions attest to the porousness of the boundaries separating slaves and quilombolas as they were negotiated in daily interactions.

However, Ignacio's expression of fear, if he is taken at his word, insinuates that there were also tensions among slaves and quilombolas. Precisely because the latter were so close by and armed, slaves may have faced dangerous consequences for noncompliance with their demands. Marcolina's assault was the most telling example. Although she claimed that she was unable to identify her assailants, the close-knit nature of the enslaved-quilombola community may

35. Bernardino d'Araujo.

36. Ignacio; "Auto de perguntas feitas a Manoel da Silva do Espírito Santo, conhecido por Curandor," August 5, 1881, AN/CA Fl. 12v; "Auto de perguntas feitas a Manoel Bahiano, escravo de Dona Maria Benedita Martins" (Manoel Bahiano hereafter), August 8, 1881, AN/CA Fl. 25v.

37. Ignacio, Fls. 6v-7v.

have compelled her to lie out of fear of vengeance.³⁸ (The attempted sexual assault on her illuminates the gendered conflicts shaping enslaved and quilombola women's lives, a topic that will be addressed in depth later in this article.) Meanwhile, some of the slaves themselves suspected Benedito. Another quilombola named Rufina recalled that Marcolina's own brother had expressed doubts about Benedito's innocence in the matter.³⁹ Even some of Benedito's fellow quilombolas suspected him, believing he "had a bad attitude and was a rabble rouser."⁴⁰ Such manifestations of fear and suspicion are a reminder that the ties that bound slave and quilombola, while possessing the power to threaten slaveholding society from within, simultaneously harbored a smoldering discord.

In his own defense, Francisco Pinto Neto admitted that he was aware of the quilombo and some of its members but made no admission of collusion, opting to cast the blame on other suspected slave hiders. Reluctance to give up a lucrative situation and the fear of reprisal were his likely motivations.⁴¹ Some of the quilombolas that came to live on his grounds had in fact previously established a very similar arrangement with another farmer named Manoel Curandor, who did not own any slaves. The quilombola Vicentino observed that "given [Curandor's] crops and the time he spends hunting, it's clear that he wants the labor of fugitive slaves."⁴² The quilombolas were fully aware of the demand for their labor and leveraged it when seeking protectors. Like Pinto Neto, Curandor denied the allegations. These slave hiders clearly knew that public opinion would not look kindly upon their activities, so neither of them openly embraced their practice.⁴³

Opportunism was not the only reason that some provided shelter to fugitive slaves. Pinto Neto's neighbor in Ribeirão, the African-born freedperson Manoel Chagas, known as Cabinda, admitted to having aided the quilombolas in the past. He regretted not reporting his actions but revealed that "if he were to tell, he would have fallen into disfavor with the slaves' relatives and with the slaves themselves."⁴⁴ Cabinda's words express a sense of obligation to help the quilombolas who came to him, in a mixture of both solidarity and fear of censure simi-

38. Only later does a witness, Manoel Antonio de Azevedo (brother of Maria Benedita Martins, Rogério and Manoel Bahiano's owner), say that according to Josepha, Benedito himself had said that day, upon leaving the quilombo with Lucindo, that he had shot Marcolina. "Testemunha jurada de Manoel Azevedo," September 20, 1881, AN/CA Fls. 107-107v; Marcolina.

39. Rufina, Fl. 82v.

40. Manoel Bahiano, Fl. 26.

41. "Auto de perguntas feitas a Francisco Pinto Neto," August 22, 1881, AN/CA Fls. 61v-62v.

42. "Inquirição sumária do réu Vicentino, escravo de José Antonio Faria" (Vicentino hereafter), August 13, 1881, AN/CA Fl. 50v.

43. "Interrogatório do réu Manoel Curandor," September 24, 1881, AN/CA Fl. 131.

44. "Auto de perguntas feitas a Manoel das Chagas, conhecido por Cabinda," August 18, 1881, AN/CA Fl. 61.

lar to Ignacio's, if only because he had close ties with the enslaved community. Cabinda's awareness of the ties binding slaves and quilombolas led the former slave to open his doors to others in flight from captivity. Through his and others' stories we have seen so far, there emerges a picture of the complex social networks to which the quilombolas belonged, in which slave hiders, go-between slaves, neighboring residents, and sometimes even the very authorities (who, in Pinto Neto's case, knew about his arrangement but did nothing for years) were willing and reluctant accomplices. The handful of slave hiders arrested by the police in August 1881, then, may have been the tip of the iceberg.

As Flávio Gomes has argued, quilombos were historically dynamic communities forged not outside of but within slavery, communities that simultaneously transformed the world in which they all lived.⁴⁵ The insurgent geographies as a social practice, embodied by the relationships Benedito and his fellow quilombolas established with enslaved and free people in the early 1880s, were clearly based on existing communal ties and economic practices forged under slavery, whether motivated by camaraderie, fear, or opportunism. None of them expressed any explicit antislavery ideology undergirding their actions, but their very actions destabilized slavery from within. For the quilombolas to desert their masters and work as free people before their very eyes amounted to a rejection of their enslavement. While their arrangements with slave hiders did not represent the independent peasantries associated with post-emancipation societies, their forging of free labor relations from the very social fabric of slave society was a political act that gave concrete expression to their lives as free citizens.⁴⁶ Steeling themselves against such challenges to their power, São Mateus' large slaveholders would violently suppress the burgeoning abolitionist movement three years later, probably horrified upon realizing that abolitionism had grown out of the very networks that slave, free, and quilombola had forged under slavery.

FLEEING INTO SLAVERY

The previous section demonstrated that the quilombolas' social networks, though extensive, included many who were loath to admit their complicity. That stood in striking contrast to the actions of the quilombolas themselves, who made little effort to conceal their existence. Their settlement on Francisco Pinto Neto's property first became known to his slaves because they heard

45. Gomes, *Histórias de quilombolas*, p. 36.

46. Among the very rich literature on post-emancipation peasantries, some important examples include Mimi Sheller, *Democracy After Slavery: Black Publics and Peasant Radicalism in Haiti and Jamaica* (London: Caribbean, 2000); Rebecca J. Scott, *Degrees of Freedom: Louisiana and Cuba after Slavery* (Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2005); and Gomes, "Roceiros, mocambeiros."

voices singing sambas in the middle of the night, drifting across the dark sky to their master's house. Pinto Neto's son had also crossed paths with the quilombolas, including Benedito, on several occasions on his way to the fields. The quilombolas had settled just under a mile from the farmer's residence, not so close as to be in the immediate reach of his vigilance, but still within a short walking—and hearing—distance. This made it convenient for the quilombolas, go-between slaves, and even Pinto Neto himself on at least one occasion to interact directly, sometimes in the farmer's house.⁴⁷

How do we explain this carefree behavior? Scholarship on marronage in the Americas has documented flights of considerable distance to faraway, inaccessible locations, or to urban centers, where a growing free black population allowed fugitive slaves to blend in and pass as free. Such flights are contrasted with temporary escapes to nearby locations, commonly known as *petit marronage*, to see loved ones or as a negotiatory tactic with their masters. The São Mateus quilombolas included those who had intended only a short flight, but the resulting group became something quite distinct. With little interest in secrecy, these quilombolas set up camp on Pinto Neto's property for months or even years, acting as free people. In other words, they deliberately collapsed the distance that separated quilombos from the space of slavery by fleeing *into* it.⁴⁸ This reconfiguration of the geographies of slavery and freedom is at the heart of the quilombolas' insurgent geographies. Their spatial claims and social networks were overlapping layers of the same map, whose richness and complexity reveal the ways in which enslaved people reimagined their place in post-colonial Brazilian society. Although their choices were shaped by the region's geopolitics, their flight became a transformative force that destabilized these very configurations.

No clearer evidence of how the quilombolas gave new meaning to their geography of enslavement existed than the locus of their settlement. Living daringly close to Pinto Neto's residence, the quilombolas felt comfortable enough to

47. "Auto de perguntas feitas a Isidio, escravo de Bellarmim Pinto Neto," July 30, 1881, AN/CA Fls. 8v-9v; Ignacio; Liberato Catarina; Antonio Pinha, Fl. 20v.

48. Many works have addressed the relationship between marronage and geography, although the ideas of distance, inaccessibility, and isolation remain predominant. Aside from the aforementioned work by Camp, see for example David Barry Gaspar, *Bondmen & Rebels: A Study of Master-Slave Relations in Antigua, with Implications for Colonial British America* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1985); Jane Landers, *Black Society in Spanish Florida* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1999); Gabino La Rosa Corzo, "Subsistence of Cimarrones: An Archaeological Study," in *Dialogues in Cuban Archaeology*, eds. L. Antonio Curet, et al. (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2005); and Carlos Eugênio Libano Soares and Flávio dos Santos Gomes, "Sedições, haitianismo e conexões no Brasil escravista: outras margens do Atlântico negro," *Novos Estudos* 60 (2002). A preliminary discussion of flight away from and into slavery in Brazil can be found in João José Reis and Eduardo da Silva, *Negociação e conflito: a resistência negra no Brasil escravista* (São Paulo: Companhia das Letras, 1989), p. 71.

make loud music at night and crisscross the grounds in broad daylight. They were undoubtedly not strangers to the fact that sambas and *batuques*, the music of choice of the African-descended community, were regularly persecuted by authorities who feared they bred public disorder.⁴⁹ Making loud music—whether to praise a higher power or simply for enjoyment—was their way to stake their claims not just on the landscape but also the soundscape of the property. Although they were outside the immediate vigilance of the Pintos, their singing trespassed the invisible boundary drawn between slave and slave owner, encroaching upon the latter’s space. Even more brazen was walking across the fields before the eyes of Pinto Neto’s son. In doing so, the quilombolas made a mockery of what was in truth an invisible distinction between slave and free, claiming the geography for themselves.⁵⁰

At the same time, the quilombolas could not disregard the precariousness of their position. The attack on Marcolina upset the delicate balance upon which their protective network rested, prompting her master, Bernardino d’Araujo, to seize the opportunity to speak out after a long-standing disgruntlement. Back in April of that year, his farm had been attacked and his livestock stolen by three quilombolas whom he identified as Benedito and two of his fellows, Lucindo and Rogerio. The morning after the attack, Bernardino followed their trail, which led back—he claimed—to the gates of Francisco Pinto Neto’s property. He proceeded to notify the slaves’ respective owners to join him in their capture, but was unable to participate himself due to a “sudden illness.”⁵¹

The intimacy of the town allowed Bernardino to recognize his assailants. Although his relationship with Benedito and Rogerio is unknown, we do know how he was able to identify Lucindo: Bernardino was his former master.⁵² The farmer had purchased Lucindo from his previous owner around 1872, when the latter was a nine-year-old child. Lucindo would invoke this fact of his past to contest accusations that he was an accomplice in the attack on Marcolina. They grew up together and had a good relationship, he stated; he had no

49. In São Mateus, *batuques* were a regular object of complaint by the police in the 1880s. For example, the law of April 1883 expressly prohibited *batuques* within the city, likely built on existing frustration over such gatherings, but the law continued to be ignored by its residents, slave and free, leading up to and after abolition; Manoel Vasconcellos to Felintro de Moraes, September 22, 1887, CPSM Processos Box 97. On music, community, and its persecution, see for example the essays by João Reis and James Sweet included in *Diasporic Africa: A Reader*, ed. Michael Angelo Gomez, (New York: New York University Press, 2006).

50. I am indebted to Dylan Penningroth’s study of African American families before and after emancipation, especially his illuminating insights on how they made claims on public space and property ownership through both movement and speech. Penningroth, *Claims of Kinfolk*, pp. 98–108, 144–150.

51. Bernardino d’Araujo, Fls. 102-102v. This may be what we call an opportunistic illness. It was also a common excuse in rural northeastern Brazil for not having done something.

52. Lucindo had previously been owned by Caetano Bento de Jesus Silveiras, who presented the slave for registration on August 8, 1872; Lucindo sales record, AN/CA Fls. 186-186v.

reason to kill her.⁵³ The restless Lucindo was sold in June of 1877 and again in July 1880 to new owners, two local slave traders, but ran away again.⁵⁴ For Bernardino the most infuriating aspect of Lucindo's proclivity to flight was that he did not bother to escape beyond his former master's reach but was residing right next door with a group of fellow quilombolas on the grounds of his neighbor, Francisco Pinto Neto. Four years after his sale he was still there, living as a free person, and to add insult to injury, had the audacity to steal Bernardino's livestock.⁵⁵

The proximity of Lucindo's destination, combined with the duration of his flight, shows the remarkable workings of an insurgent geography in practice. The quilombolas not only claimed Pinto Neto's property for themselves, but chose also to flee extremely short distances from their owners. Indeed, none of the quilombolas fled far from São Mateus. This apparently counterintuitive flight pattern was a carefully deliberated choice, shaped by their awareness of regional geopolitics and founded on their conceptualizations of freedom. Safety was one of the main reasons the quilombolas fled into the town and its environs, owing to a network of other quilombolas, slaves, and known slave hiders. Such knowledge about spaces of freedom even within the overall confines of slavery, which Philip Troutman terms "geopolitical literacy," was fundamental to the decisions they made about where to go and who to include in their networks.⁵⁶ Within São Mateus their knowledge enabled them to possess a mental map of potential settlements and their nearby water and food sources, not to mention slave hiders and collaborating slaves, all vital knowledge for these women and men who were often mandated to relocate on a moment's notice.⁵⁷ The quilombolas' testimonies indicate that they never wandered about aimlessly, a practice that would have threatened their chance at survival. When they relocated, they headed to specific *ranchos* that they chose for their relative safety and proximity to food and water, repeatedly utilizing them during transit. Benedito frequently crisscrossed the Bahia-Espírito Santo provincial border, displaying a remarkable knowledge of the local topography and a vast network of protectors that enabled him to elude large expeditions for years. However, he

53. "Interrogatório ao réu Lucindo," March 2, 1882, AN/CA Fl. 175v.

54. Lucindo was sold in absentia to the slave-trading company Fonseca, Rios & Cia on June 27, 1877 for 1,500 \$000 (1,500 *mil reis*), and after its dissolution, to Domingos and Manoel Rios on July 15, 1880. CPSM Tabelionato Liv. 7 Fl. 304 and Liv. 11 Fl. 175.

55. Bernardino d'Araujo.

56. Phillip Troutman, "Grapevine in the Slave Market: African American Geopolitical Literacy and the 1841 Creole Revolt," in *The Chattel Principle: Internal Slave Trades in the Americas*, ed. Walter Johnson (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 2004).

57. The quilombola Francisca, for example, states that their various settlements were always made in places close to vegetable gardens, where they could steal manioc. "Interrogatório da ré Francisca," September 27, 1881, AN/CA Fl. 143v.

too always remained in proximity to the coast, cognizant of the potential dangers of the interior.⁵⁸

Indeed, venturing outside of São Mateus without extensive knowledge of the surrounding geography entailed high risks. It is essential to situate these slaves' flights in their particular geopolitical context in order to understand why these "frontier" regions were no longer an obvious safe haven for fugitive slaves, as they may have been in the colonial period.⁵⁹ By the early 1880s, infrastructural development had integrated the Bahia-Espírito Santo-Minas Gerais borderlands more than ever before into the national economy through the domestic export of manioc flour, coffee, and products from the Minas interior. Settlers poured into the hinterlands as new roads and rivers were cleared for transportation, jostling with Indians and missionaries for access to indigenous lands and labor. The Bahia-Minas railroad, whose construction was near completion by 1881, ushered in a new population of railroad workers and colonists just across the border who crowded the hinterlands, making uncharted long-distance flight an increasingly risky option for a fugitive slave. Furthermore, the larger slave holders with estates in the interior would have been more than happy to capture and return any quilombola they recognized from their fellows' properties. The hinterlands were therefore neither uninhabited territory nor a place for a fugitive slave to blend in among the free. Rather, they were teeming with people who were more than eager to use slave labor themselves, including newcomers unaware of the established practice of slave hiding.

Fugitive slaves also risked confrontation with Indians. In the early 1880s, ruthless expropriation exacerbated indigenous-settler conflicts. Earlier in the same year that the quilombolas were arrested following the incidents already described, a group of Botocudo had attacked and killed a settler and a team of construction workers clearing roads in northern Minas Gerais province, a little further inland from São Mateus. While "quilombola" and "Indian" are not categories that enable us to presume amicable or antagonistic social relations, it was highly likely in this extremely tense contest over territorial colonization for Indians to perceive both settlers and quilombolas as intruders. The quilombolas' presence in indigenous lands could also attract expeditions to their mutual detriment. At the same time, regional settlers impatient for land were taking matters into their own hands by raiding and murdering entire Indian villages,

58. Benedito's flight itineraries become more evident in 1884 when he becomes the target of renewed expeditions. See Miki, "Insurgent Geographies," pp. 299–313.

59. Schwartz noted the abundance of mocambos in the frontier region of southern Bahia in the colonial period due to lax military oversight, but by the late nineteenth century this was no longer the case. Schwartz, "Rethinking Palmares," pp. 105–107.

and may have done the same to a quilombo. Traveling great distances from São Mateus therefore did not guarantee greater freedom.⁶⁰

Given these very real threats in the hinterlands, familiarity with the terrain and people was essential. By carefully navigating among familiar places and faces, the quilombolas enjoyed a notoriety that gave them leverage over their potential enemies; by venturing farther afield, a quilombola would become just another fugitive slave, vulnerable to multiple hostilities. In other words, it was safer to be among people one knew, whether friend or foe. Capitalizing on the residents' fear, or need, of quilombolas like Benedito, Lucindo and his peers could brazenly flee to another part of town for months, if not years. That said, safety was not the only reason for their flight into São Mateus. The importance of maintaining kinship ties, land, and other hard-won customary rights was the fundamental reason that freedpeople often remained in locations where they had only recently been captives—moving away could signify the loss of those things. Their idea of freedom was defined not by moving afar (which is not to be confused with freedom of movement) but by the ability to live together with family and community in the location of their choice. These themes are especially salient in women quilombolas' decisions to flee and will be explored in the final section of this article.⁶¹

Just as the quilombolas working as free laborers destabilized the legal definition of slavery, their flight into the terrains of São Mateus began to erode the geographies of enslavement. Their flight was undeniably shaped by their awareness of the diminishing opportunities for freedom in the hinterlands. Freedom for the quilombolas, however, was meaningful only insofar as it was realized among their own community and on their own terms, and that was precisely why they remained. A bird's-eye view of São Mateus and its environs allows us to appreciate the larger impact of their insurgent geographies. Tucked throughout a landscape ruled by powerful proslavery interests and reaching as far as southern Bahia were safe havens among which the quilombolas lived and moved about as free people, assisted by a network of slave hidens and slaves. The very existence

60. There are snippets of evidence suggesting that maroons and Indians sometimes did join hands in attacking settlers, but the regularity is difficult to assess. *Annual Report for the Year 1881* by Manoel da Silva Mafra, CRL Ministry of Justice, 1881, p. 26; Eng. Lucrecio Augusto Marques Ribeiro to Dr. Manoel Buarque de Macedo, Minister of Agriculture, Commerce, and Public Works, May 27, 1881; Ministry of Justice to the President of Espírito Santo, July 26, 1881; and Marcellino d'Assis Fortes to Police Delegate of the Capital, August 8, 1881, APEES Polícia Ser. 2 Cx 72 Mc 265 Fls. 152-156. For *entradas* (raids) of local settlers against indigenous villages, also in 1881, see Miki, pp. 181-185.

61. Important works addressing the value given by freedpeople to kinship and land ownership include Penningroth, *Claims of Kinfolk*; Fraga Filho, *Encruzilhadas da liberdade*, pp. 245-260; and Rios and Castro, *Memórias do cativoiro*. Fraga also discusses how freedpeople, whose new status was precarious, faced increased risk of police repression and criminalization the farther away they moved.

of these spaces within the terrains of slavery weakened slavery's grip on the region. The quilombolas utilized marronage not to isolate themselves from Brazilian society but as a way to reimagine the very same geography as free citizens. We will now see why and how this remarkable community came together.

QUILOMBOS AS “CONTINGENT COMMUNITIES”

In August 1881, approximately a month after Marcolina was attacked and a year after Benedito's dramatic prison break, an anti-quilombo expedition nearly captured Benedito, who almost killed the expedition leader with a machete in a fierce tussle before disappearing among the trees. The quilombola had been traveling with four others, three of them women. They had been living with eight others on Francisco Pinto Neto's property until tensions between Benedito and his fellow quilombola Rogerio split the group in two. Traveling on their own, Benedito's group was soon attacked and disbanded, after which it was partially reconstituted, and again reconfigured.

These fleeting and frequently self-reinventing social arrangements oblige us to question what constitutes a quilombo or maroon community. Must it have a minimum size or duration? A unified political intent? Quilombos did not adhere to any paradigm but were what Walter Johnson calls “contingent communities,” constantly renegotiated through personal decisions, daily interactions, and changing material conditions.⁶² These communities in the making were brought together by family ties, friendships, and hopes of a better life, while simultaneously contending with internal dissonances born from the clash of individual needs and aspirations.⁶³ Failure to recognize these contingencies risks rendering quilombos as ahistorical, and the women and men who made them as prototypes of resistance, rather than human beings with varied aspirations and foibles. The São Mateus quilombolas, even as late as 1881, were not inevitably drawn together through a shared antislavery ideology but had a variety of motivations for flight, rooted in their daily experiences under slavery. These disparities make their decision to create a community together all the more remarkable; it is precisely this experience that allowed the quilombolas, with their individual goals and aspirations, to begin forging a larger maroon politics that challenged slavery from within.

The quilombolas' individual testimonies reveal that not every slave who fled her or his master to join others was driven from the outset by the explicit intention

62. This expression comes from Walter Johnson, *Soul by Soul: Life Inside the Antebellum Slave Market* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1999), pp. 72–77.

63. Kelley, *Race Rebels*, chapt. 2, especially pp. 39–40.

of rejecting or challenging the institution of slavery. For many, it was a tactic of negotiation, whereas others fled to visit loved ones or to protest punishment. As numerous scholars of slave resistance and rebellion have persuasively argued, goals were also contingent: living with fellow quilombolas could engender aspirations that were hitherto implausible for a slave who had intended to run away only briefly.⁶⁴ Thus it is not useful to separate categorically individual flight from marronage, which belonged to the same continuum.⁶⁵

The quilombolas whose paths converged on Francisco Pinto Neto's property were brought together by a remarkably diverse array of "push" and "pull" factors, rather than any semblance of a common cause—except for the desire to put an end to their current circumstances. They ranged in age from 20 to 50 and consisted of six women, seven men, and at least one infant (not all of them testified). One group, led by Rogerio, had first come together at the farm of another slave hider and relocated to Pinto Neto's after a disagreement broke out with the farmer. They included Manoel Bahiano, a slave of the same mistress as Rogerio, who fled to join his friend.⁶⁶ A woman, Gertrudes, had escaped with her toddler son close to six years prior in the hopes of finding a new owner, a plan that was never realized. After some tremendous hardship, much of it in solitude, she arrived at the slave hider's, where she was eventually joined by the other quilombolas.⁶⁷ Sheer exhaustion led to Hortência's decision to leave her master nearly two years prior and arrive at the same farm.⁶⁸ Vicentino had been put up as collateral for his master's debt and fled a few weeks afterward.⁶⁹

Others soon joined the quilombo at Pinto Neto's, guided by rumors that fellow escaped slaves had founded a settlement there. Rufina, age 22, ran away

64. The idea of freedom as a moving target, first proposed by Barbara Fields, has had a profound impact on studies of slavery, resistance, abolition, and freedom, including the works of Rebecca J. Scott and more recently Laurent Dubois in the United States and Sidney Chalhoub in Brazil. Barbara Fields, *Slavery and Freedom on the Middle Ground: Maryland During the Nineteenth Century* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1985); Laurent Dubois, *Avengers of the New World: The Story of the Haitian Revolution* (Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2004); Scott, *Degrees of Freedom*; Chalhoub, *Visões da liberdade*.

65. Barbara Bush makes this pronounced distinction in her seminal work, in which she argues that marronage (in the British Caribbean) was primarily the practice of male, "unseasoned" plantation slaves who ran away to establish "free, autonomous communities." Making autonomy the benchmark for a maroon community, however, obscures their much more fluid realities. Barbara Bush, *Slave Women in Caribbean Society, 1650–1838* (Kingston, Jamaica & Bloomington: Heinemann Caribbean; Indiana University Press, 1990), p. 63.

66. Manoel Bahiano, Fl. 25.

67. "Interrogatório feito á ré Gertrudes" (Gertrudes interrogation hereafter), September 24, 1881, AN/CA Fls. 140–141.

68. "Auto de perguntas feitas a Hortência, escrava de Dr. Raulino Francisco de Oliveira" (Hortência hereafter), September 3, 1881, AN/CA Fls. 78v–80v.

69. Vicentino's owner, José Antonio de Faria, put him up as collateral for debt twice in May 1880 and again on February 8, 1881, to creditor Major Cunha, and the slave fled sometime around March. Ironically, Francisca and Ricarda fled with hopes to be purchased by the same man. CPSM Tabelionato Liv. 12 Fl. 8v and 11; Liv. 15 Fl. 24.

from her master, the São Mateus police delegate. After spending several months with other quilombolas, she went her own way, but eventually rejoined them.⁷⁰ More than a year and a half into her flight, her mother Josepha, an African-born woman of around 50, decided to join Rufina and was led to Pinto Neto's by Lucindo, who she ran into during her wanderings. Her decision points to the importance enslaved women gave to maintaining mother-daughter relationships even when the latter was no longer a child, and was likely motivated by their belonging to different owners.⁷¹ Lucindo, who would be accused of participating in the attack on Marcolina, was in the midst of one of his habitual flights. He joined his fellow quilombolas at Pinto Neto's after fleeing in fear from his latest, demanding owner. Another mother and daughter pair, Francisca and Ricarda, had escaped their master together and come to town with the hopes of being purchased by a new owner, a well-heeled resident in the outskirts of São Mateus. While their flight was not a rejection of slavery itself, like Rufina and Josepha's, what mattered to these women was to stay together. Unsuccessful in encountering their potential buyer, Francisca and Ricarda were trying to regain their bearings when they were found by Rogerio, who the women later claimed had "tricked" them into joining the quilombolas at Pinto Neto's with the promise that he would take them to their destination.⁷² Their statement conflicted with Lucindo's testimony that every quilombola had joined the quilombo of his or her own volition, rather than through seduction or force, as the authorities presumed.⁷³ The quilombola Júlio probably joined a group here as well, while Benedito was somewhere on his own.

What is remarkable about the processes that brought these women and men together is precisely the lack of a common motivation. In spite of that, they created a community, albeit a fluctuating one, with the power to erode slaveholder power. Historians may be inclined to perceive an overarching and pre-existing antislavery ideology that united these quilombolas against slaveholders. This is not at all unreasonable given the context of the 1880s. However, their testimonies reveal a wide variety of reasons, some conflicted but none of them *explicitly* aimed at rejecting the institution of slavery (although it is possible they simply chose not to mention it). Benedito or Rogerio may have spoken more explicitly against slavery, but they did not testify as such. The

70. Rufina, Fls. 81-82.

71. Josepha, Fls. 10-11. Generally the literature that does discuss fugitive slave mothers describes them with small children.

72. "Auto de perguntas feitas a Ricarda, escrava de José Rodrigues de Souza Flores," August 9, 1881, AN/CA Fl. 32; "Auto de perguntas feitas a Francisca, escrava de José Rodrigues de Souza Flores" (Francisca hereafter), August 9, 1881, AN/CA Fl. 45v.

73. "Interrogatório ao réu Lucindo," April 26, 1882, AN/CA Fl. 201v.

closest instance to an assertion of freedom involved two quilombolas who attempted to “pass” as freedpeople (*forro/a*) in first presenting themselves to their slave hidens.⁷⁴

Still, all of the quilombolas were contesting their captivity in one way or another. In recognizing the diversity of flight-inducing factors, it is essential not to privilege clearly discernible antislavery motivations as being “more political” than the desire to join friends and family or to seek better conditions under a different owner. These apparently quotidian claims expressed the quilombolas’ consciousness as free people and were made at tremendous risk to their personal safety. While the quilombolas certainly had a network of people to protect them and acted as free agents whenever possible, they also confronted daily the harsh reality of persecution. Anti-quilombo expeditions escalated in the months following the attack on Marcolina, making all the more striking the fact that the quilombolas still remained in São Mateus. This was because the quilombolas’ politics did not exist outside of their lives under slavery but were formulated within it. Their desires to live with kin, to protect their children, or to ameliorate their working conditions within the very terrain that enslaved them were in themselves political acts through which quilombolas asserted their lives as free women and men, not property that could be beaten or sold, even if they did not articulate those ideas in the language of antislavery. Their insurgent geographies were expressed in their striving to realize these aspirations exactly where they lived and on their own terms.⁷⁵

Crisis befell the Francisco Pinto Neto quilombo after Benedito, followed by João Carretão, joined the group, bringing their total number to 13. Just five months later, the precarious symbiosis of farmer, slave, and quilombola was compromised when Benedito attempted to shoot Júlio, sending a fissure through the group. Tensions and internal divisions among the quilombolas had become evident, with some openly skeptical of Benedito’s character. Manoel Bahiano blamed Benedito and Lucindo for rampant livestock thefts.⁷⁶ Vicentino was confident that Benedito would be “ready to do anything bad because he’s lost.”⁷⁷ Rogerio disapproved of the disorder Benedito caused in their settlement, given its potential to invite hostility. Upon concluding that reconciliation was impossible, Rogerio gathered seven of the quilombolas and an infant and left Pinto Neto’s to relocate to another property.⁷⁸ In Josepha’s alternate

74. They are Vicentino and Rufina.

75. Again, the unitary vision of infrapolitics and “overt” politics is wonderfully captured in Kelley, *Race Rebels*, Introduction and chapt. 1.

76. “Interrogatório feito ao réu escravo Manoel Bahiano,” September 26, 1881, AN/CA Fl. 135. As we may recall, he and Rogerio also believed Benedito to be guilty of the attack on Marcolina.

77. Vicentino, Fls. 49-52.

retelling, the rift was caused by Benedito and Rogerio's battle over her daughter, Rufina.⁷⁹

The actual causes of the parting of ways may have been manifold. This incident illuminates that the quilombo community cannot be taken for granted, given the fragility of such an endeavor in the face of individual differences and suspicions manifested under strained conditions. Benedito's threat to shoot Júlio was the last straw in a brewing factionalism. The quilombolas' criticism of Benedito's risky behaviors stemmed from a code of behavior they had devised for each other and the outside world, cognizant that survival on their own was impossible. By attempting to murder a fellow quilombola, Benedito delivered a severe blow to the unity of the precarious settlement where the 13 of them had come together. All of the quilombolas committed thefts outside the settlement in order to survive, but those who sided with Rogerio in his contest for leadership against Benedito perceived the latter's thievery as reckless and as menacing to their survival. Once past the tipping point, their networks could no longer protect them, and persecution would follow, exposing the entire group to grave dangers and a life on the run. Exerting leadership among the quilombolas was also an act of masculine self-assertion, partly defined by the access to women, the possession of weapons, and at least for Benedito, a performance of bravado. Significantly, all of Benedito's critics were men. Sexual rivalries and tensions, then, may have contributed in bringing the two men to blows, and were thus another factor that would have threatened group cohesion.⁸⁰

Violence awaited after the group had parted ways. Multiple anti-quilombo expeditions, constant relocations, and scarce resources resulted in Rogerio's murder and the arrest of many others in August 1881. Such travails suggest the downside of what Clóvis Moura, in his seminal work on quilombos, argued to be their lifeline: mobility and guerrilla tactics. Landlessness granted versatility but was simultaneously grounds for vulnerability.⁸¹ Yet such instability did not negate the quilombo's significance. As we have seen, each quilombola had distinct motives for fleeing into the terrains of São Mateus. While they were not united by an explicit antislavery ideology at the outset, the most striking outcome of these events was that *none* of them returned to slavery until they were

78. Manoel Bahiano, Fl. 25v.

79. Josepha, Fl. 11.

80. The struggle over women in maroon communities was noted in Richard Price, *Maroon Societies: Rebel Slave Communities in the Americas*, 3rd ed. (Baltimore, Md.: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996), pp. 18–19.

81. Moura, *Rebeliões da senzala*, pp. 227–231; Rios and Castro, *Memórias do cativo*, pp. 195–204. In her section of the book, Lugão Rios demonstrates that landless rural populations suffered the most in post-emancipation Brazil. Itinerant, seasonal labor prevented them from amassing wealth and developing important kinship networks.

coerced, even if doing so would have saved them from further instability and persecution. A second notable outcome was that they strove to maintain a community despite all the odds. Fleeing in order to protect what was important to them, the quilombolas experienced firsthand a life beyond slavery. They forged a consciousness of freedom by creating a community and sharing their lives as quilombolas; going back seemed no longer a viable option. Freedom, then, became a collective political practice through which they remapped their lives onto the terrains of São Mateus. In the final section, we will examine how women living in enslaved and quilombola communities confronted unique challenges in their struggles for individual and collective freedom.

WOMEN QUILOMBOLAS AND GENDERED TENSIONS

Benedito's flamboyance threatens to overshadow some of the most valuable information these testimonies provide about the lives of quilombola women. The literature on female quilombolas remains noticeably sparse in spite of Brazil's prominence in maroon studies.⁸² The lack of sources is a primary factor, but equally relevant is the male gendering of marronage in the historiography of slavery in the Americas. Historians have generally posited that enslaved women could not withstand the harsh living conditions of marronage, and that they tended towards truancy rather than permanent flight because of the emotional difficulty of leaving children behind or the physical hardship of fleeing with a child. In short, research concludes that family largely bound women to the realms of their masters.⁸³ Yet the quilombola women of São Mateus fled in order to be with, or to gain a better life with, their children. Through their stories, this section investigates maroon politics as a gendered practice shaped by the specific ways in which women were denied, and struggled for, freedom in late nineteenth-century Brazil, a time when the fate of enslaved families was fluctuating tremendously. It will also look at the tensions between enslaved and

82. For literature on Brazilian quilombos, see n. 5 above. Women do not figure prominently in these studies, and when they do, they are generally depicted as kidnapping victims or noted only in passing. Maria Lúcia de Barros Mott, *Submissão e resistência: a mulher na luta contra a escravidão* (São Paulo: Editora Contexto, 1988), a book for undergraduate and general readership, offers a brief discussion of women quilombolas on pp. 42–48.

83. Such views have been posited for example by Camp, *Closer to Freedom*, chapt. 2; Deborah Gray White, *Ar'n't I a Woman?: Female Slaves in the Plantation South* (New York: Norton, 1985); and Bush, *Slave Women*, p. 65. Bush also discusses female maroons, but as fighters and spiritual leaders categorically separate from runaways. In their introduction to *Women and Slavery*, 2 vols. (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2007), pp. 8–9, the editors, Gwyn Campbell, Suzanne Miers, and Joseph Calder Miller, cogently critique the implicitly male nature of ungendered slaves and consequentially of the common categories of slave resistance (submission, flight, revolt) but reinforce the idea that enslaved women rarely fled. On women and revolts, Natasha Lightfoot, "Their Coats were Tied Up like Men": Women Rebels in Antigua's 1858 Uprising," *Slavery & Abolition: A Journal of Slave and Post-Slave Studies* 31:4 (2010), reinterprets the event by focusing on women participants and the gendered nature of revolt.

quilombola women and men to see how masculinity shaped male quilombolas' ideas of freedom, sometimes at the expense of women.⁸⁴

The ties binding mother and child were often not a deterrent but rather a powerful motivating factor in women's decisions to flee, regardless of a child's age. It is difficult to know whether it also factored into men's decisions, since none of the men mentioned kin as a motivation. Earlier we saw that Josepha and Francisca fled to be with their respective adult daughters, Rufina and Ricarda. The story of Gertrudes, who fled with her toddler son, highlights women quilombolas' particular struggles for freedom as embodied by their willingness to risk their lives for a better life with their children, even while suffering devastating losses.⁸⁵ Gertrudes' ordeal typifies the separations endured by enslaved people despite later nineteenth-century Brazilian laws that increasingly recognized slaves' rights to have and remain with their own families, and the extraordinary lengths to which these quilombola women went in order to keep their families together.⁸⁶

84. Works that have specifically focused on female flight and marronage include Sally Price, *Co-Wives and Calabashes*, 2nd ed. (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1993), which highlights the gendered tensions among Saramaka women and men; Hilary Beckles, *Natural Rebels: a Social History of Enslaved Black Women in Barbados* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 1989), pp. 164–169; and Barbara Krauthamer, "A Particular Kind of Freedom: Black Women, Slavery, Kinship, and Freedom in the American Southeast," in *Women and Slavery*, eds. Gwyn Campbell, Suzanne Miers, and Joseph Calder Miller (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2007). A brief but important work recognizing long-term female marronage, and motherhood as a factor, is Doreya Gómez Véliz, "Algunas reflexiones sobre el cimarronaje femenino en Cuba," in *Conferencia Internacional Presencia de Africa en America*, eds. Antonio Núñez Jiménez / Comisión Cubana Conmemorativa del Encuentro de las Culturas del Viejo y del Nuevo Mundos (Havana: UNESCO, 1985).

85. Hortência was also pregnant while in flight, but the child she gave birth to died soon afterward. Rufina gave birth in May 1881, also as a quilombola, just a few months before her arrest. The fate of her child is unknown. Interrogatório feito á ré Hortência," September 24, 1881, AN/CA Fl. 124; "Autos de perguntas feitas á Tereza Maria de Jesus," August 6, 1881, AN/CA Fl. 53v. Of all the male quilombolas, we know only that João Carretão had a child, with Gertrudes. Since he was not questioned, we do not know whether his child or relationship with Gertrudes (her story below suggests they did not stay together) was a motivating factor.

86. As noted by Mahony and Slencs, after 1869, separating legally married couples and their children under 15 (later 12) became illegal. The Free Womb Law of 1871 declared the legal freedom of children born to enslaved mothers. Known as *ingênuos*, these children were placed under the "protection" of their mothers' owners, and often the latter opted to keep these children's "services" until they were 21. Mahony, "Creativity Under Constraint," pp. 643; on the Free Womb Law, see Camillia Cowling, "Debating Womanhood, Defining Freedom: The Abolition of Slavery in 1880s Rio de Janeiro," *Gender & History* 22:2 (2010), pp. 286. Important recent works on enslaved women, families, and strategies for freedom in Brazil include Robert W. Slencs, *Na senzala, uma flor: esperanças e recordações na formação da família escrava: Brasil Sudeste, século XIX* (Rio de Janeiro: Editora Nova Fronteira, 1999); Rios and Castro, *Memórias do cativo*; Fraga Filho, *Encruzilhadas da liberdade*; Mahony, "Creativity under Constraint"; Júnia Ferreira Furtado, *Chica da Silva: A Brazilian Slave of the Eighteenth Century* (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009); Flávio dos Santos Gomes, "Africans and Slave Marriages in Eighteenth-Century Rio de Janeiro," *The Americas* 67:2 (2010); and Cowling, "Debating Womanhood." Karasch, "Slave Women on the Brazilian Frontier," is a rare and important study of enslaved women in frontier regions (Goiás) in the postcolonial period. Diana Paton's bibliographic essay at the end of *Gender and Slave Emancipation in the Atlantic World*, eds. Pamela Scully and Diana Paton (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2005), pp. 347–351, offers an excellent discussion of recent works on enslaved women and gender in Brazil.

A 35-year-old woman who had spent over half a decade in flight, Gertrudes survived for years in the sole company of her toddler son by hunting and foraging in the forests. Her escape was motivated by the urgency to protect herself and her child from her master's punishments, and the hope for better conditions under a new owner. While not an outright rejection of slavery in the beginning, her decision was founded on the resolute determination to remain together with her child and break free of the circumstances that bound their lives to violence. However, being a quilombola denied her the legal protection to keep her family intact. Gertrudes' hopes for the possibility of a collective purchase of mother and son were dashed when a local resident illegally purchased only her son, a legally free *ingênuo*, thereby separating him from his mother.⁸⁷ As Mary Ann Mahony has noted, individuals who were not large plantation owners had little incentive to obey the 1869 law to keep slave families intact, since they relied more than others on the purchase and sale of individual slaves. Gertrudes was even more vulnerable to such legal transgressions in this instance, since losing her son appears to have resulted from an extralegal, direct transaction between her and the buyer.⁸⁸

We can understand the depth of Gertrudes' struggle to stay with her son in light of an earlier experience. Prior to her son's sale, a pregnant Gertrudes gave birth to a second child alone at an apparently abandoned manioc flour mill. She did so at tremendous risk to her own and her infant's life in the mill's ill-equipped and unsanitary environment. After birth, the quilombola temporarily left her newborn, only to discover upon her return that the child had disappeared. The mill, as she soon discovered, was in fact not abandoned but belonged to one of São Mateus' well-known slave hiders who had found the infant, whom he then refused to return to its mother. Gertrudes' child, unlike his mother, should have been legally free since he was born after the 1871 Free Womb Law—but then the child lost his freedom to a stranger. The tragedy that befell Gertrudes revealed the risks of treading the geopolitics of São Mateus society; although she happened upon a slave hider, the latter was no guarantor of shelter and aid. As such, Gertrudes' decision to remain on the slave hider's farm in spite of his open hostility to her presence signaled her commitment to stay close to her child by fleeing *into* São Mateus.

Gertrudes' resolve not to have and raise her children on her master's property, and her long-term decision not to return to slavery in spite of terrible losses, demon-

87. "Auto de perguntas feito a Gertrudes, escrava de Francisco José de Faria" (Gertrudes hereafter), August 9, 1881, AN/CA Fls. 33v.

88. Mahony, "Creativity Under Constraint," p. 643. Slenes has also noted that larger plantations in the Paraíba Valley tended not to sell off their slaves, so slave families had a greater opportunity to stay intact. Slenes, *Na senzala*, pp. 107–109.

strate how quilombola women understood their freedom as a right to motherhood. Freedom meant the control over their own bodies and reproduction—not just the freedom of the womb—and the ability to be with their own children. Gertrudes' actions thus bear out what Camillia Cowling has stated with regard to enslaved women in Rio: “The struggle for custody of children as part of the struggle for emancipation was first and foremost women’s battle.” Gertrudes eventually decided to cast her lot with the other quilombolas. She was found with a third child at her breast when an expedition arrested many of them in early August 1881. Even after losing two children, then, she fought to keep this hard-won right to motherhood as a quilombola who chose not to return to slavery.⁸⁹

Escaping the masters' control over their bodies and families was an important determinant in women quilombolas' quest for freedom. However, living with fellow quilombolas, while providing these women with a new “family” with whom to share their experiences, was not free of its own gendered tensions. A closer examination of gender relations among the quilombolas reveals an important side of the little-understood inner workings of maroon communities, and how women's freedoms could be circumscribed not only by their masters but also by fellow male quilombolas.⁹⁰ Labor was one example. All of the quilombolas worked, whether for a slave hider or for themselves, setting traps and gathering or stealing manioc. Women drew water while men served as lookouts. Gertrudes and Rogerio, for instance, planted cane and made baskets and other goods. However, when it came to stealing larger items like livestock, it was tacitly agreed to be the exclusive task of the men. Hortência testified that she had no idea where the animals came from.⁹¹

Thus, while women and men often performed separate tasks for their masters under slavery, the quilombolas themselves created and maintained their own gendered divisions.⁹² The male quilombolas deliberately kept certain informa-

89. Gertrudes, Fls. 33v-34v, and Gertrudes interrogation, Fls. 140-41v. It is unclear which child she had with João Carretão. For the quote, see Cowling, “Debating Womanhood,” p. 296.

90. Even scholars who have recognized the importance of women maroons have noted the lack of work documenting gender relations among women and men; see for example Flávio Gomes, *Palmares: escravidão e liberdade no Atlântico* (São Paulo: Contexto, 2005), p. 81; Hilary Beckles, *Centering Woman: Gender Discourses in Caribbean Slave Society* (Kingston, Jamaica; Princeton, N.J.; and Oxford, U.K.: Ian Randle Publishers; M. Wiener; and James Currey Ltd., 1999), p. 167.

91. Hortência, Fl. 79. The contention that the hard work associated with being part of a maroon community acted as another deterrent for women to flee seems not to have been an issue here. The only related complaint was lodged by Rufina, as seen above, who was more discontented by the compensation than the labor itself. This labor-as-deterrent argument is made by editors Gwyn Campbell, Suzanne Miers, and Joseph Calder Miller in their introduction to *Women and Slavery* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2007), p. 10.

92. One of the best studies on labor and gender under slavery is Jennifer L. Morgan, *Laboring Women: Reproduction and Gender in New World Slavery* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004). Stuart Schwartz's analysis of the quilombolas of Sant'Anna, mentioned in n. 5, also demonstrates their gendering of labor. Schwartz, “Resistance and Accommodation.”

tion from the women. Nowhere was this practice more salient than in the acquisition and possession of weapons. The men never left the quilombo without a rifle, which was probably the visual marker that allowed Marcolina to identify her assailants as quilombolas in the first place. While certainly important for self-defense, weapons possession was also a way for male quilombolas to assert their masculinity and bravado. For although the women faced equal if not greater dangers, they were prohibited from possessing weapons, let alone knowing where they came from. Francisca clearly remembered that “the *negros* would return with gunpowder and arms,” but “she did not know how they obtained them, because they were extremely reserved about it.”⁹³ Gertrudes and Rufina were equally kept in the dark. Vicentino’s remarks plainly reveal the attitude behind such measures. The women were not allowed to know what was going on, he recounted, because Rogerio did not in the least bit trust them with any information.⁹⁴ Apparently secrecy was more important than allowing women greater control over their own safety. The male quilombolas’ tight control over vital information on where to acquire certain sources of nourishment and weapons—information which would have allowed women more self-protection and mobility—limited the women’s access to resources necessary for their survival and made them dependent on men. This may have enhanced the male quilombolas’ sense of themselves as providers, expanding their own sense of freedom and measure of control over their environment (even though they may have fought for control among themselves, as seen earlier), but at the expense of female quilombolas’ freedom.

If the male quilombolas found the women so unreliable, why were they incorporated into the quilombos? The quilombola men viewed women with condescension while actively seeking them. Both Francisca and Ricarda squarely placed the responsibility on Rogerio for bringing them into his community. According to their testimonies he had deceived them, “feeding their hope” that he was going to help them to their destination but luring them to the quilombo instead. Yet the women stayed for months. Of course, mother and daughter may have been attempting to downplay their own agency before the police. A more obvious reason for the incorporation of women was to meet the men’s—and women’s own—sexual needs, the most brutal example being Marcolina’s attempted rape by her unidentified quilombola assailants. The sources are reticent regarding sexual relationships among the quilombolas. Gertrudes had a child with João Carretão, which we could ostensibly consider a quilombola family, but we do not know whether they stayed together. Hortência and Rufina also gave birth as quilombolas, but the fathers’ identities are not revealed.

93. Francisca, Fl. 46v.

94. Vicentino, Fls. 51v-52.

Benedito and Rogerio allegedly clashed over Rufina, but the testimonies do not hint at any tensions among the women regarding their access to men. Francisca and Josepha were 20 to 25 years older than the men and therefore sexual partnerships may have been less likely, although certainly not impossible. Still it is worth emphasizing that none of the women claimed they were kidnapped or otherwise brought by force, a common contention in maroon historiography. Rather, each woman clearly had her own reasons to flee.⁹⁵

Gender shaped the quilombolas' experiences under slavery and in flight. Enslaved women's freedoms were curtailed in very specific ways, first in their right to motherhood under slavery, and second in their relations with quilombola men, forcing us to recognize women's unique experiences in a practice that has been overwhelmingly masculinized. Family and children were far from deterrents but rather the very factors that shaped the political consciousness of women like Gertrudes, who decided to claim her right to motherhood by taking matters into her own hands. At the same time, living with male quilombolas revealed that their own masculinized ideas of freedom sometimes curtailed the women's own opportunities to live as fugitive and, eventually, free people. These tensions did not in any way negate the import of the quilombolas' conceptualizations of freedom, but they do oblige us to recognize the very real conflicts between quilombola women and men as they sought to forge a collective maroon politics.

CONCLUSION

In July of 1884, three years after the quilombolas were arrested, a rumor began circulating that Benedito, who had been missing since August 1881, was leading a group of quilombolas in an antislavery insurrection. Whatever the rumor's veracity, it was the first time that authorities had explicitly associated him with antislavery intent. What had changed? Benedito has not left us his words, but the political landscape of São Mateus and beyond had transformed dramatically by this time. Slave uprisings erupted all over Brazilian soil as abolition became a tangible reality in Ceará, Amazonas, and Rio Grande do Sul, while nearby in southern Bahia, slaves brazenly clubbed their master to death. In São Mateus, the first abolitionist society emerged the same year, with some of its members actively sheltering quilombolas. Although slaveholders retaliated with violence, the quilombolas had been weakening their grasp on power for many years.⁹⁶

95. A full discussion of Marcolina's case falls outside the scope of this article. She may have been a potential kidnap victim, but that does not explain why the quilombolas tried to kill her when she resisted. Perhaps Marcolina was hiding something from the police about her involvement with her attackers, or it may have been a performance of terror that could victimize enslaved women as much as free people.

96. These events are discussed in greater detail in Miki, "Insurgent Geographies," chaps. 5 and 6.

Quilombos have occupied a central place in Brazilian historiography ever since Palmares, but largely under the rubric of slave resistance.⁹⁷ The quilombolas of São Mateus certainly contested their enslavement, but that was not all. They employed marronage not in order to flee slave society but in order to challenge it from within by living as free people in its very midst and expressing the terms by which they wished to participate in Brazilian society. Long marginalized by the nation's elite and many historians alike, enslaved people in hinterland regions were not footnotes to the history of modern Brazil, but important political voices contesting a postcolonial nation-building project that created and sustained new inequalities, including the denial of citizenship to large segments of the population.

Alternately blamed along with the Indians for the region's backwardness and relied on for their labor, the São Mateus quilombolas in the 1880s saw little opportunity to gain freedom through manumission or long-distance flight. Instead, they collaborated with a network of slaves, slave owners, and free people to flee into São Mateus in the practice of insurgent geographies. Rather than originating as a community of individuals united under a common political intent, their opposition to slavery and their political claims to freedom evolved over time. They endured tensions born from differing ideas about freedom and experienced constant reconfigurations in their quest to establish a community. Freedom in turn was not a vague concept but rooted in real experiences under slavery, which in turn enabled the quilombolas to elucidate how they would live as free people. They did this by controlling and negotiating their own labor, remaining in São Mateus on their own terms in order to be safe and remain close to their community, and claiming their right to motherhood and family.

Emancipation did not arrive until 1888; these quilombolas began living as free people long before the law recognized them as such. Their undermining of slavery was precisely what prompted alarmed slaveholders to hunt them down. What I have depicted in this article contradicts the prevailing ideas of maroon communities as stable, self-contained, and explicitly oppositional to slavery. Nevertheless, these women and men were able to come together and forge a world founded on their aspirations as free people under highly restrictive, precarious, and often hostile conditions. In their own way, they laid the groundwork for undoing slavery's grasp on the region, a reality which would become ever more tangible in the years leading up to slavery's end.

*Washington University
St. Louis, Missouri*

YUKO MIKI

97. For more on Palmares, see n. 5.