

The botanist George Gardner and his impressions of slave culture in Brazil: Rio de Janeiro, 1810-1850

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Abstract

This article analyzes the English botanist George Gardner's trip to Brazil during the 1830s. After graduating from the University of Glasgow Gardner was influenced by his teacher and by readings of contemporary naturalists and set off for Brazil in March of 1836, arriving two months later in Rio de Janeiro. The article presents Gardner's impressions of slavery in Brazil, in an attempt to unveil the symbolic universe of a play he witnessed and described, which took place on a farm in Rio de Janeiro on Christmas night. By describing black slavery in its routes across the Atlantic, we compare this event with other similar happenings in Brazil and in Trinidad and Tobago.

Keywords: foreign travelers; slave culture; dramatic representation; Atlantic routes and communications; uprising.

From the end of the fifteenth century, the Atlantic world became the scene of intense movements of peoples, cultures, politics, and ideas involving the Americas, Africa, and Europe.¹ As part of the central network formed by these connections, Brazil was visited by travelers from around the world since its discovery. However, the historical transformations which occurred at the end of the eighteenth century and the beginning of the nineteenth century brought about a kind of rediscovery and revisiting of Brazil. These travelers came from many regions and ranged throughout all of Brazil's provinces during the nineteenth century, leaving detailed records on multiple aspects of the culture and social, economic, and political life in the country. Their writings, drawings, and paintings are some of the documentary sources that open a window onto the everyday life of free people and slaves in Brazil's farms and urban centers at that time. Nevertheless, it is important to remember that their judgments were almost always ethnocentric; in other words, they did not judge Brazil's inhabitants according to the values of the local culture, but instead according to what they considered civilized and produced in their own countries or continents.

From the American, French, and British travelers who visited Brazil in the early days of the Empire we have a variety of notes about the popular theater of those times which included dramatic scenes and plays, and information about the work of the actors and directors as well as the space where these performances took place.

We will address some of these records of slavery found in the diaries of travelers who passed through Brazil during the early decades of the nineteenth century. Slavery is one of the most important themes of our history, especially because of the influence Africans had in the cultural and ethnic composition of Brazilian society. The way in which travelers viewed slavery has been the object of careful reflection by historians devoted to this theme, most notably since the 1980s. Historical reviews have yielded significant results in decoding the written and iconographic discourse produced by travelers on slavery in Brazil.²

In this article, we will follow a similar approach, but we will pay special attention to a play put on by slaves in the province of Rio de Janeiro on Christmas night of 1836 on a farm owned by an Englishman. The scene was described and commented upon by the British traveler George Gardner, who remained in Brazil for about five years. Gardner was a scholar of natural history who studied at the University of Glasgow; Gardner focused on the study of botany thanks to his teacher, Sir William Hooker, who encouraged him to deepen his knowledge in this area (Gardner, 1846, p.2). Traveling to Latin America, which at that time was still nearly unknown in terms of the richness of its flora, was a way to help expand global scientific knowledge, particularly at a time of international disenchantment as the religious concepts of the world crumbled and ultimately led to a profane culture in Europe and the emergence of the modern empirical sciences (Habermas, 1987, p.1-11).

The enthusiasm stirred by reading naturalists of the time, including Cunningham and Bowie from England, Burchell from Africa, and Humboldt from Germany, was also decisive to Gardner's departure from Glasgow in March 1836; he arrived to the port of Rio de Janeiro approximately two months later. Gardner remained in Rio for around six months, touring the area surrounding the capital, meeting the influential people of the city, observing and commenting on the lives of slaves, free men, and the poor in the region, as well as collecting specimens of the local flora that were quickly dispatched back to England by ship. Once he

had explored the surroundings of Rio, Gardner traveled to the north of the province and the Serra dos Órgãos mountains to visit a farm owned by an Englishman named March, who he met in the city. After making some contacts and settling details, the two went to the mountains on December 24, accompanied by two or three families who would spend Christmas on the farm (Gardner, 1846, p.2-38).

The initial part of the trip was by sea, on a type of small schooner known as a *falua* or *saveiro* which the entourage hired by the day for a price of 18 shillings. This type of vessel was very common in the harbor and was essential to transport goods from inland to the city of Rio de Janeiro. On the return trip, they carried goods from the city to supply the owners with what they could not produce on the farms. *Faluas* had two masts with a large sail, and were generally manned by six black rowers and a helmsman who almost always was the owner or the captain of the boat. Rowing was heavy work, and the captain chose strong, muscular rowers who worked to a paced, melancholic chant.

March and his guests boarded at the Mineiros pier³ after noon, since this was the best time to make use of the sea breeze. The families were able to travel in reasonable comfort, sheltered

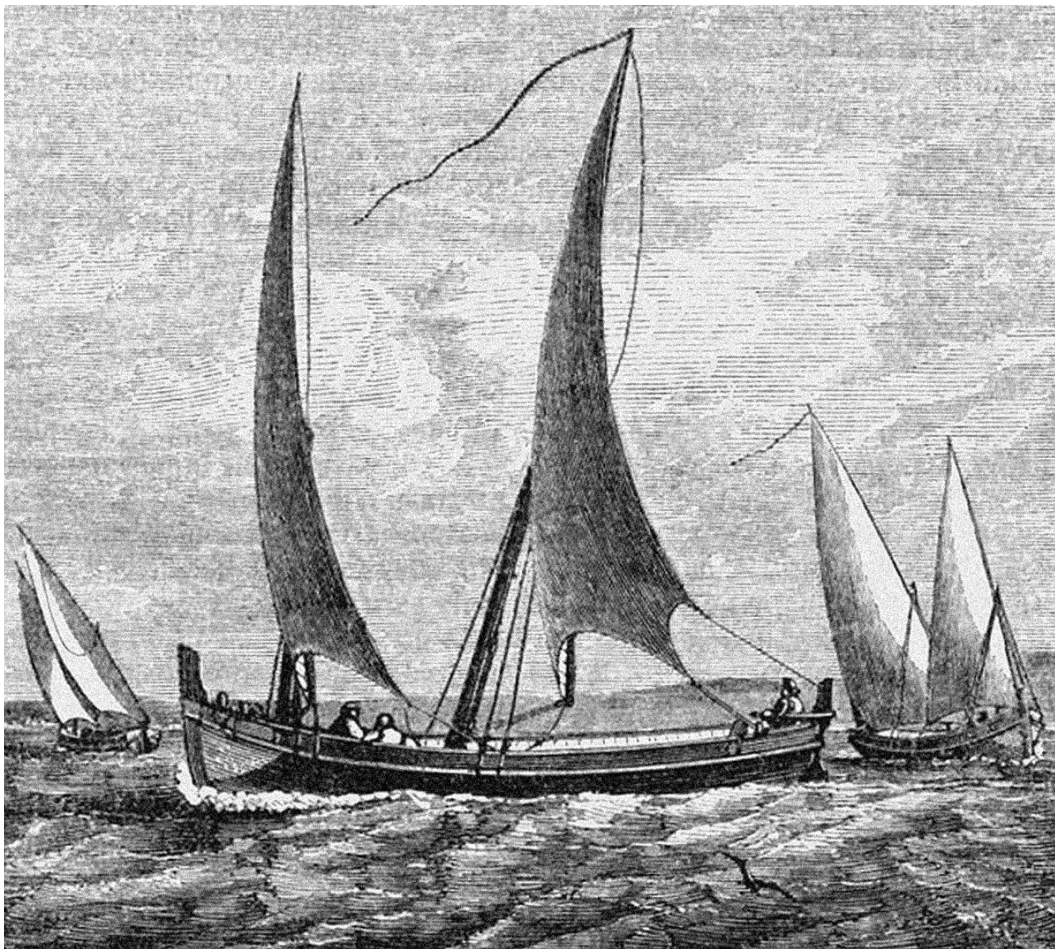


Figure 1: *Falua*; engraving by João Pedroso, 1860 (Hemeroteca Digital, Almada Virtual Museum, Lisbon)

under a covered area in the stern of the vessel which was enclosed with curtains. The *falua* took them to the port of Piedade, a busy trading center for goods coming mostly from Minas Gerais to supply the city of Rio de Janeiro and then carry products back to farms from the city (Gardner, 1846, p.38-40).

We cannot say that the rest of the journey, which was over land, was as comfortable for the families and other passengers who came by *falua*. March and his guests continued to the farm on muleback along with their baggage. From Piedade they passed through Magé, traveling around 14 miles until reaching the small village of Frechal, where they passed the night in a large public house which also sold goods to passing travelers (*venda*) which had an open room where travelers could stay.

The next day they traveled another 12 miles and arrived at the March farm. The overland journey to the farm was not a comfortable one for the travelers, particularly for the families who accompanied the group.

But Gardner's reward was the opportunity to see the ecology, cultivation, and transport of goods to the consumer centers as it was done in the region. The flat road did not go unnoticed; it often wound around small hills with flanks covered by cassava plantations. He noted a number of mule troops coming from inland; the mules were loaded with a variety of local products covered with tanned cowhides, and were connected and chained together. He was especially awed by these animals' ability to transport loads on appalling roads which were so steep at certain points that he believed them impassable (Gardner, 1846, p.38-42).

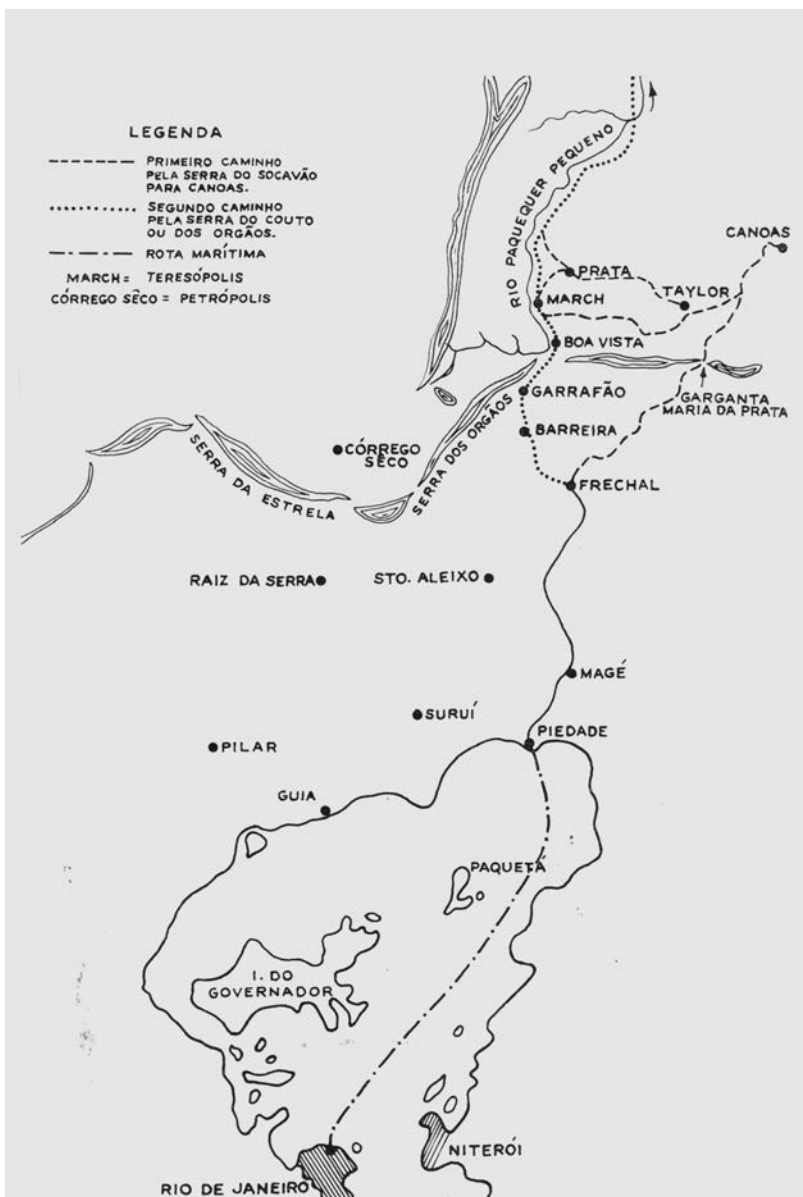


Figure 2: Map indicating the route to the March farm, by cartographer Eduardo Canabrava (Ferrez, 1970, p.23, plate 4)

The farm and its owner

Beginning in the nineteenth century, the British were the first foreigners to arrive in Brazil with ships loaded with all types of goods, benefiting from favorable trade conditions offered by the Portuguese. The opening of the ports in 1808 brought machinery, textiles, iron, steel, glass, coal, and a variety of other goods from Europe and other parts of the world to trade with Brazil under the special tariff conditions created by a bilateral treaty signed in 1810. No less than nine-tenths of all Portuguese trade was done with England (Prado Júnior, 1977, p.44). Throughout at least half of the nineteenth century, English merchants continued their greatly profitable trade and industrial activities, at times in partnerships with Brazilians such as Mauá or expanding their businesses by constructing family ties (Guimarães, 2012, p.103-147).

George March was one of these Englishmen who came to Brazil, first establishing himself in Rio de Janeiro in 1813 at the firm Barker & March and securing residence at a small farm in Botafogo. Later, around 1818, he leased a large area of land situated in the Serra dos Órgãos, which he later purchased (Ferrez, 1970, p.33-34). Around 1829-1830, the English traveler Walsh (1985, p.171) visited the property and stated that there was a huge pasture area for 150 horses and mules, a hundred head of black cattle, and a number of both sheep and pigs.

Almost a decade after Walsh's visit, Gardner (1846) added that when he was there the farm had, in addition to horses and mules, a large plantation of vegetables that regularly supplied European produce to the market in Rio de Janeiro. He also added that the discipline imposed to the slaves on the farm was extremely strict, even more so than on other farms he had visited in Brazil (p.48). It is not difficult to imagine that horses and particularly mules were good business at that time. The muddy roadways for transporting goods mentioned above could only be traversed with the strength and resistance of mules, which transported March's own products from the farm to Rio de Janeiro and brought back supplies purchased in the city; the mules could also be sold to other farm owners with similar needs.

March had hundred to 150 slaves on the farm to take care of all these activities. According to Walsh (1985, p.172), they were distributed throughout a number small slave village around the property. One of these areas he saw was comprised of approximately fifty wattle and daub huts with grass roofs, which were so low that a man could only stand upright in the center. Each hut was comprised of two areas: one holding a bed and shelf of woven sticks, and another with the fire, which burned all day even when it was hot.

Walsh did not provide further descriptions of the slave quarters, although they hold significant information about the slaves' living conditions and culture. In this sense, Robert Slenes's contribution is crucial; just the fact that it is mentioned causes the phenomenon to take on a more important interpretative dimension, thanks to the author's interest in focusing careful attention on culture-related issues. To Slenes (2011, p.256), the fires that the slaves maintained continuously burning in their shacks were full of symbolism and closely related to a widespread practice in central Africa. Namely, the fires in the slave quarters served to heat, dry, and illuminate their homes, but above all they played an important role in constructing a shared identity, connecting their "homes" to the "homes of their ancestors," which in their adopted culture continued the connection between the slaves and the living and the dead they had left behind.



Figure 3: Pencil sketch of Serra dos Órgãos by João Maurício Rugendas, lithographed by John Sweickier. Troop crossing the Baixada Fluminense into the interior (Ferrez, 1970, p.24, plate 2)

The Black Atlantic

When he arrived at the farm, Gardner commented in his diary that the slaves were celebrating Christmas in their own way, with many dances, traditional costumes and dramatic representations. Before presenting Gardner's detailed description of the event, we should remember that Africans have always been noted for their deeply musical culture, which was always present in their rituals and their amusements (Denis-Constant, 2010). Many observers of the time noted that singing, dance, percussion, and storytelling were important parts of their lives.

During the sea crossing from various regions of Africa to the New World, African captives communicated by singing in their languages so that they captains and crew members could not understand. Besides being a way of finding relatives and people from their same village



who might be on board, singing created a common base of knowledge and formed a collective identity.

Sometimes the songs were of protest, as an English merchant marine doctor who traveled in the late 1780s noted. They sang in their own language: "*Madda! Madda! Yiera! Yiera! Bemini! Bemini! Madda! Aufera!*" (Rediker, 2011, p.289-290). They meant that everyone was sick, but were getting better little by little. They sang about their fears of punishment and their yearnings for the food of their homeland, expressing desolation at knowing they would never return.

Drama was another important source of cultural expression for the slaves. During the crossing, the stage was the upper deck of the slave ship. In the late eighteenth century on one of the many slave ships that made the crossing from Africa, the crew observed a kind of play that the slaves themselves called "capture of slaves" or "fight in the bush." These scenes referred to the trauma they experienced after having been captured from their homes and brought to the ships (Rediker, 2011, p.288-291).

When they disembarked at various colonies throughout the Americas, the Africans reflected different aspects of their daily lives through their songs, dances, and dramas, which were almost always accompanied by various musical instruments from different parts of Africa; later other instruments emerged, deriving from mixtures with European instruments they encountered here (Karasch, 2000,

p.315-326). Their art was deeply connected to the policies of control and repression by slave owners and authorities, and was expressed in many different ways and circumstances in the slave villages, at work on the farms and in the towns, and in festivals; at times it was smooth and emotional, other times it was surrounded by a sphere of intense excitement.⁴ It was a little of this culture, adapted to the specific circumstances of the society and the local culture, that travelers were able to find in Brazil.⁵

Gardner was able to view a number of African cultural expressions during his stay in Brazil, and described them in his travel journal as was his custom. One of these descriptions concerned the March farm, as mentioned above. Although his descriptions were detailed, Gardner devoted only a few lines to the slaves' ritual celebration. What appears to be such a commonplace event would also have passed unnoticed for historians if not for the combined instigation of contemporary folklore and anthropology which has become frequent in the areas of history. In this sense, Thompson made a great contribution with his article "Folklore, anthropology and social history" which was first published in the

Indian Historical Review in 1977 and in his subsequent research.⁶ A decade later, following the same paths, Mona Ozouf (1988, p.47) reminds us that historians have learned to deal with the armor presented by ritualization of human existence. The same author also adds that psychoanalysis has taught history to be alert for interest that may collect what appears to be insignificant.

We will interpret the symbolic universe of dramatic representation that Gardner described, seeking to discover the meaning and emotion that the slaves infused into their world through cultural manifestations of this type.

The ethnocentric gaze

Nevertheless, such narratives written by travelers contain one of the most effective ways of diluting the historical memory of subaltern class culture. We can perceive these representations as a specific form of empowerment from cultural objects that literally transformed these oppressed people into mere functions of the vital process of society.⁷

In this way, for example, the slave festivals which expressed the collective devotion of a people were gradually processed through the colonizing action of travelers into something to be seen and consumed as entertainment. The attitude of easy delight in the face of cultural manifestations prevented them from seeing the more essential underpinning linked to cultural traditions that can survive for generations, ensuring identity and redemption between the practitioners' present and past (Brandão, 1986, p.69).

Such situations are telling with regard to how the fundamental forms of modern thought came to be so dominant in representations of Brazilian slave culture by nineteenth-century foreign travelers.⁸ This scenario also affirmed the refinement of social practices related to the standards of court civility. From the thirteenth century onward there was a slow but growing European concern with the refinement of customs that took on great force in the nineteenth century (Elias, 2001). The impact of arrival had already caused the travelers to utter their first comments on how the lower, brute nature these semi-naked and inopportune men wounded the "sensitivity of the European who had just left the delicate customs and obsequious formulas of his homeland" (Spix, Martius, 1976b, p.42),⁹ based on the primacy of gentility that comprised the perception schemes founded in European representations of the time (Corbin, 1987).

The travelers' vision coincided with a large part of the humanistic thought which developed over the nineteenth century. Morgan (1973, p.15), who was one of the most prestigious anthropologists of his time, wrote in his book *Ancient Society* that all primitive religions were grotesque and to some extent unintelligible. This position would only be partially overturned in the 1940s by Marcel Mauss, with further reinforcement of the change in opinion coming from the generation of anthropologists that emerged in the 1960s.¹⁰

If on the one hand by analyzing the travel literature of this period we must bear in mind the ideology of progress and racial theories of the time, on the other hand it must be said that some aspects favor an ethnological explanation of the text. For example, after the eighteenth-century travel literature no longer maintained its previously fantastic content. In fact, the writings of travelers, sailors, and chroniclers of the sixteenth century (a time

marked by the era of maritime discoveries and also coinciding with the second phase of the Renaissance) still for the most part retained the medieval taste for the marvelous and for mystery (Le Goff, 1980, p.263-264). With the end of the age of discovery and the initial phase of Portuguese colonization, Brazil would only sporadically receive organized expeditions of travelers (Oberacker, 1962, p.119).

Nevertheless, the period when Gardner visited Brazil is full of characteristics which are quite different from those that populated representations by travelers, sailors, and chroniclers of the sixteenth century. The fantasies of the Eldorado of Vupabuçu and the Garden of Eden (Holland, 1959, p.42) disappeared entirely, giving way to imagery of rationality and progress. So if Gardner's description of the play he saw cannot be regarded as a reflection of what really happened,¹¹ we can still say that it is not a fictional narrative, which encourages analysis of the symbols from the event's operational and positional dimensions.

In other words, on one hand it is possible to equate a symbolic meaning with its use, considering the gestures of the actors, their expressions, and other nonverbal behaviors to discover what values they represent. On the other hand, searching in the relationship between one symbol and another (in a binary opposition, for example) is an important source of its meaning (Turner, 1983, p.360-375).

The celebration

The slaves celebrated Christmas by dancing in the courtyard in front of the master's house, according to Gardner. They all wore new clothes that had been sent to them the day before. In the evening, some of the better-behaved slaves (especially the *crioulos*, slaves who had been born in Brazil and brought up with Portuguese and Brazilian customs) were allowed to present themselves on the balcony of the house. Watching the presentations, the English traveler wrote in his diary that some of these presentations were not "very refined" and chose one, which he judged to be the best, to describe in detail.

However, an initial problem arises. The dramatic representation cannot be studied firsthand. As a result we cannot, for example, explore the symbolic references of the event itself from its exegetical dimension, which is given great weight in anthropological studies. This dimension consists of the explanation given by the actors to the researcher, who infers this information that members of a given society think about their own rituals (Turner, 1983, p.368). But, as we have said, the facts occurred in 1836 and of course there are no direct witnesses who can be interviewed, and there are no written reports by the slaves. We can only study the situation from the narrative of the dance Gardner chose to memorialize in his writing. We see, therefore, how the travelers transformed into the masters of memory and of forgetting. What should be recorded or remembered? What should be forgotten? These decisions always involved conscious or unconscious manipulation that the censorship of the modern imagination exercised on individual or collective memory (Le Goff, 1984, p.11-50).

Gardner's criterion was to select the least "crude" of the dances he described as not "very refined" which were presented that Christmas night. It is possible, therefore, that the travelers' censorship blocked access to more meaningful components of slave culture. But despite the censorship he exerted to select the "refined" standard of slave culture, Gardner

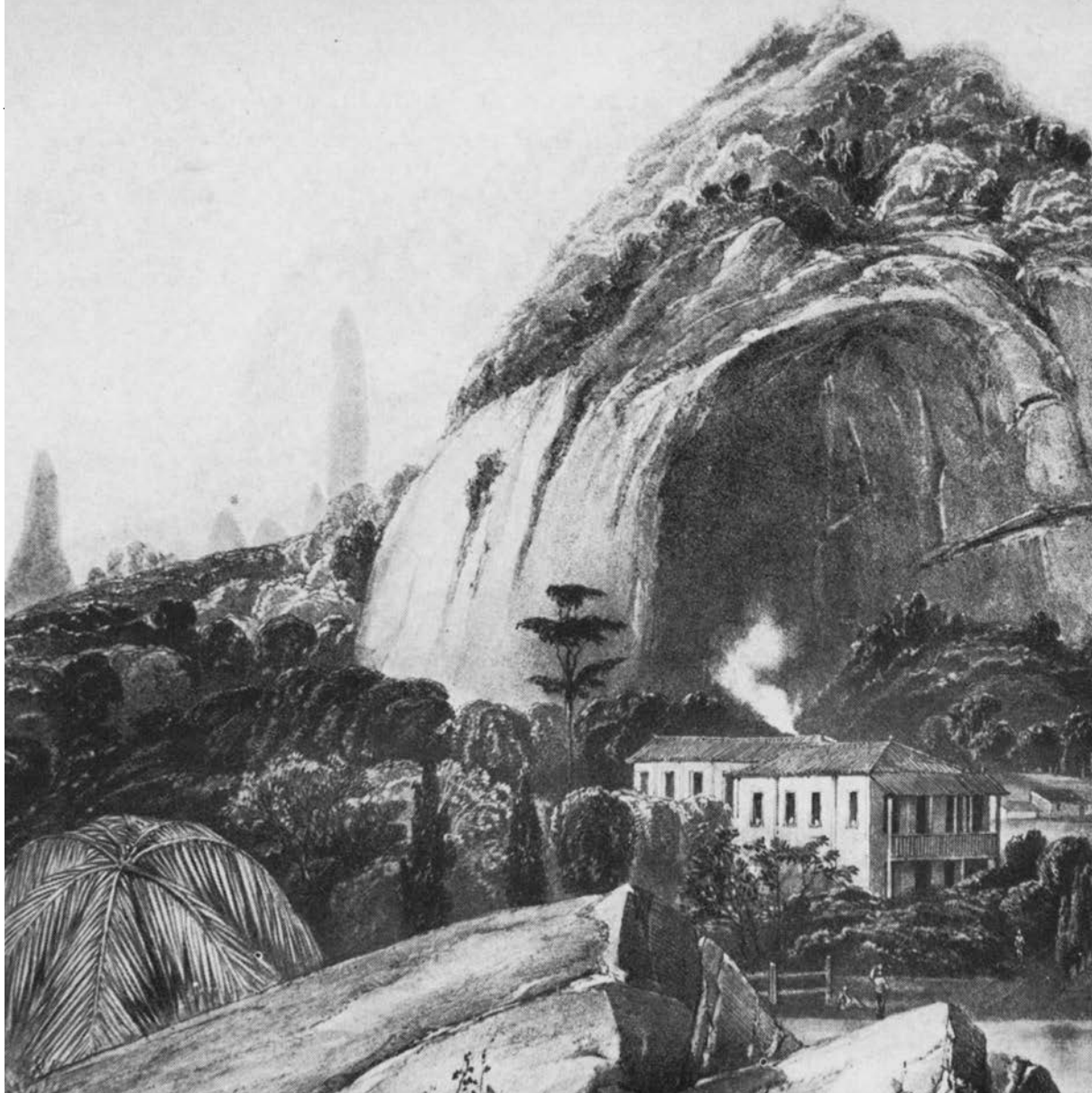


Figure 4: Serra dos Órgãos, by William Gore Ousely, 1838. In the foreground, the main house of the Santa Ana de Paquequer farm, belonging to the Englishman George March (Ferrez, 1970, p.36, plate 7)

was not able in those circumstances to select a dance with content unrelated to the theme of violence, as we shall see in the following description.

This event consisted of a dramatic representation which included dancing, instrumental music, and dialogs between the participating actors. The slaves created a scene representing the home of a priest. Near the door of the house, a young man starts dancing and playing the *viola*, which Gardner describes as a kind of guitar. The priest hears the “noise” and sends one of his servants to find out what is happening.

The servant finds the musician dancing to his own music and tells him he was sent by his master to find out what is bothering him so. The musician responds that nothing is bothering him, he is just trying a new dance from Bahia, which he found the other day in the *Diário* (newspaper).¹² The servant asks if the new dance is any good. “Oh, very good,” the musician replies, “would you like to try it?” The servant claps his hands, shouts “Let the priest go to sleep!” and immediately surrenders himself to the dance (Gardner, 1846, p.48).



the botanist George Gardner and his impressions of slave culture in Brazil

The scene repeats with other characters until the priest's servant and around twenty other men, women, and children are dancing in a circle in front of the house. Finally, the furious priest himself appears, wearing a large poncho as a cassock, a wide-brimmed black hat and a mask with a beard. He asks what is causing all the noise that is preventing him from enjoying his dinner.

The musician tells him the same story he told the servant, and invites him to dance as well. After the servant insists, the priest joins the others in the dance. He dances as enthusiastically as any of the others who were already dancing when he arrived, but as soon as the opportunity arises he reveals the whip he had hidden in his cassock and beats everyone, ending the slaves' play (Gardner, 1846, p.48-49).

The symbols

Municipal decrees from the 1830s and the subsequent 1838 legal code show serious concerns with the Blacks' festive events, leading the authorities to ban *batuque* and *zungu* houses and gatherings of more than four slaves in public places or taverns (Abreu, 1999, p.199). Police in Rio de Janeiro were also concerned with reports that several plans to revolt were unfolding in nearby rural areas, as well

as evidence that slave uprisings were being organized in the provinces of Rio de Janeiro and Minas Gerais.

This backdrop allows us to consider the influence of these uprisings on the play described by Gardner. Nevertheless, the references in the play seem to be more directly related to the Malê slave revolt which occurred in the province of Bahia. Gardner tells us the exact time and place when the dance took place, which helps explain the slave's reference to Bahia during the performance. Since the beginning of the nineteenth century, slave revolts were quite common in Bahia, and it was also very common for the slaves to represent the rebellions in their religious festivals.

On the evening of January 25, 1835, little more than a year before the play described by Gardner, the slave uprising known as the Malê revolt broke out in Salvador; this revolt, led by Muslim slaves, was considered the largest in the Americas. Around seventy slaves died fighting, and approximately five hundred were punished by death, imprisonment, flogging, or deportation. The insurgency achieved a national repercussion. The report by Bahia's chief of police was published in the Rio de Janeiro newspapers to inform the province's entire

population of the revolt (Reis, 1986, p.7). The Africans who lived in the royal Court were submitted to rigid control, especially those known as *negros-minas* originating from what is currently Ghana (including the *Nagô*, who were the main nation responsible for the rise of Bahia).¹³

According to rumors which circulated in December 1835 and the chief of police of Rio de Janeiro, “in different districts, there are Blacks who have said that at Christmas they will protest and create unrest” (Reis, Gomes, Carvalho, 2010, p.83).

Consequently, the slaves’ reference to the dance from Bahia (seen in the *Diário*) may have resulted from the news that the slaves in Rio de Janeiro likely heard about the Malês of Salvador fighting for their freedom. Among the slaves, news about the slave uprisings spread throughout the country and the continent by means of a communication system spanning countries and colonies. The news about the Haitian revolution in 1804, for example, was carried to some Brazilian slaves by Haitians arriving in Rio de Janeiro (Mott, 1982).

There are many meanings implied in the dance. The reference to the *Diário* seems to indicate that the slaves had some contact with the newspapers of the time. Today there are no longer any doubts that there were literate slaves (Karasch, 2000, p.292-299). We do not know if they read or listened to reading by their masters. It was common to read reports of local happenings and newspapers out loud, a practice that was carefully attended by members of the family and certainly also the domestic slaves, who passed the news on to the slaves in the village. Some slaves accompanied products as they were transported from the farm to supply the markets in Rio de Janeiro. It is possible that they came into contact with the newspapers and transmitted what they read or heard to the other slaves on the farm. The fact is that, as several cultural historians have said, a boundary cannot be identified between oral and written culture by studying people or social groups in different times and places. To understand important aspects of slave life and culture, it is important to explore the various ways in which the oral tradition, gestures, and writing can be manifested in the communication and organization of the various spaces slaves occupied in Brazilian society.

When we explore what the traditional Brazilian Christmas celebration of that era was like, we are able to observe the inventive adaptations the slaves made from their culture and their needs and feelings to the traditional, Christian way of celebrate the holy day. The *cheganças* and the *janeiras* which were brought from Portugal to Brazil could not be left out of traditional Christmas celebrations. In the *cheganças*, festive groups celebrated Christmas through an epic drama portraying the fight between Christians and Muslims. And according to the tradition of the *janeiras*, groups of people roamed the neighborhood singing and playing musical instruments to pay homage to the holy infant. These groups received gifts, food, and drink from families who welcomed their visits.

Pastoral dances were another way of celebrating Christmas. A solemn tone was maintained in these dances through the use of incense and an environment decorated with flowers. The emphasis in these celebrations was on simplicity, which granted the party a general spirit of peace and harmony and always transmitted messages of unity and friendship (Moraes Filho, 1979, p.46-56). They also symbolized social leveling, because they were considered a kind of feast in which there were no social differences. After all, these dances revered God, and in the Catholic tradition all were equal before the Almighty, and rich and poor could

commemorate the holiday. The content of these dances was full of symbolic meanings that communicated notions of unity and friendship. The Dance of the Four Parts of the World is a good example; it portrayed the European, American, African and Asian continents overcoming their conflicts, building friendship and unity between them to honor Jesus and his mother the Virgin Mary (Moraes Filho, 1979, p.49).

The slaves' Christmas celebration showed a complete reversal of this climate. Violence and conflict set the general tone for the dance. Tension was mixed with an effusive and collective joy of creation, of the men, women, children and priest who participated in the dance. The slave actors screamed and clapped their hands to the sound of musical instruments, questioning the social hierarchy by disobeying the priest's orders.

The religious elements are introduced very differently in the two celebrations. The scene of the birth and simplicity of the holy infant in the traditional celebration contrast with the figure of the priest in the slave dance.¹⁴ The large poncho used as a cassock, the wide-brimmed black straw hat, and the bearded mask gave the priest the appearance of the devil, which could also resemble a slave master or the *capitão do mato* (slave hunters).

This inversion of the religious elements in the slaves' Christmas celebration also appears in other New World colonies in the same period. One example was the slave uprising in Trinidad and Tobago planned for Christmas of 1805. The revolt was supposed to involve the areas of Diego Martin, Maraval, and Carenage (northwest of the capital, Port of Spain). On December 10, several leaders of a planned meeting were arrested by the authorities and tortured to obtain information about the rebellion. Eight days later, four slave ringleaders were hanged and beheaded; their bodies were shackled and hung, and their heads were displayed on platforms as examples to their companions (Campbell, 1988). Although there is little information, a literary fragment survived the attempted rebellion; through the mixture of French and the *Nagô* dialect, the slaves clearly showed the inversion of the religious elements of Christmas as a significant part of the planned revolt. More or less during this same period, two farmers in the region heard slaves singing:

Bread is the meat of the white man, São Domingo/Wine is the blood of the white man,
São Domingo/We will drink the blood of the white man, São Domingo/The bread that
we eat is the meat of the white man/The wine that we drink is the blood of the white
man (Campbell, 1988, p.3).¹⁵

In this song, the bread and the wine lose their Eucharistic sense of restoring life through the forgiveness of sins, and instead come to represent death for the white man.

But does this mean only death in the sense of physical destruction? Here again we should return to the topic of violence. If we orient ourselves using the most apparent underpinnings, we find Gardner's perception, which was bound to the rules of civility and the obsequious forms that comprised the imagery of his time. This perception attributed the violent elements of the "not very refined" dance to the grotesque, primitive condition of the slaves. However, from the document's vision to historiographic interpretation we must move toward conceptualizing the experience (Veyne, 1971, p.253-255). It is relevant for us to consider that the slaves used the elements of violence to question Christmas as an annual, recurring festival that secures memory linked to Brazilian traditions as well as transplanted European

traditions. They experienced the new, introducing traditional elements of circumstance and improvisation into the festival, abandoning the strict meanings linked to the celebrations of their adopted society.¹⁶ In fact, the slaves' Christmas widely questioned the bizarre notion that harmony and social peace could exist in a slaveholding society.

It would certainly be too much of a simplification if we were to confine ourselves to discussing the material aspects of slavery linked to purely physical coercion and infra-human exploitation in labor relations through the dramatic representation. The very argument of the dance brings up the question of black culture as a value neglected by the society in which they lived since the great African diaspora reached Brazil. This is quite evident if we note that the dance that the slave plays on the *viola* in the performance does not appear to European ears as an expression of black culture in Brazil, but rather "noise" that hinders the sleep of a priest dressed up as a devil.

It seems more logical to interpret the slaves' musical performance as a critique of the trivialization of their own culture every day in the society in which they lived. Previously we saw how black culture lost its dimension of durability under European colonization, which transformed its cultural traditions into an act of fruition.

From this scenario we can finally see the anthropophagic content expressed by both the Rio de Janeiro slaves in their Christmas celebration and the slaves in the Caribbean. The drama presented by the slaves in Rio clearly shows the presence one of the most significant general signs of anthropophagy, linked to the almost irrational need to rebel against an oppressive culture. Anthropophagic metaphors are also present in the devorative representation by the slaves in Trinidad, who appropriated the Christian Eucharistic rites of the bread and wine to "eat" the white culture.¹⁷

Final considerations

Let us return, then, to the farm in Rio de Janeiro. Through dance, the slaves there denounced the violence committed against them by the slave-owners and the slaveholding system. But the social protest expressed through their artistic representation was clearly circumscribed within clear limits. Gardner tells us that March's slaves faced the most rigorous discipline of all the farms he had visited in Brazil. Only the best-behaved slaves were permitted to appear on the balcony of the master's house for the Christmas celebration. How could they express their protest without being punished by their owners? They needed to use ambiguous symbols that simultaneously revealed and hid their real meaning so that their owner would have no reason to punish them.

This manipulation of symbols required a significant amount of skill. We might even consider, as did Darnton (1986) in his study of a ritual killing of cats by eighteenth-century craftsmen, that the symbolic language of slaves was as effective as that of the poet using the printed word. The priest, for example, is represented by an ambiguous symbol that oscillates between the figure of the devil and a slave owner.

It should also be remembered that the owner of the farm was English and a Protestant, which explains why the slaves would criticize Catholicism through the inverted representation of a cruel priest presented as devil or an evil spirit to be exorcised and permitted them to

criticize the Brazilian slave system and their own living conditions on the farm. The dramatic ending of the dance, with the priest whipping the slaves, demonstrates a strong sense of reality; the slaves had a very clear view of the violence and oppression of the social order in which they lived.

Analysis of the ritual allows us to understand aspects of the slaves' symbolic language and even to realize how, through cultural events of this kind, they infused their world with meaning and emotion. Even though their musical contributions and protests were initially censored and produced in a context of violence and extreme domination, they took on an Atlantic dimension and circulated in other parts of the Americas.

NOTES

¹ This perspective has, over at least the last two decades, resulted in a new field of research known as Atlantic history; it was primarily developed by English and American historians who have recovered nearly-forgotten contributions from historians such as Eric Williams, Frederic Mauro, and Fernand Braudel to give them new meaning through a critical vision that presents itself through different interpretative bases. Awakened by the importance of the role the Atlantic routes played in interconnecting Europe with peoples and cultures from other continents, this aspect has permitted better understanding of the meaning of the reinvention of slavery in the modern world and its consequences in all forms of social organization since the sixteenth century. See Baylyn (2005); Greene, Morgan (2009); Solow (1993).

² Here I emphasize the article by Slenes (1988), with subsequent developments that resulted in the study "African Abrahams, Lucretias and men of sorrows: allegory and allusion in the Brazilian antislavery lithographs (1827-1835) of Johann Moritz Rugendas" (Slenes, 2002). See also Lima (2007). In the fourth chapter, this author discusses the development of a historic speech from the images and texts of Debret.

³ The Mineiros pier was near the beginning of the street now known as Rua Visconde de Inhaúma. See Ferrez (1970, p.38).

⁴ In a recent article, Martha Abreu (2015) studies the impasses and social and political conflicts after abolition as experienced in the field of music, most notably through writings by the American W.E.B. Du Bois and Coelho Netto. The thought provoking and profound tones of the slave songs are described by Martha Abreu through the authors she studies.

⁵ This brief description of the cultural resources slaves used to survive the long crossing from various parts of Africa, as well as to preserve and adapt them to the different colonies of the New World where they landed (and which gave rise to a system of global communications marked by migration and cultural exchange) underlies Gilroy's expression "The Black Atlantic," which also appears as a heading for this part of the article. As an exhaustive discussion about this expression is beyond our scope, for this article we adopt Gilroy's position, according to which we must perceive these slaves "as agents, as people with cognitive abilities and even as an intellectual history – attributes denied by modern racism" (Gilroy, 2001, p.41).

⁶ Thompson's article was subsequently translated into Portuguese (Thompson, 2001). For more about the importance of Thompson's work to renewing the historiography of labor in Brazil, particularly the historiography of slavery, see Lara (1995).

⁷ Here I rely on Hannah Arendt's criticisms of modern societies (1979, p.248-281), which tend to operate in order to destroy a culture's character of "durability," dragging it insatiably to the metabolic cycle of the vital process of society.

⁸ Some assessments and commentary from travelers on slave culture and popular culture in Brazil in general can be found in Spix, Martius (1976a, p.40-41), Koster (1942, p.316), Pereira da Costa (1958, p.408), and Castelnau (1949).

⁹ In this and other citations of texts from non-English languages, a free translation has been provided.

¹⁰ This included Victor Turner (1974, p.14-15; emphasis in the original), who stated that: "in matters of religion as well as art, there are no 'simpler' peoples, only some peoples with simpler technology than our own. Man's 'imaginative' and 'emotional' is always and everywhere rich and complex." See also Mauss (1972).

¹¹ We should add that not even a historiographic text can contain these characteristics, given the incomplete nature of history itself; see also Veyne (1971, p.27-29).

¹² The *Diário* mentioned by the slaves may have been the Rio de Janeiro newspaper *Diário do Rio de Janeiro*,

founded and edited by Zeferino Vitor de Meireles. After his murder, the newspaper was headed by Antonio Maria Jourdan and continued until 1878 (Sodré, 1966, p.58-59).

¹³ The book by Reis, Gomes and Carvalho (2010), especially Chapter 6, provides clear indications of the connection between the Malê revolt in Salvador and the slave performance on the March farm described by Gardner.

¹⁴ Representations of the devil were popular in Black rituals. Roger Bastide (1974, p.169) refers to the Mexican dramatic comedy Juan de Dios and finds a similar relationship, in which the slaves use a symbolic image of the white master as the devil. It is also interesting to note the presence of the devil in the imagination of American Blacks. On this issue, the best work is that of Genovese (1988, especially p.324-326). There are also interesting reflections on the devil from the Middle Ages up to the beginning of modern times in Francastel (1965, p.326-338).

¹⁵ In the original: "*Pain cest viande béqué, San Domingo/Vin c'est sang béqué, San Domingo/Nous va boire sang béqué, San Domingo/Pain nous mangé est viande béqué /Vin nou boire c'est sang béqué.*"

¹⁶ The work by Mona Ozouf (1976) on revolutionary celebrations in France in the late eighteenth century shows, for example, that these celebrations cannot be parsed linearly but only from their more apparent aspects to avoid the risk of losing sight of their underlying elements of contestation. By holding on to these due proportions and specificities, Ozouf's studies illuminated important points in our analysis.

¹⁷ On the fundamental traits of anthropophagy, see Nunes (1972).

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