

Urban Slavery as a Scenario?

A Critical Examination of the Historiography of Urban Slavery in Rio de Janeiro and Havana

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Ynaê Lopes dos Santos

Fundação Getúlio Vargas

Bertoleza was one of many heroines of Brazilian literature whose trajectory distressed several readers' hearts. Her condition/experience as a female black slave would be enough to do so. As if that were not enough, Aluísio de Azevedo (1890) created such an unhappy ending for her in the novel *O Cortiço* that it managed to touch reality.

Creole Bertoleza was a Rio de Janeiro resident in the late nineteenth century, and enjoyed the freedom of movement that urban slaves experienced when they lived far from their master's watchful

eye. The character was a slave of a man who lived in Juiz de Fora—in the province of Minas Gerais—and to whom she must pay twenty thousand *réis* a month.

Like so many other slaves and black freedwomen, Bertoleza made her living as a stallholder. She sold angu (corn mush/polenta), fried fish and bait liver to residents and passersby in Botafogo. Although her master “*lhe comece a pele do corpo*” (“worked her fingers to the bone”) to force her to deliver such a high amount every month, by the age of forty, the enslaved stallholder had saved enough money to buy her freedom. Fearful of a possible theft, Bertoleza left her nest egg in care of a neighbor, the Portuguese barkeeper João Romão, who soon tried to soften up the captive.

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It was from this “friendship” that Bertoleza’s life gained even more cruel edges. The sly and avaricious João pretended to have bought a Freedom Letter for Bertoleza and used the slave’s nest egg to invest in his own dream: the construction of a tenement. The trickster João had no limits. In addition to deceiving the captive, the Portuguese barkeeper began to make money from Bertoleza’s hard work, as she worked in the Portuguese tavern during the day, and also worked on the streets selling fish and angu at night.

João Romão literally used and abused the weak relationship established with Bertoleza, and when the slave became a business impediment, the Portuguese trader tried to warn her old masters about the fugitive slave. When she discovered this total farce, Bertoleza resisted in the way that seemed most efficient: by taking her own life.

Bertoleza was not the only character to live the vicissitudes of a slave society. Eight years before Aluizio de Azevedo published *O Cortiço*, Cirilo Villaverde published (an enlarged version of) *Cecilia Valdés*. The novel has in its subtitle the phrase *Costumbres Cubanos* or Cuban Customs in English (VILLAVERDE, 1995)¹. This novel, set in Havana in the first half of the nineteenth century, tells the story of a mulatta Cecilia who is an illegitimate daughter of Candido Gamboa, a powerful Cuban slave trader. Raised without knowing her true origin, Cecilia falls for her brother, Leonardo Gamboa who, without knowing the relationship with his loved one, decides to abandon her to

¹ First edition, 1839. Revised edition, 1882.

marry a woman of the Cuban high society. Consumed by blind hatred, Cecilia vows revenge and convinces José Dolores Pimienta to murder her former lover. The plan comes to fruition, but the perpetrators are discovered: José Dolores is sentenced to death and Cecilia is arrested as an accomplice.

Even though they made use of literature's seductive tools, there is no doubt that the work *O Cortiço*, by Brazilian Aluizio de Azevedo, and *Cecilia Valdés*, by Cuban Cirilo Villaverde, also retain some urban ethnography. Although full of physical, psychological and moral violence, the life of urban slaves did not always have an end as miserable as the serials of the eighteen hundreds. However, as men who lived during the slavery era, Aluizio de Azevedo and Villaverde brought fictional elements of their observed realities to their works.

The choice of two black female protagonists, directly linked to slavery, reflects part of the universe that these two authors experienced throughout the nineteenth century. Residents of the two largest slave cities in the Americas, the stories created by Aluizio de Azevedo and Cirilo Villaverde revealed different aspects urban slavery. One of those aspects is precisely the figure of the urban slave, which existed in the thousands, not only in Brazil's imperial capital, but also in Havana and other American cities. In a distinctly slave context like the Cuban (until 1886) and Brazil (until 1888), slavery was the main source of manual labor not only on large mono-crop plantations, but also in major cities. These urban slaves, ominously represented by the characters of Bertoleza and Cecilia, not only populated the kitchens and backyards of Rio's and Havana's houses, but they also worked in customs, carried the most varied products, sold delicacies, produced and repaired shoes, worked with precious stones and in factories, and even worked in more specialized trades such as carpenters, metal workers, barbers, etc. (KARASCH, 2000, p. 259-292)

Interestingly, the male and female slaves who populated the streets, newspapers and various literary works produced in the eighteen hundreds do not seem to have raised serious questions for twentieth century researchers who study the Americas' last slave societies. Even though many of the eighteen-hundred novels were set in slave cities; foreign travelers' accounts express surprise at finding a mass of slaves (Creoles and Africans) in the cities; newspapers announced the sale,

rental and even escape of urban slaves, for many years urban slavery seemed to be part of the “landscape of different historical contexts,” without requiring greater questioning. Starting with the clues left in literature, the purpose of this article is precisely to critically examine the history of urban slavery in the Americas through a connected analysis of studies about Rio de Janeiro and Havana—the two largest slave cities in the Americas—demonstrating how this scenario was also the protagonist of many plots.

Urban slavery: The Construction of a Scenario

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In the early twentieth century, in Brazil and Cuba, slavery became an independent object of analysis. Although the slave institution has been analyzed by numerous studies in both locations—whether of a historiographical, sociological or literary nature—the abolition of slavery in the late nineteenth century (1886, in Cuba, 1888, in Brazil) and the subsequent formation of the Brazilian and Cuban Republics (respectively in 1889 and 1898) raised new questions for those trying to examine how nations needed to deal with the civic expansion of the concept of freedom amid their recent slave past. Concurrently, the passage from the late nineteenth century to the next century was also marked by the establishment of social scientists who became independent from the classic chairs of law and medicine, and, little by little, were recognized as authorities of work that chose society (in its multiple expression) as their object of study. (Cf. SCHWARCZ, 1989; ORTIZ, 1985)

In this context, two names gained prominence in the countries’ intellectual framework: Fernando Ortiz and Gilberto Freyre were authors who not only focused on the study of slavery, but elected the slave figure or individual slave as a guide for works for which they became internationally renowned. Rather than analyzing the societies in which they lived, both authors ended up formulating an integrated and transcultural project about the black slave and the African legacy in Cuban and Brazilian histories.

In 1916, Fernando Ortiz published *Hampa afro-cubana: Los Negros Esclavos* (Afro-Cuban Hampa: the Black Slaves)², a work

² Cf. ORTIZ, 1916. In 1987, this work, together with the author’s annotation found in the archive

that represented a kind of watershed in his career. The criminologist and positivist foundations that guided his first publication, *Los Negros Brujos*, (the Blacks Wizards)³ were later strongly influenced by the theoretical guidelines proposed by anthropologists Bronislaw Malinowski and Franz Boas. In *Hampa afro-cubana*, Ortiz examined different aspects of slaves' lives in Cuba through an ethnography that combined an analysis of travelers' accounts with the serial reading of documents produced by Spanish and Cuban authorities. Ortiz tried to understand the various instances of slave life, such as the African origin of these men and women, the material conditions of their existence, the dynamics of their work, the struggles for freedom and, even though with lacking depth, the differences between the slaves who lived in the countryside and those who lived in the big cities.

Corroborating that which was recorded over a hundred years earlier by the naturalist Alexander Humboldt, Ortiz (1987, p. 283-293) was adamant (and synthetic) in stating that in Cuba, the urban slave had better living conditions compared to those who worked in the field. In ten pages devoted to the subject, the author wrote that the city slaves were fed better, wore more fashionable clothes, did not have to sleep in barracks, and enjoyed greater mobility as they could lease themselves. Such advantages have just facilitated access for these slaves to savings, which accounted for the higher rate of coarctation and manumission in the large Cuban cities.

Although urban space and African heritage had been examined by the author in other studies⁴, the place reserved for the slave city

of the History Institute of the Science Academy of Cuba, were used to compose the book edition: ORTIZ, Fernando. *Los Negros Esclavos*. La Habana, Editorial de Ciências Sociales, 1987.

3 ORTIZ, F. *Los negros brujos*. Editorial de Ciencias Sociales, La Habana, 2007 (first edition in 1906). In this work, Ortiz aimed at analyzing "the bad Cuban life," which, he said, could be understood as the spread of witchcraft performed by blacks in Cuba, whose "*psiquis africana, hubo de mantenerse ésta por largo tempo en un nivel inferior de cultura, así moral como intelectual*" (p. 21). According to scholars, this study showed a first phase of Fernando Ortiz when his anthropological practice was strongly influenced by the studies of criminologists, especially those made by the Italian Cesare Lombroso and the Brazilian Nina Rodrigues (With whom Ortiz exchanged correspondence). Cf. ARAÚJO, 2003. LOPES DE BARROS, 2011. Available at: <<http://www.abralic.org.br/anais/cong2011/AnaisOnline/resumos/TC1082-1.pdf>>

4 Five years later (1921), Ortiz published an important work in which he analyzed the solidarity networks set up in Cuba by slaves and freedmen from the same ethnic background. Cf.: ORTIZ, F. Los cabildos afrocubanos. *Revista Bimestre Cubana*, vol. XVI, n° 1, enero-febrero de 1921. After his death in 1969, many Ortiz writings were compiled in other works, which also

remained the same: a non-place. Although not punished as much as the slaves that worked in the sugar plantations, nor as much as a freedman who had been emancipated, the urban slave was a kind of analytical limbo, although their presence had never been discarded by Ortiz.

The theoretical changes in anthropological studies in the early twentieth century, and how Fernando Ortiz made use of them to analyze the Cuban blacks, exercised an important influence on Gilberto Freyre's study published in 1933. In the famous *Casa Grande e Senzala* (The Masters and the Slaves), Freyre (2009) broke with the racist discourse prevailing in the Brazilian social sciences, but also ushered in a new look on Brazil. One of the author's assumptions states that the Brazilian formation was a process resulting from balanced antagonism, be it economic, social, political or even geographical (2009, p. 116). However, Freyre noted that the largest and deepest antagonism of Brazil was that between slaves and masters of the countryside. It is understood that the choice of the title *Casa Grande e Senzala* was not random.

According to the author, the formation of the intimacy of the patriarchal family (considered by Freyre the main institution of Brazilian society), shaped the slaves' contribution (and his African background) in the history of Brazil. For Freyre, the great legacy was left by rural and house slaves: captives who transited through the corridors of the master's houses of Brazil, who worked on planting, harvesting and processing tropical products, and also tempered the Master's kitchen and nursed their owners' children (and were sometimes used as sexual objects by their masters).

Although it was very well received in intellectual circles, and was seen as an analysis that encompassed the entire Brazilian history, *Casa Grande e Senzala* was indeed a study that aimed to examine the colonial past of Brazil. In the title that followed the analytical trilogy of Brazilian society—first published in 1936—the urban slave, not previously mentioned, received some prominence. According to the author, *Sobrados e Mucambos* sought to:

analyzed aspects of the slave/black life in Cuba. Cf. ORTIZ, F. *Contrapunteo cubano del tabaco y el azúcar*, La Habana, Editorial de Ciencias Sociales, 1978. ORTIZ, F. *Los Negros Curros*. La Habana, Editorial de Ciencias Sociales, 1986. Other Ortiz works, as well as a brief examination of his life, can be found at GARCÍA-CARRANZA, A. SUÁREZ, Norma. QUESADA MORALES, Alberto. *Cronología Fernando Ortiz*. La Habana, Fundación Fernando Ortiz, 1996.

“study the subordination processes [...] that characterizes the formation of our rural patriarchy and, from the late eighteenth century, its decline or its extension in a severe patriarchy of lords of urban and semi-urban houses; the development of cities; the formation of the Empire; we are almost saying, the formation of the Brazilian people.” (FREYRE, 2002, p. 9)

Through a process of imitation, the urban plaza winning the sugar mill (FREYRE, 2002, p. 61), the intimacy of the rural patriarchal family was giving way to the inherent theatricality of life in cities. The private sphere of houses (*sobrados*) and shanties (*mucambos*) rivaled the public realm of streets, alleys and fountains of a world city. Amid the tensions that marked the urban life of nineteenth-century Brazil, Freyre ended up building the first inventory of urban slavery, marked by greater transience of slaves (both men and women) who went to city streets in search of work, by slave escapes constantly reported in the newspapers, by coops gangs (*capoeiras*) that plagued the authorities (Ibidem, chapters 8-9). However, according to the author, such dynamics had “numbered days.” Although Freyre has approached a good part of the complexity of the urban slavery, the author had in advance classified this phenomenon as an “*extension, [...] less severe, of urban masters.*” As noted by Ortiz twenty years before, “*Urban bondage allowed certain favorable situations to the slave*” (ORTIZ, 1987, p. 285) which in fact distanced the experience of urban slaves from slave plantation experience. At the moment the slave institution began to receive the first in-depth analysis, the little violence attributed to the city world did not seem to be of any interest to researchers.

Other scholars corroborated the central role that Ortiz and Freyre attributed to slavery (and rural slaves) in building their societies. Thus, Fernando Ortiz and Gilberto Freyre’s analyses were well received, especially Freyre’s analysis, ultimately making urban slavery a less important issue facing the whole slave system⁵. These authors opened

5 In the case of Brazilian historiography of the 1930s and 1940s, other important works that proposed to examine the Brazilian colonial past corroborated the secondary role that Freyre attributes to urban slavery. See Cf. HOLLANDA, Sérgio Buarque de. *Raízes do Brasil*. (first edition in 1936). 26ª edição. Rio de Janeiro, Editora José Olympio, 1994. PRADO Jr., Caio. *Formação do Brasil Contemporâneo*. (first edition in 1942). 24ª reimpressão. São Paulo, Brasiliense, 1996. Prado Junior devoted a few pages to the examination of urban slavery that, according to the Marxist perspective that guided his work, should be seen as an anomaly of the Brazilian slave system. The analysis that slavery received from the Cuban historiography of

a discussion of slavery that dealt positively with African heritage in two notably blended societies—although violence was a constituent part of the two authors' development.

If, on the one hand, readings and interpretations of Ortiz and Freyre's works reinforced the little relevance that urban slavery seemed to have to the analysis of slave societies, on the other, the analytical and theoretical proximity of the studies of the two authors strongly influenced the comparative analysis of slavery in the Americas, which placed Brazil and Cuba in the same model of slave systems. An example was the essay by Frank Tannenbaum (1991) *Slave and Citizen*, published in 1946.

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Immersed in the racial issues that marked American society in the first half of the twentieth century, under the influence of Ortiz and Freyre's work⁶, Tannenbaum has detected a number of similarities of moral and legal order in the slave system of the Iberian colonies. According to the author, these similarities would arise from the Christian heritage and legacy of the Justinian Code implemented by Portugal and Spain in the New World (Cf. COPPER; HOLT; SCOTT, 2005, p. 39-41). The possibility of having mediators in the relationship with their masters would, in theory, enable the slaves of Iberoamerica a less violent experience when compared to that experienced in the English colonies. One of the arguments used by Tannenbaum was the largest manumission rate found in Brazil and Cuba, which, consequently, would have contributed to the greater racial miscegenation seen in both countries.

The terms used by Tannenbaum illuminated the existing idyllic view of Iberian slavery studies especially in Brazil, and paved

that period was not much different. The US occupation of the island during the 1920s and the dictatorship of Gerardo Machado in the following years has led to a number of interpretations of the history of Cuba which were more concerned with understanding issues concerning the island's independence process and the diplomatic relations. Emilio Roig Leuchsering and Ramiro Guerra y Sánchez gave little attention to urban slavery. Cf. SMITH, Robert F. Twentieth-Century Cuban Historiography. *The Hispanic American Historical Review*, Vol. 44, N° 1 (feb., 1964), p. 44-73.

⁶ Important to note that one of the reasons for Tannenbaum to talk openly with Gilberto Freyre was due to the fact that Freyre's work was one of the few reviews written by Brazilians that were translated into English.

the way for other comparative studies⁷. The work of Stanley Elkins (1959), a prime example of the influence of the comparative model, was developed in *Slavery and Citizen*. Since then, a number of studies (comparative and local) were produced in a broad dialogue with Tannenbaum's interpretation in order to either reinforce or head off the author's points⁸. It would not be an exaggeration to say that the controversy caused by Tannenbaum reinforced the primacy of rural slavery in the works that analyzed Brazil and Cuba's slaveholding past.

New scenarios, new objects

In the international context, the numerous examinations undertaken on slavery in the Americas, the expansion of historians' source scope, the civil rights struggles of African-Americans and the African independence process, created new questions that could not be answered only by examining rural slavery, or from the perspective that understood the slave as a "thing."⁹ On this occasion, in the 1960s, the urban slavery began to gain independent object status and legitimate analyses. The work of Richard Wade (1964) inaugurated the study of modern bondage in urban areas, showing that even in a society marked by monoculture (in this case, the southern United States), slavery adapted to different situations.

From the 1960s, urban slavery became a relevant question in American history studies. In addition to the international framework just noted and the investment in transatlantic slave trade research¹⁰, particular aspects of Brazil and Cuba's histories were instrumental in putting urban slavery on research agendas, and to compose terms on

7 To understand Tannenbaum's impact on the production of Comparative History see: SILVA JÚNIOR, 2009, p. 8-20.

8 In an important article that analyzes the debate over slavery in the Americas created by Tannenbaum, Alejandro de la Fuente pointed out a number of studies that have been done in order to show that racial reality of Latin America was not associated to the slave regime of the Iberian colonies. Cf. DE LA FUENTE, 2004.

9 The historiographical change on modern slavery is well commented in the article: "The Study of Slavery." *Annual Review of Sociology*, n. 3, p. 407-449, 1977.

10 Although in a first moment the research on transatlantic slave trade had a fundamentally demographic approach, these studies have pointed to the need to understand in more depth the dynamics of African societies involved in transatlantic trade. During this period, one of the most important works on the subject was CURTIN, Philip D. *The Atlantic slave trade: a census*. Madison, Wisconsin University Press, 1969.

which such analysis would be based. Without a doubt, the broad debate about the existence or non-existence of racial democracy in Brazil (in which the UNESCO Project was a key in the discussions)¹¹, and the Cuban Revolution of 1959¹² were crucial in defining the study of slavery.

In the case of Brazilian historiography, the first analysis on the subject seems to clarify the confluence of these streams. Influenced by the work of Richard Wade and in a frank debate with the historiography of slavery that understood that urban bondage was a less violent dimension of the slave system, in 1972, Mary Karasch defended her doctoral thesis, published fifteen years later. The work of Karasch (2000) was innovative for two reasons. First, because of its choice of subject matter. To take advantage of a rich documentary corpus—from travelers’ reports to municipal minutes, newspapers of the period, and criminal cases—the author demonstrated the feasibility of research on the subject, contrary to what Gilberto Freyre had postulated years earlier. The second innovative point refers to Karasch’s adopted analytical perspective, which took the slave as an agent of his own history¹³. This approach allowed her to scrutinize Rio de Janeiro’s aspects

11 Analyses of the Brazilian racial issue produced by the intellectuals of the School of Chicago and later the Free School of Sociology and Politics of São Paulo, expanded the debate on the existence of a “racial harmony” in Brazil. The Freyrian work interpretations had created the myth of absent or lesser violence in Brazilian race relations that made Brazil a kind of “racial democracy” that should be taken as a model by other societies. Racial issues were further sharpened after the horrors of the Second World War, which had led to the extreme the racist theories of the nineteenth century. In order to further study the issue, in 1950 the UNESCO sponsored a series of research on race relations in Brazil. As suggested above, the origin of this project was linked precisely to the anti-racist agenda formulated by UNESCO in the late 1940s under the impact of the Holocaust. The apparent racial harmony has made Brazil a country understood as a kind of “living laboratory.” In this way, the objectives of the UNESCO project were to determine the economic, social, political, cultural and psychological aspects that favored (or not) the existence of harmonious relations between races and ethnic groups. Therefore, young Brazilian and foreign social scientists have undertaken the analysis of the significant mobility and integration of black people in Brazilian society. As part of the work reinforced the idyllic picture of race relations in Brazil, other studies, especially those produced by the University of São Paulo, rejected this premise, using the strong violence of Brazil’s slave past as a constitutive part of their analysis. Cf. GUIMARÃES, article in CHOR; SANTOS(org.), 1996. GUIMARÃES, 2004. The “Escola de São Paulo” was deeply influenced by Marxism: CARDOSO, 1962. COSTA, 1966. FERNANDES, 1964.

12 About the influence that the 1959 Revolution had in the Cuban historiography, see: SMITH, 1964, p. 44-73. PÉREZ Jr, 1980, p. 79-89. PÉREZ Jr. 1988, p. 87-101.

13 Part of the analytical perspective adopted by Karasch follows the systematic platform by

of slave life, outlining a broad picture of the slave system structure and the slave's daily life. Taking into account the inherent violence of slavery, the author presented a true guide of slave life in Rio de Janeiro, which includes the slaves' origins, the transatlantic slave trade, the sale of slaves, the activities they carried out in the urban space, reinventions of identity bonds, and state attitudes towards slave masses, amongst other issues.

From Karasch's analysis, we can say that the study of urban slavery in Brazil was included in an interesting investigative field, which had been gaining greater legitimacy. Seven years later, the US research Katya Mattoso (1982) published *Ser escravo no Brasil* (To Be a Slave in Brazil), a work which presented a general picture of slave life in the city of Salvador¹⁴. In João José Reis' doctoral thesis, which he defended in 1982, and published a few years later, he reoriented the slavery issue concerning urban centers. By studying the uprising of Malês in 1835 in the city of Salvador (Malês' Rebellion), the author worked with the explosive potential of urban centers of Imperial Brazil, which exacerbated the sense of social and political inequality (REIS, 2003).

The work of João José Reis already announced important changes in the Brazilian historiography of slavery. The late 1980s and early 1990s were extremely profitable in academic production. The dialogue with social movements (such as the Black Movement), Brazil's democracy and the refusal of racial harmony in Brazil had a strong influence on works that selected the slave as the object of analysis. Nevertheless, this choice was also guided by a number of innovations that had taken place in Social History, such as the concern to address the "history of the vanquished," or "history from below", Micro History, and the new Marxist approach developed by E. P. Thompson, who employed the concept of agency to analyze the English working classes¹⁵. In general, such analysis emphasized the

Genovese in his work: GENOVESE, Eugene *Roll. Jordan, Roll. The World the Slaves Made*. New York. Vintage, 1974.

¹⁴ Many of the points raised by the author were questioned by subsequent historiography, especially in regard to certain softness of the slave system in cities, compared to slavery in the field. See: GORENDER, J. *Escravidão Reabilitada*. São Paulo, Ed. Ática, 1990.

¹⁵ Important works that were crucial to the renewal of the Social History of this period are GINZBURG, Carlo. *O queijo e os vermes. O cotidiano e as ideias de um moleiro perseguido*

violence inherent to the slave system, but were strongly concerned with presenting the different forms of resistance of slaves inside the system—this resistance was often linked to African heritages.¹⁶

Although a significant part of the academic production in this period analyzed the slave subjected to the dynamics that dictated the pace of productive plantations¹⁷, new historiographical approaches favored more specific studies, which passed off generalizing analysis. In this context, the city world became extremely inviting for further research, and many historians took the clues left by Mary Karasch for crushing the urban slavery and their apparent contradictions.

Rio de Janeiro was one of the cities studied by historiography due to the large number of slaves in the nineteenth century and, consequently the large numbers of documents in the archives. In 1983, Leila Mezan proposed to study slavery in Rio de Janeiro from what she considered to be the lack of intermediation in the master-slave relationship that, in the field, was represented by the overseer figure (ALGRANTI, 1988). Through the study of criminal cases, the author worked with one of the most controversial aspects of urban slavery: the greater freedom of a slave on the streets of urban centers and the state's role as a mediator of social control, or as a substitute for the overseer. The violence, the increased mobility of the urban slave and the state actions were well discussed by Leila Mezan.

Five years later, when Brazil celebrated the centenary of the abolition (1988), Marilene Rose Nogueira da Silva (1988) defended her Masters dissertation, which sought to understand the everyday life of the *gain slave* (*escravo de ganho*)—the slave who worked on the streets performing different tasks—from the assumption that the urban space was a highly explosive environment. That same year, Luis

pela Inquisição. São Paulo, Cia. das Letras, 1987 (first edition in 1976). SHARPE, Jim. “A história vista de baixo.” BURKE, P. (Org.). *A Escrita da História - Novas Perspectivas*. São Paulo, UNESP, 1992, p. 39-62. THOMPSON, E. *A Formação da Classe Operária Inglesa*, 3 volumes. Rio de Janeiro, Paz e Terra, 1997. (First edition in 1963). THOMPSON, E. *Costumes em Comum – estudos sobre cultura popular tradicional*. São Paulo. Cia. das Letras, 1998.

16 Cf.: REIS, J.J. SILVA E. *Negociação e Conflito*. São Paulo, Cia. das Letras, 1989.

17 Important works that analyzed the rural slavery in Brazil were MACHADO, Maria Helena P.T. *Crime e escravidão. Trabalho, Luta, Resistência nas lavouras paulistas 1830-1888*. São Paulo, Editora Brasiliense, 1987; LARA, Silvia H. *Campos de Violência. Escravos e senhores na Capitania do Rio de Janeiro 1750-1808*. Rio de Janeiro, Paz e Terra, 1988.

Carlos Soares (1988) also examined some of the issues related to the labor world of urban slaves, reiterating that the annuity received by the captives did not diminish the violence inherent to slave relations.

To some extent, the three works described above deal with the thorniest issues of urban slavery: the increased mobility of the slave in the urban space, the possibility of this captive saving/having a nest egg, and the limits of state interference in the city slave's daily life. All were categorical in demonstrating that while urban slavery had significantly different characteristics from those observed in rural areas—particularly with regard to the material life of the slaves—violence was present in all dimensions of urban slavery.

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Although Cuban history has experienced the weight of slavery very intensely (especially between the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries), the trajectory of the historiography of urban slavery in Cuba was significantly different from what was seen in Brazil's case. Many scholars regard the 1959 Revolution as a kind of watershed in the historiography produced in Cuba. Before the Revolution, urban slavery was a minor or unexplored theme. Although there was significant intellectual production between the 1930s and 1940s, the topics analyzed were linked to the understanding of the colonial past, the war of independence and diplomatic relations with the United States, which almost resulted in the annexation of the island. The city of Havana was the scene of many studies, but most of them were concerned with understanding what social networks were established by the intellectual elite of the eighteenth century and especially of the following century (SMITH, 1964).

It is undeniable that the works of Fernando Ortiz exerted strong influence on culturalist approaches, demonstrating the need to deepen the studies on the slave and the black population to obtain a better understanding of the colonial past. Perez de la Riva published a major work in 1944 in which, under the strong influence of Freyre's studies, chose the coffee plantation as the center of Cuban culture during colonization (apud SMITH, 1964, p. 71). Immersed in the discussions initiated by Frank Tannenbaum and Stanley Elkins about the differences between the Americas' slave systems, Herbert Klein (1989) and Franklin Knight (1970) elaborated interpretations of the Cuban slave system which, although divergent, agreed that the urban

slave was less relevant in Cuban history. As much as Klein (1989, p. 159-164) recognized the importance of the slave (and freedman) for the operation of the major Cuban cities, the author took as irrefutable the reports left by travelers, and ranked urban slavery as less violent than slavery on the plantations, and even than the urban slavery in Virginia. Knight reinforced this perspective, stating that:

It was not just the lives of slaves much less regulated in cities, but also the opportunities to get money allowed them to buy their freedom with relatively higher ease than rural slaves. Urban slaves also mingled with the free people of color, which facilitated escapes. (KNIGHT, 1970, p. 61)

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As Ortiz had said half a century before, the best material condition of urban slaves—they could dress and feed themselves better than field slaves—did not only create a slave subtype, but eventually developed into a gradient of violence inherent to the institution of slavery.¹⁸

The many ills suffered by slaves began to be studied more systematically by the historiography formed after the Revolution of 1959. Although a more leftist approach of the Cuban history had already been drawn up in the 1930s, much of the Marxist analysis began to face the slave period as the seeds of the twentieth century class struggles. Not only was the inherent violence in the slave system embodied in the analysis, but the very black figure rose to prominence as well (PEREZ Jr, apud SMITH, 1964, p. 74).

Aspects of the complexity of the relationships created in Cuban slave cities were presented in *El negro en la economía habanera del siglo XIX*. Published in 1971, Pedro Deschamps Chapeaux's book (1971) rescued part of the trajectory of the black-mulatto population that lived in Havana during the nineteenth century. Although urban slavery itself

¹⁸ In 1972, John Blassingame published an interesting article in which he criticized the condescending look that Klein and Knight developed about urban slavery. His main question focused on the uncritical use of accounts left by travelers who visited the island during the colonial period, and the deliberate choice of these foreigners. According to him, other travelers who were on the island not only denounced the violence suffered by city dwellers slaves, but also classified it as more spiteful if compared with the lives of slaves who lived in the Southern United States. Cf. BLASSINGAME, J. W. Bibliographical Essay: Foreign Writers View Cuban Slavery. *The Journal of Negro History*, Vol. 57, n° 4 (Oct., 1972), p. 415-424.

was not its object of analysis, the author investigated important issues such as black clusters (*cabildos de nación*), the battalions of Pardos and Morenos of Havana, musicians, barbers and bleeders, interracial weddings that indicated the intricate relationship established between African slaves and those who had obtained freedom.

Even while pointing to the need for a more systematic study of urban slavery in Havana, the great contribution of Deschamps Chapeaux's work was to illuminate the issues experienced by blacks (slaves and free), paying particular attention to the events and situations perpetrated by the black population (*población de color*). In a way, Deschamps ended up creating a tradition that favored the study Cuba's slaves and freedmen's actions, if they would have lived in the countryside or in the cities. The author's contributions did not stop there. Imbued in proving the relevance of the black population (free and slave) in the history of Cuba, in 1973, Deschamps Chapeaux published *Contribución a la historia de la gente sin historia* (Contribution to the History of the People without History), a work which is a theoretical and methodological analysis of the black presence in Cuba. Eleven years later, the same Deschamps published *Los cimarrones urbanos*, a study in which the author pointed out some of the complexity of the dynamics of urban slavery, and showed what documents are required to think captivity in the city space¹⁹.

The first works of Deschamps Chapeaux were very important to Verena Martinez-Alier's (2001) analysis, *Marriage, Class and Colour in Nineteenth-Century Cuba*, originally published in 1974. Even if her goal was not only to examine the dynamics of slavery or the world city, Martinez-Alier raised important questions about aspects that guided the daily lives of slaves and freedmen who lived on the island during the nineteenth century, especially in regard to sexual values and practices of a slave society marked by strained race relations. This work was of great importance in the debate on race and gender issues in Cuba, which were considered less violent compared to other locations in the Americas, especially the towns of English and French colonization.

In an effort to accomplish a full history of Cuba, Levi Marrero

19 See: DESCHAMPS CHAPEAUX, P. PÉREZ DE LA RIVA, J. *Contribucion a la história de la gente sin historia*. La Habana, Editorial de Ciencias Sociales, 1974. DESCHAMPS CHAPEAUX, P. *Los Cimarrones urbanos*. La Habana, Editorial de Ciencias Sociales, 1983.

(1984) addressed interesting questions about slavery in Havana in volumes 9 and 10 of the work *Cuba: economía y sociedad. Azúcar, ilustración y conciencia (1763-1868)*, reinforcing the complexity of race relations on the island. Still in the line of studies that have drawn on racial and ethnic issues in Cuba—establishing important links with the dynamics of urban slavery—there is the conspiracy book *La Escalera* (1844) published in 1988²⁰. In this work, Robert Paquette showed the complexity of racial issues on the island, at a time when abolitionism gained a lot of space between certain Cuban groups (especially in Havana), and which relied on strong support from the English directly involved in antislavery actions in Cuba. As in the work of João José Reis, the dynamics of a slave urban space also showed potential violence. As such, the fine stories of these cities gained new contours and other new characters.

What can be observed is that, between the 1970s and 1980s, a series of analyzes on the history of Brazil and Cuba began to examine the transition from slave to free labor, as well as the overlapping of concepts of race and nation in Cuba during the last decades of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the Republic. Through comparative analyzes or case studies, the alleged Cuban racial harmony—already questioned in previous works—is now systematically tackled²¹.

Scenario as a Protagonist

It was only in the late 1980s that the fringes of urban slavery present in fictions turned into historiographical research as objects that leaned on the dynamics of Rio de Janeiro and Havana. Still immersed in the historiographical renewal, especially in the area of Social History—that inaugurated new historical perspectives—the studies from 1990 confirmed the particularity of urban slavery, placing new questions about the city space and expanding the range of relevant issues on the theme. In Brazil, one can notice a profusion of urban slavery studies, mainly in Rio de Janeiro, a city that had a very singular

20 See: PAQUETTE, Robert L. *Sugar is Made with Blood*. The conspiracy of La Escalera and the conflict between Empires over Slavery in Cuba. Middletown, Wesleyan University Press, 1988.

21 SCOTT 1985. SCOTT, 2005. FERRER, 1995, p. 101-125. FERRER, 1999. DE LA FUENTE, 1999, p. 39-73.

trajectory within the American context, with a view that has been transformed into what Kisten Schultz (2008) called Tropical Versailles. Besides the uniqueness of Rio de Janeiro, it is necessary to point out that the creation of many post-graduate courses and the development of research in archives and/or sources hitherto rarely consulted were also crucial to the rise of urban slavery as an object of analysis for which the scenario earned protagonist status, allowing historians to further scrutinize the urban dynamics.

The examination of the types of slave housing was a topic research of Sidney Chalhoub (1996) and Carlos Eugenio Lebon Soares (1998), who demonstrated that urban slaves were able to enjoy the benefits of traffic mobility in urban context. The same authors also examined, in different studies, how slaves built bonds of solidarity, and how Capoeira was used to fight against slavery (CALHOUB, 1990). The complexity of life in Rio de Janeiro was such that more specialized analyzes could be done. Formation of quilombos within Rio de Janeiro city limits; slave capoeira; escapes; crime; purchase of manumission; crony relations; ways to control the captives; origin of enslaved Africans²²; different housing possibilities: these are examples

22 See: GOMES, Flávio dos Santos. "Quilombos do Rio de Janeiro no século XIX." REIS. J.J. GOMES, Flávio dos Santos (Org.). *Liberdade por um fio*. História dos quilombos no Brasil. São Paulo, Cia. das Letras, 1996, p. 263-290. GOMES, Flávio dos Santos. *Histórias de quilombolas – mocambos e comunidades de senzalas no Rio de Janeiro – século XIX*. Rio de Janeiro, Arquivo Nacional, 1995. SOUSA, Jorge Prata (org.). *Escravidão: ofícios e liberdade*. Rio de Janeiro, Arquivo Público do Estado do Rio de Janeiro, 1998. FERREIRA, Roberto Guedes. *Na pia batismal; família e compadrio entre escravos na freguesia de São José do Rio de Janeiro*. Dissertação de mestrado defendida na Universidade Federal Fluminense, Niterói, 2000. SOARES, Mariza de Carvalho. *Devotos da cor*. Identidade étnica, religiosidade e escravidão no Rio de Janeiro, século XVIII. Rio de Janeiro, Civilização Brasileira, 2000. SOARES, Carlos Eugênio Líbano. *Capoeira Escrava e outras tradições rebeldes no Rio de Janeiro (1808-1850)*. Campinas, Ed. Unicamp, 2002. ROSSATO, Jupiracy A. R. *Sob os Olhos da Lei: o escravo urbano na legislação municipal da cidade do Rio de Janeiro (1830-1838)*. Dissertação de Mestrado apresentada na Universidade Federal Fluminense, Niterói, 2002. FLORENTINO, Manolo. "Dos escravos, forros e fujões no Rio de Janeiro imperial." *Revista da USP - Dossiê Brasil Império*, 58, jun./jul./ago. 2003 p.104-115. FRANK, Zephyr L. *Dutra's World. Wealth and Family in Nineteenth-Century Rio de Janeiro*. Albuquerque, University of New Mexico, 2004. MOREIRA, Carlos E.A. *O Duplo Cativo: escravidão urbana e o sistema prisional no Rio de Janeiro, 1790 – 1821*. Dissertação de Mestrado defendida na UFRJ, Rio de Janeiro, 2004. FARIAS, J.B. SOARES, C.E.L. GOMES, F. *No Labirinto das Nações*. Africanos e identidades no Rio de Janeiro, século XIX. Rio de Janeiro, Arquivo Nacional, 2005. LARA, Silvia H. *Fragmentos setecentistas*. Escravidão, cultura e poder na América portuguesa. São Paulo, Cia. das Letras, 2007. LIMA, C.A. *Artífices do Rio de Janeiro (1790-1808)*. Rio de Janeiro,

of other issues that were being addressed by the historiography that focused on city slavery, particularly in the city of Rio de Janeiro²³.

In the case of Havana, the historiography of the urban slave dynamics is smaller and less diverse than Rio's, although it revealed the plot of slavery in the city. Although only tangentially speaking about the issue of slavery, the work of Venegas Fornias (1990 and 2002) was fundamental for a better understanding of the diverse population that inhabited the walled Havana²⁴. In a summary made on the relations between Cuba and Spain²⁵, Moreno Friginals (2005) emphasized the prominence of slavery in Havana's neighborhoods providing important clues about the complexity of bondage in the city. By analyzing the *Negroes and mulattoes: life and survival, and the company produced by the sugar*, the author showed how the city slave was part of the entire history of the Cuban capital, and he also warned about the major changes in this segment of the population from the nineteenth

Apicuri, 2008. SELA, Eneida M.M. *Modos de ser, Modos de ver. Viajantes europeus e escravos africanos no Rio de Janeiro (1808-1850)*. Campinas, Editora UNICAMP, 2008. SANTOS, Ynaê Lopes dos. *Além da Senzala. Arranjos escravos de moradia no Rio de Janeiro (1808-1850)*. São Paulo, HUCITEC, 2010.

23 Despite the fact that a significant portion of the research on urban slavery has examined Rio de Janeiro for the reasons already scored, important analyzes of other Brazilian cities have reinforced the importance of the study of urban slavery. The slave house, African heritage, gender relations and dynamics between captives and freedmen were some of the aspects that permeated the daily life of cities like Salvador, Pernambuco, São Paulo and Porto Alegre. This diversity, combined with the use of various sources, the formulation of new questions and careful analysis, demonstrate the relevance and potential of research of urban slavery in Brazil. COSTA, Ana de Lourdes R. *Ekabó. Trabalho escravo, condições de moradia e reordenamento urbano em Salvador no século XIX*. Dissertação de Mestrado defendida na Faculdade de Arquitetura e Urbanismo da Universidade Federal da Bahia. Salvador, 1989. CARVALHO, Marcus J.M. *Liberdade: Rotinas e Rupturas do Escravismo*, Recife, 1822-1850. 2ªed. Recife. Editora da UFPE, 1998. DIAS, Maria Odila Leite da Silva. *Quotidiano e Poder em São Paulo no século XIX*. São Paulo, Brasiliense, 1984. WISSENBAACH, Maria Cristina Cortez. *Sonhos Escravos, Vivências Ladinhas. Escravos e forros em São Paulo (1850 – 1880)*. São Paulo, Editora Hucitec, 1998. MAESTRI, Mário. *O Sobrado e o cativo. A arquitetura urbana erudita no Brasil escravista. O caso gaúcho. Passo Fundo*. Editora UPF, 2002. FARIAS, J.B. GOMES, F. SOARES, C.E.L. MOREIRA, C.E.A. *Cidades Negras. Africanos, crioulos e espaços urbanos no Brasil escravista do século XIX*. São Paulo, Alameda, 2006.

24 VENEGAS FORNIAS, Carlos. *La urbanización de las murallas: dependencia y modernidad*. La Habana, Editorial Letras Cubanas, 1990. VENEGAS FORNIAS, Carlos. *Cuba y sus pueblos. Censos y mapas de los siglos XVIII y XIX*. La Habana, Centro de Investigación y Desarrollo de la Cultura Cubana Juan Marinello, 2002.

25 See FRAGINALS, M.M. *Cuba. Espanha. Cuba. Uma História Comum*. Bauru, EDUSC, 2005.

century (FRAGINALS, 2005, p. 217-237). In 1998, Antonio Núñez Jiménez (1998) published a compilation of announcements from major newspapers in Havana between the years 1790 to 1886. With this material, the author presented part of the scenario that marked the everyday life of slaves in Havana, with particular attention to the origin of these captives, the activities performed by them in the urban world and the resistance to the slave system through the escapes.

In the last fifteen years, different aspects of urban slavery in Havana were approached by historiography, confirming what the previously indicated works announced. The mentioned innovations and broadening of the debate on racial issues in Cuba marked many of these studies. In 2001, for example, Mena Luz (2001) defended a doctoral thesis that analyzed the free blacks and race relations in Havana during its urban modernization. Two years later, Gloria García (1996, p. 3) worked with different aspects of Cuban slavery in a constant dialogue between documental sources and historiographical analysis, whose goal was to try to “listen to the voice of the slave.” In the same year, Maria del Carmen Barcia Zequeira²⁶ examined the issue of the formation of slave families in Cuba and; once again, Havana was cited as one of the spaces of reconstruction of ties of kinship between slaves and their descendants. In 2004, Daniel Walker addressed the urban slave resistance based on the comparative study between the cities of Havana and New Orleans²⁷; to this end, the author analyzed the social control in the public space, the slave struggle for the establishment of families, the African and the African-American mentality and, finally, the construction of what he called cultural heritage.

In 2006, Matt Childs²⁸ analyzed aspects directly related to slavery in Havana to examine the struggle against Atlantic slavery from the Aponte rebellion in 1812, indicating a more explosive character that this city could have. Two years later, in 2008, Maria del Carmen Barcia Zequeira²⁹ published another work, which examined public spaces that

26 See: BARCIA ZEQUEIRA, Maria del Carmen. *La Otra familia. Parientes, redes y descendencia de los esclavos en Cuba*. La Habana, Fondo Editorial Casa de las Americas, 2003.

27 See: WALKER, D.E. *No more, No more*. Slavery and Cultural resistance in Havana and New Orleans. Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 2004.

28 See: CHILDS, Matt D. *The 1812 Aponte Rebellion in Cuba and the Struggle against Atlantic Slavery*. Chapel Hill, University of North Carolina Press, 2006

29 BARCIA ZEQUEIRA, Maria del Carmen. “Negros en sus espacios: vida y trabajos en la

blacks occupied in Havana. Not only did the author address the life of the slave in the Cuban capital, but she also shed light on some of the implications that urban slavery had in the city, especially with regard to the free and “de color” population. That same year, Alejandro de la Fuente highlighted the importance of slavery in Havana, when the author analyzed the history of the city during the sixteenth century. In *Havana and the Atlantic in the Sixteenth Century*, De la Fuente (2008) gave an important contribution to the study of urban slavery, especially of Havana, to defend the thesis that the city could already be classified as a place of slavery long before the plantation system was consolidated in Cuba.

The following year, Maria del Carmen Barcia Zequeira (2009) expanded the research indicated above and published *Los Ilustres Apellidos*, a work which analyzed the different areas occupied by black people in Havana during the nineteenth century, especially by freed and free segments that made up black and mulatto battalions, and helmed confraternities and urban *cabildos*.

Although the number of studies on Havana is smaller when compared to Rio de Janeiro, the innovation of Social History allowed historians to answer new questions about the city’s past whose answers were closely related to the slave character of Havana. The most recent work of historians Aisnara Perera Diaz and Maria Ángeles Fuentes were good examples of this: in addition to the perspective of micro history and the concern in understanding the world of slaves and freedmen, the research of these two historians also allows us to understand Havana compared with other Cuban cities³⁰.

From another perspective, the recent Ada Ferrer (2014) work ends with no doubts about the strength of slavery in Havana at the turn of the eighteenth century into the following century. In *Freedom’s Mirror* the author investigates the relationship between Cuba and Haiti during the Age of Revolution. Showing how the Cuban capital was not

Habana Colonial (espacios físicos, espacios sociales, espacios laborales).” In.: José Antonio Piqueras. (Org.). *Trabajo libre y Coactivo en Sociedades de Plantación*. Madrid: Siglo XXI, 2009.

30 Aisnara Perera Diaz & Maria de los Ángeles Meriño Fuentes. *Esclavitud, familia y parroquia en Cuba: otra mirada desde la microhistoria*, Santiago de Cuba: Editorial Oriente, 2006; idem, *Para librarse de lazos, antes buena familia que buenos brazos*. Apuntes sobre la manumisión en Cuba, Santiago de Cuba: Editorial Oriente, 2009.

so much an entry for thousands of Africans; Ada Ferres pointed out, as shown by Matt Child, that the circulation of ideas could have imploded the system of slavery on the island of Cuba.

The possibility to compare slavery in Havana and Rio de Janeiro was also announced in the nineteenth century when the scientist Alejandro Humboldt was startled by the black percentage of both cities' population, or a few years later when the abolitionist Aureliano Tavares Bastos compared—without hiding his happiness—that the number of slaves in the two cities decreased significantly (HUMBOLDT, 1836). Historian Michel Zeuske (LAGO; KATSARI, 2008, p. 148-184) even suggested the potential of a comparative study on those he called “The Atlantic Sisters.” The relationship between urban space and female trajectories was the main topic analyzed by Camillia Cowling in a thesis defended in 2006 and published in 2014³¹. Making use of comparative analysis, Cowling worked with the reality of women “of color” (black and mulatto women) in Rio de Janeiro and Havana during the last years of the existence of the slave system, showing how slave women who were mothers exercised important roles in the struggle to end slavery in Brazil and Cuba. In a doctoral thesis defended in 2012, the potentiality of a study comparing those who were the largest cities of slaves was once again analyzed; in *The Atlantic Sisters*, the author showed that the common reasons of the Cuban and Brazilian elites made Rio de Janeiro and Havana share the hardly honorable title of largest slave cities of the world (SANTOS, 2012).

The ability to compare dynamics and connect experiences allows us to enlarge the look at the scenario of urban slavery in the Americas, an issue that is gaining greater role in research agendas.

Analyzing urban slavery in perspective allows us to dive into the urban slavery specifics in different cities of the Americas, and understand what dynamics were characteristic of urban bondage. The scenario, in which the lives of suffering, anguish, loves and toils of Bertoleza and Cecilia took place, became therefore a promising research field.

31 COWLING, Camillia. *Matrices of Opportunity: Women of Colour, Gender and the Ending of Slavery in Rio de Janeiro and Havana, 1870-1888*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2013

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