

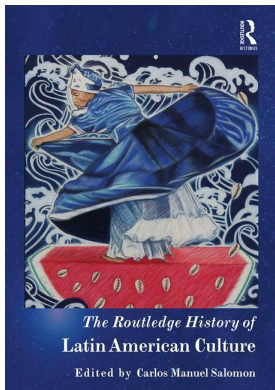
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THE TRAJECTORY OF THE AFRICAN MICHELINA

Identities, Slavery, and Post-Abolition at the Parish of
Nossa Senhora do Pilar, Rio de Janeiro, Brazil

Nielson Rosa Bezerra

In late 1872, as slavery took new directions in Brazil, vicar João Antônio da Silva Barriga baptized the innocent Crescência, a creole registered as a freeborn because of the *Lei do Ventre Livre* [Law of the Free Womb], which had been enacted the previous September 28. The little girl was the natural daughter to an African named Michelina and goddaughter to Bento and Thereza, who, like her mother, were the slaves of Donna Ignácia Antônia do Amaral Mattos.¹ Such a baptism entry exemplifies the different dimensions of the life of Africans and creoles during the last days of slavery in Brazil.

Crescência's mother, Michelina, descended from Africans who used to constitute the greater part of the enslaved population in Brazil. With the end of the Atlantic slave trade,² Africans began to arrive in smaller quantity, but they were still considerably abundant due to the persistence of the illegal trade. In the parish of Pilar, the African presence suffered a disaggregation within the enslaved population—at least with regard to baptism data. Such fluctuations in the number of Africans promotes the idea of a constant connection between the Atlantic world and the Recôncavo³ da Guanabara's economy and society.⁴ That not only happened during the apogee of the slave trade, but also throughout its disintegration process. Of the 201 mothers who gave birth to freeborn children, only Michelina was identified as an "African." Besides Michelina, only one slave was identified with the label "of a nation," pointing out the minority rates of Africans among slave women between 1871 and 1888.

The absence of African women who baptized their children after the Law of the Free Womb does not mean that they were nonexistent in that parish. The 1872 census counted 1129 slaves in the parish of Pilar.⁵ A brief comparison with the figures from the baptismal book allows us to identify a difference of almost a thousand people. There is a difference of over seven hundred people between the parents registered by the baptismal book and the people registered by the census. Therefore, the baptismal book offers an interesting perspective on society and slave families, but its data may be questionable when it comes to the demography of the parish of Pilar.

The absence of Africans among the women who had their freeborn children baptized in Pilar could be explained by a biological factor. By then, twenty-two years had passed since the end of the trade. The slave labor force in Pilar had not been renewed with Africans for a long time. The remaining African women, among those 1,129 slaves verified by the census, could possibly be "grandmothers," considering their advanced age

for reproduction. The fact that the Atlantic trade privileged male adults creates even more doubt, and explains the absence of African women in the entries. When studying the slave families in Vale do Paraíba, in the inland of Rio de Janeiro, Ana Rios and Hebe Mattos have found different references to “African grandparents” in the recollections concerning the period after 1871. Those references make an interesting allusion to the baptism of children, which gathered many people apart from their mothers and godparents. At the time, baptisms were seen as an important social space where grandparents, and even fathers attended—despite not being registered in the entries. One may presume, according to Mattos and Rios, that the baptism gathered families into celebration. Even so, the connection among those people, who lived together for decades, who raised their children and grandchildren together, who were united by marriages and baptisms, existed well before this formal celebration.⁶

This chapter focuses on the enslaved people of Brazil during last official year of African slavery, which was abolished in 1888 with the *Lei Aurea* [Gold Law]. Almost two decades before, the Brazilian Government passed *Lei do Ventre Livre* [Law of Free Womb] which proclaimed that every child who was born after that day would be free. Furthermore, this chapter details the condition of Black lives at the Parish Nossa Senhora do Pilar, Rio de Janeiro, during a specific period of Brazilian history. I want to show how African people lived during the last years of slavery in Brazil in order to contribute to the understanding of how much the post-Abolition period impacted the lives of Brazilians of African descent.

We cannot dismiss the fact that the majority of the Africans around the Recôncavo Fluminense (the stretch of land between the city of Rio de Janeiro and Serra do Mar) were from West and Central Africa, a place where the Bantu culture predominated. According to Robert Slenes, “talking of hopes and recollections of enslaved people from that part of Brazil necessarily means turning our attention to the cultural heritage that those exiled from Africa brought along with them.”⁷ Considering that it was a common characteristic to almost all African societies to be structured around the family lineage organization—that is, a group of relatives that delineates their origin from ancestors in common—it is likely that “African old people” attended the social meetings of slave communities by the end of the nineteenth century.

Like little Crescência, 97 percent of the freeborn children baptized in the parish of Nossa Senhora do Pilar did not have an identified father, so they were considered “natural children” instead of “legitimate children” (when father and mother are identified), which account for only 3 percent.⁸ Many hypotheses were created to explain the high frequency of natural children among slave women. Because the Atlantic trade prioritized male adults, it is likely that there were not enough women available to the “matrimonial market” within the slaves’ quarters, leading to conflict between Africans from different nations interested in a partner for a stable relationship.⁹ Robert Slenes, for instance, pays to attention to a greater number of legitimate marriages in larger estates. There was also a probable existence of “fictitious marriages,” having only the master’s consent, that were not always formalized by a clerical representative.¹⁰

However, Table 3.1 shows six fathers identified along the 201 entries. Legitimate children, those born to couples who had married under the rules of the Catholic Church, were an exception. Nevertheless, if those entries have little quantitative importance, an intense analysis on their details may contribute to the understanding of the relationships the enslaved forged among themselves and with people from other social spheres, such as freed slaves.

Table 3.1 Slave family, Pilar (1871–1888)

	<i>Father</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>Mother</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>Baptized</i>	<i>%</i>
African	–	–	1	0.5	–	–
Creole	–	–	141	70.1	112	55.7
Of a nation	–	–	1	0.5	–	–
Slave	6	3.0	17	8.6	–	–
Not identified	195	97.0	6	2.9	4	2.0
Mulatto	–	–	32	15.9	81	40.3
Black	–	–	3	1.5	4	2.0
Total	201	100	201	100	201	100

Source: Arquivo da Diocese de Duque de Caxias. Livro de Registro de Batismo de Escravos da Freguesia de Nossa Senhora do Pilar (1871–1888)

All the slaves who had legitimate children baptized belonged to José Pereira Bulhões de Carvalho, owner of the farm Santa Cruz, where the chapel of Nossa Senhora do Rosário, a filial church in Pilar, was located. The parish baptismal book contains entries from 1873–1875, registered by the entrusted priest, who signed as José Antônio da Silva Barriga. Among the slaves who stand out were Zeferino and Apolinária, a couple from the parish of Santo Antônio da Jacutinga. They took active part in the registration of their two legitimate children, Anacleto and Veríssimo. They were also the godparents of Marcelina, legitimate daughter of Joaquim and Cândida, who were also slaves who belonged to the same owner. Besides this, Zeferino also appears as the godfather of Marcelino, son of the same slave couple from the previous entry. However, in this case, the godmother was Angela, another slave.¹¹

The few couples who had legitimate, baptized children suggests that the slaves had autonomy in relation to the plantation, and as a family with spatial mobility. Such a perspective offers a broader view on the life conditions of those people throughout the last moments of slavery. The formation of a family was the first step in the long process of the social establishment that those people experienced during the transition to freedom. These few entries of legitimate, baptized children in Pilar offer an important glimpse of the close social relations the enslaved weaved throughout that period.

In many cases, the lack of a formal marriage prevented couples from registering their children as legitimate, producing a great number of natural children—as in the case of the parish of Pilar. With or without ecclesiastical consent, the formation of a family was a stabilizing factor initiated by the masters, who saw the slave family as an interesting way of assuring their authority—which by then was questionable due to the legal transformations that Brazil was slowly absorbing. Forming a family was advantageous to the enslaved since it could represent an important manorial permission, such as a small plot of land, a house apart from the slave quarters and some other little, yet significant, privileges. We should not forget that the parish of Pilar, as well as the entire Recôncavo, was dotted by small and medium estates, which were inhabited by no more than thirty slaves.

Of the mothers, 70.1 percent were identified as creoles, which means they had a closer African ancestry. This meant that the children's grandparents were most likely Africans, even though they are not registered in the accounted entries. Mulatto women accounted for 15.9 percent, demonstrating that the society in that parish, in the one generation was rapidly transforming. On the other hand, slightly more than 55 percent

of the children were identified as creoles and 40.3 percent as mulattoes. Such apparent plurality may hide a common ancestry, which could reveal a cultural pattern based on African traditions and family lineage. Although many inhabitants from São José, in Valença, were considered distant relatives, a genealogical study in that community based on baptism records revealed a common ancestry: All of them had some kind of kinship, even though their collective lineage had been forgotten. Nevertheless, the jongo dance became a common cultural practice that, incidentally, is likely of Bantu origin.¹²

It may be argued that as the number of Africans decreased in the parish of Pilar, the number of creoles and mulattoes would increase. However, we cannot disregard the fact that lighter skin designated social prominence. Many people of color who integrated into Brazilian society used the information about their skin color as a method for gaining social mobility.¹³ The small number of Africans in the entries changed the picture of social designations among the slaves of Pilar and demonstrates the collective strategies of freedom and social mobility that were undertaken in the bosom of the slave family. The absence of fathers in most baptism entries does not mean that they were absent. Still, after 1871, the figure of the slave mother became significant again within the relations established by slavery because of the *Lei do Ventre Livre*. The same womb that provided the reproduction of the slave condition would now secure freedom for children like little Crescência. So once freedom came, it was necessary to articulate a collective strategy of social mobilization, even though it was possible only through a generational perspective. The skin color designated in the baptism entry could represent the first and major step towards such a goal. Thus, the increase in the number of “mulattoes” throughout generations of slave families is no surprise. Another way of contributing to such a goal was through the strategic choice of godparents.

According to Silvia Brügger, godparenting tended to connect the children’s family to people of equivalent or higher status in the social hierarchy. Godparents were essential elements for family ties in the slavery environment.¹⁴ As can be seen in Table 3.2, all the baptism entries evidenced godparents, whatever their social condition was. When cross-matching data related to (free or slave) godfathers and godmothers, the numbers are equivalent. Regarding the godfathers, the slaves (52.3 percent) show a slight advantage; the free or freed godfathers (46.2 percent) are close to an equivalence. Though reversed, the percentage of free or freed godmothers (28.4 percent) was not so different from the slave godmothers (25.4 percent). Especially in the case of the godmothers, we can highlight the various devotions to Our Lady, who was registered as godmother in 44.2 percent of the entries.

Table 3.2 Social condition of godfathers and godmothers in Pilar (1871–1888)

	<i>Godfather</i>	%	<i>Godmother</i>	%
Freed creole	–	–	1	0.5
Devotions*	1	0.5	89	44.2
Slave	105	52.3	51	25.4
Freed	1	0.5	1	0.5
Free	93	46.2	57	28.4
Not identified	1	0.5	2	1.0
Total	201	100	201	100

Source: Arquivo da Diocese de Duque de Caxias; Livro de Registro de Batismo de Escravos da Freguesia de Nossa Senhora do Pilar (1871–1888)

* *Devotion*: A saint or representation of Mary in absence of a human godparent.

It is interesting to notice that although fathers are disproportionately absent, accounting for the great number of natural children, the same is not true among godparents. The majority of the godfathers were slaves. Free godfathers are likely the ones who had a surname and no mention of captivity. Given the minimal amount of freed godparents, we can assume that many of them did not mention their skin color in order to acquire social distinction. Another hypothesis, though less likely, is the possibility of the biological father attending the baptism as the godfather. This may have been a chance for the fathers to be with their children, since godparenting was a space of stabilization and creation of social ties. Although not necessarily a rule, baptism and godparenting—as well as the formation of families—were also forms of reassuring manorial authority.

Godparents have always compensated for the absence of one member of the family, usually the father. Godparenting was an important strategy to access the family's resources. The family was the main space of slave autonomy, which godparenting ensured, leading to greater social mobility. It is obvious, therefore, that godparents were carefully chosen and, regardless of manorial intervention, slaves had ways to monitor and discuss such intervention. However, there was a balance between godfathers and godmothers in the parish of Pilar. While there was a majority of slave godfathers, there was also a majority of free and freed women serving as godmothers for those innocent children.

In Brazil, more women were manumitted than men, making it likely that there were more free and freed women available to serve as godmothers for those children. Nonetheless, it seems to me that the kind of the estates and the characteristics of the slavery in Pilar—which can be seen as a representation of the Recôncavo Fluminense—also interfered in the pattern of choosing godparents.

Godparenting as a social mobilization strategy within different generations of a slave family is a factor that can be strongly identified in the parish of Pilar. There was an equivalence of godfathers and godmothers who held the same condition or were at a higher level in the social hierarchy.

According to the 1872 Census, there were 1,129 slaves in the parish of Pilar, of which 1.2 percent were seamstresses or bricklayers; 36 percent had household occupations; 37 percent were ploughmen; and 26 percent did not have their occupation registered.¹⁵ Considering this data, we can see that most slaves were somehow involved in farming, particularly food goods such as cassava flour. As it is known, many household slaves were employed in different activities of the house and the plantation, as the percentage of slaves in the region was low—an average of thirty slaves per estate. In general, slaves who had no “specialty” that deserved to be registered were employed in agriculture. So we can see that the Parish of Pilar was basically an agricultural area where the family ties

Table 3.3 Slave population in the parish of Pilar by gender (1871–1888)

<i>Sex</i>	<i>Number</i>	<i>%</i>
Men	306	40.4
Women	252	33.3
Boy	90	11.8
Girl	110	14.5
Total	758	100

Source: Livro de Registro de Batismo de filhos de mulheres escravas da Freguesia de Nossa Senhora do Pilar (1871–1888)

of the slaves, the lease of small allotments, and ladinization were all aspects of this late nineteenth century slave society.

Table 3.2 also reveals that in Pilar there was a blend of slave godfathers and free (or freed) godmothers. This factor is likely to be the same in other parishes of the area as well. Many women who appear with surnames and without mention of manumission or freedom in Table 3.2 were possibly free. Most of the men were employed as ploughmen on small estates located on the outskirts of the city of Rio de Janeiro. The closeness to the capital and the daily flow of goods induced a strong confluence of the Recôncavo and the urban world, causing the social inequalities characteristic to that society.

When comparing the total number of slaves registered in the 1872 census (1,129 slaves) and those 758 people involved in the baptism, such as parents, children to be baptized and godparents, it is possible to establish that a large proportion of people who lived in Pilar somehow took part in that Catholic ritual. In addition, Table 3.3 shows that the adult males had a small advantage (40.4 percent) over adult females (33.3 percent). Even after the end of the slave trade, the small landowners in the Recôncavo do Rio de Janeiro continued to prefer men to women as plantation workers. Interestingly, the birth of freeborns shows an inversion in the figures as the girls represented 14.5 percent and only 11.8 percent were boys. Apparently, there is a contraction in the data, since the freeborns should not be included in the figures of the slave population. However, these children remained in the bosom of the slave family because they were cared for by their parents. In addition, the Law of 1871 established a series of conditions that guaranteed freedom for these children.

At the Parish of Pilar, as well as throughout the region now known as the Baixada Fluminense, slavery was marked by constant influence from many social actors, causing dents and asymmetry in the idealized imperial society. Everyday slave life preserved interactions among people who did not belong to the same society, as it can be seen through the analysis of the baptismal book. It was also possible to identify the strong connection between the histories of the Parish and the debate about the end of slavery. The life of those people proceeded. Many already had a prospect of freedom on the horizon, either by negotiating manumission letters or even through expectation, since children born after 1871 were granted freedom, regardless of slave-owner resistance. Regardless, slave resistance was also present as well as the rebellious actions characteristic to the spreading of maroon communities of fugitive slaves and their descendants throughout the nineteenth century.

Peasantry and Social Rooting

Recôncavo da Guanabara was a place of food production, an economic activity that presupposes the existence of peasantry. In this case, the peasantry was more than a form of work organization. In the surroundings of the plantations, there was an economic and social conjuncture that marked the limits and levels of autonomy of the workers—either free men, freedmen, or slaves. With the advent of the Golden Law and the general freedom of all enslaved workers, the coffee sector suffered a direct impact. However, other sectors of agricultural production remained as an important foundation of the economy in Rio de Janeiro.¹⁶ The transformations of late nineteenth century Brazil led to a reorganization of national interests—whose main impulses were the end of slavery and the Proclamation of the Republic.

The society changed; the national wealth and the power relations that directed the course of the nation were significantly displaced. Nevertheless, the lives of ordinary

people proceeded. In this case, the Black population also underwent a major transformation since slavery, freedom, and citizenship were issues that directly involved them. Although the debate about the course of the nation was restricted to the elite, the impoverished population, formed mostly by former slaves, was also involved in the process. According to José Murilo de Carvalho, though an ideological construction had been carried out, which aimed for a social detachment during the Proclamation of the Republic, ordinary people got involved in the process, revealing a sense of citizenship.¹⁷

The Golden Law had multiple impacts on national life. The masses of people who had descended from slaves were not indifferent to these changes. At least they would cease being a slave to become a wage earner. An analysis of the impact of the Golden Law in the lives of the Black people is an interesting step toward increasing knowledge about that region during the early twentieth century. According to the *Jornal do Comércio* in 1890, cassava flour, corn, and bean were still the goods that came from places like Magé, Suruí, and São Matheus, places located in the Recôncavo, close to Pilar.¹⁸ This information is repeated in an issue of early January 1900. At that time, the railways had already mingled the transportation of goods and passengers, causing a reaction from the National Service of Public Health.¹⁹

Some studies have explored the demographic explosion in Baixada from 1930 on.²⁰ However, it is necessary to leave the statistical data behind and analyze the documents, such as the ecclesiastical books, that have greater opportunity to demonstrate the local reality. Here I chose to quantify the data from the slave baptismal book of Pilar, which, despite the Golden Law, kept being used. Note that the book begins in 1871, with a beautiful opening and recommendations made by the bishop, on behalf of the Law of the Free Womb. However, in the case of the Golden Law, there is only an interval of blank pages, but the records continued to be written in the same book without any recommendation. By censoring skin color, it is impossible to be sure that all entries made after 1888 were of children of former slaves. It is hard to imagine that a freeman under the previous system would have agreed to register his children in the same book of the former slaves—even if the Republic, in theory, would make them fully equal.

For some reason, no entry was registered for about ten years. The book fails to register children in the year of 1888 and only returns to be used in the year of 1897. However, it was possible to identify fathers, mothers, and godparents who “were born and lived” in the parish of Pilar, which shows the rooting of the people in that region even after the transformations in Brazil. Specifically in 1897, only ten entries were recorded. The meager amount limits the analysis, although table 3.4 reveals their location.

Aside from Isabel da Conceição, in the entry of her daughter Etelvina, everyone else, besides being residents, were also born in the parish of Pilar. Surely, this would be the case of people who had settled in that parish before the end of slavery due to the regional trade. But the fact that all the other mothers appear as “born” in the parish of Pilar nine years after the Golden Law demonstrates the fact that the Black population was rooted in the Recôncavo during the post-Abolition period. People were born into slavery in that place, but remained there after receiving freedom because they had ties to the land, with other people, within their social spaces and, of course, because they had minimal economic means to maintain themselves and their families.

The box of entries registered in 1897 shows the adoption of surnames in place of color designations such as “creole,” “African,” “of a nation,” and “mulatto,” among others so common during the slavery period. Despite the concentration of natural children, which refers, at least on the records, to the absence of fathers, mothers, godfathers, and godmothers, they turned out to be identified by surnames. The reason for these choices

Table 3.4 Baptism entries, Parish of Pilar, 1897

<i>Year</i>	<i>Child</i>	<i>Status</i>	<i>Place</i>	<i>Father</i>	<i>Mother</i>	<i>Godfather</i>	<i>Godmother</i>
1897	Joaquim	Legitimate	Pilar	Carlos Manoel Assunção	Carolina Rosa dos Santos	Joaquim Maria dos Reis	Maria Joaquina dos Santos
1897	Victalina	Natural	Pilar	XXX	Antonia Soares da Silva	Francisco Soares da Silva	Elvira Correa de Mattos
1897	Francisco	Natural	Pilar	XXX	Rita Luiza da Conceição	Francisco Vieira Netto	Rita da Conceição Netto
1897	Severiano	Natural	Pilar	XXX	Eufrásia Joaquina Botelho	Luiz Antonio d'Araujo	Felizarda Pereira da Silva
1897	Manoel	Natural	Pilar	XXX	Lucrecia Alves da Conceição	José Teixeira da Conceição	Antônia Drotheia da Conceição
1897	Felix	Natural	Pilar	XXX	Eulídia Maria das Neves	Bonifácio da Conceição	Geneveva da Conceição
1897	Ambrósio	Natural	Pilar	XXX	Maria Ritta da Assunção	Alfredo da Silva	Geneveva Isabel da Conceição
1897	Carina	Natural	Pilar	XXX	Maria Rosa dos Passos	Francisco Borges de Carvalho	Laurinda Justina da Conceição
1897	Joaquim	Natural	Pilar	XXX	Maria Rosa dos Passos	Paulino Ribeiro	Geraldina Ribeiro
1897	Etelvina	Natural	Pilar (resident)	XXX	Isabel da Conceição	Guilherme Maia	Ana Alexandrina de Araujo

Source: Arquivo da Diocese de Duque de Caxias; Livro de Batismo de escravos. Freguesia de Nossa Senhora do Pilar (1871–1888)

is not clear, but considering how often it happened, it seems that family names of former slave owners—particularly of Nossa Senhora da Conceição—were the preferred identification of the Black population in those days. Similarly, Ana Rios and Hebe Mattos found that the surname of the former masters was perpetuated by the Black population of the Vale do Paraíba, even after the end of slavery.²¹ In the first decades of the twentieth century, the surname of slave owners became the only tie that connected those people to slavery.

I would like to draw attention to the entry of Severiano, natural son of Eufrásia Joaquina Botelho, whose godparents were Luís Antônio de Araújo and Felizarda Pereira da Silva. The archives also revealed the identity of the creole Eufrásia, slave of Joaquim da Silva Botelho, who had her daughter Hortência baptized in 1874.²² In both cases, the children were natural; they did not have their father's name registered. However, in the case of Hortência, the godmother was described only as "Devotion," while the godfather was the slave Luis, who belonged to Pedro José Botelho. We cannot say for sure that the slave Luis was her father who served as her godfather. Before 1888, few Black children were legitimate; most had just the name of mother and godparents in the entries. That did not mean the father was absent. In any case, even if the slave Luis was not the father of Hortência, a bond was certainly created between those two people. Besides her mother, Luis and "Devotion" were responsible for Hortência, a minor, according to the Law of the Free Womb.

It was impossible to know if the creole Eufrásia received her manumission before 1888, which would easily explain the adoption of the surname Botelho. It is interesting to note that she became Eufrásia Joaquina Botelho, as registered in the entry of her son Severiano in 1897. Her former master was Joaquim da Silva Botelho. It is interesting to note how former slaves chose their names in the post-Abolition period despite the cruelty of slavery. In previous research, I found the case of an entire family that was manumitted and kept the name of their masters, even baptizing their younger children with the same names of their former masters. However, this was a case from 1857, in full legality of slavery.²³ The recognition of freedom was urgent since the dangerous possibility of being unduly enslaved was always at hand. But the case of Eufrásia was different because slavery already come to an end. It was the time of freedom. Still, Eufrásia kept ties with her former master. We may imagine that she kept on working in Mr. Botelho's plantation, but now as a wage-earning peasant or even a sharecropper. That is only a possibility, since the source does not offer more information about Eufrásia, who was listed at the time as a Creole and named Joaquina Botelho.

After listing the first ten baptism entries in Pilar after the abolition of slavery and having found Eufrásia, who could be the same person found in the entries from the slavery period, I decided to search a little more for her in entries done after 1897. I wondered if she kept on living in Pilar or had moved to another place after the turn of the century. In 1900, Eufrásia Botelho (no Joaquina listed as middle name) had her natural son Benedicto baptized at the parish church in Pilar. His godparents were José Maria do Espírito Santo and Joana Francisca. However, in this case, the entry indicates that Benedicto was born in Iguaçu, although it also states that Eufrásia still lived in Pilar.

The Pilar River is a tributary of the Iguaçu River. Thus, the traffic among parishes of Pilar, Piedade do Iguaçu, and Santo Antônio da Jacutinga happened daily. It is possible that Eufrásia had sought some help for the birth of Benedicto among friends or relatives in the neighboring parish. After all, after 1874 (when she had her first child), twenty-six years had passed. Considering the minimum age for a woman to have children, one can tell that Eufrásia was in her middle ages—probably more than 40 years old. It is needless

to say that adequate health care did not exist for her at that time, especially for the Black population of the Baixada Fluminense.

The trajectory of Eufrásia's family, after she had more children and baptisms, would not end yet. In 1905, a woman named Hortência da Silva Botelho had her natural son Paulino baptized; his godparents were the couple Manoel Antonio Sampaio and Rita Rufina de Jesus. It is important to notice that some years later Hortência also assumes the surname of the former master of her mother, with whom she had contact, since he would have been responsible for raising her until the age of eight and had rights on her work until she was twenty-one, as determined by the Law of 1871. In this case, the freeborn Hortência was past the age of thirty and was still living in Pilar, living her life, looking after her children, surely working and attending the same social events.

Following the model of the trajectory of Eufrásia, I sought to identify others who had been slaves and who are in some way identified in the entries registered after the advent of the Golden Law. By then, it was no longer a surprise to find dozens of people who had something to do with those entries. As a method, I have listed the names of all the masters who appeared in the entries between 1871 and 1888. The almost complete absence of them is symptomatic, because it shows that godparenting was a manorial prerogative. Even if the slaves were consulted or occasionally chose who would be their children's godparents, the masters were the ones who made the final decisions. The presence of masters as godparents of slaves usually depended on their relation with the owner of the slave. With the end of slavery, former slaves began to choose the godparents of their children, making the godparenting relationship a more effective space for sociability among them. Nevertheless, with the "tip" of Eufrásia, I searched the main surnames from the list of masters and found many former slaves who kept on living in Pilar. Sometimes they had moved to nearby places such as Jacutinga, Iguaçú, or Meriti.

Mr. José Manoel da Câmara appears as the owner of three slaves who had their children baptized in the chapel of Santa Rita da Posse. Their names were Agostinha, Efigênia, and Eufrásia. Besides them, the same master owned Juliana, a slave who was registered as the godmother of the natural daughter of the Creole Eva, a slave of Mrs. Clara Maria de Jesus.²⁴ Following the surname analysis, it was impossible to find any of those people in the entries registered after 1888. However, different people were found using the surname Câmara. For example, in 1898, Thereza was the legitimate daughter of Alfredo Moreira Coelho and Antonina Proencia Câmara. Her baptism, held at the parish church in Pilar, had as godparents the couple Isak Manuel da Câmara and Euphânia Proencia da Câmara.²⁵ Similarly, the legitimate son of Amélia Menezes Câmara and Afonso Soares Pereira had as godparents the couple Carlos Menezes Câmara and Sophia Rosa da Câmara in 1903.²⁶

Even though I have not found the same people registered as slaves and then as free people using the surname of their former masters, it is possible that entire families who kept the surname of former slave owners were not registering their legitimate children in the same book that had once been used to register the children of slaves. Certainly, those people had some relation to slavery. The presence of families of free people using the surname of former slave owners also offers a dimension of the social rooting process linked to the practice of the peasantry during that period.

Continuing my research, I found the Mattos family. One of the most prominent women in the slave entries was Mrs. Ignácia Antônia de Amaral Mattos, owning eight slave women who were registered as residents of the Santa Cruz farm. The baptisms had been held in the parish church, the chapel of the farm, and the chapel of Santa Rita da Posse. Six different people in eight different entries had the surname Mattos. Again,

none of her former slaves reappeared in the entries of the period after slavery. However, what draws attention is the couple Tito Lívio Mattos and Elvira Correia de Mattos, who, besides having a legitimate son baptized in 1899, served as godparents at different times, sometimes together, sometimes separately. Elvira even appears as the godmother of Vic-talina, baptized in 1897, as seen in the baptism box.

In the search for those people, almost by chance, the African Michelina appeared in the records. Michelina appears as the only slave mother identified as African over all 201 entries registered between 1871 and 1888. At a time of skin color censorship and transformations involving the end of the African slave system in Brazil, the permanence of the African identity is symptomatic. Besides her, some seven or eight men were still identified with the label “of a nation.” Gradually, the records made African ancestry invisible for those who contributed so much to the economy and the national culture of Brazil. The registration of Michelina’s children contributes to the threads of African memory in the vicinity of Rio de Janeiro.

As we have seen, in 1872 Michelina was a slave of Mrs. Ignácia Antônia do Amaral Mat-tos, mother of her natural daughter Crescência, whose godparents were Thereza and Bento, slaves of the same woman. According to the entry, this baptism was held at the parish church in Pilar, although, as stated earlier, Mrs. Ignácia owned the Santa Cruz farm, which had a chapel. Mrs. Ignácia Mattos died in 1873 and her slaves became the property of her heirs. Gradually the names of the heirs begin to appear and the name of the matriarch disappears completely. In 1876, Michelina had another natural son, named Manoel, baptized. His godfather was Américo, slave of Captain Luís Ignácio da Costa Vale. Although the entry states that she still lived at the Santa Cruz farm, now she appears as the slave of José Pedro Martins, possibly one of the heirs of Mrs. Ignácia. Despite having a chapel at Santa Cruz, Manoel was baptized at the chapel of Santa Rita da Posse.²⁷

It is impossible to know the real age of Michelina or how she ended up at the Santa Cruz farm. However, considering that the slave trade had ended nearly thirty years before and that she already had two children baptized by 1876, we can imagine that she was not a young woman. At least in Pilar, she was the last enslaved African woman. We do not know about her African identity, but, if we consider that more than 78 percent of Africans were from West and Central Africa, it is possible to think that Michelina could have come from any Bantu cultural area.

After the end of slavery, I wondered about Michelina. Searching the surnames of her masters, I found no records of her. However, when I was about to give up on finding the “last of the African women,” almost by chance I found a Michelina Ignácia as the godmother of Antônio, natural son of Benevides Maria da Conceição, whose baptism occurred in late 1898 in the parish church in Pilar.²⁸

After twenty-six years, Michelina returned to the same church, now as a free woman, to be the godmother of her friend’s son. Michelina was no longer registered as an African, although she had never ceased to be one. The invisibility imposed by the change in the post-slavery records and documents was somehow circumvented by her insistence on being recognized as an African. It may not have been the insistence, but the excessive zeal of the priest who registered the entry.

My interest here is the little information available about Michelina’s African roots, which help us to understand the lives of people who were taken from Africa to work in Brazil during the nineteenth century. On different occasions, the Brazilian legislation stated the possibility of returning former slaves to Africa. We know, however, that it rarely happened. Besides, Michelina rooted herself in Pilar. Her permanence in the region, even after the final release of all slaves, is proof. In 1898, Michelina may have been a

grandmother; her daughter *Crescência* was almost 30 years old. I do not mean to say that the African references were lost, as it happened in the records, but that *Michelina* transformed them, turning herself into a *ladino* African woman. *Michelina* was an old woman, mother, grandmother, and godmother. She is an example of the collective Black experience that formed the Brazilian population during the early twentieth century.

The African collective experience involved not only themselves, but also all those who were around them. There are countless studies on Africans seeking traces of their identities through their names, either African or adopted, during the slavery period. Perhaps the most famous one is *Mahommah Gardo Baquaqua*, who adopted an African name when he was a free man in the United States and Canada. Before that, in Brazil, the same person was *José Mina* in Pernambuco, and *José da Costa* in Rio de Janeiro, after being bought by Captain *Clemente José da Costa*.²⁹ I have researched the meanings of the freed African names in the parish of *Nossa Senhora da Piedade do Iguaçú* during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. It was common to use the surnames of the former masters, but it was also common to use the name of the most appreciated devotion to the Virgin Mary. Apparently, *Nossa Senhora da Conceição* was very popular among Africans and creoles from the *Recôncavo* of Rio de Janeiro.³⁰

In the case of *Michelina*, there is an insistence on being identified as “African” in the baptism entries of her children. However, in the only record we have about her after the Golden Law, her name appears as *Michelina Ignácia*. Unlike most of the people who appear in the period after 1888, she has not adopted the surname of her former masters nor the name of any Catholic devotion. It has been argued that slavery was only a moment, however violent, in the lives of the people who were born in Africa. Slavery was just one of the transformations experienced by those people throughout their personal trajectory.³¹ In the case of *Michelina*, she was not born a slave and she did not die as a slave. Slavery was only a part—a significant part, in fact—but only a part of her trajectory, which began in Africa and went through the painful experience of crossing the Atlantic to arrive at the port of Rio de Janeiro and then reach the cassava plantations at the farm in Santa Cruz. We cannot say if she still had habits and cultural references of her childhood in Africa, let alone what levels of *ladinization* she had after the Golden Law. However, at least in the early years after slavery, *Michelina* remained in the same region.

I do not know how the process of adopting the former owner’s surname worked. I do not know if only those who remained working for their masters acquired the right to bear their surname or each one made a random choice. *Michelina* reappears using the first name of her deceased master, a mark that enables her identification, though completely different from the recurring pattern seen in the records. Therefore, I prefer to recall her as *Michelina the African*. Certainly, much of the cultural diversity of the *Baixada* was formed through the cultural heritage left by African women such as *Michelina*.

Notes

- 1 Arquivo da Diocese de Duque de Caxias and São João de Meriti. Livro de Batismo de Escravos da Freguesia de Nossa Senhora do Pilar (1871–1934).
- 2 In Brazil, the Eusébio de Queiróz Act was enacted in 1850, determining the end of the slave trade.
- 3 The word “*recôncavo*” refers to the hollow of the Guanabara Bay. *Recôncavo do Rio de Janeiro*, *Recôncavo Fluminense* or *Recôncavo da Guanabara* were common names used to designate the stretch of land between the city of Rio de Janeiro and Serra do Mar. It was divided into many parishes.

- 4 See Nielson Rosa Bezerra, *Escravidão, Farinha e Comércio no Recôncavo do Rio de Janeiro, século XIX* (Duque de Caxias: Clio, 2011).
- 5 Biblioteca Nacional do Rio de Janeiro. OR-095. Freguesia do Pilar, 1872.
- 6 Ana Lugão Rios and Hebe Mattos, *Memórias do cativo: família, trabalho e cidadania no Pós Abolição* (Rio de Janeiro: Civilização Brasileira, 2005).
- 7 Robert Slenes, *Na senzala, uma flor: esperanças e recordações na formação da família escrava, século XIX* (Rio de Janeiro: Nova Fronteira, 1999), 142.
- 8 It is important to remember that natural children were those born from a union not recognized by the Church. Sometimes the father was known, but the child was considered natural if not recognized by him.
- 9 Manolo Florentino and José Roberto Góes, *A paz das senzalas: famílias escravas e tráfico atlântico, Rio de Janeiro, 1790–1830* (Rio de Janeiro: Civilização Brasileira, 1997).
- 10 Robert Slenes, *Na senzala, uma flor: esperanças e recordações na formação da família escrava, século XIX* (Rio de Janeiro: Nova Fronteira, 1999), 96.
- 11 Arquivo da Diocese de Duque de Caxias and São João de Meriti. Livro de Batismo de Escravos da Freguesia de Nossa Senhora do Pilar (1871–1934).
- 12 Ana Lugão Rios and Hebe Mattos, *Memórias do cativo: família, trabalho e cidadania no Pós Abolição* (Rio de Janeiro: Civilização Brasileira, 2005).
- 13 For better understanding of this debate, see Hebe Maria Mattos, *Das cores do silêncio: os significados da liberdade no sudeste escravista: Brasil, século XIX* (Rio de Janeiro: Nova Fronteira, 1998). Roberto Guedes, *Egressos do cativo: trabalho, família, aliança e mobilidade social. Porto Feliz, São Paulo, 1780–1850* (Rio de Janeiro: Mauad-Fapej, 2008).
- 14 Sílvia Maria Jardim Brügger, *Minas Patriarcal: Família e Sociedade. São João Del Rei, séculos XVIII e XIX* (São Paulo: Annablume, 2007).
- 15 See Nielson Rosa Bezerra, *As chaves da liberdade: confluências da escravidão no Recôncavo do Rio de Janeiro, 1833–1888* (Niterói: EdUFF, 2008), 39.
- 16 Sônia Regina de Mendonça, *O ruralismo brasileiro (1888–1931)* (São Paulo: UCITEC, 1997).
- 17 José Murilo de Carvalho, *Os bestializados: o Rio de Janeiro e a República que não foi* (São Paulo: Companhia das Letras, 1987).
- 18 Biblioteca Nacional, *Jornal do Comércio* (Rio de Janeiro, 06 de janeiro de, 1890).
- 19 Biblioteca Nacional, *Jornal do Comércio* (Rio de Janeiro, 10 de janeiro de, 1900).
- 20 Marlúcia dos Santos de Souza, “Escavando o passado da cidade: Duque de Caxias e os projetos de poder local, 1900–1964,” *Dissertação de Mestrado em História, Universidade Federal Fluminense*, 2002.
- 21 Ana Lugão Rios and Hebe Mattos, *Memórias do cativo: família, trabalho e cidadania no Pós Abolição* (Rio de Janeiro: Civilização Brasileira, 2005).
- 22 Arquivo da Diocese de Duque de Caxias, “Livro de Batismo de Escravos,” *Assento*, 56 (1874), Pilar, 1871–1934.
- 23 Ver: Nielson Rosa Bezerra, *As chaves da liberdade: confluências da escravidão no Recôncavo do Rio de Janeiro, 1833–1888* (Niterói: EdUFF, 2008). (Especialmente o capítulo 2).
- 24 Arquivo da Diocese de Duque de Caxias. Livro de Batismo de Escravos. Assentos 24, 73, 74, 98, 137, 177, 178 (Todos anteriores a 1888). Pilar, 1871–1934.
- 25 Arquivo da Diocese de Duque de Caxias, “Livro de Batismo de Escravos,” *Assento*, 249 (1898). Pilar, 1871–1934.
- 26 Arquivo da Diocese de Duque de Caxias, “Livro de Batismo de Escravos,” *Assento*, 300 (1898). Pilar, 1871–1934.
- 27 Arquivo da Diocese de Duque de Caxias, “Livro de Batismo de Escravos,” *Assento*, 109 (1876). Pilar, 1871–1934.
- 28 Arquivo da Diocese de Duque de Caxias, “Livro de Batismo de Escravos,” *Assento*, 234 (1898). Pilar, 1871–1934.
- 29 Robin Law and Paul Lovejoy, *The Biography of Mahommah Gardo Baquaqua: His Passage from Slavery to Freedom in Africa and America* (Princeton, NJ: Markus Wiener Publishers, 2007).
- 30 See Nielson Rosa Bezerra, *Escravidão, farinha e comércio no Recôncavo do Rio de Janeiro, 1833–1888* (Duque de Caxias: APPH-CLIO, 2011). Especially, see the topic: Gracia Maria da Conceição Magalhães: africana, forra, ladina e produtora de farinha, 42–50.
- 31 Paul Lovejoy. *A escravidão na África: uma história de suas transformações* (Rio de Janeiro: Civilização Brasileira, 2002). Paul Lovejoy, *Identity in the Shadow of Slavery* (London: Continuum, 2000).