Commerce, Nations and Gender: the Mina Coast
1835-1900

Carlos Eugênio Líbano Soares

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In August 1863, the police entered in a United States ship at anchor in Rio de Janeiro harbor. They were searching for a stowaway, a black slave born in Brazil, with the name of Napoleon. With the slave were found a great amount of money, a watch, diverse objects and clothes. Apparently Napoleon was searching for a new country to live. A country that in that moment was going through a Civil War, caused exactly by the “servile institution”. Some months before the president Abraham Lincoln had declared the slaves emancipation in all United States.

After being interrogated by the police he denounced whom had helped him to stealthily come aboard the United States cargo ship: an African woman of the Mina nation, with the name of Paula, greengrocer by profession, slave of a certain Manuel Martins de Freitas, with 35 years of age. She was also put in jail, stopping with her confinement a whole scheme to help slaves to flee from Brazil to a country that had just decreed the end of slavery. The case of the slave Paula opens the way for one of the most interesting facets of the African slavery in the lands of Brazil: the African women of the Mina Coast that controlled as greengrocers, the trade in the streets of the Rio de Janeiro city during most of the nineteenth century.

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The first authors to reveal the strong presence of Mina Coast greengrocers and *ao ganho* (slaves for hire or earning wages) in Rio de Janeiro were the travelers. Since Debret, passing through reverend Kidder and even the photographs of the Swiss naturalized Brazilian Leuzinger and of Marc Ferrez, all show the strong presence of the black women in the *ganho* (for hire or working for wages) in Rio de Janeiro urban slavery and, among them, the women from the Mina Coast of the *ganho de rua* (as the street peddlers were called) and the greengrocers.

Some travelers, like Thomas Ewbank, Dabadie and Charles Ribeyrolles made abundant references to the Mina Coast women, always showing the masters' predilection to

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WALPOLE, Frederick. *Four years in the pacific in Her Majesty’s ship “Collingwood” from 1844 to 1848*. 2 vols, Londres, 1849, 1:48.


BURGESS, Wilson e CANDLER, John. *Narrative of a recent visit to Brazil...to present na address on the slave trade and slavery*. Londres, 1853, p. 38.


POHL, João E. *Viagem no interior do Brasil, empreendida nos anos de 1817 a 1821*. (Tradução de Teodoro Cabral) Rio de Janeiro, 1951, p.84.


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have them as slave street peddlers. This prestige certainly rebounded to the free and freedwomen. This masters’ outlook on the black Mina women certainly had its counterpart in the midst of the slave population and among the lower strata of the free classes, which saw this African women as powerful merchants, lady owners of coveted sale points in the urban commerce network.10

These travelers reveal much of the usual outlook, but show only a glimpse of the relation of the Mina women with the rest of the black population of the city11. In the end of the 19th century, in the context of the final decline of capitivity, the Brazilian scientists and ethnographers turned themselves to the African blacks in the country, writing a separated chapter on the Minas. Nina Rodrigues was the first scholar to dedicate a major work to the African presence in Brazil, following the tenets of the scientificist and positivist principles of the time and that became hegemonic for a long time into the 20th century12.

However, even if Nina was formally concerned with the whole of the Africans in Brazil, he devoted a relevant part of his text to the Occidental Africans of Bahia – the Minas, Jejes, Haussas, etc. Consequently, his work touches an important point of our project, which is to understand the racial nomenclature and the origins of the Minas in the 19th Century.

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Nina was the pathfinder of a generation of anthropologists and ethnographers that produced a copious work on the African legacy in Brazil. Arthur Ramos was the most brilliant name of the subsequent generation of followers of Nina’s “school”\textsuperscript{13}. For these scholars the Minas were the upholders of a cultural answer to the slavery oppression that separated them from the body of the said Center-occidental Africans – the so called Bantus – that made up the majority of the black continent natives in the Brazil during the slavery period. This answer reached the point of being understood in terms of superiority in relation to other Africans, a point of view that reflected the racial visions of the time, which understood humanity as an evolutionary chain.

Another important scholar, now in the 20th century, was Roger Bastide, in his study of religiosity\textsuperscript{14} as well in the one on the cultural transformations undergone by the African cultural models in American lands\textsuperscript{15}. Bastide took an incisive attention on the Occidental Africans legacy and contributed decisively for the construction of a Nagô stereotype, strongly incorporated by the Gege-Nagô religious cults and by the political movements with a racial slant. However, the greatest scholar of the Afro-Occidental heritage was without a doubt Pierre Verger. His monumental work on the slave trade is based in details of the relations between Salvador and the Occidental coast of Africa, particularly the so called Coast of the Mina, that is, the ports located in the Gulf of Benin\textsuperscript{16}. The whole of his work, especially the

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\textsuperscript{14} BASTIDE, Roger. As religiões africanas no Brasil: Contribuição a uma sociologia das interpenetrações de civilizações, 3ª edição, São Paulo, Pioneira, 1989

\textsuperscript{15} BASTIDE, Roger. As Américas negras: as civilizações africanas no Novo Mundo. São Paulo, Difel/EDUSP, 1974.

\textsuperscript{16} VERGER, Pierre. Fluxo e refluxo do tráfico de escravos entre o golfo de Benin e a Bahia de todos os Santos dos séculos XVIII a XIX, 3ª edição, Ed. Corrupio, 1987.
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texts on freedmen\textsuperscript{17} is a reference for the studies of the freed and slavewomen from the Mina nation in Rio de Janeiro.

In the decades of 1970 and 1980 a new burst of studies in the slavery history field, combined with a new historiography on the subject, slowly led towards our localized objectives – this in the international field\textsuperscript{18}, as well in the local one. Mary Karasch’s monumental work already gave an invaluable attention to the Africans of Mina Nation, including the women, and their specific occupational world\textsuperscript{19}. This was the moment in which the historiography invaded the places traditionally reserved to the anthropology and sociology. The new ethnic-historical line was a symbol of the new field of interdisciplinary studies that would mark profoundly the history studies, notably those of cultural history\textsuperscript{20}.

The United States historiography dealing with slave culture – and which is not specifically tributary of this new cultural history – also had an impact in Brazil. Since Genovese, in his classical study of the slavery in the southern cotton plantations, going on through Hebert Gutman, which emphasizes the autonomy and slave family, and Richard Price and Sidney Mintz – these by their side reevaluating the African cultural production in the Caribbean slavery context – we observe a vigorous intellectual production\textsuperscript{21}, which will have a strong influence in the more specific themes of urban slavery.

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\textsuperscript{17} VERGER, Pierre, \textit{Os libertos: sete caminhos na liberdade de escravos na Bahia no século XIX}. São Paulo, Corrupio, 1992.


\textsuperscript{20} HUNT, Lyn. \textit{A nova história cultural}. São Paulo, Comp. Das Letras, 1992.

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The question of the slavewoman would sprout in the last twenty years, even if the emphasis still were more in the domination mechanisms and less in the adaptation mechanisms. However, it would be necessary the Centennial of the abolition of slavery for the studies of woman, nation and slavery in Brazil to have its space in its specificity. The thesis of Luis Carlos Soares on urban slavery in Rio de Janeiro of the 1800’s, and specifically its chapter on ganho slaves, has passages that detail the disproportionate importance of the Mina nation slaves in the street peddler commerce in Rio de Janeiro.

In the 70’s Maria Odila finished a pioneer work when she illuminated the somber and nebulous experiences of the colored women, slave and freed, in São Paulo in the 19th Century, through a profound study of daily life. In the 1990-decade, the new approaches would finally flourish. Giacomini would be one of the pioneers in the study of the black woman under the slavery. Luciano Figueiredo, working with 18th century Minas Gerais, showed how much the

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24 Of the amount of 2,823 africans black for hire between 1851 and 1870, 516 (18%) to be mina. SOARES, “Os escravos de ganho...” p.139 tabela I.


specificity of the black street peddler woman of the 18th century was a precursor for the greengrocer woman of the 19th century27.

However, these works were not very compromised with the problems of the relations of the Ganho Mina women with the rest of the society, principally with the slave parcel of it. In Bahia, the thesis of Cecília Moreira Soares proved the weight of the Occidental Africa women in the practice of commerce and trade in the colonial city, and their resistance strategies in a capital in which the numerical presence of women coming from the Gold Mine Coast was always considerable28.

In the field of the more ample slavery, the work of Eduardo Silva on the “Prince Obá”, a Bahia born black which will became the leader of a large part of the black population of the Court due to his relations with elements of the governing elite, including the Emperor himself, relates an interesting parallel with the Gold Mine greengrocer women, which also came from Bahia in the same period29. A few years earlier, Sidney Chalhoub deciphered the political signs of the black masses, slave and free, in the city of Rio de Janeiro in the twilight of the slavery institution30. The study of the liberty processes petitioned in courts against the masters by Mina African women takes a particular importance, as they show the ability of these women in articulating allies in the corridors of courts of justice, apparently immune to their claims. Moreover, the studies on rural slavery, principally those of Flávio Gomes, also points to a


great degree of slaves’s political mobilization in this critical period for the slaveowners’ order\textsuperscript{31}.

However, the most important work to our bibliographical inventory would come only in 1997. The PhD thesis of Mariza Carvalho Soares on the Minas of Rio de Janeiro in the 18th century was the first large scale experience in Brazil in the study of a single African “Nation” in the colonial period\textsuperscript{32}. Even if we known – and that author more than anyone is aware of this – the limits of the “nations” understanding that covers the documents of the slavery period, not as given ethnic identities, but as constructions of the slave trade and the uses of the praxis of the masters, we follow Mariza’s reasoning, that the “Mina nation” (as the rest of the other African nations) was a identity in construction, fruit of the profound cultural changes that affected the sons of Africa in the Americas.

We understand that this debate is one of the great qualities of Mariza’s work, as she understand that a great part of the cultural constructions of the Minas in colonial Rio de Janeiro were products of the new realities of the capitivity, and not a heritage brought from Africa. Therefore, it may be that the commercial aptitude of the black Mina women had more than an African root, being a political option forged in the gauntlet of the slave experience, and that it passed to the free and freedwomen.

Another virtue of Mariza is locating the role of the Minas in the “Black” brotherhoods of the Colony capital, especially Saint Efigênia and Saint Elesbão, where they had positions of prominence and strong numerical importance. In this way, the work of Mariza Carvalho Soares points out the possibility – even if in many cases in a polemical way – of the study of a specific


\textsuperscript{32} SOARES, Mariza Carvalho. Identidade étnica, religiosidade e escravidão: os “pretos minas” no Rio de Janeiro (século XVIII) UFF-ICHF, História, 1997, p.278
“nation” in the midst of the vast black-slave population. Our work reduces even more this object, as we intend to emphasize a determinate occupational niche inside the Minas, which are the black greengrocers or street peddlers.

In my thesis on the slave *Capoeira* in the first half of the 19th century I already perceived the importance of the Mina nation slaves in the context of the ethnic network in the period after 1835, which was confirmed in the study of the *Zungu* houses of the same period, in which these African women had a leadership role.

In short, we may say that the bibliography has advanced a lot in some points in relation to our theme, but some points still justify the relevance of our work: what was the social and cultural weight of the black merchant women in the midst of the Afro-Occidental population in Rio de Janeiro? What were the prerogatives of these women in the relations with the captives and free people, ostracized sectors and parts of the ruling elites? What were the influence channels that these women enjoyed to became leaders of urban micro-communities? These questions the bibliography has not answered yet, and this is the essence of our project.

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Rio de Janeiro was one of the regions more affected by the Atlantic slave trade, but this commerce was directed more to the Center-Occidental Africa, dominated by the Bantu people of the Congo region – Angola. However, the researcher of the theme usually forgets that the African trade between the different parts of Brazil was also great, and this much before the end of the Black transatlantic trade in 1850. The coastal route of African slaves more important for Rio de Janeiro was the one that linked it to Salvador of Bahia.
For a long time the trade to Salvador was centered in the Mina Coast, land of the so-called Nagô Minas\textsuperscript{33}. In reality, a variety of different peoples was identified in Bahia as belonging to this nation, among them the Calabar, Gege, Haussa, Bornu, Tapa, Maki, and Mandinga. Even considering the linguistic diversity, they shared a common mystic-religious universe, which helped in the fight against the slavemaster’s power.

The Malés uprising, in 1835, represented the pinnacle of a series of slave rebellions that shook the province of Bahia in the first half of the 119th century\textsuperscript{34}. The repression that was unleashed in Bahia over the Africans, slaves and freedmen, after the defeat of the movement, was tremendous. Hundreds of them were deported abroad, while a similar number left the province, a great amount of them going to the African continent.

Among those that remained in the Brazilian Empire, one of the preferred routes was the one that went to the Empire capital, the Rio de Janeiro.

In this way, from 1835 the Rio de Janeiro becomes the stage for a true exodus of Occidental Africans from Bahia, in a rate never seem before in their history. It is true that from many years past Minas-Nagôs lived in the city, mainly from the 18th century, when the Rio de Janeiro became the main nexus of the flow of captives to the Minas Gerais\textsuperscript{35}. However, the flood of Occidental Africans that were spilled in the city after 1835 was never seen before. They were not only freedmen. Slaves by the hundred were sold by their Bahian masters, afraid of the them called “rebel bent” of the Minas.

\textsuperscript{33} VERGER, Pierre. \textit{Fluxo e refluxo do tráfico de escravos entre o golfo de Benin e a baía de Todos os Santos do século XVII ao século XIX}. São Paulo, Corrupio, 1988.

\textsuperscript{34} REIS, João José. \textit{Rebelião escrava no Brasil: a história do levante dos malês}. São Paulo, Brasiliense, 1986.

The police sources gave a hot testimony about this crescent presence, which were dreaded by the State and by private slavemasters36: ships loaded with Africans to the markets of Rio de Janeiro were embarrassed by the harbor police; passports were denied; whole families of Minas, up to the forth generation were summarily deported to the African Coast. All was done to prevent a new Malês uprising to happen in the heart of the Empire capital.

Among the Afro-Bahian that immigrated to the Rio de Janeiro, the women stood out. In the city of Salvador they were already traditional street peddlers, with their characteristic clothing made of an Islamic turban, of a cloth with colored stripes crossed over the shoulders (the *Cloth of the Coast*), the silver and gold bangles showing wealth. They were respected not only by the other Africans that worked in the streets, but also by the native born blacks, poor whites, and even by merchants of “grosso trato” (great traders) that had them as able street tradeswomen. Many masters lived of their “jornal”(daily wages), that was the amount they paid their masters to continue living “by themselves”, paying their own rents, buying their food and paying their expenses with the fruits of their own daily labor.

In addition to the anti-African repression, the Bahian capital entered the decade of 1830 in profound depression, with the sugar prices falling in the international markets. This crisis influenced many masters, which were forced to sell their black women to the more opulent masters of the Rio de Janeiro Court. The freedwomen, with the economic crisis, lost markets and clients, being forced to leave the city in search of the them pole of prosperity: Rio de Janeiro, the center of the new basis of the agrarian-exportation complex, the coffee.

Therefore, slaves and freedwomen of the Mina Coast turned up in the city, beginning a deep change in the ethnic panorama of Rio de Janeiro slavery. The sources about the sale of


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Africans from Bahia to the south show that more than 80% of these women were of the Nagô nation. However, the data on the Occidental Africa population in Rio de Janeiro of the years of 1830 on show that a great part of these Africans was called Minas and rarely the name “Nagô” is mentioned.

Which are the factors that made the Nagô mass of Bahia to became a in a large Mina majority in the city of Rio de Janeiro? The new studies on slave identity in the Caribbean and in the United States reveal that the “ethnicity” of the Africans in America was not a unilateral result of the master’s wishes, nor a single derivative of the African origin, unavoidable for the sold person.

The “Nation” could be arranged by the African depending of the political conjunctures or of the own interethnic policies among the Africans. Even if originally attributed by the slave traders, European or African, the “Nation” could be, with time, changed, in order to correspond to association interests. The brotherhoods are the more striking example of this identity dynamic of the Diaspora. Notices of runaway slaves every now and them show captives that conceal their own “national” origin, in order to deceive their capturers.

In relation to the Minas, it is clear that Rio de Janeiro population generalized the term to cover all the Occidentals coming from Bahia. Nevertheless, the sources suggest that these women slowly introduced the new label, and articulated with the intention of creating an Afro-Bahian community in Rio de Janeiro, that would became famous in the turn of the century as the “Little Africa”.

This new Mina identity has to be thought in the dynamic context, and not in a static one, of the African Identities of the New World. The English language bibliography on the exported people of the Gold Mine Coast mentions the Akan traditions, of the present day
Dahomey, which in reality were a collection of different peoples with limited language and religion links, but without a political unity. The literature on the Afro-Brazilian theme mentions the peoples of the Yoruba language as the origin of the Minas. Anyhow, Minas in Bahia are one among the other nations, and of a markedly inferior presence in relation to the Nagôs. In Rio de Janeiro they form an ethnic “umbrella”, as João Reis explained, where all the Occidentals, and even all the Africans coming from Bahia, met.

Another important factor in the attraction of the Minas to Rio de Janeiro is the urban tradition of Occidental Africa. It is notorious that this region of the continent had a long urban experience, visible in the ruins of the mythical Ifé. About a thousand years BC the region that goes from the Niger mouth to the Benin Gulf was a belt of villages, the maximum which we can call urban in black Africa.

This experience is apparent in the living patterns of the Minas. The great majority lives in the central parishes – Candelária, Sacramento, Santa Rita, Santana and São José – the area of more dense urbanization of the Court.

Another tradition of the overseas, transformed in the experience of bondage, is the commerce. The strong link of Occidental Africa with the Moslem world transformed the region in one of the terminus of the complex network of desert caravans, and provided many of local people with a dense commercial and money dealing tradition. This aptitude was recognized by the masters, which employed the Minas, men and women, in paid activities, as greengrocers or porters.

However, it is important to perceive that these “traditions” were rethought and reconstructed in the Diaspora, as urban ways and commerce were not a monopoly of the Occidentals. Many Bantus also found occupations in the street commerce, but no other group
had an occupational monopoly as the Mina women: almost 100% of the women of this nation were greengrocers.

Another important data that may help to explain the salient and especial paper of these Minas in the midst of the African community, and their specific occupational niche, is the area of the African and slavewoman in society. The men made up the great majority (80%) of the Africans brought by the slave ships. However, even this female numerical inferiority indicates a social space that opens the way for a more complex negotiation with the involving society.

The women were chosen for specific functions: washerwomen, seamstresses and mucambas (housemaids). But the greengrocers were seem as specialized, able to transit with easiness in the colonial city, with its complex network of alleys, ways and narrow streets, go where the consumer market was more attractive, and defend themselves against the perils that lurked in the public ways. By some reason still not completely understood, the Minas were seem as more adept for this chore than any other.

It ought not be forgotten that the ample majority of the masters were of the male sex, and occasionally the feminine wiles could have acted on them: the Minas were imaged by the foreign travelers as the most beautiful of the black women, even surpassing the native born crioulas due to their fine facial features, what, according to the models coming from the Occidental Europe countries or from the United States, was a signal of greater “civilization” advance in relation to the more “coarse” Bantus in general.

The prices of the Mina Slaves also should have be greater than those of the men, due to their rarity (likewise the captive African women in general), and this made that the masters resisted to put them to work in unhealthy or less lucrative jobs.

These virtues ought to have counterbalanced the endemic fear of Rio de Janeiro masters come to have of the Africans coming from Bahia after the 1835. However, all this does
not means that the relations with the masters were not controversial. The notices of escapees for the Mina slavewomen were relatively numerous, and they convey a very rich and complex image of the particular daily life of these African women: they easily hid themselves in the city, but rarely the masters said that they have gone outside the urban milieu, which indicates a escape pattern restricted to the city, or something similar to what the Caribbean historians have called of “petit Maronage”: fast flights only to culturally and socially replenish themselves in the common houses of the Africans, also called “houses of Angu” or “houses of Zungu”\(^{37}\).

The number of the runaway Mina women imprisoned due to this reason, proportional to the whole, is surprising. Possibly they were seem by the others, African and Crioula women, as the masters of an obscure religiosity, hidden in the Babel of houses lost in the urban landscape, and as reservoirs of an already remote religious tradition, effective in dealing with the myths coming from the diverse African ethnic matrixes. It is highly possible that these women brought the religion Yorubá to Rio de Janeiro, and their power of persuasion to the Africans coming of other places should have been devastating, even if by their virtual monopoly of the subterranean African faith in the city, in the turn to the 20th century.

Another particularity of the Mina’s escape pattern was the tendency of keeping the same occupation of greengrocers, to whatever environment they went. The captive in general changed their occupation very fast, certainly to throw out of the track their master, but the Minas almost always did not opt for this, certainly because the street peddling profession was a lucrative one and so, without paying the jornal, she could have money to spare.

A third characteristic was that, in opposition to their other fellows in bondage, the Mina women usually run away alone, without a previous third party’s plan that could determinate a


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path to their whereabouts – a process them called “seduction”. This autonomy in the urban environment certainly was coveted by the others sons of Africa, which planed flight routes but were in desperate need for someone to give them cover.

These three singularities indicate one more particularity of the Mina women that segregated them from the remaining blacks kept in captivity, and that point out to a hierarchy inside the native black and African mass, where they were in the top.

However, it cannot be forgotten that many of these Minas were freedwomen. From the documentation of the main prison in Rio de Janeiro regarding the second part of the 19th century, the Casa da Detenção, springs an astounding amount of data on the Mina freedwomen from 1860 up to the first years of the 20th century. The registers of slavewomen are smaller and cover only four years: 1863, 1879, 1881 and 1882. In the end 70 prison records of Mina slavewomen survived in the registers, and only one was of Calabar nation. Mina was already a synonymy for Occidental African in Rio de Janeiro.

The crime pattern of the slavewomen approached itself from the one of the whole of the incarcerated slaves in the same year in the Casa de Detenção penitentiary: 20% was “runaways” or “suspect of escaping”, that is, they were imprisoned because the police officers believed that they had disappeared from their masers. Possibly, some police soldiers hoped to receive some reward for the capture of the “escapee”.

Another interesting date is the number of Minas imprisoned for “fora de horas” (curfew violation). The Empire penal code referred to slave individuals detained for being found outdoors late in the night. The Mina black women incarcerated for this reason were all greengrocers that stayed outdoors at night selling their products, generally fruits and foods. The women confined for “disorder” (which amounted to 11%) certainly were arguing for
spaces in the market, inflicting the rigid code of city ordinances and defending themselves from robbers, numerous in the streets hostile environment.

Inebriation was another common reason (10%) for carrying the Mina African women to the cubicles of the cellular prisons of the Detenção. In reality, a great number of Africans, slaves and freedmen were detained for the excessive use of alcohol. It was a form of ameliorating the oppressing daily life of the victims of the Diaspora.

“Immoral acts” could be associated with the prejudice of the authorities against the slavewomen that stayed late at night in the streets, or where found in “suspect houses”. Five captive Minas (8%) were detained for this. Only one was imprisoned for stealing, but three was for disobeying their masters. This means that their master called the police to detain an African woman that did not obey him. At last, we cannot forsake to mention the imprisoned women for “investigations regarding their condition” (8%), which means that the arrest was the fruit of the policeman’s ignorance whether they were slaves or freedwoman.

In the whole, searching for a global vision, the greatest part of the slavewoman’s crimes referred to flight, but very few were incarcerated for robbery (only one) and many were arrested in the exercise of their jobs. This denotes that they were not worried in defying the dominant society, but in guaranteeing their gains in society interstices and remaining in the city, even if far from the master’s watchfulness, which may explain the high incidence of suspects for the crime of escaping.

Concerning the Mina freedwomen, the first contrast is the reduced number of those found in the Detenção penitentiary: only 21 freedwomen were found between 1860 and 1883\(^{(10)}\). Certainly, until the end of the century many more freedwomen were incarcerated in the

\(^{(10)}\) The years in raising: 1860, 1861, 1868, 1870, 1875, 1879, 1880, 1881, 1882 e 1883.
cramped cells of the Detenção, but as this is a going research this is still to be confirmed. Regarding the criminality patterns, logically the escape and suspicion of flight crimes disappear, substituted by those of “disorder”, which implies in a ample range of activities, but all involving violence against adversaries and even policemen. Almost half of the freedwomen were arrested for this cause (47%). The other great reason for imprisonment of these African women was “loitering”, which approach them of the slaves in the labor of going about as peddlers, late at night (33%).

The occupational patterns of the freed and slavewomen come closer to each other. Among the slavewomen, 71% were greengrocers and in the freedwomen, this percentage reached the 76% mark. In any case, it was smaller than we expected. The occupational life of these women was not completely monopolized by the street commerce. Among the slaves, the presence of washerwomen is surprising (14%).

Another important data is the one regarding the place where the slave and freedwomen were arrested. By the place of arrest we can sense whether the freed and slavewomen had separated places in the urban trade geography, or if they shared the same areas without differences. A great number of the slavewomen (16%) were arrested in the Sacramento parish, the central and oldest part of the city. Following comes Santa Rita (8%) in the harbor zone, were sailors and seamen commonly went about.

Concerning the freedwomen, the data are very distinct. Almost half of the freed was arrested in the Santana parish (47%), an area in the periphery of the older city. Coming after is the São José parish, this already in the road to the City southern shores, with almost 23% of the arrests. Only 14% of the freed were arrested in Sacramento. Santana answers to only 10% of the imprisonments of Mina Coast slavewomen.
These figures points out to a different occupational geography, which segregated the work niches of both conditions. Curiously, the tradition of both Capoeira groups of the second half of the 19th century spoke of the two confederation of groups, called Nagôas and Guayamús. The first dominated the Santana and São José parishes, while the Guayamús were hegemonic in Sacramento and Santa Rita. Can we believe that the tradition of street culture of the capoeiras influenced the street culture of the African greengrocer women? It is hard to believe.

Only grouping the registers of street addresses of the freedwomen by parishes – the slavewomen do not have addresses, and we know that they normally did not live with their masters – we can be exactly sure if this pattern can indicate a division of the city between freed and slavewomen. However, we can be sure of a thing: freedwomen were more uninhibited and they treaded the urban map with greater easiness than their fellow women kept in bondage, and the fact of their work parishes being farther away from the urban center may be a reflection of this fact.

We know that slavewomen normally craved to became free, even if the daily life conditions of the Mina Coast African women of both situations certainly were not very different from each other.

In the last years of the 19th century, the Mina women population in Rio de Janeiro was drastically reduced. Proud and numerous in the 1840 and 1850 decades, they reached the turn of the century as living memories of a past that the city elites wished to erase.

The 1890 repression still found a reasonable number of “houses of reading fortune” (places of witchcraft) kept by Minas, surrounded by crioulos, colored and even whites. Routed by the moralist repression of the draconian and positivist new republican regime, they shed light over the permanence of the African cultural reconstruction so for as the after abolition.
However, they still troubled the scenario. In 1889 the so called “Orange Revolt” – led by medicine students, furious by the expelling by a policeman of a greengrocer that had her point in front of the Medicine College – reveals a rooting in the urban matrix that defied the State own authority. The students’ victory, with the return of the greengrocer Sabina, seller of oranges (so the name of the movement), to her place at the door of the college in the Misericórdia street, can be pointed as one of the elements that undermined the authority of the Monarchy last cabinet, and helped, even if timidly, in the overthrow of the old Imperial order.

The Republic did not express its gratitude. Saw as “deceivers of popular beliefs”, contumacious defiers of the city ordinance code, they withstood – as the streetwalkers, capoeiras, “ratoneiros” (house robbers), loiterers, and all the members of the poor and unemployed urban worker strata – the impact of the “social cleaning” of the streets, made by the new regime to allow the passage of the republican parade.

However, the worst enemy was the time. The prison records since the end of the century show a small number of old women, bent by the extenuating toil, some in such poverty situation that they ended in the Beggar’s Asylum kept by the city. Death arrived to the major part of them before the 19th century came to the end of its twilight.

However, a new generation was rising. Crioula women, Rio de Janeiro or Bahia born, wearing the turbans, the Cloth of the Coast, the gaudy jewelry in the hands, and the infallible tray, still traverse the streets, notwithstanding the repression of the new regime. These women will be the decisive link that kept alight the flame of the Mina culture among the crioulos, Cariocas (citizen of Rio de Janeiro) and Bahian of the first half of the 20th century, not only in the formation in the “Houses of Saints” of Candomblé, redoubt of the Pan African religious culture in the federal capital, but also in the creation of modern samba, as in the case of Tia
Ciata, icon of the popular culture in downtown Rio de Janeiro in the turn of the century and a bastion of that time.