

Manumission in Rio de Janeiro, 1749-54: An African Perspective

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On 30 August 1751, Father João Rodrigues Pina appeared before a public notary in Rio de Janeiro to record the manumission of his Angolan slave, Lucrécia de Andre. On the surface, Lucrécia's case did not seem out of the ordinary. Like many other slaves in colonial Brazil, she received her *carta de alforria* [freedom letter] in exchange for a cash payment. After more than 20 years of service to her master, it seemed quite reasonable that her master would be willing to let her purchase her freedom. It also seemed plausible that, over the course of those 20 years, Lucrécia would have been able to save the 110 mil-réis that was paid for her manumission. But Lucrécia did not purchase her own freedom, and neither did anyone else in Brazil.

What was remarkable about Lucrécia's manumission was the way in which the money was received by her master. Lucrécia's master accepted payment from one Manuel Rodrigues de Freitas Silva, a ship's captain who arrived in Rio from Angola. The ship captain explained that he had been ordered to pay the 110 mil-réis by Captain Félix José Nogueira, resident of the city of Luanda. In turn, Captain Nogueira remitted the money on behalf of one Manuel da Costa Perico, the brother of Lucrécia de Andre. Thus, Lucrécia's freedom was purchased, in a four-man relay across the Atlantic, by her Angolan brother, whom she had last seen more than 20 years earlier.¹

We have no way of knowing whether Lucrécia returned to Angola to be reunited with her brother, although the mechanisms for her return certainly seemed to be in place. Nor do we know if she had the desire to return to Angola after spending the majority of her adult life in Brazil. Nevertheless, Lucrécia's story reveals important insights into the Central African world view on kinship and slavery. The uncertainty and uprootedness that accompanied enslavement were never forgotten, neither among the enslaved in the Americas, nor among their kith and kin left behind in Africa. Kinship ties, and the anchor of identity that they represented, remained strong in the historical memory of those affected by slavery, no doubt

providing hope, sustenance and a basis for self-definition, even as new kinship structures were forged in the Americas. Yet despite Lucrécia's unlikely resurrection from the 'social death' of slavery,² the fact is that the vast majority of Africans in Brazil remained trapped in slavery until they met their biological fates, usually through disease, malnutrition, overwork or, far more rarely, old age. Those who were fortunate enough, or resourceful enough, to be granted manumission by their masters remained extraordinarily small throughout the colonial period.

This article follows in the footsteps of a long series of manumission studies that have been conducted on slave societies in the Americas.³ Over the years, these studies have systematically reshaped our understandings of the manumission process. While some non-specialists stubbornly persist in pointing to manumission as a signifier of the benign nature of slavery in Latin America,⁴ recent studies of manumission have demonstrated that this was not the case. Indeed, scholars have shown quite clearly that a finite group of slaves – women, children and the mixed-race offspring of slave owners – were the overwhelming beneficiaries of manumission. While these studies have illuminated our understanding of who was *not* manumitted, they have only revealed the broadest contours of who was *not* manumitted. In short, we know that young African men were the least likely to be manumitted, but even among this group, were some more likely to be freed than others? Or, to put it another way, what was the likelihood that slaves from certain African regions were privileged over Africans from other regions in manumission decisions?

My objective in this article is relatively simple. I want to shift the focus away from the institutional parameters of manumission, a perspective that too easily lends itself to conclusions that manumission was liberal and exceptional, especially when compared to slave societies in the English-speaking world. Rather, I am interested in trying to capture the meanings of manumission through the collective prism of the largest group of slaves in eighteenth-century Rio de Janeiro – that is to say Central African males.⁵ Using slave-trade data, as well as slave inventories from wills, baptismal records and so on, we can now reconstruct the demographic terrain of eighteenth-century Rio in ways that have been impossible in the past. When we compare this demographic data to statistical and anecdotal evidence from manumission records, a decidedly illiberal picture emerges. As we will see, while manumission represented hope and promise for a select few, it remained an elusive mirage for the vast majority of enslaved Africans.

Before we can begin to understand the impacts of manumission on African slave society in Rio, we must first attempt to discern the demographic makeup of the slave community. While there is no reliable census data from this early period, we can make some fairly accurate

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conclusions about Rio's slave population, based on slave-trade data, slave inventories, and baptismal and burial records. Scholars are now suggesting that during the era of the slave-trade, four out of five slaves taken to southeast Brazil came from Central Africa.⁶ These numbers are reinforced by Herbert Klein, who has noted that in a sample of 23,872 Africans arriving in Rio between 1731 and 1735, 90 per cent came from Central Africa.⁷ And, as Joseph Miller has noted, 'imports of Angolan slaves through Rio grew steadily through the 1740s and remained at high levels until the end of the 1750s'.⁸ Thus, we can reasonably conclude that Rio's African slave population was overwhelmingly Central African during most of the eighteenth century.

TABLE 1
IDENTITIES OF AFRICAN SLAVES LISTED IN THE WILLS AND
TESTAMENTS OF SLAVE HOLDERS IN RIO DE JANEIRO, 1737-40

	Males	Females
Central Africans		
Angola	44	44
Benguela	27	14
Ganguela	16	5
Congo	6	3
Monjollo	4	1
Massangano	1	1
Bamba	2	0
Libollo	1	0
Maxicongo	1	0
Mbaca	1	0
Loango	0	1
TOTAL	103 (59.8%)	69 (40.2%)
		172 = 66.7% Central African
West Africans		
Mina	33	34
Cape Verde	8	1
Fula	2	0
Carabari	1	1
Benin	1	0
Cobu	1	0
São Tomé	1	0
TOTAL	47 (56.6%)	36 (43.4%)
		83 = 32.1% West African
East Africans		
Moçambique	2	1
TOTAL	2 (66.7%)	1 (33.3%)
		3 = 1.2% East African

Source: Arquivo da Curia Metropolitana do Rio de Janeiro (ACMR), Nossa Senhora de Candelaria and Santíssimo Sacramento, Óbitos, 1737-40. This sample includes only those slaves with narrow designations of identity where some degree of African regional accuracy can be determined. Hence, 'Guine' slaves are not included.

An examination of slave inventories from urban parishes in Rio results in figures similar to those from the slave-trade. While the percentage of Central Africans is smaller than the 80 per cent figure indicated in the slave-trade data, this can be explained, in large part, by the timing of our sample. Between the late 1690s and the 1720s, slaves from the Bight of Benin dominated slave imports into Brazil, especially to Bahia.⁹ The trade in so-called 'Mina' slaves to Rio is not nearly as well documented as the trade to Bahia during this time period, but it seems clear that significant numbers of Mina slaves also arrived into Rio during the first three decades of the eighteenth century. Some may have arrived via the internal trade between Bahia, Minas Gerais and Rio, but others probably came directly via the Atlantic slave-trade, either into the city of Rio itself or into smaller ports nearby. Either way, it is clear that there was an increase in the number of Mina slaves arriving into Rio during the first three decades of the eighteenth century.

The recent work of Mariza de Carvalho Soares highlights this demographic trend, demonstrating the rise and fall in the 'Mina' presence in Rio.¹⁰ Soares shows that between 1724 and 1736, Minas represented 30.7 per cent of all Africans buried in the parish of Candelaria; but by the time of our sample from 1737 to 1740, Minas represented only 25.9 per cent of enslaved Africans in the city.¹¹ Similarly, between 1718 and 1726, 681 Mina adults were baptized in Rio, while the period 1744-50 saw only 235 adult Minas baptized.¹² Clearly, by the late 1730s the number of Mina slaves was declining, even as the Central African trade was expanding.

As the reader will see, I compare the Rio slave population of the late 1730s to manumission records in Rio roughly a decade later. I have chosen the 1730s as the measure of Rio's overall slave population for several reasons. First, the time lag from 1737-40 to 1749-54 might account for the higher numbers of Mina slaves who were manumitted in the later period, especially since it often took Africans years to save the money necessary to purchase their freedom. Second, the period of our sample was probably near the high watershed mark in the Mina presence in Rio's slave population. This high watermark in the Mina slave population functions as a conservative impact on the probability of Central Africans being manumitted. In other words, given that the numbers of Central Africans arriving into Rio only increased over the 1740s and 1750s, the very slim probability that Central African males had of being manumitted between 1749-54 was probably even smaller than indicated below.

Other factors also may have contributed to the discrepancies in slave-trade and inventory statistics. We should keep in mind that many Central African slaves were sold to the rural regions surrounding Rio, and also to Minas Gerais. Because slave holdings in the urban centre of Rio were

generally much smaller than those in the hinterlands, slave owners could be more discriminating in who they chose to purchase. The average number of slaves on 107 properties surveyed in Rio de Janeiro totalled only 3.5.¹³ Given that slaves were utilized in a wide variety of urban occupations – porters, muleteers, peddlers, boatmen, factory workers, personal body servants and so on – these low numbers should not surprise us. Nor should the relatively high percentage of female slaves (see Table 2). Unlike Brazilian sugar plantations or mines, where sex ratios were almost always greater than two-to-one in favour of males, urban settings provided broader occupational possibilities for slave women. Thus, slave women in Rio could be found working as dressmakers, midwives, cooks, wet nurses, laundresses, housekeepers and prostitutes. Ultimately, in the 1730s, Rio's African slave population was more female and more likely to derive from the Bight of Benin than was generally the case in the slave-trade to Rio; however, as Central Africans rapidly overtook Minas in the overall trade to Brazil, accessibility to Mina slaves declined.

TABLE 2
BRAZILIAN-BORN vs. AFRICAN-BORN SLAVES IN RIO DE JANEIRO, 1737–40

African-Born		
Males	153	
Females	118	
TOTAL	271	= 77.9% African-born
Brazilian-Born		
Males	47	
Females	58	
TOTAL	105	= 22.1% Brazilian-born

Source: ACMRJ, Nossa Senhora de Candelaria and Santíssimo Sacramento, Óbitos, 1737–40. This sample is drawn from 107 different properties where all slaves are listed clearly according to birthplace. Inventories that include any slaves listed by first name only are excluded from this sample.

Table 2 shows the sex and birthplace of Rio's slave population between 1737 and 1740. What is most striking about the figures in Table 2 is that more than three-quarters of slaves in Rio were African-born. When combined with the data in Table 1 that show two-thirds of these were from Central Africa, we can estimate that at least half of Rio's slave population in the mid-eighteenth century was of Central African origin. Of these, around 60 per cent were male. Thus, in a random sample of 100 slaves, we could expect to find around 30 males and 20 females from Central Africa, 13 males and 12 females from other parts of Africa, and 12 males and 13 females born in Brazil.

Manumission in Rio de Janeiro

If manumission decisions were made blindly, Africans and men would have figured prominently among Rio's freed; however, the reality was quite the opposite. Of 605 manumissions granted to slaves in Rio between 1749 and 1754, only 180 (30 per cent) were granted to Africans. Men fared little better, as only 185 (31 per cent) received their *cartas de alforria* (See Table 3). These numbers mirror those from other parts of Brazil, where we have long known that manumission was largely the preserve of women, children and the Brazilian-born. The reasons for the high numbers in these categories are rather obvious ones related to familiarity, kinship and blood ties. Brazilian-born slaves were more likely to share the world view of their masters. Their first language was Portuguese. They worshipped in the Catholic church. And they understood the customs and culture of their masters.

TABLE 3
MANUMISSIONS IN RIO DE JANEIRO, 1749–54

Age and Sex	305	Females Males	420 185	(69%) (31%)
Women	115			
Girls	125			
Men	60			
Boys		Children	175	(29%)
Total Manumissions = 605				
Brazilian Born				
Females	283	(67%)		
Males	142	(33%)		
Total	425	(70%)		
African				
Females	137	(76%)		
Males	43	(24%)		
Total	180	(30%)		

Source: Arquivo Nacional do Rio de Janeiro (ANRJ), Primeiro Ofício de Notas do Rio de Janeiro, Livro de Notas, Nos. 117–121, 123–125; Segundo Ofício de Notas do Rio de Janeiro, Livro de Notas, Nos. 62, 65–68, 70; Quarto Ofício de Notas, Livro de Notas, Nos. 44, 46–49.

Slave masters were most likely to free those with whom they shared some bonds of affection, including female lovers and their own offspring. Examples of these types of manumissions abound in the *cartas de alforria*, usually hidden behind terse phrases like 'for the love I have for him/her', or 'because I raised him/her from infancy'. Others are more explicit. In 1753,

Manuel Gomes de Carvalho e Silva freed two 'mulatinhos', Joaquim, 8 years old, and his sister Francisca, 5 years old. The two children were willed to Gomes by his stepmother, Dona Luíza Jozefa Grinalda. Gomes claimed that he was freeing the two siblings 'for the reason that he recognizes them to be his children and for the great love that he has for them'.¹⁴

TABLE 4
IDENTITIES OF AFRICANS MANUMITTED IN RIO, 1749-54

	Males	Females
West Africans		
Mina	21	61
Courana	1	6
Cabo Verde	1	4
São Tomé	0	2
TOTAL	23	73
	= 96 (57%)	
Central Africans		
Angola	9	41
Benguela	2	8
Congo	2	4
Ganguella	0	5
Monjollo	0	1
TOTAL	13	59
	= 72 (43%)	

Source: ANRJ, *Ofício de Notas*, *Livros de Notas*. 'Guine' slaves - six males and six females - are excluded from this sample.

Given earlier studies of manumission in Brazil, the statistics in Table 3 should not surprise us. However, if we examine the backgrounds of only those Africans who were manumitted (Table 4), we begin to see just how limited the institution of manumission actually was. Earlier, we noted that Central Africans constituted greater than two-thirds of Rio's African slave population, and better than half of the overall slave population. Yet they constituted only 43 per cent of African manumissions, and just under 12 per cent of all manumissions. Central African men fared even more poorly. Though they represented about 30 per cent of Rio's slave population, they constituted only 2.1 per cent of all manumissions in Rio between 1749 and 1754. Thus, the probability that a Central African male would be freed was extraordinarily slim.

While these figures are sobering enough, if we look at the numbers of Africans who were freed unconditionally, we can finally understand how truly limited the institution of manumission was (see Table 5). Of the 605 total manumissions, only 78 were Africans freed unconditionally - that is, without monetary consideration or promise of future service. Half of these were 'Mina' slaves, while only a third were from Central Africa. African

TABLE 5
UNCONDITIONAL MANUMISSIONS GRANTED TO AFRICANS
IN RIO DE JANEIRO, 1749-54

	Males	Females	Total
West African = 43			
Mina	8	31	39
Cape Verde	0	2	2
São Tomé	0	1	1
Courana	0	1	1
Central African = 26			
Angola	3	21	24
Benguela	0	1	1
Monjollo	0	1	1
Guine = 9			
Guine	4	5	9
TOTALS BY SEX	15	63	78

Source: ANRJ, *Ofício de Notas*, *Livro de Notas*. This sample does not include those Africans who were listed as 'old' or 'sick' in the *carta de alforria*, and who were freed 'unconditionally'. They will be discussed below.

women were overwhelmingly more likely to be freed than were their male counterparts, representing 83 per cent of the sample. Thus, African men freed unconditionally represented only 2.5 per cent of all manumits. For Central African men, the numbers were even smaller. In the five years between 1749 and 1754, only three men from Central Africa were granted their unconditional freedom, less than one half of one per cent of all manumissions. Even though they constituted roughly 30 per cent of the total slave population of Rio, their chances of unconditional manumission were essentially nil.

One of the most intriguing questions that arises from the figures in Table 5 is why slaves from the Bight of Benin were favoured over Central Africans in manumission decisions. Even though Minas constituted only around 25 per cent of all African slaves, they represented half of the African manumissions. Meanwhile, Central Africans - nearly two-thirds of the African slave population - were only one-third of African manumissions. While there is no easy explanation for these disparities, one might posit that the sheer dominance of Central Africans in Rio discouraged slave owners from extending them their freedom, since large numbers of freed Central Africans could potentially stoke resistance among their enslaved brethren.

Another possible explanation lies in the discriminatory perceptions of slave holders, who apparently believed that Mina slaves were more attractive and more intelligent than other Africans. Mina women drew particular attention for their physical beauty and were looked upon as

'excellent companions', who in addition to being ideal sexual partners were 'preferred as maids and cooks'.¹⁵ Some slave holders even thought that Mina slaves would bring them good luck in their mining ventures. In 1730, Luís Vahia Monteiro, Governor of Rio de Janeiro, noted that 'there is not a Mineiro who can live without a Negro Mina, for they say that it is only with them that they were lucky'.¹⁶ The fact that Minas were idealized in such personal and potentially affective terms might give us some indication as to why they were favoured over other Africans in manumission decisions. Whatever the case, they were still 'Africans' and, like other African slaves, their chances for manumission remained terribly slim when compared to their Brazilian-born counterparts.

The Arduous Paths to Freedom

It should now be clear that the probability of Africans being freed outright was extraordinarily small. And those who held numerical superiority in the African slave population – males and Central Africans – were even less likely to be granted their *cartas de alforria*. While the numbers reveal the virtual impossibility of certain groups achieving freedom, the numbers alone tell us nothing about the struggles that Africans endured in order to gain the freedom of themselves or their families, a topic to which we now turn.

Perhaps the most painful and contradictory stories of manumission are those of Africans who were designated in their *cartas de alforria* as 'old' or 'infirm'.¹⁷ While we normally associate manumission with opportunity and freedom, for those who were nearing the ends of their lives, manumission was fraught with ambivalence. Unlike younger slaves who might be able to cobble together a reasonable living once they were freed, the old and infirm were often no longer able to care for themselves. For some, manumission threatened to cut off their food supply, evict them from their shelters, and remove them from the loved ones who might care for them in their waning years. One way for the master to rid himself of economic liabilities was to free slaves who were no longer productive. In 1728, Bahian chronicler Nuno Marques Pereira noted that rather than incur the cost of curing their ailing slaves, many masters simply threw them off the property when they fell ill.¹⁸ Other slave masters apparently took the trouble to formalize these evictions through manumission.

Of the 180 Africans who were manumitted in Rio de Janeiro between 1749 and 1754, 18 were listed as 'already very old' and/or 'with various ailments'. Some of these old and infirm slaves, with few resources and no place to go, were most likely put out to die.¹⁹ To make matters worse, half of these Africans were required to make some sort of financial restitution to

their masters. The amounts of the payments varied from 6 mil-réis to 64 mil-réis. The average amount, 37\$400 (37 mil + 400 réis, or 37,400 réis), was about one-half to one-third of the average price for a slave in Rio during the period. Presumably, these slaves had saved money over the course of their lives, perhaps in the hope that they would one day be able to purchase their freedom. Whether any of them had financial resources left over to support themselves as free people remains uncertain. Their masters, on the other hand, not only benefited from the years of labour provided by the Africans, but they recouped upwards of half the value of a prime African slave. Ultimately, there was nothing benevolent about these transactions, despite the fact that a number of the *cartas de alforria* make reference to the 'years of good service' performed by these slaves. In recognizing the extent of their slaves' assets, their declining utility as workers and their deep desires for freedom, masters engaged in bald, exploitative economic opportunism.

This economic opportunism was not isolated to promises of manumission for the old and infirm. Indeed, slave masters regularly extorted money and property from Africans in exchange for their freedom papers. Slave masters sometimes reinvested these cash windfalls back into the slave market, thereby increasing their human capital and reinforcing slavery as an institution. For example, between 1781 and 1783, the Benedictine monastery of Nossa Senhora do Monserrate manumitted four slaves in Rio, 'and with the product of these another seven were bought'.²⁰ In this way, manumission actually served as a stimulus for expansion of the slave-trade. Though it is very difficult to determine how extensive this practice was, at the very least, slave masters were able to profit handsomely from the manumissions of their African slaves.

During the period of our study from 1749 to 1754, it was not at all uncommon for Africans to pay more than 200 mil-réis for their freedom, even though the value of the average African slave was less than 100 mil-réis.²¹ In at least a dozen cases, Africans paid greater than 200 mil-réis; however, we must be cautious in trying to measure the value paid by a slave in exchange for the *carta de alforria*. The level of a slave's professional skills, years of service and so on, were intangible factors that often do not come through completely in the freedom letters, and were no doubt taken into consideration when placing a value on a slave's worth. In addition, slaves often purchased their freedom based on several conditions, the most common of which were an exchange of money and/or service until the master's death. Trying to determine the value in a manumission that required a 150 mil-réis payment and service until the master's death is virtually impossible. The value beyond the cash payment was contingent on how long the master (or the slave) lived. Thus, many other Africans probably paid more than 200 mil-réis for their freedom.

Given the steep cost of freedom, manumission payments often were not made by the slaves themselves. Rather, they were made by freed friends and relatives who yearned to release their loved ones from bondage. The lengths to which Africans would go to free their loved ones is best illustrated by several examples. On 12 January 1753, Manuel Antônio de Carvalho freed his slave, Antônio Mina.²² Antônio Mina, who was a barber by trade, was granted his manumission in exchange for 350 mil-réis and a young Angolan boy (*moleque*) named Matheus. These payments were made by Antônio's wife Rita da Silva, '*preta forra*'.²³ Antônio's owner noted in the *carta de alforria* that he had bought Antônio when he was still '*boçal*', freshly arrived from Africa. The implication was that because he '*civilized*' Antônio and introduced him to a '*respectable*' profession, Antônio was now worth much more than an '*average*' African slave. Indeed, licensed barbers like Antônio could earn an annual salary of between 20 and 40 mil-réis during the eighteenth century.²⁴ Recognizing the loss of potential future earnings, Manuel Antônio de Carvalho demanded the equivalent of ten years' salary for Antônio's freedom.

Rita da Silva bore the brunt of her husband's growing value. Not only did she have to pay roughly four times the going rate of an average African slave, but she also had to give up a young male slave of her own. Thus, Carvalho received nearly five times the value of the average slave in exchange for the freedom of his slave Antônio Mina. The contract that Carvalho entered into with Rita da Silva was not without stipulations. She could only afford to pay 256 of the required 350 mil-réis on the day of her husband's manumission. Therefore, she contracted to pay the remaining 94 mil-réis in equal payments of 4 mil-réis per month over the next two years. As guarantors for the contract, Rita da Silva offered Francisco Borges de Brito and Maria da Glória de Jesus, both freed Minas, who agreed that they would make the payments if Rita reneged. Meanwhile, Antônio Mina had to remain within the confines of Rio de Janeiro until the debt was paid. Apparently, Rita da Silva and her newly-freed husband met their financial obligation with no problems. The note of quittance, indicating full payment of the remaining 94 mil-réis debt to Manuel Antônio de Carvalho, appeared in the notary's records on 14 September 1754, four months earlier than scheduled.²⁵

A second example of the economic hardships suffered by slaves in their attempts to free their loved ones involved the manumission of a Brazilian-born slave named Antônio da Souza. Antônio's wife, a *preta forra* named Maria de Encarnação, traded two little houses and a small plot of land for her husband's *carta de alforria*. These properties were not particularly valuable; however, they were apparently all that Maria de Encarnação owned, since she continued to occupy the houses even after her husband

was freed. The contract for manumission stipulated that she would be 'obliged to pay ... 800 réis per month for the time that she might be permitted to continue living in [the houses]'. In essence, Maria de Encarnação gave away the roof over her head in order to secure the freedom of her husband.²⁶

Expressions of family and kinship loyalty are evident throughout the manumission records, as freed Africans harnessed their resources in attempts to release their brethren from the burdens of slavery. Interestingly, some of these cases reflect natal kinship connections that imply clusters of family members who arrived together from Africa. For instance, in 1754, Antônio de Basto Maia, *preto forro*, paid 200 mil-réis for the freedom of Caterina Mina. Antônio 'declared that he gave the said quantity for the love of God, the said *preta* being his sister'.²⁷ Other Africans freed natal kin who were born in Brazil. For instance, in 1749 a freed Mina woman named Isabel da Silva paid 115\$200 to free her creole daughter, Rita.²⁸

While the emotional bonds of natal kinship are not surprising, we must keep in mind that these bonds were rare in Brazil's African slave population. Few Africans travelled with family members from their homelands to Brazil. And live birthrates among African slave women remained very low throughout the colonial period. Thus, most Africans forged new kinship groups in Brazil, groups which were no less important than natal kin in providing emotional sustenance and an anchor of identity. Some of these Brazilian-born kinship ties reflected western understandings of 'marriage' and 'family'. For instance, in 1753 the *preto forro* Miguel de Mattos Quintal purchased the freedom of his Angolan wife Marcella.²⁹ Other examples did not necessarily reflect 'marriages' in the Christian sense of the term, but still indicated relationships that were just as meaningful and enduring. For instance, although there is no reference to their 'marriage', Rosa Fernandes, a freed Mina woman, purchased the freedom papers of Joseph Mina, 'for the great love that she had for him'.³⁰ Still others purchased kin members from the same African nation (*nação*), in demonstrations of group solidarity that apparently remained intact from Africa to the Americas. For example, within the span of five months in 1751-52, Miguel Barbara, *preto forro*, purchased two Benguela slaves: Joanna Benguela, for 128 mil-réis on 28 August 1751; and Ventura Benguela, for 166\$400 on 22 January 1752. Though we can not be certain, it seems reasonable to assume that Miguel Barbara was acting on some understanding of shared national identity. After all, why would he spend nearly 300 mil-réis to free two anonymous Benguelans?³¹ Similarly, in 1754, the Irmandade de Santo Elesbão e Santa Efigênia purchased the freedom of Antônio Courana for 89\$600.³² This particular Catholic lay brotherhood, which was founded in 1740 in the parish of Nossa Senhora da Candelária,

consisted largely of freed Mina slaves.³³ Like other lay brotherhoods that were segregated according to African *nações*, Santo Elesbão e Santa Efigênia made efforts to free their Mina kin who remained in bondage.³⁴

While many Africans sought to free their relatives and kin, we should not lose sight of the fact that slave masters retained a great deal of control over manumission proceedings, often dictating conditions for freedom that protected their interests and perpetuated the institution. At times, these decisions could be terribly corrosive on African families and networks of kin. For instance, in 1751, João Rodrigues Álvares freed his Angolan slave, Maria de Ramos, because 'it was not just that his wife should be under subjection of slavery'. When Maria had entered into the power of her master/husband, she brought with her a son from a previous relationship. Instead of freeing the ten-year-old boy along with his mother, João Rodrigues Álvares chose to leave the boy enslaved, requiring him to serve Rodrigues and Maria de Ramos until their deaths. In short, Maria de Ramos became the master of her own son, at the whim of her white husband and former master.³⁵

Another way manumission decisions reinforced slavery was through the practice of exchanging the freedom of one slave for the labour of another. We have already suggested how slave masters reinvested profits from manumission back into the slave-trade. Ironically, this most pernicious of practices emanated from the very institution that was designed to provide freedom. As we have also seen in the case of Rita da Silva, who traded 350 mil-réis and an Angolan slave for her husband's freedom, some Africans were slave holders themselves and did not hesitate to barter their chattels for the liberation of a loved one. When Africans traded other Africans, they simply affirmed the centrality of slavery as an institution.³⁶ Moreover, some of these exchanges not only reinforced slavery; they *expanded* it. For example, in 1753 the freed black, Ignácio da Silva, gave two Mina women in exchange for the freedom papers of another Mina woman, Marianna Mina. Marianna's master, Antônio dos Reis Franco, reaped the benefits of this trade, essentially doubling his human profit.³⁷ In the end, exchanges like these rendered manumission an illusory mechanism of 'freedom', as individual liberty was achieved at the expense of others' enslavement.

Conclusion

For the vast majority of African slaves in Rio de Janeiro in the mid-eighteenth century, the institution of manumission was a cruel delusion. As we have shown, very few Africans were freed, and those who were came from demographic groups that were not the most prominent in the overall African slave population – women and those from the 'Mina' coast. For

those few who were lucky enough to be granted manumission, the flush of freedom was often tempered by the reality that freedom was earned under the master's terms. Elderly or ailing Africans who had become unproductive were put into the streets to die. Families were broken apart. Mothers became owners of their own children. And the high prices required by slave owners could lead to financial stresses, if not outright insolvency.

Despite these impediments, Africans still freed their friends and family members, demonstrating the emotional bonds that emerged in Brazilian slave society, even under the worst of circumstances. Unlike Brazilian-born slaves, who relied upon emotional ties to slave masters or networks of natal kin to aid them in their manumission attempts, African manumission often depended on kinship ties made with other Africans in Brazil. These kinship ties took a variety of forms – male/female relationships, religious brotherhoods and other 'ethnic' or 'national' relationships that remain obscured in the records. These bonds, forged under the most arduous of circumstances, not only provided psychic balm to aid in defending against the slings and arrows of slavery, but they allowed Africans to realize themselves as 'new people' in the Americas.

This is not to say that the African ethnic past disappeared in the Americas. On the contrary, as manumission and other records show, Africans most often forged kinship ties with those from similar ethnic or regional backgrounds. But the ethnic past invariably took on new meanings in the absence of natal kin and in the face of chattel slavery. For someone like Lucrécia de Andre, whose brother reached across the Atlantic and plucked her from the obscurity of natal kinlessness, his gesture must have been bittersweet. On the one hand, it affirmed her natal place in a bitterly hostile world, reinforcing memories of real kin and homeland. On the other hand, her present reality was one in which she no doubt had created enduring bonds of kinship that cast her identity anew. After 20 years in Brazil, she was neither 'Angolan', nor Brazilian. Though free by law, her identity was still in thrall.

NOTES

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1. Livro de Notas, no. 121, ff. 136v–137, Primeiro Ofício de Notas do Rio de Janeiro, Arquivo Nacional do Rio de Janeiro (hereafter ANRJ).
2. Orlando Patterson's definition of 'social death' emphasizes 'the permanent, violent domination of natally alienated and generally dishonored persons', Patterson, *Slavery and Social Death: A Comparative Study* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1982), p. 12.

3. See, for instance, Katia M. de Queirós Mattoso, 'A propósito de cartas de alforria, Bahia, 1779-1850', *Anais de História*, 4 (1972), pp.23-52; Stuart Schwartz, 'The Manumission of Slaves in Colonial Brazil: Bahia, 1684-1745', *Hispanic American Historical Review*, 54 (1974), pp.603-35; Lyman L. Johnson, 'Manumission in Colonial Buenos Aires', *Hispanic American Historical Review*, 59 (1979), pp.258-79; Jerome S. Handler and John T. Pohlman, 'Slave Manumissions and Freeman in Seventeenth-Century Barbados', *William and Mary Quarterly*, 41, 3 (1984), pp.390-408; Rosemary Brana-Shute, 'Approaching Freedom: The Manumission of Slaves in Suriname', *Slavery and Abolition*, 10 (1989), pp.40-63; Mieko Nishida, 'Manumission and Ethnicity in Urban Slavery: Salvador, Brazil, 1808-1888', *Hispanic American Historical Review*, 73 (1993), pp.361-91; Kathleen D. Higgins, 'Gender and Manumission of Slaves in Colonial Brazil: The Prospects for Freedom in Sabara, Minas Gerais, 1710-1809', *Slavery and Abolition*, 18 (1997), pp.1-29; Douglas Cole Libby and Clotilde Paiva, 'Manumission Practices in Late Eighteenth-Century Brazilian Slave Parish: São José d'El Rey in 1795', *Slavery and Abolition*, 21 (2000), pp.96-127; and Carlo Guimarães Monti, 'Por amor a Deus: o processo da alforria dos escravos de Mariana (1750-1759)', *Revista do Centro Universitário Barão de Mauá*, 1, 1 (Jan/June 2001), http://www.baroademaua.br/revista/v1n1/por_amor.html.
4. Most of these non-specialists continue to rely on the classic interpretations of Frank Tannenbaum, *Slave and Citizen* (New York: Knopf, 1946); and Stanley M. Elkins, *Slavery: A Problem in American Institutional and Intellectual Life* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1959). See, for instance, Ronald Segal, who describes the 'relatively liberal provision' of manumission in Brazil, in *The Black Diaspora: Five Centuries of the Black Experience Outside Africa* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1995), p.156. Also, see John Hope Franklin and Alfred A. Moss, Jr., who conjecture that in Brazil, 'there are perhaps no records of an owner's refusal to emancipate a slave who was able to purchase his freedom'. Franklin and Moss go on to argue that 'in the colonial period Brazilians felt little, if any, race prejudice'; *From Slavery to Freedom: A History of Negro Americans*, 8th edn. (New York: McGraw Hill, 2000), p.62.
5. Scholars have long recognized the common linguistic, religious and cultural heritage of the various peoples of Central Africa. During the era of the slave-trade, the term 'Angola' often referred to slaves from the broad region bordered by the Congo River in the north and the Kunene River in the south. By the time various groups of Kongo, Mbundu and Ovimbundu were boarded onto ships in eighteenth-century Luanda, they often spoke a common language (Kimbundu) and shared cultural attitudes. Though I will refer to the different Central African 'nations' that were present in Brazil, I emphasize the regional affinities noted by scholars and contemporaries alike. For Central Africa, see Jan Vansina, *Paths in the Rainforests* (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 1990); Joseph C. Miller, *Way of Death: Merchant Capitalism and the Angolan Slave Trade, 1730-1830* (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 1988); and the various works of John K. Thornton, especially *Africa and Africans in the Making of the Atlantic World, 1400-1800*, 2nd edn. (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1998). For Brazilian discussions of Central Africans, see Mary C. Karasch, *Slave Life in Rio de Janeiro, 1808-1850* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1987); Robert Slenes, *Na Senzala, uma Flor: Esperanças e Recordações na Formação da Família Escrava Brasil Sudeste, Século XIX* (Rio de Janeiro: Editora Nova Fronteira, 1999); and James H. Sweet, *Recreating Africa: Kinship, Culture, and Religion in the African-Portuguese World, 1441-1770* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, forthcoming). For a diaspora-wide examination of Central African culture, see Linda M. Heywood (ed.), *Central Africans and Cultural Transformations in the American Diaspora* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2002).
6. See David Richardson, 'Slave Exports from West and West-Central Africa, 1700-1810', *Journal of African History*, 30 (1989), pp.7-22; and more recently, David Eltis, 'The Volume and Structure of the Transatlantic Slave Trade: A Reassessment', *William and Mary Quarterly*, LVIII (2001), pp.17-46.
7. Herbert S. Klein, *The Middle Passage: Comparative Studies in the Atlantic Slave Trade* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1978), p.253.
8. Miller, *Way of Death*, p.463.

9. This phenomenon was noted some time ago by Maurício Goulart, *Escravidão Africana no Brasil* (São Paulo, 1949), pp.203-17; and reinforced by Philip D. Curtin, *The Atlantic Slave Trade: A Census* (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 1969), p.207. More recently, see Richardson, 'Slave Exports'; and Eltis, 'The Volume and Structure of the Transatlantic Trade'. The extent of West African arrivals into Rio, either via the transatlantic trade or the internal Brazilian trade, remains uncertain; however, it is clear that after the 1730s, Central Africans represented more than 90 per cent of the slaves imported into Rio via the Atlantic, a trend which would continue well into the nineteenth century. Karasch, *Slave Life in Rio de Janeiro*, pp.14-15.
10. Mariza de Carvalho Soares, *Devotos da Cor: Identidade étnica, religiosidade e escravidão no Rio de Janeiro, século XVIII* (Rio de Janeiro: Editora Civilização Brasileira, 2000).
11. *Ibid.*, p.150. Again, I have excluded 'Guinea' from the sample.
12. *Ibid.*, p.83.
13. Given the relatively small sample, there is obvious margin for error; however, Mary Karasch has found that there were 36,182 slaves in 10,151 households in 1821, roughly 3.6 slaves per household. Karasch, *Slave Life in Rio de Janeiro*, pp.62-3.
14. Livro de Notas, no.123, ff.150v, Primeiro Ofício de Notas do Rio de Janeiro, ANRJ.
15. The notion of 'Mina' women as particularly beautiful can be found across the literature on slavery in Brazil. See, for instance, Gilberto Freyre, *The Masters and the Slaves: A Study in the Development of Brazilian Civilization*, 2nd edn. (New York: Knopf, 1956), pp.308-9; Donald Pierson, *Negroes in Brazil: A Study of Race Contact at Bahia* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1942), pp.145-6; A.J.R. Russell-Wood, *Fidalgos and Philanthropists* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1968), p.182.
16. Freyre, *The Masters and the Slaves*, pp.308-9.
17. These usually appear in the documents as 'já de maior idade', 'já muita velha', or 'com varios achaques'.
18. Nuno Marques Pereira, *Compendio Narrativo do Peregrino da America (1728)*, 6th edn., 2 Vols. (Rio de Janeiro: Academia Brasileira de Letras, 1939), Vol.1, p.157.
19. Such practices were widespread across the Americas. Father Alonso de Sandoval, a Jesuit priest residing in Cartagena from 1605 to 1617, wrote that masters would free their sick slaves for the period of their illness, just so they would not have to incur the cost of curing the slave. If the slave regained his health, he was required to return to service. Padre Alonso de Sandoval, *De Instauranda Aethiopum Salute: El Mundo de la Esclavitud Negra en America* (Bogotá: Empresa Nacional de Publicaciones, 1956), p.197.
20. Arquivo Distrital de Braga/Universidade de Minho, Congregação de São Bento, 135 - Estados do Mosteiro de Nossa Senhora do Montserrat, ff.196.
21. There are few reliable estimates for slave prices in Rio during this period; however, Laird Bergad has shown that the average price of healthy African slaves in Minas Gerais was 158 mil-réis between 1749 and 1754, Laird W. Bergad, *Slavery and the Demographic and Economic History of Minas Gerais, Brazil, 1720-1888* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), p.262. Scholars have estimated transport costs from the coast to the interior of around 100 per cent. Thus, average slave prices in Rio would have been around 79 mil-réis. Anecdotal evidence is also suggestive. For instance, the average price of six healthy Africans from the inventory of a Rio olária in 1752 was 75 mil-réis, Livro de Notas, no.123, ff.98v-99v; Primeiro Ofício de Notas, ANRJ. Comparison with Salvador is also instructive. In 1754, the average cost of a 'prime' slave there was 86\$400, Dauril Alden, 'Price Movements in Brazil Before, During, and After the Gold Boom, with Special Reference to the Salvador Market, 1670-1769', in Lyman L. Johnson and Enrique Tandeter (eds.), *Essays on the Price History of Eighteenth-Century Latin America* (Albuquerque, NM: University of New Mexico Press, 1990), p.343.
22. Livro de Notas, no.123, ff.130-131, Primeiro Ofício de Notas do Rio de Janeiro, ANRJ.
23. 'Preta forra' simply means freed black; however, we can surmise that Rita da Silva was African, and very likely from the Mina coast. As we will see, the two guarantors of her contract were also freed Minas.
24. Brazilian barbers were authorized to 'bleed, scarify, and apply leeches and other suckers', as well as pull teeth and perform other minor medical procedures. See A.J.R. Russell-Wood,

The Black Man in Slavery and Freedom in Colonial Brazil (New York: St Martin's Press, 1982), pp.56–7. Barbers' salaries were commensurate with the annual income produced by slaves in sugar production during the middle of the eighteenth century. Bahian sugar planters estimated that the average slave produced 35\$500 annually. Stuart B. Schwartz, *Sugar Plantations in the Formation of Brazilian Society, 1550–1835* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), p.226. The major difference, of course, was that barbers usually had far lengthier working lives.

25. Livro de Notas, no.125, ff.134–134v, Primeiro Ofício de Notas do Rio de Janeiro, ANRJ.
26. Livro de Notas, no.117, ff.112–113, Primeiro Ofício de Notas do Rio de Janeiro, ANRJ.
27. Livro de Notas, no.125, ff.29v–30, Primeiro Ofício de Notas do Rio de Janeiro, ANRJ.
28. Livro de Notas, no.117, ff.40v–41, Primeiro Ofício de Notas do Rio de Janeiro, ANRJ.
29. Livro de Notas, no.124, ff.42–42v, Primeiro Ofício de Notas do Rio de Janeiro, ANRJ.
30. Livro de Notas, no.49, ff.89–89v, Quarto Ofício de Notas do Rio de Janeiro, ANRJ.
31. Livro de Notas, no.66, ff.140 and no.67, ff.16v, Segundo Ofício de Notas do Rio de Janeiro, ANRJ.
32. Livro de Notas, no.70, ff.27–27v, Segundo Ofício de Notas do Rio de Janeiro, ANRJ.
33. The brotherhood accepted members from the Mina coast, Cape Verde, São Tomé and Mozambique. However, they explicitly forbade membership of Angolans, Creoles, Cabras and Mestiços. See João José Reis, 'Identidade e Diversidade Étnicas nas Irmandades Negras no Tempo da Escravidão', *Tempo*, 3 (1997), p.20.
34. *Man in Slavery and Freedom*, pp.38–9, 152–3.
35. Livro de Notas, no.121, ff.162–162v, Primeiro Ofício de Notas do Rio de Janeiro, ANRJ.
36. These exchanges are morally troubling, particularly for those Africans who had first-hand knowledge of the severity of Brazilian chattel slavery. Nevertheless, the presence of African slave owners in Brazil should not surprise us, since slavery was a 'normal' source of labour and wealth building, not only in Brazil, but across most of Africa as well.
37. Livro de Notas, no.49, ff.75v–76, Quarto Ofício de Notas do Rio de Janeiro, ANRJ.

The Slave Ship Manuscripts of Captain Joseph B. Cook: A Narrative Reconstruction of the Brig *Nancy's* Voyage of 1793

MITRA SHARAFI

Captain Joseph B. Cook set sail for Africa at the worst possible time. The rainy season along the African west coast falls between May and August, when tornados and malaria ravage the coastline.¹ Cook steered the brig *Nancy* out of the port of Providence, Rhode Island, on 29 March 1793. It would take about six weeks to reach Africa, such that he must have arrived just when the rains and winds became torrential.² It was a bad start to what would become an even worse voyage – Cook's first slaving voyage aboard the brig *Nancy*, and probably his second slaving voyage generally. Cook loaded the *Nancy* with a full cargo of 121 Africans on the Upper Guinea coastline somewhere between Senegambia and Sierra Leone. He then sailed south-west across the Atlantic, bound for the Dutch port of Suriname on the north-east coast of South America. In the early months of 1794, the New England public would read that during the middle passage there had been a slave revolt aboard the brig *Nancy*.³ The revolt failed – Cook and his crew suppressed it without loss of life on their side. But they did kill 'a number' of Africans, undoubtedly a regrettable financial loss from the perspective of the *Nancy's* Providence owners, Zachariah and Philip Allen.

The revolt occurred amidst a swirl of revolutions proclaiming the natural liberty of man. The American Revolution was less than 20 years in the past. The French Revolution was an even more recent memory.⁴ The slave revolution in Saint Domingue (now Haiti) was raging as the *Nancy's* revolt occurred. Inspired, abolitionists garnered public support, not least of all in Providence, Rhode Island, where the Brown family found itself divided between sons John Brown, a leading slave-trader, and Moses Brown, leader of the Rhode Island abolitionist movement.⁵ In the fall of 1787, an anti-slave-trade bill that Moses Brown had initiated by petition breezed through both houses of the state legislature, to the delight and disbelief of abolitionists. It prohibited Rhode Island residents from participating in the

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