

Salvador da Bahia: retratos de uma cidade atlântica.
Evergton Sales Souza, Guida Marques and Hugo R. Silva
(eds.). Salvador, Lisbon: EDUFBA, CHAM, 2016, 343 pp.
ISBN: 978-85-232-1460-9 (EDUFBA) 978-989-8492-35-7
(CHAM)

Luís Frederico Dias Antunes¹

The publication of the book *Salvador da Bahia: retratos de uma cidade atlântica*, displaying “images” of Bahia between the seventeenth and nineteenth centuries, is the result of a work of discussion among many researchers from different academic and scientific institutions, both in Portugal and abroad. These experts participated in several multiannual projects funded by the Marie Curie Actions International Research Staff Exchange Scheme and the *Fundação para a Ciência e a Tecnologia*. The editorial coordination of this scientific work was the responsibility of Evergton Souza, Guida Marques and Hugo Silva.

The absence of an introductory note to the most important studies about this topic hampers clarification of the goals and the structure of the book. As a matter of fact, we could benefit from an essential overview of both the social history of slavery and the economic history of Bahia, as well as all its imperial connections, which would lead us to understand what distinguishes Bahia from the other cities of the Portuguese empire, taking their real dimension into consideration. In short, what distinguished Bahia as the capital of the State of Brazil? First of all, Salvador da Bahia was, along with Goa, the great port hub of the empire, in that it was the key element linking goods, men and ideas from Asia, Africa, America and Europe; secondly, in social terms, it was a slave-holding city, with an eminently black and brown-colored African and indigenous population; finally, it was a gateway for the intensive domestic slave trading activity that fed the *sertão* and the Bahian Recôncavo region.

However, in much of the book, the authors chose to study and emphasize the features that Bahia had in common with the kingdom of Portugal, especially everything that brought its conduct and customs closer to those of the upper echelons of Portuguese (and subsequently European) society. A much smaller space is occupied by essays on the singularities of Bahia: the role of the brotherhoods as associations representing the social

¹ History Center, Lisbon University. E-mail: luisfredantunes@netcabo.pt

expression and inclusion of the African population, both slaves and freemen, during the colonial period, advocating their causes and interests and sponsoring the “Creolization” of the Africans; the difficulties faced by recently emancipated individuals in the labor market; the strategies for overcoming the problems raised by the dividing lines between slavery and freedom; the issues related with the re-appropriation of African ethnicities; the complexity of the identity-based terminologies developed in slave traffic and in servitude; and the way that these terminologies tended to play a fundamental role in the lives of both the enslaved black people and the emancipated Africans.

The book is divided into three parts, each of which has three chapters. The first part studies Bahia’s strong dependency on the Portuguese crown, chiefly with regard to fiscal, political and social matters, and it also points out the role played by communications within the Empire. In her text, Guida Marques begins by developing the idea presented by Catarina Madeira Santos in her work about the city of Goa as the “key to the *Estado da Índia*.”² Likewise, she seeks to question the shaping of Bahia’s central status as the capital city, within the framework of its interdependence with Atlantic Africa and with the Portuguese crown in the seventeenth century. In this respect, Guida Marques has produced a fundamental text on the process of building Bahia as the “head of the State of Brazil,” during the seventeenth century, through the speeches and representations that projected it and, very often, imagined it. It was a central interface of territories, interests and businesses that, as an essential instrument of colonization, was also used as an element in the representation of Portuguese sovereignty, linked to the figure of the king. The author has accurately portrayed the mercantile foundation of Bahia, as well as the undeniable importance of slavery and the massive presence of Indians and Africans in the city.

The chapter by Pedro Cardim and Thiago Krause studies the leading role played by the main local authorities in Bahia, the people who established an interface with the court through the administrative communication network, and who, within the municipal framework, were valuable, not so much because of the fees they earned, but more because of the prestige that they obtained by “showing up and showing off.” Hence, the authors resume the discussion of the meaning of being a vassal of the Portuguese crown in the context of the overseas empire. Cardim and Krause build up a text with a great deal of interesting information that enables us to portray the Bahian municipal elite, and illustrate the way in which they related to the crown, through the study of the correspondence exchanged between the city senate and its permanent representatives, who, in Lisbon,

² Catarina Madeira Santos, “Goa é a chave de toda a Índia.” *Perfil político da capital do Estado da Índia (1505-1570)*. Lisbon: CNCDP, 1999.

sought to defend their interests before the crown. The matters most frequently discussed were, in ascending order: the city's political and administrative autonomy and its authority to enforce the law in specific cases; immediately afterwards, matters relating to the representation of Bahia in the courts of Portugal; then, illustrated by specific references, the relationships with native and African peoples; the comparison with the privileges enjoyed by other municipalities, both in the mother country and in the rest of the Empire, in order to achieve a position of identical dignity; and, finally, the issue of the population's African origins and the increasingly bitter disputes that took place over sugar and the lack of currency. Obviously, the conclusion drawn from the study on the correspondence exchanged between the Bahia city senate and its representatives in Lisbon was that "the demands are not very different from those that feature the main Portuguese City Councils of that time" (p. 89).

In the last chapter of the first part, the text by Avanete Sousa is indeed intriguing. She starts her study with two epithets used in documents of the time – "Head of State" and "Emporium of the Universe" – to illustrate the economic centrality and the capital status of seventeenth-century Bahia. The author's intention is to paint a picture of the truly cosmopolitan dimension of Salvador da Bahia throughout the eighteenth century. However, Avanete Sousa limits her analysis of Bahia to the subject of the city's relations with the Atlantic world: she thoroughly scrutinizes the connections maintained with the production of tobacco and sugar in the Recôncavo and subsequently with its domestic trade; she presents the extent of the inter-regional exchanges, including those taking place in the realm of internal commerce and mostly using slaves as merchandise; she presents data on the bulk of the transatlantic traffic of slaves from Africa, and shows this to be the most important activity in the city, economically speaking, i.e., she essentially studies Bahia's overseas trade.

As far as the connections of Bahia with the Indian Ocean and the Far East are concerned, there are no more than two minor references. The almost total omission of any references to the Asian dimension of the Portuguese empire belies the "universal" image of Salvador da Bahia's commerce, and it is a reason for my great perplexity, since the whole of the historiographical process that began in the 1970s is completely overlooked, in particular the work by Amaral Lapa.

The second part of the book focuses on the role played by the Church within the framework of a city that claimed to be the capital of Portuguese America. Most of the texts seek to highlight the institutional aspects that make it possible to track the processes of

power consolidation and social ascension followed by a clerical elite existing at the city's religious institutions. Thus, Evergton Sales Souza and Bruno Feitler debate the city of Bahia as an "ecclesiastic metropolis" within the framework of the Portuguese Empire, scrutinizing the Church chiefly by studying the historical evolution of the episcopal see. Essentially, the text highlights the local elite's social prestige and the representation of colonial power, which was not only to be found in publishing activity, but also in the architecture of buildings and in the works painted in the cathedral, the very place where the bishop exercised his jurisdiction.

In the second chapter, the text by Hugo Ribeiro da Silva studies the issues related with the Cathedral Chapter of Bahia and its clergy. His essay seeks to understand and answer a set of questions related to a cathedral chapter overseas. In particular, he examines the organic structure of the *Cabido* (chapter), its utility, the identity of the clergymen and the means by which they gained access to and participated in the cathedral life, the origin of their revenues and the development of their careers. Specifically, the Cathedral Chapter of Bahia was distinct from others in matters relating to the origin and management of income. There were huge restrictions placed on the actions of the bishops, not only because overseas prelates were not able to manage the income from their dioceses (since for their livelihood they received nothing more than a *côngrua* (a contribution) paid by the crown), but also because the right to determine ecclesiastical benefits belonged to the King, as well as the livelihood of the parish churches and cathedrals, through the Royal Treasury. Moreover, when compared to other Chapters, namely those from the mother country, the differences were not very significant. This important study highlights the idea that the cathedral chapter, just like other European institutions, was one where power was negotiated and exercised so as to consolidate the social hierarchy that existed within an organ belonging to "an almost elite."

In the third chapter, the essay by Lucilene Reginaldo on the register of the members of the Irmandade do Rosário das Portas do Carmo (1719-1826) presents the brotherly associations that were created by slaves and those who were emancipated within the framework of the Portuguese overseas empire, providing a unique reflection on the black identities that existed in colonial Bahia and their role in shaping religiosity all over the Bahian region. After analyzing the brotherhoods of black people based on the social status and the geographic origin of their members, the author recognized the primacy of *Angolas* and Creoles throughout the history of the Irmandade do Rosário das Portas do Carmo, even when the slave traffic was geared towards the coast of Mina, in the eighteenth and

nineteenth centuries. She comes to the conclusion that “this privilege” granted *Angolas* and Creoles the best positions, especially as leaders of the brotherhoods devoted to the cult of the Rosary in the Bahia archbishopric. Her research focuses on the way in which the Irmandade do Rosário das Portas do Carmo operated and the role that it played during the colonial era as an institution for the representation and inclusion of the African population, both slaves and freemen, by sponsoring their causes and defending their interests. This also involved studying the “process of the Creolization or Ladinization of Africans” (p.220), namely the change in the status of Africans and the creation of Creole elites that managed to achieve their own social and economic ascension, coming to occupy important positions in the Brotherhood, and perhaps even in the colonial administration, with special attention being drawn to the role of women, who constituted the vast majority of its members (72.1%). Some of them, regardless of their legal status (i.e. their condition of being free, emancipated or slaves), could play important roles in the Brotherhood, as judges, representatives and majordomos. By giving greater prominence to a valuable documentary collection of African people, the text by Lucilene Reginaldo not only points out the Atlantic, African and Bahian features of the most influential black brotherhood in Salvador, but it also underlines its huge relevance for the development of Bahian Afro-Catholicism.

The third part of the book studies individual trajectories from the early eighteenth to the late nineteenth century, showing us the strategies that people adopted for asserting their own identities, as well as various kinds of Atlantic interactions that either resulted in the assertion of principles and of the Catholic doctrine or led to the re-appropriation of African ethnicities. Thus, in the first chapter, Giuseppina Raggi starts by defining *quadratura* and by describing its technical specificities in Salvador; then she recovers the historical context of the origin of this parietal art, locating it in Bologna and Lisbon; and, finally, she reflects upon its use, in the early eighteenth century, by the different social elite groups seeking to turn the interiors of churches and nobler buildings in the city into spaces with a powerful and symbolic visual impact that were important for the assertion of identities. Obviously, it was the king and his court who were the most frequent commissioners of such greatly expensive decorations and scenic works. In Bahia, most commissioners were to be found among a set of affluent tradesmen, united by ties of kinship to the traditional Bahian families, civil servants and church dignitaries, who sought to transmit a dignified image of themselves. The essay by João Reis starts by presenting us with some important documentary evidence: the paintings of the eighteenth century Salvador da Bahia that highlight the black and brown colors associated with slavery, flecked here and there with

white. From the late seventeenth century onwards, but mainly during the eighteenth century, most of the captives entering Bahia were sent to the sugarcane fields and the sugar mills in the Recôncavo, while others went to the sugar mills and mines in the southeast of Portuguese America, although there were still many thousands that ended up staying in Salvador. Of course, slave labor reached huge proportions in the city, with many working in domestic service or making their *ganho* (wage-earning) on the streets, turning Bahia into the “capital of the black Atlantic.” In the mid 1830s, about 60% of the city’s slave population had been born in Africa, while about 80% of the whole population was black and *mulato*. Showing great flexibility, but nonetheless insisting on accuracy, João Reis provides a very clear explanation of the complexity of the identity nomenclatures that were forged in the course of trafficking and slavery, and shows how these fitted into the daily lives of enslaved Negroes and emancipated Africans. He draws attention to the aspects related with the negotiation of identities, centered around the idea of African nations, in the Catholic brotherhoods, in the Candomblé yards, and among the Islamic groups, thus demonstrating that very fluid ethnic divisions were created in these processes. It is exactly in relation to this matter and in the framework of a scientifically coordinated work that the importance of João Reis’ text is to be understood: it operates rather like a hinge that supports and connects the excellent research by Lucilene Reginaldo and Gabriela Sampaio. Finally, Gabriela Sampaio’s research takes us to the labor world of the former enslaved individuals, in the late nineteenth century. A profound expert on the post-abolition period and on the problems that still arose from the fine line between slavery and freedom, Gabriela Sampaio has managed to reconstruct and attach visibility to the complex life paths of two hitherto unknown emancipated Africans: Benedito Cardoso and Benedito Lopes Viana. The author seeks to highlight the reconfigurations of the overseas business that existed between Brazil and Africa after the end of trafficking, as well as its economic and social consequences in the Portuguese America, by emphasizing four fundamental aspects: acknowledging the commercial and cultural ties that emancipated Africans legally maintained with traders and other residents in Lagos, as well as other ports on the coast of Mina; clarifying the economic motivations of the numerous journeys they made in Brazil, accompanied by their female wage-earning slaves; providing information on their participation in the trade of certain African products, some of them used in rituals, thus allowing for the possibility of legitimate work and a livelihood for emancipated Africans, and moreover, as stressed by the author, bearing in mind that they themselves underwent this trading experience when they were still slaves; and identifying the very diverse

networks of relationships, including those of ethnic and religious origin, with members of the African communities in Bahia and Rio de Janeiro.

Salvador da Bahia: retratos de uma cidade atlântica is an asymmetric book, not because of the quality of the texts – although the essays by Guida Marques, Lucilene Reginaldo, Gabriela Sampaio and João Reis stand out – but instead due to the difficulty of finding a guideline that may provide the work with a clear internal logic. The proposed aim of understanding the city of Bahia as a social, political, economic and symbolic construction, through a series of portraits that “are not intended (...) to deplete all the dimensions of the city” (p. 9) is not only seductive, but also offers a certain accountability for the publishers of this scientific work, in that they are obliged and committed to choosing the portraits that best identify Bahia in the seventeenth to the nineteenth century. Obviously, in this context, the selection of themes and the choice of texts are matters of great importance.

The essays collected together here almost exclusively debate Bahia and its port in the Atlantic context, some of them focusing on the relationships with the crown and the Portuguese elite. There is no harm in this. However, the book neglects the actual imperial character of Salvador. It ignores all the implications of economic, social and political relationships maintained by Salvador with Asia and the African lands beyond the Cape of Good Hope, namely Mozambique, in East Africa, as well as with the Malabar and Coromandel coasts in India, and with Macao, in the Far East. In short, the texts are important contributions to our understanding of Salvador da Bahia between the seventeenth and nineteenth centuries, but the book does not fully live up to the overseas, multi-continental character of the port and the city, which was not just a mere port of call for the ships of the *Carreira da Índia* on their journeys from Asia to Lisbon, or vice-versa, nor just a simple warehouse with multiple influences and oriental products. Instead, the Brazilian presence in Asia was dynamic and lively, just as it was in terms of the Atlantic aspect of the Portuguese Empire.