

STUDIES IN GLOBAL SLAVERY 15

Slave Subjectivities in the Iberian Worlds

(16th-20th centuries)



Edited by

Ângela Barreto Xavier, Cristina Nogueira da Silva
and Michel Cahen

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Prologue: Understanding the Voice of the Enslaved in the Iberian World

João José Reis

Historians of slavery have long been engaged with the topics that make up the core of this volume. Studies of slave subjectivities in the Atlantic basin witnessed a renewal since the 1970s, when the standard narrative describing enslaved Africans and their descendants as brutalized, depersonalized, and passive to such a point that they would have shared few characteristics of human communities was contested. Notable pioneering works such as *The Slave Community* by John Blassingame, *Roll Jordan Roll* by Eugene Genovese, and *The Black Family in Slavery and Freedom* by Herbert Gutman described with plentiful sources and arguments the existence of a much deeper level of autonomy and self-consciousness among the enslaved.¹ A New History of Slavery was born, alongside other kinds of “new histories” that shook the foundations of different areas of the discipline. The movement prospered, gained followers, transformed and diversified narratives, multiplied topics, and refined both methods and interpretations.

Although they were not undertaking a common project of historiographical reassessment, these scholars placed the slave experience as their central concern, as they tried to recreate the lives of the enslaved, including their visions of themselves and the world around them. Despite the brutality of the system, one could observe in the documents the existence of a “slave community” that was vibrant in many respects, molded by cultural originality (informed but not merely reproducing African traditions), religiosity, the formation of families, the practice of artistic and trade skills, commercial ingenuity, as well as daily strategies for freedom, negotiation, resistance, and sometimes outright rebellion. Each of these dimensions of an enslaved life depended on the control and retaliatory capacity of the slave-owning class. The slave owners themselves were not united and consistent but diversified by region, time period, and colonial context, among other variables. This means that conjunctural and structural elements conditioned the slave experience in each place and period.

¹ John Blassingame, *The Slave Community: Plantation Life in the Antebellum South* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1972); Eugene D. Genovese, *Roll Jordan Roll: The World the Slaves Made* (New York: Pantheon, 1974); Herbert Gutman, *The Black Family in Slavery and Freedom, 1750–1925* (New York: Vintage, 1977).

Since the beginning of the movement, the new historiography of slavery would seek to understand the will, desires, thoughts and agency of the enslaved while using documents almost always written by slave owners and civil, political, and religious authorities. The subaltern voices contained in these pages are rarely heard and more often only as a whisper. It is precisely for this reason that the memories and autobiographies of enslaved subjects were and continue to be particularly valued. Such stories abounded in the United States, particularly in the nineteenth century, in the form of *slave narratives* that became a unique literary genre in its epoch as pieces of abolitionist propaganda. In addition to these narratives there were in the United States the numerous interviews of the last generation of former slaves in the 1930s collected by the Works Progress Administration (WPA) project's personnel, who traveled throughout the South assigned with this task.

However, even these first-hand accounts were rarely able to escape white abolitionists' filters that took down their testimonies, though some exceptions exist, with Frederick Douglass' narrative being perhaps the most famous of them.² The testimonies were frequently influenced and directed towards a more impactful denunciation of the heinous system, leaving readers to often stumble across sections of abolitionist or morally elevated poems disguised as the slave's own words. Similarly, the WPA papers were produced by writers and staff members overwhelmingly white. Nevertheless, these sources remain access points to the experiences and the subjectivity of the enslaved despite the problems mentioned above. They are certainly much more open to the voices of the enslaved than the police reports and inquiries, colonial chronicles, fictional works, or similar sources that portray the enslaved throughout the world.

This book's project proposes an ambitious goal of investigating slave subjectivity but, in most cases, without the help of sources written or dictated by the slaves themselves. The authors of the following chapters used an extensive variety of strategies to achieve this goal. If not the subjectivities, the authors knock on their doors; at times, they manage to spy upon the soul of their subjects through the open cracks in the walls of silence.

I must, however, confess that the bibliography of slavery of the last three decades has discussed, using other terms rather than "subjectivity", much of the subjects that the reader will encounter here. The most frequent term employed is perhaps that of "agency". Unsurprisingly, in both the literature that emphasizes agency and the studies that use subjectivity included in this

² *A Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, an American Slave*. Written by himself (Boston: Anti-Slavery Office, 1845).

volume, the attempts by the enslaved to liberate themselves are the privileged moments of perception of a more autonomous individual or collective “attitude”; even more so when the enslaved person had already achieved freedom, however precarious. The notion of subjectivity/agency employed here expands itself in multiple directions, breaking with countless ideological, moral, and material boundaries. Full of nuances, it manifests itself through a range of meanings that vary from the strongest of accents to being almost imperceptible to the reader.

Many of the studies gathered here concern successful and unsuccessful attempts at acquiring freedom by people that considered themselves to be illegally enslaved according to the laws in effect in the places they lived under captivity or restricted freedom, be it in Goa, Macau, Brazil, Argentina, Portugal, Cuba, Peru, or Mexico. This is a classic topic in the historiography of slavery, but, in this book, it is used to try to access the subjectivity of those attempting to prove their liberty. For this reason, the authors selectively reconstruct their subjects’ life stories and their memories, thereby revealing as much as they hide. According to Natalie Zemon Davis, a large part of what we find in testimonies such as these can be considered “archival fictions”: versions of the truth told to convince generally powerful interlocutors.³ This does not mean that they were false statements, they were mostly used not to reconstruct lives lived, but rather to present desired lives, the product of personal and at times collective aspirations, projects of good fortune and future.

In numerous cases, it is said that these stories are present in more “neutral” documents. However, I insist that these petitions and testimonies contain the enslaved persons’ strategic movements, who used them as a pathway to freedom. In these papers, scholars often find descriptions of life events that accentuated relevant moments justifying the pleas presented. Despite rarely being first-hand accounts, written as they were by lawyers and attorneys, they narrate credible stories conceived by petitioners to speak about themselves, where they came from, their place in society, which collectivities they were connected to, and what they wished to become.

The circumstances and strategies of the enslaved varied considerably. In seventeenth-century Peru Japanese individuals claimed to be free since there was no slavery in Japan, only forms of servitude. But they also identified themselves as “Japanese Indians” to contest the legitimacy of their condition, given that the enslavement of native peoples was illegal in Spanish America at the time. In the same period, three of them, one residing in New Spain (Mexico),

3 Natalie Zemon Davis, *Fiction in the Archives: Pardon Tales and their Tellers in Sixteenth-Century France* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1987).

another in Madrid, and the third one in Portuguese Macau, separately brought before metropolitan and colonial courts cases against their illegal enslavement. The story of these three characters is outlined in the chapter written by Rômulo da Silva Ehalt, which points to their resistance to being equated to African slaves within the Asian and American domains of the two Iberian empires.

For one of these characters, Damião de Lima, Ehalt had access to an extraordinary kind of document to investigate individual subjectivity: a will and testament. Despite the formulaic nature of notarial bureaucracy, this source often reveals traces of the authors' understanding of themselves and their esteem for those that they benefitted with bequests. For example, Lima describes his travels between Lisbon and Macau, always affirming himself as a free man and deeply identifying himself with the colonial religion. Typically baroque in terms of funerary plans, his will is an eloquent demonstration of how a good Christian should adequately prepare for a good death, whether in Lisbon, Bahia, Luanda, Goa or Macau. A will, therefore, is not only a register of the actions of its author. Although written or dictated by those having already been freed from slavery, the will is a meeting point between the historian and their characters. It reveals many of their memories and most intimate secrets when preparing for the afterlife. Religious subjectivity, in particular, indeed permeates every aspect of a will.

Religion is highlighted in several contributions in this book, although not always in such an eloquent manner as described in wills. Continuing the thread of funerary regimes in the Iberian colonial world, we disembark in Mexico City at the beginning of the seventeenth century. A black brotherhood promoted burials with distinctly African characteristics that included food offerings to the dead and the spiritual possession of an officiant. They were not African ceremonies frozen in the tropics, given that brotherhoods as institutions were as perfectly integrated with the missionary spirit both in the metropolises and in the Iberian overseas possessions. On the contrary, according to Miguel A. Valerio, these "diasporic ways of dying" demonstrated a convergence of African and Catholic traditions in order to form what would effectively be a "Creolization of death", thereby positioning the author's perspective at the core of a classic debate between Creolist and Afrocentric theories. Valerio discusses the mental molding and adjustments of African and Afro-descendent persons facing death, how they lived and how they experienced this crucial moment of the life cycle. In other words, funerals allow us to perceive how a proper death was organized in that culturally hybrid mode by the Afro-Mexican community, and duly received by its dead, given the numerous occasions on which they had participated in similar ceremonies allowing them to fully understand their meaning. It was not by chance that the lay Catholic brotherhoods were placed

in a strategic position of dispatching the dead. Though not their only duty, it is reasonable to consider it as their most important one.

In the corporative atmosphere that characterized the metropolises and their colonies, brotherhoods combined and even constituted social bodies with similar profiles: racial, national or ethnic origin, class, or social status. The black brotherhoods gathered Creoles and Africans, but the Africans were often organized according to their origins in Africa, defined at times by ethnic identities reinvented in the various New World diasporas under the term “nation”.

Beyond whites and blacks, there were also many mixed-race brotherhoods, especially in cities and villages of Iberian America. For example, Lisa Voigt suggests the expression “collective subjectivity” to understand the mobilization carried out by a *pardo* brotherhood in Salvador, Bahia, to celebrate São Gonçalo Garcia, its patron saint (the female counterpart would be Our Lady of Conception). In the sermon written in order to document a festivity in the cathedral of the city of Bahia in 1747, it was made known, in a delightfully baroque language, “that they are not ashamed by the mixture of colors, but rather take pride in having a Saint that was also shadowy [que pela mistura das cores não se envergonham, antes se gloriam de ter um Santo também assombrado]”. At the same time that they commemorated their saint, the *pardos* celebrated their skin color to demonstrate affective and moral comfort regarding their racial identity.

The people of color’s brotherhoods were also active in the heart of Portugal, carrying out similar identity and charitable functions for their clientele. One of the primary activities of these institutions, wherever they were set up, was to help their enslaved members gain freedom, most often as money lenders in the purchase of manumissions. However, in Lisbon, black and *pardo* brotherhoods went further and promoted “freedom suits [ações de liberdade]”, a judicial dispute brought before competent authorities. They thus challenged what they considered illegal enslavement according to abolitionist legislation of 1761 that freed captives disembarking on Portuguese soil, and a 1773 law that gradually abolished slavery in Portugal.

The role of black brotherhoods between the end of the eighteenth and the beginning of the nineteenth century is the main subject of the chapter written by Fernanda Domingos Pinheiro. The Rosário brothers at the Convento da Graça, in particular, were very successful in obtaining favorable sentences by launching different judicial strategies (mainly that of summary rites) set in motion by competent proxies and lawyers. Soon, the brotherhood became the legal warden of the captives while they awaited the outcome of their freedom bids. The author summarizes the institution’s performance in these cases as such: “their board members publicized the content of Pombaline laws, received

and verified complaints, moved about the city streets and docks trying to identify the unknown [slaves] and to verify how they had been acquired.” We are faced with a behavior that displays individual and collective wishes woven among brothers and sisters (and captive ones in some cases), alongside the indispensable support of white abolitionists.

Other Catholic institutions were involved in other ways in the configuration of specific slave regimes. It is noteworthy that the way African brothers celebrated their deaths in seventeenth-century Mexico relied upon a form of paternalist tolerance, if not acquiescence, on the part of the Mercedarian monks in whose conventual church the funerals were held. The Catholic religious orders associated themselves with slavery in different ways. Many owned people trafficked from Angola, for example, and put them to work in their plantations, cattle ranches, and urban convents. In the Luso-Brazilian context, the historian Robson Costa baptized a series of concessions negotiated between the Benedictine monks and their slaves between the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries as “institutional paternalism”: an incentive to form families, access to land for subsistence agriculture, permission to sell surplus crops and to work for hire, a selective concession of manumission, among other measures. The chapter on the “slaves of Saint Benedict” focuses on one aspect of these customs: the permission for slaves to possess slaves. Though uncommon, this practice was verified only within these monks’ domains as it has been found in several places in both rural and urban Brazil. One aspect of this phenomenon was the possibility of the enslaved to purchase their freedom by providing another slave in exchange, which often occurred on the Benedictine farms, but more often the enslaved master would choose not to pursue freedom but to take advantage of his slave’s work. In general, this situation implied negotiated terms of subordination that allow the historian to grasp a perspective of the enslaved (subjectivity?) that made slavery, as well as freedom, appear like a moving target rather than a fixed point in time and space (paraphrasing Barbara Fields).⁴ Unlike the majority of the enslaved characters found in this book, the enslaved master invested resources, energy, and sensitivity into the slave regime that, despite pointing out their accommodation to it, could at the same time be understood as a form of subversion of the system’s typical *modus operandi*. By being an owner of people, the Benedictine slave shared with free persons a fundamental prerogative in a slave society.

Not only Catholicism and African religions made up the spiritual and material life of slaves in the Iberian world. Throughout the first half of the

4 Barbara J. Fields, *Slavery and Freedom in the Middle Ground: Maryland in the Nineteenth Century* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985), 193.

nineteenth century, when Brazil was transitioning from a Portuguese colony to an independent nation, Muslim captives were overflowing the slave ships coming in from Costa da Mina on the Bight of Benin. They were victims of the jihad begun in 1804 by Fulani Muslims in Hausaland, which led to the formation of the Sokoto caliphate, an expansionist state in the North of present-day Nigeria. Disembarked en masse in Bahia, these Muslims tried to keep up with their devotional lives. Inspired by Allah, they organized several uprisings, the most famous of which is the Malê Revolt in January 1835, led by Yoruba-speaking Muslims, the Malês proper. During the inquiry on the revolt, a large volume of writings in Arabic was confiscated either from the fallen rebels' bodies or in the houses swept by the police authorities. Studies of these texts have been undertaken since the end of the nineteenth century, but only in the last few years three small, short books emerged from the dust of the archives: one of them held at the Instituto Histórico Geográfico do Brasil (Rio de Janeiro), another in Le Havre municipal library (France), and the other in the municipal library of Porto (Portugal). This last one is presented here by Michel Kabalan, who sought to identify the Quranic and other Islamic texts in it. The Arabic documents are noteworthy in that they count among the few written by enslaved and freed Africans, revealing a rich spiritual universe that was incomprehensible to the slave masters and authorities alike. As various studies on the subject demonstrate, this and similar documents allow unprecedented access to a community marked by literacy, devotional learning, and intellectual introspection.

In the case of the small Malê book in the municipal library of Porto, nothing is known about the biography, not even the name of its author or who owned it. However, in the new history of slavery, the dramas, yearnings, failures and victories of the enslaved have been increasingly told through small bits of life trajectories, culminating at times in more or less detailed biographies. Extraordinary as they might appear, these personal stories illuminate collective experiences, at times through contrast. In most cases, the lead protagonist of these biographies was either a freed person who prospered sufficiently to leave their traces in the archives or people charged with a crime, investigated, and judged in a civil or ecclesiastical court. The Inquisition documents, for example, are used in a few chapters of this book as good sources to scrutinize the intimate life and worldviews of the victims on trial.

This is the case of the "fragments of a life" presented in the chapter written by Patricia Souza de Faria, who investigated freed and enslaved Asians in the Portuguese Inquisition records. Despite the restrictions and violence to which the accused were put through, it is possible to extract narratives and feelings from the interrogations that bring forward fragments of subjectivities. A case in point is Paulo, whose Muslim name was Sidi Assem Vacanady. Born in Surat

(Gujarat, India), he was captured in 1678 when trading on the Island of Pate, then transferred to Mombasa (both in today's Kenya) for a few months before being sold in Bardez (Goa), from where he fled five years later and made his way back home. Having converted to Catholicism during his years of captivity, he returned to Islam, and, as a free man, he resumed his former occupation as a traveling merchant. However, he committed the imprudence of going back to trading in the same region where he had originally been enslaved. In 1689 he was recognized and denounced to the Inquisition of Goa for the crime of apostasy. I chose this trajectory to illustrate a more complex case of memory exercise on the part of an individual, among others that Souza de Faria discusses. Incidentally, these cases were not only found in inquisitorial documents but also in others produced by the Church bureaucracy, including marriage licenses in Lisbon, which are very fruitful for investigating trajectories, social networks, and social identities, among other spheres of life. Generally, they are registered in a way that the individuals involved describe experiences based on personal relationships and events relevant to be remembered.

The next chapter rewrites the biography of Eleno (or Elena) de Céspedes, judged by the Spanish Inquisition in 1587. It is a story of sexual ambiguity. Born from an enslaved mother in Alhama (Andalusia), likely of mixed race, they were set free as a child by their master. They identified themselves as hermaphrodite before their interrogators, but his subjective identity was that of a man (or neutral, at times), and he was living as such, marrying a woman and choosing male occupations on different occasions, as a soldier in the front line or a self-taught, successful doctor. It was precisely the type of occupations that Eleno performed that Sophia Blea Nuñez picked up to guide her discussion concerning the character's self-identity. Eleno's skills were notable in medicine and anatomy, and he deployed this knowledge to express his sexually paradoxical subjectivity. If displayed diacritical signals convinced many people of his masculinity, the Inquisition's officials were not among them. They insisted on declaring him to be a woman and accused her of being just a skilled impostor, even convincing of his manliness the doctors who examined his genitalia. It is an incredible story of willpower and intellectual dexterity.

Another chapter on the definition of an enslaved body revolves around Nazaria, a woman in 1873 Cuba who petitioned the liberal-republican Spanish government claiming to have been unjustly enslaved for forty years under the name of Cesarea. She claimed to be a Spanish-born free white from the Canary Islands. To prove her racial profile, she submitted her own body and that of her son as evidence. She explained that she had disembarked on the island of Cuba at the age of four, accompanied by her mother. After her mother's death, she was raised by a woman who enslaved her and, once a grown up, rented

her out on different occasions as a domestic servant, wet nurse, and worker in sugar cane fields alongside enslaved Blacks. The words heard from an elderly Black man when she was chained to a tronco (a torture instrument known as “the floor” in the English-speaking slave societies) as a child led her many years later to resume her “true” identity. “Poor little island girl,” the man said to her. The author of this chapter, Lisa Surwillo, suggests that despite claiming to be white, Nazaria had a mixed-racial phenotype and asks whether enslavement in Cuba darkened one’s skin. According to Nazaria, this was the case for she had to justify her somewhat brownish complexion, which, according to her, resulted from working under the Caribbean sun. She then offered her lighter-skinned son as definitive proof of her whiteness, without, however, revealing who his father was, by all means white, a part of her history that remained secret. Hiding this man was strategic, as it would be better for Nazaria to use her son to explain her descent. Her son’s skin color was supposed to prove her parents’ racial background and not that of his father. Despite petitions being documents written to convince through narratives that should not be taken literally, this extraordinary case is essential for what Surwillo describes as “the evolution of her self-consciousness in understanding that she (Nazaria) was enslaved, but not a slave for as long as she had believed being.”

More biographies and more women, though not only women, flow through the chapter written by Magdalena Candiotti. The author followed several people whose actions and decisions led to contradictory and even “erratic” life experiences under slavery. As in other chapters, the key terms are social networks, negotiation strategies and resistance, this time in Argentina in the first quarter of the 1800s. One of the characters, Antonio Porobio—whose racial identity varied in documents from white, to mixed-race, to African-born!—made his career in a regiment staffed with “pardos and morenos”, fighting for national independence and personal emancipation, which was a frequent path in Iberian America. Francisca Sebastiana de Araujo was already enslaved in Montevideo when she was captured in 1813 by pro-independence forces and sold to Porobio where he was stationed. She would be freed by him, for her excellent service (including sexual ones), before heading out together again for a campaign in Peru against Spain. However, Francisca had lost her manumission paper during the expedition and, upon returning to Argentina, was re-enslaved by Mariza Maza, a freedwoman like her and Porobio’s legal spouse. Maza claimed that the money used by her husband to buy Francisca belonged to her, and as a consequence, she would be considered the legal owner of her husband’s mistress. Francisca mobilized her contacts in the army to prove her freedom and eventually won her case, but documents to detail that outcome are missing: the paper trail disappears with the announcement of Porobio’s

testimony. The chapter would revolve around Maria Maza's quarrel with politically powerful men, a dispute that involved a young enslaved boy that she apparently would try to set free. Going from one plot to another, the author narrates a story of interwoven black biographies, unveiling a complex, mostly feminine and black mental universe full of desire, will, agency, and strategies inscribed in attitudes regarding slavery and freedom.

Women also pervade a chapter dedicated to the enslaved concubines in the sixteenth-century Portuguese empire in Asia. Casting a wide net of fragmentary sources that do not frequently establish with certainty the status of slaves of his characters, James Fujitani discusses women that accompanied their masters, who were usually employed as sailors and merchants. In some instances, these women served more than one man at a time, in the role of concubines. Although no testimony allows us much room to imagine what these women thought about themselves, their masters-lovers, and the world they lived in, the author attempts to read between the lines to search for answers. He suggests that many women accommodated their roles because they had no other choice; others grew fond of their lovers, some of whom lived as if legally married, enjoying the prerogatives resulting from that position, including the right to be jealous. Little was revealed about the Portuguese society in which they lived beyond the fact that, overall, their alleged adaptation did not offer any way out: after all, they were captives.

Two chapters take place in seventeenth-century Brazil, as seen through complex and controversial, even somewhat antagonistic, male figures: the militia captain Henrique Dias, who fought against Palmares *quilombo* (a runaway settlement), and the leader of this *quilombo*, a man by the name of Gana Zumba, who, after being defeated, decided to accept a peace treaty with the colonial government. Hebe Mattos uses Henrique Dias's petitions to the Portuguese Overseas Council to reflect on processes of racial subjectivity that would push him into being identified as a "black man". This documentation, sparse yet significant, constituted an exercise in the "rhetoric of self-construction" in a colonial context. Notwithstanding the services provided by black man, the color of his skin was enough to establish the entrenched stigma of slavery in Portuguese America, thereby limiting social esteem or circumscribing military service in racially segregated militias. With his few writings, Henrique Dias is emblematic of a simultaneously subaltern and somewhat arrogant subjectivity.

The main subject of the chapter by Silvia Lara is not exactly Gana Zumba, but rather the peace treaty negotiated by him with the Portuguese colonial authorities in 1678. The episode is well known, but Lara's interpretation is original. She suggests that the Palmares leader and his advisors understood the treaty according to a Central African "political grammar" of vassalage to the

Portuguese Crown, whereas the terms were adapted to the local conditions regarding slave subalternity. Among other items, the treaty provided freedom for those born in Palmares, the return of slaves who had escaped there, the Palmares inhabitants' commitment to acting as an auxiliary military force of the Portuguese, even when fighting against other *quilombos*, and the provision of land to the surrendered. Gana Zumba was recognized, it is true, as the "king and master" of the ex-*quilombo*. For the general theme of this volume, the critical aspect is how the Palmares leader interpreted the whole affair as an African protocol of power and vassalage familiar to him. According to Lara, it is "possible to discern the point of view of the *palmaristas* [people from Palmares] in the 1678 negotiations." Without labeling it as such, this could be seen as Central African political subjectivity playing out in an American colonial setting.

The book ends with a chapter dedicated to legally freed workers who lived in conditions analogous to slavery on a cocoa plantation in São Tomé between the end of the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth century. Brought from Angola aboard later-day slave ships, these men and women toiled long hours under severe supervision (including ferocious dogs), had their liberty of movement restricted day and night, suffered physical punishment, lived in the most precarious material conditions, and became homesick. At times their desperation led them to commit suicide. Still, some were able to resist their physical and moral annihilation by creating links of solidarity between the immigrants and the island's native folks, creating or recreating new communities where love, family, religion, healing, festive and funeral rituals all lent meaning to both life and death. The workers also protested (in vain) against the colonial authorities, rebelling individually and collectively, carrying out escapes and creating *quilombos* in the woods and mountains, thus rewriting on a smaller scale the "forest wars" of the 1600s. Like other authors in this volume, Marta Macedo constructed her research based on colonial accounts and reports, "sources profoundly entangled with the politics of domination," but still useful to access practices and thoughts that point to working-class agency. In the same way that they took advantage of minor breaches in the system to protest against it, the historian exploited the silence between the lines of colonial manuscripts to perceive voices silenced in other ways.

The volume that readers have in their hands offers a collection of themes, narratives and strategies of research rooted in different points of a vast geographic space that made up the Portuguese and Spanish dominions. Both colonial empires were pioneers in their making in the modern era, and their relevance would continue into the second half of the twentieth century. Similarly, for four centuries, Iberian colonies and ex-colonies promoted slave trafficking across the waters of various oceans, notably the Atlantic and the

Indian oceans, harboring various slave regimes within their territory while subjugating peoples of different “racial” origins, mostly Africans and native Americans. Their maritime, agricultural, mining, cattle, urban, and domestic economies, ultimately all of the material and social fabric that constitute the global Iberian space, were based on various forms of forced labour, including the enslavement of native and displaced peoples. Among colonial empires, none overshadowed the Iberians in the exploitation of slave labor. Because of this, there is no better justification for studying slavery within it, from any angle. This book has adopted the perspective of slave subjectivities.

The essays gathered here represent an effort of historical imagination to understand slavery from the viewpoint of the enslaved. The slavery and colonial archives were excavated with this mission in mind. In some cases, however, the subaltern’s vision was found on the surface of the sources in petitions, testimonials, wills, and correspondence, among other papers written, dictated or advocated by enslaved or freed peoples. When the various sources were able to be cross-checked in the development of the plot, the map of meanings naturally widens, although dense and long judicial processes, and those alone, were frequently sufficient to achieve good results and provide worthy discussions. As for unearthing evidence concerning the subjectivity of the enslaved, the authors’ success varies in density according to the richness of the sources that they were able to amass and the varied creative strategies applied in their interpretations.

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WORLD

ON THE

The Iberian world played a key role in the global trade of enslaved people from the 15th century onwards. Scholars of Iberian forms of slavery face challenges accessing the subjectivity of the enslaved, given the scarcity of autobiographical sources. This book offers a compelling example of innovative methodologies that draw on alternative archives and documents, such as inquisitorial and trial records, to examine enslaved individuals' and collective subjectivities under Iberian political dominion. It explores themes such as race, gender, labour, social mobility and emancipation, religion, and politics, shedding light on the lived experiences of those enslaved in the Iberian world from the Indian Ocean to the Atlantic.

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