

## “Hellish Nurseries”

### *Slave Smuggling, Child Trafficking, and Local Complicity in Nineteenth-Century Pernambuco*

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#### INTRODUCTION

The transatlantic slave trade to Brazil became illegal after November 1831. Yet as many as a million African slaves came to the country between 1831 and the early 1850s, when the Eusebio de Queiroz Law finally extinguished the trade. Ineffectiveness did not, however, imply impotence: the 1831 ban still had a profound impact on Brazil’s economy, politics, and society. It forced the trade to shift its physical operations from conspicuous ports in the Empire’s principal coastal cities to natural harbors and beaches controlled by provincial landowners, many of whom were also the slave trade’s avid customers. The trade’s new geography and clandestinity spawned important new business opportunities: scores of people were employed in the trade – guiding the slave ships as well as landing, feeding, healing, guarding, and distributing the contraband survivors of the middle passage – and the 1831 law also consolidated the already existing articulation between slave smuggling and cabotage, responsible for a thriving slave trade among Brazil’s coastal areas since colonial times. These new economic networks grew embedded in local and provincial politics; in Brazil, as in Africa, the imperatives of Britain’s high seas antislavery campaign had to be weighed against the complex internal structures that fortified the slave trade. Multitudes of traders, plantation owners, bureaucrats, and small-time slaveowners depended on slavery and did all within their power to prolong it. The continuous contraband of slaves after 1831 was visible enough to all Brazilians, but the trade’s profitability and centrality to national political and economic structures meant that top

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governmental officials – including members of several Imperial cabinets – were more than willing to favor power over the letter of the law in the two decades between 1831 and the early 1850s.

Needless to say, the people involved in the contraband of African slaves to Brazil tried to hide their participation. Investigating the process is thus difficult: one must face omissions in the sources and ferret out the secrets kept by those who took part in, condoned, and benefited from an illegal business that involved some of the richest and most powerful men in the country. This chapter will uncover some of those secrets by focusing on the illegal slave trade to the province of Pernambuco between 1831 and the 1850s. This focus is significant for two reasons. First, while there is a wide literature about the Atlantic slave trade to Brazil after 1831, we still know little about how it actually operated – its logistical unraveling on Brazil's remote beaches – or how the adjustments it engendered influenced both the nature of the trade and the evolution of local networks of economic and political power. Second, although Pernambuco's slave trade was in some ways singular, the province was Brazil's third and the Americas' fourth most important destination for enslaved Africans: 854,000, or 8.1 percent of those who came to the Americas between 1501 and 1867, arrived in Pernambuco.<sup>1</sup> Between the sixteenth and nineteenth centuries, the province lagged only behind Rio de Janeiro, Bahia, and Jamaica. Regardless, and surprisingly, what David Eltis and Daniel Domingues da Silva claimed a decade ago still remains true: the slave trade to Pernambuco is less investigated than those to Cuba, Haiti, and the United States, locations that received far fewer African people.<sup>2</sup>

In the following pages I will discuss how Pernambuco's slave trade adapted to the new circumstances created by the 1831 ban. Landing sites shifted to beaches adjacent to plantations. British anti-slave trade squadrons noted the growing use of smaller vessels, which were cheaper, faster, easier to hide, less visible to the British navy, and more capable of entering hidden natural harbors and creeks in both Brazil and Africa. The 1831 law also probably spurred a significant rise in the number of adolescents and children forcibly brought to Pernambuco from West Central Africa. As Herbert Klein has observed, children were usually a distinct minority in the trade before the eighteenth century.<sup>3</sup> This

<sup>1</sup> D. Eltis and D. Richardson, *Atlas of the Transatlantic Slave Trade*, pp. 17 and 264.

<sup>2</sup> For the demography of the slave trade to Pernambuco, see D. da Silva and D. Eltis, "The Slave Trade to Pernambuco, 1561–1851."

<sup>3</sup> H. Klein, *The Middle Passage*, pp. 223–224.

changed in the 1800s. Children were frequently forced onto nineteenth-century slave ships;<sup>4</sup> despite slave-dealers’ reluctance to trade in them, there was a widespread and significant increase in the importation of people from five to twenty years of age to Brazil between 1810 and 1850.<sup>5</sup> While Klein and others have argued that this transformation reflected changes on the African supply side, the timing and geography of the change suggest it could also have had much to do with the 1831 law. Briefly put, the ban created new logics for profit within the slave trade, especially valorizing agility and subterfuge. Although the slave trade to Pernambuco was less capitalized than that to Rio de Janeiro and Bahia, the trip’s short duration drastically reduced the human and monetary risk of voyages undertaken in the tiny, overcrowded vessels that could promise clandestinity. Traders could reap abundant profits if they were willing to use small ships, pack them with the compact bodies of children and adolescents, and forge active partnerships with the complicit plantation owners who controlled the coast, roads, and towns around surrounding Brazil’s natural harbors. In encouraging these new and brutal economic logics, the 1831 ban deeply impacted both the social demographics of Pernambucan slavery and the political and economic networks that structured the province.

#### CAMILO’S STORY AND THE NETWORKS OF THE CLANDESTINE TRADE

The 1831 law presented slave traders with abundant challenges, all of which required strong local networks to overcome. Traders had first to find a proper harbor or beach to land their human merchandise; although the Brazilian coast is gigantic, a slave ship could not stop just anywhere. Once an adequate harbor was found, a human network had to be constructed to facilitate clandestine trade on potentially perilous shores. Systems of signs were devised to communicate with slave ships, including bonfires that were lit at night<sup>6</sup> to guide incoming ships.<sup>7</sup> In Pernambuco, fishermen also used *jangadas*, locally made catamarans, to reach distant slave ships, guide them to the beaches, and help to disembark.<sup>8</sup> At least

<sup>4</sup> D. Eltis, *Economic Growth*, pp. 256–257; P. Lovejoy, “The Children of Slavery,” p. 200.

<sup>5</sup> C. Villa and M. Florentino, “Abolicionismo inglês.”

<sup>6</sup> L. Bethell, *A abolição*, p. 99; J. Reis, F. Gomes, and M. Carvalho, *O alufá Rufino*, p. 152.

<sup>7</sup> P. Verger, *Fluxo e refluxo*, p. 460.

<sup>8</sup> Consul Edward Watts to Mr. Hamilton, May 9, 1837, 3rd Enclosure to no. 84, in *Parliamentary Papers, Correspondence with Foreign Powers Relating to the Slave Trade, 1837 [Class B]*, vol. 15, p. 76.

one slave ship was captured off Pernambuco at the moment its captain was riding a *jangada* to the Cabo de Santo Agostinho beach.<sup>9</sup> Once on land, there was need for security, water, and food. Plantation owners, who controlled local lands, roads, and towns, were essential in providing these goods and guaranteeing that the trade would remain an open secret.

It was at a beach adjacent to a sugar plantation that an African boy, who would later be named Camilo, disembarked, enslaved, sometime after 1831. Camilo believed that he was in his forties in 1874, when he filed a civil suit to gain his freedom before the judge of Itambé, Pernambuco.<sup>10</sup> He could not state exactly how long he had been in Brazil: twenty-seven to thirty years, he said. Supposing he was right about his age, the Congolese boy probably disembarked in Pernambuco in the early 1840s. He did not remember the name of the vessel; to him, it would have made little difference. Perhaps the boy was too terrified to pay attention, for he was only “nearly seven years of age” when he faced the middle passage. When he first filed his freedom suit with a notary, Camilo said he did not know the name of the beach where he landed. But when he spoke to the judge later the same day, he claimed to have landed at “Itapuí,” probably Atapus, one of the continental beaches surrounding Itamaracá Island near Catuama, an important natural harbor north of Recife frequently used for slave smuggling. He was taken from there – at midnight, he said – to “Major Paulino’s” Itapirema plantation, where he was imprisoned for a few days in the *casa de purgar* (the building where the plantation’s cane syrup was boiled) along with “ninety” other Africans.<sup>11</sup> We do not know their ages, but they were certainly his *malungos* – that is, fellow captives who were brought to Brazil on the same slave ship.<sup>12</sup>

After a few days, Camilo said, he was bought by a man named Rochedo (later identified as Joaquim de Mattos Alcantilado Rochêdo) and taken to

<sup>9</sup> Vicente Thomas Pires de Figueiredo Camargo to Francisco Antonio de Sá Barreto, August 1, 1837, and November 24, 1837, in the Arquivo Público Jordão Emerenciano (APEJE), Ofícios da Presidência à Prefeitura, Repartição Central de Polícia, pages unnumbered.

<sup>10</sup> The 1871 Free Womb Law expanded the legal mechanisms that allowed slaves to seek freedom in Brazilian courts. One of those mechanisms was to claim that the African-born person had entered the country after the 1831 anti-slave trade law and therefore had been illegally enslaved. See K. Grinberg, “Slavery, Manumission and the Law”; C. Castilho, *Slave Emancipation*.

<sup>11</sup> The full transcription of his freedom suit is in C. Amaral and L. Sette, “Traslado da Ação de Liberdade movida pelo escravo Camilo.”

<sup>12</sup> Regarding the notion of *malungo*, see R. Slenes, “Malungu, ngoma vem”; W. Hawthorne, “Being Now, as It Were”; M. de Carvalho, “Malunguinho quilombola.”

the house of the “Portuguese” Manoel Gonsalves in Goiana, then the second most important town in the province (smaller only than Recife in terms of population). The boy walked there with four other captives, who had died by the time Camilo filed his freedom suit. The judge asked if the other slaves had remained at Itapirema’s *casa de purgar*; Camilo answered that, when he left for Goiana, some others had likewise departed, also in small groups at night, but that half of his fellow captives remained. Once in Goiana, Camilo and his four companions were baptized in the lower room of a *sobrado* (a large townhouse) belonging to Manoel Gonsalves. According to Camilo, the priest (whose name he could not remember) was white and tall. His godfather was “Agostinho de tal” (*de tal* meaning that Camilo did not know the man’s last name), whom the clerk described in parentheses as a “natural” son of the *sobrado* owner. It was at this point in his life that the seven-year-old Congolese child became Camilo: the records did not preserve his African name.

After Camilo and his *malungos* Abraham, Manoel, Luis, and Justino were baptized, they were returned to Manoel Gonsalves, the owner of the *sobrado* where the baptism was performed. After a few days’ pause for rest and recovery, Camilo, Luis, and Justino were sent to Perory, a sugar plantation in the same county owned by Manoel Gonsalves’s legitimate son, Major Henrique Lins de Noronha Farias. Abraham and Manoel stayed in Goiana. Camilo thus came to serve a planter family that lived in the same county he had landed in; when the judge asked him where Agostinho, his godfather, lived, Camilo said he also lived at Perory, “Major” Henrique’s plantation. This provides a revealing clue about those plantation owners’ family arrangements; as was relatively common in Brazil at the time, members of the same extended family occupied different social classes according to the nature of their parents’ relationship. Major Henrique, the legitimate son, owned the plantation, whereas Agostinho, the “natural” son, lived there as a dependent of his half-brother. We do not know if they shared the same skin color, but Agostinho was certainly a free man. Camilo survived his first masters only to serve another generation of the same family; after Major Henrique’s death, Camilo told the judge, he was inherited by Belarmino de Noronha Farias, Major Henrique’s son and Manoel Gonsalves’ grandson.

Camilo’s odyssey was repeated by countless African children who were smuggled into Brazil after the 1831 anti-slave trade law. Young people, mostly teenagers but sometimes even children, constituted common cargo on slave ships. That seven-year-old African boy renamed Camilo was one; two others were Maria and Joaquim Congo, who testified in a freedom

suit filed by Maria in 1884. Maria and Joaquim were around fifty in 1884, but like Camilo they had been just children when they disembarked in Pernambuco “some forty-something years” earlier, in Joaquim Congo’s words. Joaquim’s recollections were confirmed by Narciso Congo, an older African, aged fifty-six, who worked as a “water carrier” on the streets of Recife. Narciso Congo and Joaquim Congo were witnesses for Maria in her suit; they were also *malungos*, for they had all arrived on the same ship. Joaquim clearly stated he was no longer a captive at the time he testified and that the claims he had made to be freed could be extended to Maria. He said he was granted freedom “for having proved” that he was illegally smuggled to Brazil after 1831. In 1884, he was a whitewasher (*caiador*) living in Santo Amaro das Salinas, a parish of Recife that was home to many freedmen and women.

Narciso Congo also stated that he was no longer a captive in 1884, and he too had a story to tell. He said he landed with Maria and Joaquim at the beach of Porto de Galinhas. Unlike Maria, Joaquim, or Camilo, Narciso Congo was around sixteen years of age when he arrived in Brazil. He was soon baptized in the town of Cabo, located at a very traditional plantation area south of Recife, where several plantation oligarchies were based, including that of the Baron of Boa Vista, president of the province of Pernambuco between 1837 and 1844. We do not know any more details about the circumstances of Narciso’s baptism. But soon thereafter he ran away. Narciso did not talk about his escape route in his statement, except to note that he was “caught in Recife.” He was then sent to work at the Arsenal de Marinha, the headquarters of the Brazilian navy in Recife. This is an important detail, because fugitive slaves with known masters were generally sent back to them after capture. The Arsenal, in contrast, was the place “liberated Africans” were taken to and put to work; Narciso’s presence there reinforced his claim of free status.<sup>13</sup> Narciso stressed the fact that he was brought to Brazil on

<sup>13</sup> When a slave ship was confiscated for disobeying the antitrafficking law of 1831, the captives thus detained were considered “liberated Africans.” According to the letter of the law, as well as treaties signed by Brazil, Portugal, and England, liberated Africans were to have their “services” auctioned to suitable people, who could retain the “free” Africans in their custody for up to fourteen years. This limit, however, was rarely adhered to. Most liberated Africans died working for those who had purchased their services or were simply (illegally) enslaved. Still, some remained under the custody of the Brazilian state, working in the arsenals, in public works, and in other governmental installations, including the Imperial Palace. See B. Mamigonian, *Africanos livres*. On liberated Africans in Pernambuco, see C. Oliveira, “Os africanos livres em Pernambuco.”

the same slave ship as Maria and confirmed she was just a “girl” (*menina*) when she arrived.<sup>14</sup>

Camilo, in his forties in 1874, and Maria and Joaquim, aged fifty in 1884, had been about the same age when they disembarked in Brazil sometime in the 1840s; they might all have arrived around the same time, perhaps even in the same year, when the Baron of Boa Vista was president of Pernambuco. Nevertheless, they definitely came on different voyages, for Camilo landed on one of the beaches near Goiana, north of Recife, while Maria, Joaquim, and Narciso arrived at Porto de Galinhas, south of Recife. They were all baptized in important towns in plantation counties, which proves that the local clergy condoned the illegal slave trade; one witness even identified the “white and tall” priest who baptized Camilo as one “Father Genuíno.” Apart from the teenager Narciso – virtually an adult at age sixteen – the others were just enslaved children who fell from the Congolese slave trade networks into the web of transatlantic smuggling. They should have been freed immediately after reaching Brazilian soil. Or at least that is what the 1831 anti-slave trade law stated. Instead, they were given Portuguese names and remained enslaved.

#### CHILDREN AND THE MATERIAL CALCULUS OF THE MIDDLE PASSAGE

Louis François de Tollenare, a French cotton merchant who spent a few months in Recife between 1816 and 1817, witnessed one of those slave ships full of boys and girls docking at the port in 1817. The trade of “Congo” captives (those captured south of the equator) to Portuguese America was then still legal. In Tollenare’s words, only one-tenth of the slaves in the transatlantic slave trade to Pernambuco were full-grown men. No more than two-tenths were young women between the ages of eighteen and twenty-five. The rest of the human cargo, 70 percent, comprised children of both sexes.<sup>15</sup> Perhaps Tollenare exaggerated when he generalized this particular observation to the transatlantic slave trade as a whole. According to José Francisco de Azevedo Lisboa, a slave trader on the Pernambuco route, a very young cargo was not the most profitable one. In

<sup>14</sup> Memorial da Justiça (Recife), Caixa 1161, Fundo: Recife. Ano 1884, Autor Maria (Africana), Réu: Rita Maria da Conceição, pp. 13 e 13 (reverse).

<sup>15</sup> L. Tollenare, *Notas dominicais*, p. 138. According to Mary Karasch, travelers to Rio de Janeiro also observed a large proportion of children on slave ships. See M. Karasch, *A vida dos escravos*, pp. 68–69.

February 1837, Lisboa authoritatively instructed employees at a slave trade *feitoria* (outpost)<sup>16</sup> by the Benin River that it was very important to know how to choose among the slaves offered by the African nobility and middlemen under the suzerainty of the king of Benin. Older people, who were rejected at African fairs, should be rejected by the Portuguese as well, unless they were “women with full breasts” (*negras de peito cheio*). The most valuable merchandise for the “country’s taste” (*gosto do país*) were young twelve- to twenty-year-olds.<sup>17</sup> So Narciso, who was sixteen, was more valuable than boys and girls like Camilo, Joaquim, and Maria.

All the same, even if the resale value of children below twelve years of age was lower, they were still good merchandise, and improvements in shipping speeds rendered them a better value still in the nineteenth century. At the pinnacle of the slave trade in the eighteenth century, when the business was still legal, child slaves were assessed lower taxes in the Americas and toddlers were usually exempt. But high mortality rates signaled the frailty of such young human cargo.<sup>18</sup> By the last quarter of the eighteenth century, however, the slave trade moved on faster voyages and resulted in lower mortality rates. It therefore became easier to transport pre-adolescent children, and in the nineteenth century they would become ubiquitous in the transatlantic slave trade. According to Eltis, the child ratio in slave ships steadily increased after 1810.<sup>19</sup>

Captain Henry James Matson had long experience combating the slave trade when he told the British Parliament that the trip from the African coast to Cuba took as long as three months, whereas the route to Brazil was half as long and much simpler, requiring much smaller crews, which meant that old or low-quality vessels could be used. For this reason, Captain Matson asserted, Brazilian smugglers could afford to lose three or even four out of five slave ships and still make a profit, an equation that was impossible for ships heading for Cuba.<sup>20</sup> And of all the slave smuggling destinations in Brazil and the Americas, Pernambuco enjoyed the quickest access from West Central Africa, because of the Benguela current

<sup>16</sup> The establishments in Africa where the Atlantic slave traders dealt with the African middlemen and warehoused their trade goods and the slaves to be embarked were called *feitorias*. D. Eltis, *Economic Growth*, p. 56.

<sup>17</sup> Quoted in J. Reis, F. Gomes, and M. Carvalho, *O alufá Rufino*, chapter 10 and passim.

<sup>18</sup> G. Campbell et al., “Children,” p. 165. See also H. Klein, *The Middle Passage*, pp. 35, 53, and 162.

<sup>19</sup> D. Eltis, *Economic Growth*, p. 132.

<sup>20</sup> Henry James Matson, June 21, 1849, in House of Commons Parliamentary Papers, Reports from the Select Committee of the House of Lords, 1850, vol. 6, p. 202.

and the Atlantic winds. Inferring from Captain Matson’s logic, smugglers could risk overloading slave ships sailing to Pernambuco, because shorter voyages meant reduced time for the spread of diseases in the hold or on deck, as well as fewer deaths from starvation or dehydration. Smaller, more vulnerable children were especially good merchandise if the trip was short.

In 1839, the British consul at Recife wrote that the crossing from the Portuguese possessions in Africa to Pernambuco could take as little as fifteen days, which led smugglers to overload their vessels.<sup>21</sup> When he described the slave trade to Pernambuco in 1817, Tollenare said the journey from Africa was very fast and that he had heard tell of a vessel that crossed the Atlantic in thirteen days, resulting in a nearly zero mortality rate.<sup>22</sup> The brief duration of the trip would have made it possible to bring scores of children in the slave ship that Tollenare described.

Perhaps the British consul and Tollenare exaggerated. But some voyages were indeed very fast. The schooner brig *Maria Gertrudes*, listed in Table 2.1, took no more than twenty days to bring 254 live captives from Angola to Recife in 1829. The ship was named after the wife of the slave trader Francisco Antonio de Oliveira, the man who brought the largest number of African slaves to Pernambuco in the 1820s.<sup>23</sup> Experienced slavers like him were able to cross the Atlantic very quickly. The *Jovem Marie* took only eighteen days to travel from Cabo Verde islands to Recife, although we do not know if it brought any slaves to the province. In 1831, the brig *Oriente Africano* and the schooner *Novo Despique* sailed only nineteen days from Angola to Recife.<sup>24</sup> The fastest documented trip after 1831 was the 1840 journey of the schooner *Formiga*, which sailed from Luanda to Recife in just seventeen days.<sup>25</sup>

We do not know how many Africans were aboard the *Novo Despique* and the *Formiga*, but the brig *Oriente Africano* brought fourteen freed

<sup>21</sup> Mr. Watts to Palmerston, July 27, 1839, in Great Britain, *House of Commons Parliamentary Papers, Correspondence with British Commissioners and with Foreign Powers Relative to the Slave Trade, 1840* [Class A and Class B], vol. 18, p. 391.

<sup>22</sup> L. Tollenare, *Notas dominicais*, p. 139.

<sup>23</sup> For more on the life of Oliveira (the Barão de Beberibe), see A. B. Gomes, “De traficante de escravos.” Maria Gertrudes was Ângelo Francisco Carneiro’s sister. Ângelo was also a very notorious slave trader, probably the greatest one in the Pernambuco route after 1831. See A. Albuquerque, “Ângelo dos retalhos.”

<sup>24</sup> *Diário de Pernambuco*, June 22, 1829, July 6, 1831, and July 31, 1831.

<sup>25</sup> *Diário de Pernambuco*, June 22, 1829, June 6, 1831, July 31, 1831, and March 10, 1840.

TABLE 2.1 Slave ships that entered Recife's harbor, according to the Diário de Pernambuco, 1827–1831.

Year	Ship's Name	Origin	Trip Duration	Alive	Dead	Consignee or Owner of Ship	
1	1827	Brigue São Joze Grande	Angola	29	447	45	Antonio Joze Vieira
2	1827	Cutter Conceição Minerva	Molemo	68	102	0	Manoel Alves Guerra
3	1827	Brigue-Escuna Paquete de Pernambuco	Angola	26	284	9	Luis Botelho Pinto de Misquita e Joaquim Antonio de Almeida
4	1827	Brigue-Escuna Neptuno	Angola	39	317	19	Joaquim Pereira da Cunha
5	1827	Brigue Activo	Ambriz	24	342	0	Francisco Antonio de Oliveira
6	1827	Galera Conceição Felis	Molemo	30	255	0	Manoel Antonio Cardozo
7	1827	Brigue Boa União	Angola	25	377	20	Joaquim Avelino Tavares
8	1827	Brigue Maria Thereza	Mozambique	40	260	0	Gil Thomaz dos Santos
9	1829	Brigue-Escuna D. Ama	Angola	29	337	0	José Ramos de Oliveira
10	1829	Brigue S. José Grande	Angola	N/I	507	19	Elias Carvalho de Sintra
11	1829	Brigue-Escuna 04 de Agosto	Angola	22	295	9	Antonio da Silva e Cia.
12	1829	Escuna Borboleta	Molemo	N/I	218	0	Manoel Alves Guerra
13	1829	Brigue-Escuna Maria Gertrudes	Angola	20	254	3	Francisco de Oliveira
14	1829	Galera Tamega	Angola	22	454	0	Antonio José de Amorim
15	1829	Brigue Imperador do Brasil	Angola	26	381	35	Francisco Antonio de Oliveira
16	1829	Escuna Margarida	Ambriz	26	160	7	João Maria Sève
17	1829	Patacho Paquete de Pernambuco	Ambriz	27	231	31	Elias Coelho Sintra
18	1829	Brigue General Silveira	Angola	34	495	11	Elias Coelho Sintra
19	1829	Brigue Trajano	Angola	28	251	4	Antonio Luiz Gonçalves Ferreira
20	1829	Brigue Maria da Glória	Angola	21	60	0	Antonio da Silva e Cia

21	1829	Escuna Maria Gertrudes	Angola	27	285	8	Francisco Antonio de Oliveira
22	1829	Brigue Lião	Angola	22	304	3	José Ignácio Xavier
23	1829	Brigue Triunpho do Brasil	Angola	24	507	20	Gabriel Antonio
24	1829	Brigue Dois Irmãos	Mozambique	57	281	0	Antonio da Silva e Cia
25	1829	Brigue Protetor	Angola	26	120	10	Antonio de Queiroz Monteiro Regadas
26	1830	Escuna Maria Gertrudes	Angola	27	254	4	Francisco Antonio de Oliveira
27	1830	Conceição de Maria	Molembó	53	176	0	Jose Ramos de Oliveira
28	1830	Brigue Sacramento e Prazeres	Angola	34	342	13	Joze Joaquim Jorge Gonçalves
29	1830	Brigue Abismo	Angola	30	191	12	Francisco Ribeiro de Brito
30	1830	Brigue Imperador do Brasil	Angola	21	430	15	Francisco Antonio Oliveira
31	1830	Brigue Paquete de PE	Angola	26	231	26	Elias Coelho Cintra
32	1831	Brigue Sueco Maria	“Da Costa D’África”	28	N/I	N/I	N. Otto Bieber e Cia
33	1831	Patacho Dona Anna	Sierra Leone	33	N/I	N/I	José Ramos de Oliveira.
34	1831	Escuna Jovem Marie	Cape Verde	18	N/I	N/I	Joaquim Joze Soares Miarim
35	1831	Brigue Oriente Africano	Angola	19	22	N/I	Antonio Luiz
36	1831	Brigue Abismo	Angola	23	8	N/I	Francisco Ribeiro de Brito
37	1831	Escuna Margarida	Angola	31	N/I	N/I	Joze Maria Seve
38	1831	Brigue Triunfo do Brasil	Angola	23	N/I	N/I	Gabriel Antonio
39	1831	Escuna Novo Despique	Angola	19	N/I	N/I	João Baptista Cezar
Totals				1077	9178	323	

Source: *Diário de Pernambuco (Recife)*, 1827–1831.

Africans and eight captives owned by the captain himself.<sup>26</sup> The case of the *Formiga* is intriguing, because – although we have no direct evidence of human cargo – the goods within the ship suggested participation in the illegal trade. The *Formiga* arrived in Recife from Luanda in 1840, with only three Portuguese passengers. It was consigned to Pinto da Fonseca e Silva, probably a well-known Rio de Janeiro slave dealer who had contacts in Pernambuco.<sup>27</sup> Apart from its few passengers, the ship carried only palm oil, wax, and mats, which were not nearly valuable enough to justify the trip. This was a very typical cargo for slave ships during the era of the illegal slave trade, when vessels left their more precious human cargo at natural harbors on the coast and proceeded to the major towns of Brazil in order to make repairs and organize subsequent voyages to Africa or elsewhere. The *Formiga*'s seventeen-day journey suggests that Tollenare and the British consul in Recife may not have been too far from reality when they claimed that a slave ship could arrive in fifteen days or less.

Similarly, in their study of the slave trade to Pernambuco, Daniel Domingues da Silva and David Eltis estimated that it was possible to arrive there in less than thirty days. On the basis of large samples for Bahia and Rio de Janeiro but data from only three voyages to Pernambuco, Eltis and Richardson concluded that, between 1776 and 1830, a slave ship took on average 40.9 days to reach Rio de Janeiro, thirty-seven days to Bahia, and only 26.7 days to reach Pernambuco.<sup>28</sup> The sample in Table 2.1, drawn from research in the daily newspaper *Diário de Pernambuco* between 1827 and 1831, shows almost the same average: 26.1 days from Central-West Africa to Recife, although, as we have just seen, it was occasionally possible to make this trip in less than twenty days.

#### THE ADVANTAGES OF ILLEGAL CHILD TRAFFICKING

Such quick voyages to Pernambuco clearly made the trade of captive adolescents and children from Angola and Congo easier: it is thus unsurprising that it became more common in the nineteenth century. The presence of children entered the vocabulary of the slave trade early on. *Moleques*, *mulecões*, and *mulecotas* recur in slave trade-related sources

<sup>26</sup> *Diário de Pernambuco*, August 3, 1831.   <sup>27</sup> *Diário de Pernambuco*, March 10, 1840.

<sup>28</sup> D. da Silva and D. Eltis, "The Slave Trade to Pernambuco, 1561–1851," p. 113; D. Eltis and D. Richardson, *Atlas of the Transatlantic Slave Trade*, p. 185.

and express common Brazilian understandings of age. Yet it is worth highlighting that these words were not originally Portuguese. According to Joseph Miller, their root derives from *muleke*, “dependent” in Kimbundu, one of the major languages of West Central Africa.<sup>29</sup> Assis Júnior translated *mulêKe* as a “young man, boy, servant.”<sup>30</sup> In contrast, Valencia Villa and Florentino stated that the expression *moleques*, in the plural, probably originally referred to children of any sex below twelve years of age.<sup>31</sup> These possibilities are not necessarily contradictory. Many captive adolescents and children were male dependents, “servants” in West Central Africa, who were frequently sold in different markets before ending up in the web of the Atlantic slave trade. But other categories of captive children were also frequently sold elsewhere in Atlantic Africa, and the word *moleque* thus gradually lost its conceptual and geographical specificity and came to include young people from the Gulf of Guinea. By 1640, when Portugal separated from Spain, the term had entered the Portuguese language, according to Miller, and it still appears frequently in Brazilian Portuguese.<sup>32</sup>

From the cold-blooded perspective of slave merchants, there were some advantages to buying children. They were relatively defenseless and therefore less able to effectively rebel in the middle passage. They ate and drank less.<sup>33</sup> They abounded at sales points in West Central Africa in the nineteenth century and were less expensive than adults. In Africa, children were more vulnerable than adults, both to *razzias* (slave raids) and natural catastrophe; they could also more easily be kidnapped and were subject to tributary systems and debt relations that eventually justified their enslavement.<sup>34</sup> From the beginning of the slave trade, there were social, economic, and political trapdoors that caught children and threw them into slavery.<sup>35</sup> It is thus little wonder that Captain James Matson, one of the most iconic characters of the British squadron that patrolled the coast of Africa to combat the Atlantic slave trade, said that 1,033 of the 1,683 captives he seized from slave ships were children.<sup>36</sup>

<sup>29</sup> J. Miller, *Way of Death*, p. 68.

<sup>30</sup> A. de Assis Júnior, *Dicionário kimbundo-português*.

<sup>31</sup> Valencia Villa and Florentino, “Abolicionismo inglês,” p. 7.

<sup>32</sup> J. Miller, *Way of Death*, p. 68.     <sup>33</sup> P. Lovejoy, “The Children of Slavery.”

<sup>34</sup> See G. Campbell, “Children and Slavery”; G. Campbell et al., “Children”; P. Lovejoy, “The Children of Slavery”; A. Diptee, “African Children.”

<sup>35</sup> A. da Costa e Silva, *A manilha e o libambo*, p. 112.

<sup>36</sup> Matson based his observations in his personal experience between 1832 and 1847. J. Matson, *Remarks on the Slave Trade*, p. 23.

This was further aggravated by the turn of the nineteenth century because the overwhelming volume of the eighteenth-century slave trade put pressure on the supply side of this most lucrative type of business. West Central Africa was much less populated than West Africa, and adults were better able to defend themselves. Soon, new forms of enslavement emerged, endangering children whose parents, close relatives, or lineages could not effectively protect them. Even in places where there were no wars, *razzias*, or kidnappings, defenseless children could still be enslaved. Children could be given as security for debts, and Roquinaldo Ferreira and Mariana Candido have observed that West Central African legal tribunals, backed both by Portuguese authorities and by African middlemen and nobility, often ratified the enslavement of dependent people (servants, retainers, and their children), who could easily fall prey to the Atlantic slave trade networks and end up in one of the slave ships bound for the Americas.<sup>37</sup>

After 1831, when the trade to Brazil became illegal, there was yet another advantage to trading captive children. This was revealed in a letter from Augustus Cowper, the British consul in Pernambuco, to the Count of Clarendon on November 3, 1855, regarding the capture of an unnamed pilot boat at the Barra de Serinhaém (about 80 kilometers south of Recife). This episode embarrassed Brazil's Imperial government, for the ship was seized with enslaved captives aboard five years after the 1850 Eusebio de Queiroz law, which had been passed by the Brazilian government under heavy British pressure in order to put an end to the contraband of African slaves.<sup>38</sup> After 1850, the Brazilian government tasked its navy and local coastal authorities with ending the trade. However, some ships still evaded detection. One of them was the unnamed pilot-boat that came to Serinhaém in 1855, the last one seized in Brazil with captives inside its hold. The boat was only 30 tons but contained 250 captives when it arrived in Santo Aleixo island, facing the beach of Serinhaém – adjacent to Porto de Galinhas – on October 10, 1855. A vessel's tonnage measures volume, not weight. In the early nineteenth century, when the transatlantic slave trade was legal, a slave ship was allowed to carry up to five captives per 2 tons, according to Article 1 of the notorious 1813 *alvará* (decree) that regulated the matter.<sup>39</sup> The British consul in Recife found it

<sup>37</sup> R. Ferreira, *Cross-Cultural Exchange*, chapter 3 passim. M. Candido, *An African Slaving Port*, pp. 180, 209.

<sup>38</sup> For the 1855 Serinhaém episode, see G. Veiga, *O gabinete*.

<sup>39</sup> Alvará de 24 de novembro de 1813 in Brazil, *Collecção das Leis Brasileiras, desde a chegada da corte até a época da Independência – 1811 a 1816*, vol. 2, pp. 292–302.

absurd that so many people could fit inside a 30-ton schooner that, according to the tight rules of the 1813 *alvará*, should have carried only seventy-five slaves. He inferred those captives must have come from some larger vessel far away in the ocean. Indeed, perhaps that was the case; slave traders sometimes used that strategy. But very small slave ships packed with Africans also crossed the ocean toward Pernambuco after 1831. This may very well have been the case here, for the ship was not overloaded with adults. According to the British consul, of the 250 captives thirty were women, and all the rest were just boys. The consul explained that this could have indicated a new strategy that involved bringing only “untattooed boys” to Brazil.<sup>40</sup> The consul may have used the wrong word, for he probably meant that the boys had no scarifications, the diacritical marks of African populations who were subjected to the Atlantic slave trade. Those boys, in other words, were so young they had not been yet initiated in their original African communities. They did not bear what Brazilians called “nation marks” (*marcas de nação*) and could thus easily pass as *crioulos* (Brazilian-born enslaved people, not subject to the 1850 law).

Consul Cowper was probably mistaken when he said that ship was the first one intentionally filled with captives lacking scarifications. Until the Brazilian government decided to fight slave smuggling on the Brazilian mainland in the early 1850s, smugglers were very successful in cheating the British navy and going about their business as usual. That strategy was not new in 1855, for there were children inside slave ships before; kids like Camilo, Maria, or Joaquim were also so young that they were probably unmarked. In this sense Consul Cowper’s account is precious, for it explicitly reveals a critical advantage to bringing children to Brazil after the 1831 anti-slave trade law: they could more easily pass as *crioulos* (Brazilian-born slaves) and therefore be sold anywhere in the presence of authorities without suspicion.

This case also shows that, as brutal as it was, bringing children on small vessels was quite normal from the slave traders’ perspective. Tiny ships could more easily cheat the British navy, for they were harder to spot. And bringing children as cargo allowed traders to make the most of their limited cargo space. It is even likely that some ships were built with

<sup>40</sup> August Cowper to the Earl of Clarendon, November 3, 1855. In Great Britain, *British Parliamentary Papers, Correspondence with British Commissioners and other Representatives Abroad and with Foreign Ministers in England Together with Reports from the Admiralty Relative to the Slave Trade* [Class B], vol. 42, April 1, 1855, to March 31, 1856, pp. 242–243.

precisely that idea in mind. According to Lieutenant R. N. Forbes – the commander of the *Bonetta*, one of the British vessels that patrolled the African coast – nothing was done without reason in the slave trade. In his reports, Lieutenant Forbes praised the beauty of some slave ships, but he also stressed their exiguity, expressed especially in cramped corner spaces that were only 14 to 18 inches high, specifically designed to carry children. According to Forbes, some ships were virtually built for that purpose. In his words, the *Triumfo* (sic), a tiny 18-ton yacht seized in 1842, was one of these “hellish nurseries.” In addition to a crew of only five Spanish seamen, the vessel carried a fourteen-year-old girl and 104 children aged between four and nine.<sup>41</sup>

Lt. Forbes’ reference to “hellish nurseries” suggests that the British consul may have been mistaken in 1855, when he found it somehow absurd that a small 30-ton vessel could carry 250 people, even if 220 were children so young that they had not been initiated in their original communities. Perhaps Consul Cowper simply could not imagine that the small boat in Serinhaém was just one of those hellish nurseries that Lt. Forbes spoke of, crowded with children from West Central Africa.

The slave ship commander Theodore Canot wrote in his memoirs about a similar episode involving a tiny boat with only two sailors and a pilot, which escaped the British navy and fled to Bahia with a cargo of thirty-three boys. According to him, this grotesque yet successful adventure encouraged other smugglers to repeat it.<sup>42</sup> Pastor Grenfell Hill narrated his journey from Mozambique to Cape Town on a slave ship that carried 447 people, which was seized by the British in 1843; forty-five were women and 189 were men, few more than twenty years old. The rest of the human cargo was composed of 213 boys.<sup>43</sup> According to Manolo Florentino’s calculations, the hold where those people were piled up was no bigger than 70 square meters (about 750 square feet).<sup>44</sup> According to Robert Harms, the British had a word for such tight packing of people: “spooning,” for it resembled the stacking of spoons.<sup>45</sup>

The brutal way children were confined caused the death of at least sixty of them on a small slave ship that landed in Porto de Galinhas, Pernambuco, in 1844. During its entire voyage from Africa, according

<sup>41</sup> R. N. Forbes, *Six Months’ Service*, p. 87.

<sup>42</sup> T. Canot, *Adventures of an African Slaver*, p. 348.

<sup>43</sup> P. Hill, *Cinquenta dias*, pp. 63–64.

<sup>44</sup> Florentino, “Apresentação,” in P. Hill, *Cinquenta dias*, p. 15.

<sup>45</sup> R. Harms, *The Diligent*, p. 305.

to British Consul Cowper, 160 of its captives died “from the leaky state of the vessel and other causes.” There had been rumors that the thirty-year-old ship was originally bound for Rio de Janeiro, but the ship’s sailing master, a near relative of the man who took charge of the surviving slaves in Recife, decided in collusion with the first mate to come to Recife. The second mate – “it is said” – “resisted and was thrown overboard at sea.” Consul Cowper did not note the age of the slave trade victims in this episode. He claimed, however, that sixty people, all children, “were drowned or killed by a heavy lurch of the vessel when she first grounded.” The 130 survivors, in a “weakly state,” were rushed from the ship to be sold in Recife.<sup>46</sup>

Lieutenant Forbes’ logic should not be overlooked. Traders did not bring children simply because they had no other choice, either because they lacked capital or because children were the only merchandise available to them on the African coast. Children could fit anywhere, and they were chattel just as adults were, albeit less valuable. Our contemporary notions of infancy did not apply to enslaved children at that time; on the contrary, minors were considered more pliant and flexible workers, and their tiny bodies made it easier to pack them in, just as E. P. Thompson has argued for British mines.<sup>47</sup> If Forbes was right, the vessels themselves were designed to meet the demand for children on the part of buyers who plied the African coast. Those overcrowded ships that came to Brazil may have been full of children so young that they had no scarifications, the diacritical marks of their original ethnic groups in Africa that might otherwise have betrayed them as contraband.

#### THE DAILY ROUTINES OF CHILD SMUGGLING IN AFRICA AND THE ATLANTIC

Data produced by the British show that, besides schooners and brigs, small yachts were also used in slave smuggling to Pernambuco and other parts of Brazil. The Portuguese consul in Recife – who was not generally very concerned with the slave trade unless it was practiced by Portuguese citizens – confirmed the use of very small ships by Brazilian-born slave dealers. In December 1844, he said that yachts were used to enter West

<sup>46</sup> First Enclosure in 266, in Great Britain, *Parliamentary Papers, Correspondence with Foreign Powers Relative to the Slave Trade [Class B and Class C]*, n. 28, vol L, February 4, August 9, 1845, p. 414.

<sup>47</sup> E. P. Thompson, *The Making*, pp. 331–332.

African harbors such as Onim, Benin, and Whydah to buy slaves. At least six of them had successfully landed captives in Pernambuco that year.<sup>48</sup> British consular agents did not always report the tonnage of those smaller vessels or note how many people they carried, but they occasionally provided sound information. The yacht *Mariquinhas*, for example, was just a 45-ton boat when its human cargo disembarked in December 1843 near the mouth of the Una River, about 120 kilometers south of Recife, almost at the border with the Province of Alagoas. Based on the regulations of the aforementioned 1813 *alvará* – which specified the brutal terms of the legal slave trade and allowed for very restricted food and water supplies – the *Mariquinhas* should not have held more than 110 to 115 captives. It is hard to imagine how was it possible to fit 203 people into the *Mariquinhas*, unless much – perhaps most – of the human cargo was composed of children like Camilo, Maria, or Joaquim, who also came to Pernambuco in the 1840s. Two people died during the transatlantic crossing of the *Mariquinhas*, and 201 disembarked alive.<sup>49</sup> The voyage of the *São José* had that same scale of brutality. It was an 83-ton vessel and was managed by a crew of thirteen men. It left 340 captives in Catuama in December 1841.<sup>50</sup> Given such crowded conditions, the *Mariquinhas* and the *São José* may well have been two of those “hellish nurseries” Forbes spoke of.

Boys and girls, likely under twelve years of age, also appear in the sources about the slave ships *Camões* and *Veloz*, seized by the British squadron on the Benin River in West Africa, when they were preparing to embark with a load of captives bound for Pernambuco in 1837. The ships belonged to the firm run by José Francisco de Azevedo Lisboa in Recife; the *feitoria* in the Benin River where the two ships operated was one among his many business enterprises. Neither the *Camões* nor the *Veloz* had captives aboard when they were captured by the British schooner *Fair Rosamond*. The slaves were on the beach, waiting to embark. The British officer who apprehended the two slave ships on the river decided to take

<sup>48</sup> Arquivo Nacional da Torre do Tombo (Lisboa): Joaquim Baptista Moreira to the Ministro dos Negócios Estrangeiros, December 10, 1844. *Coleção do Ministério dos Negócios Estrangeiros, Pernambuco*, caixa 3.

<sup>49</sup> First enclosure in n. 265, January 1, 1844, Great Britain, *Parliamentary Papers, Correspondence with Foreign Powers Relative to the Slave Trade* [Class B and Class C], vol. 28, p. 411.

<sup>50</sup> August Cowper to the Earl of Aberdeen, August 4, 1843, *House of Commons Parliamentary Papers, Correspondence with Foreign Powers Relative to the Slave Trade* [Class B and Class C], vol. 26, 1st Enclosure in n. 307, p. 374.

the captives to Sierra Leone at his own risk. Yet at that time, only ships with slaves within their holds were fair game for the British squadron. So the captain of the *Fair Rosamond* decided to load the human cargo inside the *Camões* in order to justify the ship’s apprehension and transport to Sierra Leone (the *Veloz* was badly damaged). Of the 138 Africans forced on board, seventy-one were boys and girls. The commander of the *Fair Rosamond* noted that thirty-eight of the boys were healthy when they were embarked, while seven were ill. Twenty-five of the girls were healthy, while one was sick. Of those 138 people, sixty-seven subsequently died, twenty-two during the trip to Sierra Leone and forty-five after landing. This very high mortality rate happened in a ship that had been loaded with slaves by a British commander who was nominally concerned with their fate.<sup>51</sup>

Several employees worked in that *feitoria* by the Benin River. One of them, Antonio Candido da Silva, was in charge of the captives that would be sent to Pernambuco. The appropriate handling of his tasks was crucial to the success of the business. His correspondence with his superiors at the *feitoria* suggests that there were often children among the slaves bought from the African nobility and middlemen. Children were certainly less threatening than adults, but they also demanded a lot from Antonio Candido da Silva, who had to keep them alive, well supervised, and clean. He had to cut their hair, to prevent lice; at least once he ordered his subordinate, a Spanish seaman, to scrape the teeth of the “moleques” to prevent scurvy.<sup>52</sup> Children could also die before embarking, like a poor girl who passed away from diarrhea, whom Antonio Candido described in a note to his manager at the Benin factory, João Baptista Cezar. On occasion, boys tried to escape; Antonio Candido wrote that he had once counted the children twice before lunch, but after the meal he noticed a “moleque” had disappeared. The boy was eventually captured and punished with the help of a local African “queen” (*rainha*).<sup>53</sup>

The presence of enslaved children in the *feitoria* was considered absolutely normal. It is thus not surprising that the captain of the

<sup>51</sup> H. W. Macaulay and Walter W. Lewis to Lord Palmerston, January 24, 1838, in *Parliamentary Papers, Correspondence with British Commissioners and Foreign Powers, 1839 [Class A and Class B]*, vol. 16, no. 24 and enclosures, pp. 15–67. See also J. Reis et al., *O alufá Rufino*, chapter 10.

<sup>52</sup> National Archives (London): “Antonio Candido da Silva to Senhor Capitão,” Benim, August 5, 1837, in Foreign Office 315/69.

<sup>53</sup> National Archives (London): Antonio Candido da Silva to Senhor Capitão, Bobi, August 17, 1837, in Foreign Office 315/69.

*Fair Rosamond*, who captured the company's ships, embarked them to Sierra Leone without much concern; the lawsuit at the British and Portuguese Mixed Commission Court in Sierra Leone that eventually resulted from the incident of the *Veloz* and the *Camões* in Sierra Leone did not even mention that it had involved children. Captives were just captives, both for the British and for African and Brazilian slavers – so much so that children were even included among the gifts that the head of operations at the *feitoria*, João Baptista Cezar, intended to send to his family in Recife. Although José Francisco de Azevedo Lisboa was the general manager of the firm, Cezar ran most of the operations on the Benin River, including negotiations with the African nobility over slave purchases. Antonio Candido, the man who took care of the captives, made very clear in his correspondence that Cezar was a strict boss whom Antonio Candido tried hard to please. But two undelivered letters to his wife, seized by the British navy, also indicate that Cezar was a caring and loving husband and father. Writing on successive days, Cezar addressed his wife as “Josephina, cara esposa do meu coração” (“Josephina, dearest wife of my heart”) and “Josephina, caro bem da minh'alma” (“Josephina, dearest love of my soul”). In those letters, he wrote that the commander of the *Veloz*, Joaquim Pedro de Sá Faria, had several gifts to deliver to her. In addition to “panos da costa” (the famous Benin cloth), three “esteiras finas” (reed mats), two parrots, and three “dentes de cavalo marinho” (seahorse teeth [sic]), he mentioned that he was also sending gifts to his “filhinhos” (small children): to “Henriquetinha” (“Little Henriqueta”), a “very pretty” “*molequinha*” (a little African girl); to “meu Joãozinho” (“my little João”), a little goat to play with and a “*molequinho*” (a little African boy). Both those slave children were marked with an “O” on their left arms in order to be easily distinguished among the cargo of captives on the slave ship.<sup>54</sup>

On one occasion, the king of Benin – who sold people to the *feitoria* – decided to send one of his young slaves – whom João Baptista Cezar referred to as a “*moleque escravo do rei*” (“king's slave boy”) – to Pernambuco to learn to “lidar com gente do mar” (“deal with seamen”). He was probably meant to become a cabin boy. Cezar recommended he should be especially well cared for; guaranteeing his safety was very important, because any incident could interfere with the good commercial relationship that Cezar had established with the African nobility who sold

<sup>54</sup> National Archives (London): João Batista Cezar to Josephina, September 15, 1837, and João Batista Cezar to Josephina, September 16, 1837, in Foreign Office 315/69.

him slaves.<sup>55</sup> Because of the British Navy’s raid against the *feitoria*, we do not know if the “moleque escravo do rei” ever actually made the voyage, though he could have eventually done so on another of the firm’s ships.

#### CONTRABAND AND LOCAL POWER IN PERNAMBUCO

Whatever that particular young African’s destiny, other ships came to Pernambuco after 1837; one of them brought Camilo in its hold. His 1874 statement gives us a few other clues about the logic of slave smuggling at the other end of the voyage, on the beaches of Pernambuco. Camilo testified that, after disembarking, he was imprisoned for a few days in a *casa de purgar* with ninety other captives. A few days later, they were sent to Goiana. This part of his statement resembles that of Mohammah Gardo Baquaqua, who also landed in Pernambuco in the 1840s.<sup>56</sup> Once he landed, Baquaqua said that he stayed at a plantation before being resold. The same happened to Camilo, who was taken to the Itapirema plantation and probably sold from there, along with other four captives, to Manoel Gonsalves, whose grandson would eventually become Camilo’s last master. It seems that Camilo’s and Baquaqua’s shared narrative was probably the general rule in the province after 1831: captives disembarked at beaches bordering plantations, where they were kept to recover from the voyage before either being sold or being sent to work on the plantations themselves. One former Brazilian slaver, called before the British Parliament as a witness, said that captives needed about three months to recover from the transatlantic crossing.<sup>57</sup> His experience, however, was with longer routes than the one between Congo/Angola and Pernambuco, and so the time of recovery was thus probably greater than it might have been for other voyages. Investigating reports by Africans who disembarked in Bahia after 1831, historian Ricardo Caíres Silva has shown that many of them stayed several days or sometimes even months near the disembarkation location, during which time they recovered from their journey and learned Portuguese, which increased their price.<sup>58</sup>

<sup>55</sup> National Archives (London): João Batista Cezar to José Francisco de Azevedo Lisboa, September 16, 1837, in Foreign Office 315/69.

<sup>56</sup> According to Robin Law and Paul Lovejoy, he had embarked at some of the ports surrounding Ouidah, probably Little Popo (modern Aného), and traveled from there to Pernambuco. R. Law and P. Lovejoy, eds., *The Biography of Mahommah Gardo Baquaqua*, p. 149.

<sup>57</sup> Joseph Cliffe, excerpted in R. Conrad, *Children of God’s Fire*, p. 36.

<sup>58</sup> R. Silva, “Memórias do tráfico ilegal.”

It is interesting to note that Baquaqua did not disembark very far from Atapus, the location where the slave ship that brought Camilo from Congo arrived. Robin Law and Paul Lovejoy have suggested that Baquaqua may have hypothetically arrived in 1845. According to the British consul in Recife, Augustus Cowper, the only ship that came to Pernambuco in that year landed at a place called “Macaro.”<sup>59</sup> Consul Cowper probably meant the Santo Antonio Macaro parish, on the coast a few miles north from Catuama and Atapus, according to a map from the mid-1800s.<sup>60</sup> Camilo and Baquaqua thus came to Brazil through the same slave smuggling network and perhaps even lived close to each other until Baquaqua was sold and moved away from the province.

The British consul in Recife virtually repeated Camilo’s and Baquaqua’s testimony when he narrated the case of the *Feiticeira*, which landed in Porto de Galinhas in 1835. That vessel had previously made other slaving voyages to Pernambuco. In 1835, it brought 300 Africans who were taken from the beach to the town of Nossa Senhora do Pilar, where they spent the night. The next morning, they were taken to the Conceição plantation. Finally, they were “distributed among buyers.”<sup>61</sup> In Pernambuco, where the transatlantic voyage was shorter and slave smuggling beaches were located in the limits of large plantations, the captives did not have to wait long in order to be sold, for the main market for them was right there on the sugar plantations themselves. The entire operation thus depended on plantation owners: they were the customers, and the locations where slave ships disembarked bordered their plantations or towns subjected to their sphere of influence. For that reason, it was very important for slave ships to arrive at the exact beach where they were expected. Slave ships that got lost and ended up at the wrong beach had to pay expensive bribes or risked having their cargo stolen by landowners who were themselves the authorities in charge of the local police and the National Guard. The commander of the ship that brought Baquaqua to Pernambuco had to give eleven slaves as bribes to local authorities.<sup>62</sup>

<sup>59</sup> R. Law and P. Lovejoy, eds., *The Biography of Mahommah Gardo Baquaqua*, p. 41.

<sup>60</sup> Map archived in the Arquivo Público Estadual Jordão Emerenciano (Recife): V. J. De Villiers de L’Ile Adam, “Carta Topographica e Administrativa das Províncias do [sic] Pernambuco, Alagoas e Sergipe,” Rio de Janeiro: Didot Irmaos, Belly Le Priek e Morizot, 1848.

<sup>61</sup> Edward Watts to Lord Palmerston, October 12, 1835, Sub-Enclosure in no. 112, from Great Britain, *Irish University Press British Parliamentary Papers – Slave Trade*, “Class B. Correspondence with Foreign Powers Relating to the Slave Trade, 1835,” p. 102.

<sup>62</sup> R. Law and P. Lovejoy, eds., *The Biography of Mahommah Gardo Baquaqua*, p. 41.

There was thus a need for a very well-knit articulation between transatlantic traders and plantation owners who controlled the best natural harbors. In Pernambuco, it is virtually impossible to separate the slave smuggler from the plantation owner who controlled land access. In his *Corografia Brasílica*, originally published in 1817, Aires de Casal wrote that Pernambuco was perhaps Brazil’s best province in terms of distribution of natural harbors, although most could only receive small vessels.<sup>63</sup> But those harbors were virtually all located in the sugarcane production region on Pernambuco’s coast. Even slave ships that stayed at sea disembarked at beaches on the borders of plantations. Slave smuggling was only possible with the help of those who controlled the beaches within the limits of their lands – and thus also the roads and paths that led to other plantations and to towns in the interior.

Many of Pernambuco’s most prominent plantation owners took part in these transactions. In 1817, Louis François de Tollenare visited the Salgado plantation near Cabo de Santo Agostinho. According to that French traveler, Salgado had a harbor that could receive ships of up to 150 tons. Tollenare was curious why the plantation owner, José de Oliveira Ramos, did not send his sugar directly to Europe. Ramos replied that the harbor was blocked by ships sunk in the war against the Dutch (1630–1654). Yet when Tollenare asked around, he found out that this was not true: the harbor was clear. Because he became friends with “Mr. Ramos,” Tollenare attributed the mistake to the planter’s naiveté.<sup>64</sup> But Mr. Ramos in fact seems to have known very well how to use his natural harbor. He was a major slave trader, responsible for bringing at least 5,186 captives to Recife on his slave ships before 1831.<sup>65</sup> We do not know how many more he smuggled directly into his own plantation.<sup>66</sup> Nearly thirty years later, August Cowper, as British

<sup>63</sup> M. A. de Casal, *Corografia brasílica*, p. 259.

<sup>64</sup> L. Tollenare, *Notas dominicais*, pp. 68–70.

<sup>65</sup> Cited in D. Albuquerque et al., “Financiamento e organização,” p. 220.

<sup>66</sup> The records of the 1817 Rebellion investigation contains a “List of traders, manufacturers, farmers, and other wealthy residents of Recife, to whom no contribution is too large until the amounts noted at the margin herein are reached” (“Relação dos negociantes, fabricantes, lavradores e outras pessoas pecuniosas residentes no Recife, e a quem se não faz pesada qualquer contribuição até as quantias indicadas à margem”). Mr. Ramos, as Tollenare liked to call him, is at the top of that list, classified as a “money-driven, stubborn European” (“europeu aferrado à riqueza e teimoso”) with a fortune of “around a million give or take” (“casa de milhão e pouco mais ou menos”) in vessels, commercial businesses, plantations, slave trade businesses, and more than 300,000 *cruzados* in currency. L. Tollenare, *Notas dominicais*, pp. 218, 225, 228, 231, and 271. See also J. H. Rodrigues, *Documentos históricos*, vol. cv, pp. 238 and 241.

consul in Pernambuco, became an “intimate friend” (in his words) of Ramos’ son, also named José Ramos de Oliveira, who was then a very successful businessman and the first president of the Commercial Association of Pernambuco. The consul paid him a tremendous compliment for the way he managed his 180 captives: “an experience with free labor,” he said. Mr. Cowper also mentioned that the younger Ramos’ father had been a slave merchant.<sup>67</sup> According to the British consul, the younger Ramos claimed that he had left the trade. However, archival evidence suggests that the son himself was in fact still involved in illegal slave trafficking. At least two ships that left Recife to trade in Angola were consigned to the younger Ramos: the *Leal Portuense* in 1835, and the *Eugenia* in 1837 and 1839. The most incriminating evidence, however, derives from his wife’s posthumous inventory, which indicated that the couple owned the lands that bordered Porto de Galinhas, adjacent to the Engenho Salgado (Salgado sugar plantation). Several slave ships landed there after 1831, including the one that brought Narciso, Maria, and Joaquim from Congo. On the list of slaves of the Engenho Salgado in 1848, there was even one fourteen-year-old Congolese boy, João Baú, worth 400 mil réis who had not even been born when the trade was banned in 1831.<sup>68</sup>

Plantation owners like Mr. Ramos de Oliveira knew very well what they were doing and made sure they did not leave explicit traces of their illegal business. But sometimes their names emerge in the sources. A brother of one of the region’s most prominent leaders, the Baron of Boa Vista – who was president of Pernambuco province when Camilo, Maria, Joaquim, and Narciso came to Brazil – was himself directly involved in at least one case of slave trading. The episode was brutal. In 1843, the 381-ton barque *Temerário* set sail from Africa with 913 people imprisoned in its holds. Only 816 survived the voyage to Catuama, a natural harbor north of Recife. According to the British consul, the devastation continued on land, where at least another 300 Africans passed away from dysentery, four days after they reached shore. According to the British consul, a relative of the Baron received 10,000 réis for each captive he harbored in his property before sending them to Recife.<sup>69</sup>

<sup>67</sup> National Archives (London): Consul Christopher to Lord Palmerston, May 30, 1850, pp. 97 and 97 (reverse). Foreign Office, vol. 84/809.

<sup>68</sup> Instituto Arqueológico, Histórico e Geográfico Pernambucano (Recife): Inventário of Isabel Maria da Costa Ramos, 1849, p. 31.

<sup>69</sup> August Cowper to the Earl of Aberdeen, May 8, 1843, in *Parliamentary Papers, Correspondence with Foreign Powers Relative to the Slave Trade* [Class B and Class C],

CONCLUSION

What, ultimately, became of the children whose stories have helped open a window on Pernambuco’s nineteenth-century trade in illegally enslaved children? Maria won her case because her mistress said in court that she considered Maria a freedwoman already. Camilo also won his case in Itambé, thanks to the witnesses. His lawyer argued he could not have come before 1831, simply because he was forty years old in 1874. Therefore, he should be a “liberated African.” His master’s lawyer, however, argued Camilo had arrived in 1830. One of the witnesses who favored Camilo was Agostinho, the “natural” son to the father of Camilo’s first master, Manoel Gonsalves. Agostinho said he was fifty-seven years old in 1874 and just eighteen around the time Camilo arrived at his father’s home, which meant that Camilo had been brought around 1834, when the slave trade was already illegal. We don’t know if Agostinho acted against the wealthy branch of his family because he resented his condition as a lower, “natural” son, or if he just acted in favor of Camilo because the African was his godson. Maybe both. Camilo’s master, however, did not accept the sentence and appealed to a higher court in Rio de Janeiro. I was not able to trace the final outcome of this case.

In Pernambuco, nineteenth-century plantation owners often portrayed themselves as debtors and therefore as victims of slave dealers. However, it was impossible to maintain the slave trade after 1831 without their full participation. They owned the beaches where the Africans were illegally enslaved, and those beaches faced towns dominated by large plantation owners, who controlled the justices of peace, the National Guard, the juries, and all posts at the local town council. They were also the ones in charge of the trade’s repression until the 1850 anti-slave trade law gave the Brazilian navy jurisdiction over everyone involved in the contraband, including those who received and harbored slave ships and captives inland. Through their political networks, plantation owners ruled an entire hierarchy of local authorities, and it is thus little surprise that ships were only seized in cases of conflict, most often when a slave vessel mistakenly ended up on a beach controlled by a rival network. But even in those cases, the captives did not become “liberated Africans.”<sup>70</sup> They

vol. 26, p. 359; August Cowper to the Earl of Aberdeen, August 4, 1843, in *House of Commons Parliamentary Papers, Correspondence with Foreign Powers Relative to the Slave Trade [Class B and Class C]*, vol. 26, p. 364.

<sup>70</sup> For the fate of liberated Africans in Pernambuco, see C. de Oliveira, “Os africanos livres.” See also B. Mamigonian, *Africanos livres*.

were simply enslaved by people who originally had no part in the slave ship's voyage. In Pernambuco, plantation owners whose lands bordered the beaches of the province were directly complicit in the contraband trade.

The literature on the slave trade emphasizes how overcrowded slave ships became after 1831. It seems likely that these overcrowded ships were not packed with adults but rather mostly with small children, who were the only people who could have fit in such numbers inside the tiny ships that plied Pernambuco's coast. We cannot know the precise number of enslaved African *moleques* who arrived in Brazil before the age of twelve. But the evidence suggests that much of Pernambuco's nineteenth-century plantation wealth was generated by a trade in very young people – unmarked children who ate and drank little, rarely rebelled, and were easy to pack like spoons into a slave ship's dank hull. Once they reached Pernambucan shores, such children easily melted into the *crioulo* masses whose enslavement remained the law of the land until 1888.