

Batuque: African Drumming and Dance between Repression and Concession, Bahia, 1808–1855¹

JOÃO JOSÉ REIS

Department of History, Universidade Federal da Bahia, Salvador, Brazil

In this essay I will discuss some of the meanings acquired by black revelry under slavery. Given the restrictions of the available sources, I discuss above all the attitudes and the views of masters, policemen, journalists and politicians towards the batuque. For this reason I have chosen those festive manifestations which are more African or seen as such by these individuals. I intend to point out particularly what changed and what did not during the first half of the nineteenth century in attitudes towards the batuque, which here generally means black percussion music usually accompanied by dance.

Keywords: slave revelry, nineteenth-century Brazil, repression and tolerance.

The four million Africans transported to Brazil as slaves brought with them not only the physical energy to produce wealth, but also brought the religious, aesthetic and moral values to create culture. It is commonplace to talk about the African contribution to different aspects of Brazilian culture, but little has been produced to document the tense and often conflictual history of the formation of Afro-Brazilian culture (Tinhorão, 1988, 1998). This is an essay about a small piece of that history, about African drumming and dance (or batuque). However, I do not intend to identify the African origins of instruments, rhythms and musical forms; rather, I take African revelry as a window onto power relations under slavery in Bahia.

Blacks were involved in all kinds of celebrations in Brazil during slavery. At white men's private parties, they figured as servants and often as musicians. They also participated in public festivities, whether civic or religious, segregated or mixed. Beyond this, they produced their own celebrations, which were far from identical. Some had more, and others less, African density. Those produced by black Catholic brotherhoods, for instance, included processions and masses as well as African drumming, dancing and singing. But there were also those celebrations that tried to

1 This article was written with the help of a research grant from the Brazilian Research Council, CNPq.

reproduce more closely the experience that slaves had left behind in their homelands. The so-called *batuque* represented this kind of cultural manifestation.²

Another way to discuss black celebrations is to look at the degree of 'Africanity' among the revellers. In some, participants were exclusively African-born blacks, although unfortunately documents usually hide their specific origins in Africa. What difference was there between the Yoruba and the Benguela *batuque*, for instance? Cultural exchange among Africans, which certainly happened all the time, can be perceived but rarely detailed. There were other possible differences regarding who were involved: slaves, free or freed people? Recently arrived or seasoned Africans? And how about the mixture of Africans from different ethnic groups, new and seasoned, slaves and freed? Mixing leads to change. The problem is to establish the direction of the change. When we add the *crioulo* or Brazilian-born black, the detail is still lost, but our imagination suggests that we are facing a deeper process of cultural change, of transculturation. Furthermore, even the most densely African celebrations, including those of a religious character such as Calundu and Candomblé, could involve free *mestiços* (or mixed-bloods) and whites, initially only as curious observers, later as partners, but in the case of the *batuque* without ever threatening established African hegemony.

Despite the incorporation of foreign elements, despite change, the *batuque* continued to be a basic reference of black and slave identity until the late nineteenth century, so long as we remember that identity is not a fixed point in the experience of a group. Identity can change and be multifarious. What is constant is a sentiment of alterity, collective singularity and often opposition. That is the reason why all black celebrations under slavery, albeit some more than others, represented a means of expressing slave and black resistance, and therefore, a source of concern for those in command. On the other hand, celebrations also developed as means of negotiation with other sectors of society, with locally born blacks and *mulattos* and whites, too.

The several meanings and the many forms taken by slave celebration often confused those responsible for its control. Slavemasters, police and religious and political authorities regularly disagreed on what to do about it. On the one hand, they could see it as immoral, barbarous, bad for labour productivity and worse as a rehearsal for rebellion. On the other hand, they could view it as good way of placating the tensions in the slave quarters, as a healthy distraction and even as a right as long as it could be considered 'honest and innocent', to use the words of a seventeenth-century Jesuit priest (Antonil, 1982: 82). Of course, the slaves often used 'honest and innocent' celebration as a smoke screen behind which to hide deeply meaningful manifestations of their culture.

In this essay, I suggest some of the meanings acquired by black revelry under slavery, particularly the *batuque*. Given the restrictions of the available sources, all of which are written by whites and *mulattos* with power and prestige, I discuss above all the attitudes and the views of slavemasters, policemen, journalists and politicians towards the *batuque*. I therefore focus on those festive manifestations that were more densely African, or seen as such by these individuals. I discuss particularly what changed during the first half

2 The problem of how to define the meaning of *batuque* in different contexts is discussed by Abreu (1999: 287–294).

of the nineteenth century in their attitudes towards the batuque, here defined as black percussion music usually accompanied by dance. For this discussion, I have selected three basic sources or episodes: a police report describing an African celebration in the sugar plantation town of Santo Amaro in 1808; a series of newspaper reports published between 1838 and 1841; and finally, a debate by representatives in Bahia's Provincial Assembly in 1855. Across this period, we see both continuity and change.

In December 1808, a large African celebration took place in the streets of Santo Amaro, one of the most important towns in the sugar plantation region of Bahia, known as Recôncavo. Those were prosperous days in the sugar business, thanks to the Haitian revolution, which had destroyed slavery and plantation society in what had been a wealthy French colony. The sugar boom meant more slaves in Bahia, who arrived in numbers of up to 8000 a year. In 1815, the slave population of the larger sugar zone where Santo Amaro was located has been estimated to have reached 90,000 souls.³

During a weekend day of Christmas celebration – not Christmas Day exactly – plantation slaves met with urban slaves in the streets of Santo Amaro, where they organised themselves according to their *nações* or nations, as African ethnic groups were known in Brazil. Angolans (Africans exported through the port of Luanda), Jejes (Gbe-speaking peoples), Nagôs (Yoruba-speaking peoples) and Hausas – the last two together – occupied different parts of the town. In the plantations, while cleaning the soil, planting, cutting and crushing the cane, they all probably worked side by side; maybe they were allowed to live ethnically apart in the slave quarters. When celebrating, however, and free to organise themselves, they chose to reconstruct their differences, to assert their alterity among themselves.

Their ethnic severance, however, was clear but imperfect or incomplete. Hausas and Nagôs had combined to produce the 'brightest' group of them all, according to Militia Captain José Gomes. He explained: 'their bodies are half dressed, they [play] a big tambour, and some of them are decorated with some golden pieces, . . . they continued with their dances not only during the day but continued going a good part of the night, they dined in a nearby house in the same street . . . which they found empty . . . and there they had a lot to drink, paid for by the same blacks'.⁴ The town had become a free territory for a few hours. Captain Gomes was disturbed, and he was probably not alone. He detected danger in so much physical energy lost to labour, exhibited in those seminaked, dancing black bodies, adorned with golden trinkets – nakedness and dance which suggested excessive sensuality, always unsettling for the white man in an environment where African women were scarce.

The captain also noted the existence of a large African drum, a sign that he was familiar with smaller, less-threatening drums. But he considered them all 'accursed instruments' in another passage of his report. He appeared to be faced with a witches'

3 That there were 90,000 slaves in the Recôncavo in 1815 is an estimate provided by Barrickman (1991: 352).

4 Capitão José Roiz de Gomes to Capitão-mor Francisco Pires de Carvalho e Albuquerque (20 January 1809). Arquivo Público do Estado da Bahia (hereafter, APEBa), *Capitães-mores. Santo Amaro, 1807–1822*, maço 417-1. I have analysed this document previously in Reis (1997a: 7–10).

Sabbath, appropriately including a large amount of food and drink, all paid for by the blacks themselves, which meant that some slaves had access to subsistence gardens and local markets, and others may have been slaves-for-hire in Santo Amaro and neighbouring villages. This was additional evidence of African autonomy in that context, more fuel for fear. And besides dancing and drumming during the day, celebrating Nagôs and Hausas invaded the shadows of night, hours forbidden for slaves because those were ideal for planning plots against masters. It was all too threatening in the captain's eyes.

However, not all whites seemed to be as disturbed as he was. Free local people converged on the streets to watch the African celebration: 'there were many people of all quality and sex', the captain himself wrote, meaning that individuals belonging to different classes and races, women and men, converged to watch the batuque. The African revellers' masters themselves had allowed them to leave their plantations, and some may have been among the spectators. There was also complicity from the local councilmen and magistrates, 'who rule the republic by hiding this insolence entitled divertissements . . . to which even masters in their engenhos and farms consent, except for a few of them', reproached the intolerant captain. What figured as slave entertainment for masters, councilmen and magistrates, meant slave insolence for the captain. Political power and military power were in disagreement. Good for the slaves.

The captain's words indicate that Santo Amaro's slaves were gaining breathing space, at least on the cultural front. This interpretation is confirmed elsewhere in his report, where he writes that such scenes represented 'disorder . . . not unheard of in this village'. For a good number of whites, nevertheless, this apparent disorder actually meant the true expression of order, in the sense that they believed that the slave who danced and sang represented less danger. I disagree with, and will return to, this point. For the moment, let me bring another distressed white man into the plot.

He was Ignacio dos Santos, the village priest. During the African afternoon function, he tried in vain to stop Nagôs and Hausas from singing and dancing. We do not know precisely what he told the revellers, but according to Captain Gomes, 'he approached them with apostolic zeal'. We can imagine him trying to preach Christianity to Africans in the middle of a seemingly pagan celebration. He spoke in vain, according to Captain Gomes, 'for the said blacks did not listen and responded with indecent words, and . . . they said that their masters had all week to amuse themselves while they only had one day, and asked him to leave or he would get what they had for him, and thus the said priest left pleading to God'. God, however, apparently did not grasp the gravity of the situation, for He did not come forward to help His missionary.

Indecency, lack of decorum, nakedness, sensual dance, noisy drumming, in sum cultural subversion, but also well-defined antagonistic words heated this episode of class struggle in the 1808 Santo Amaro summer. The slaves' attitude is evidence of class conflict. We have seen that Captain Gomes had represented slaves and masters in mutual cooperation, the former dancing and the latter letting them dance. Now that we can hear, however indirectly, the Africans' words, what emerges is their cutting critique of the masters' exploitative and privileged position in the social and economic structure. Instead of seigniorial concession, the slaves' words presented their freedom to cultural expression as conquered right, and this interpretation, mixed with some

lewdness, was thrown in the face of the priest, the man who represented the official, seigniorial religion, the most powerful instrument of ideological control in Brazilian slavery.

It may be that Father Ignacio had Muslim slaves in front of him. The Hausas had come from lands largely controlled by Allah. They had been victims of the Fulani-led *jihād* begun in Hausaland by Shaikh Usuman dan Fodio in 1804, a holy war that was still in progress when the episode here discussed took place. One of the main goals of the *jihād* was to fight the pagan practices that the Shaikh believed to have been corrupting the souls of Muslims. These Bahian slaves had probably been in the opposite camp to the Shaikh in Africa. After all, he had denounced drumming in words that echoed those written in Bahia by intolerant whites: 'My view is that a drum should be beaten only for some lawful purpose, such as calling a meeting or announcing when an army departs, pitches camp, or returns home and the like'. The Prophet himself, according to the Shaikh, had once called 'beating the drum diversion in spite of the fact that it was being beaten for a legitimate purpose because it was not essential. How [much worse] then, is what the ignorant people do – playing musical instruments for entertainment and singing!' (Fúdi, 1978: 90). Shaikh Usuman dan Fodio had something of Father Ignacio dos Santos in him. Because the Hausas associated with the Nagôs to dance in 1808, and the latter were predominantly 'pagans', Santo Amaro may have become the stage for further estrangement between Hausas, a form of orthodox religion.

On both sides of the Atlantic, African celebrations divided those who had the power to subdue them, but who nevertheless lacked the determination of a Father Ignacio or a Shaikh dan Fodio. To illustrate this point, let us introduce another character, Francisco Pires de Carvalho e Albuquerque, member of a powerful planter family and Captain-Major of Santo Amaro, the highest local militia officer. It was to him that Captain Gomes had written his report. After reading it, the Captain-Major wrote to the Colonial Governor and Captain-General of Bahia, the Count of Ponte, a man who considered that social order depended on the absolute submission of slaves to masters and on the deference of free blacks to whites in general. Such a vision did not combine well with expressions of African cultural autonomy, of course. Ponte owned property in Portugal and Bahia, including sugar plantations and more than 500 slaves. Therefore, besides defending the interests of the Portuguese crown, he also defended his own private interests however he could. Contrary to the local planters, he considered African drumming and dances to be rehearsals for revolt, a thought that disturbed his mind still more than the slave drums disturbed his sleep.

In reporting to the Count, the Captain-Major would soothe him by saying that 'the reunion of blacks who came down from the plantations' had no other goal than promoting 'their entertainment'.⁵ But because disorder had broken out in the past on such occasions, he asked the governor for instructions on how to behave in the future. Aware of his superior's hard-line anti-slave politics, he could have just gone ahead and clamped down on the slave revellers, but because the Santo Amaro masters allowed

5 Capitão-mor Francisco Pires de Carvalho e Albuquerque to Governor Conde da Ponte, 21 January 1809, APEBa, *Capitães-mores. Santo Amaro, 1807–1822*, maço 417-1.

them to revel, he chose to back up his actions with written orders from the governor. And the latter instructed him to forbid slave meetings, to arrest those who disobeyed and to warn masters of the new guidance regarding slave control.⁶

These were the Count of Ponte's methods. And he was not alone. In spite of his hesitation, Captain-Major Albuquerque agreed with the idea of hardening slave control, and so did his subordinate Captain Gomes. They all might have been listening to the warnings of Luís dos Santos Vilhena, a Portuguese Greek language teacher in Bahia, who wrote the following about the capital city, Salvador, in 1802:

it does not seem to me to be sound politics to tolerate that in the streets [of this city] and its environs crowds of blacks of both sexes should make their barbarous batuques to the sound of so many horrendous tambours, dancing impudently, and singing gentile songs, speaking diverse languages, and with much noise and such horrendous and cacophonous shouts that cause fear and strangeness... due to the consequences which can emerge from this situation, given the... number of slaves that there are in Bahia, a fearful corporation which deserves much attention in spite of the rivalry that there is between the Creoles and those who are not [Creoles], as well as among the several nations that comprise the slaves brought from the coast of Africa (Vilhena, 1969: I 134).

This is all very similar to what happened in Santo Amaro: the noisy celebration and the indecent dance. Vilhena proceeded by saying that slaves should be kept in a total state of subordination, not only to their masters but also to whites in general. Unfortunately, he maintained, Bahian slaves, especially those who belonged to powerful whites, treated lesser whites – like Vilhena himself or Captain Gomes and Father Ignacio – as though they were their inferiors.

That was precisely the situation the Count of Ponte believed he found when he arrived in Bahia to become Governor in December 1805. He responded as though following Vilhena's prescription. By April 1807, he could write to Lisbon of his success in the struggle against many centres of African cultural resistance in the outskirts of Salvador, where he arrested numerous blacks who, he said, 'with absolute liberty, with dances, capricious dress, false remedies, blessings, and fanatical prayers, lounged about, ate, and celebrated in the most scandalous offence to all rights, laws, ordinances, and public order'.⁷ Again, this is all very similar to what Santo Amaro witnessed during that Christmas season. To the slaves' relief, the governor would die two years later, only 35 years of age, perhaps a victim of 'false remedies, blessings and fanatical prayers' well administered by the Africans. However, he had lived long enough for the masters become accustomed to his style of slave control.

That was at least what Ponte's successor took to be the case. In contrast with the dead governor, the Count of Arcos believed that Bahian slaves were poorly fed, excessively punished and forced to work long hours without rest – and this kind of treatment, he

6 Ibid. Despacho do conde da Ponte (27 January 1809).

7 Conde da Ponte to Visconde de Anadia, 7 April 1807, *Anais da Biblioteca Nacional do Rio de Janeiro*, 37 (1918), pp. 450–451.

thought, explained the attempts to rebel. In 1813, he wrote to a magistrate in the Recôncavo that 'the safest and most efficient way to avoid the disorders caused by black slaves is to allow them without hesitation to entertain themselves with their dances on Sundays and Holy Days'.⁸ This was precisely what the Santo Amaro masters had been doing before harsher methods of control were introduced by the former governor. Arcos indicated several reasons why slavery should be more flexible, and in each case, African celebrations were at the centre of his argument: revelry helped relieve the slaves' souls from oppression, made them forget their miserable lives for a few hours and, more importantly, promoted ethnic division among them.

Because of their well-defined differences in method, Ponte and Arcos represent paradigms of slave control: rigidity versus flexibility.⁹ Slave revelry was central to this distinction, for its approval or its repression became metaphors of opposing techniques by which to administer peace in the slave quarters. African revelry therefore also became a focal point of slave resistance. It could evolve to rebellion, just as the Count of Ponte believed, or it could cause rebellion if forbidden, as the Count of Arcos maintained. That is, neither repression nor acquiescence to batuque could guarantee peace. The Hausa and Nagô slaves whose festivity shook Santo Amaro in 1808 would shake Bahia with their revolts over the following 30 years. This cycle of revolts would begin in 1807, when the Count of Ponte discovered and suppressed a sophisticated conspiracy led by Hausa slaves. From then on, Nagôs and Hausas, together or separately, would organise over twenty conspiracies and revolts, some of them fought to the sound of war drums.

After Brazil's independence from Portugal in 1822–1823, local authorities tried to improve control over the slave population through provincial laws and municipal ordinances including the prohibition of batuques and other forms of black revelry 'everywhere and at any time'.¹⁰ These measures reflected the fear provoked by slave rebelliousness on one hand, and by the dissemination of African customs on the other. There were good reasons for this fear. African slaves continued to arrive by the thousands every year, even after the prohibition of the slave trade in 1831. At least 170,200 were imported to Bahia between 1820 and 1850, the majority illegally (Eltis, 1987: 136). Slaves formed 40 per cent of Salvador's 65,000 strong population in 1835. Approximately 60 per cent of these slaves had been born in Africa, and hence including the African freed men and women, 34 per cent of the population came from the continent. Moreover, the Yoruba or Nagô represented two-thirds of the African community in the 1850s, which meant that old ethnic divisions slowly declined to be replaced by a kind of Nagô cultural hegemony. Revelry was therefore no longer an important vehicle of division among Africans. Maybe for this reason, revelry gradually became more vigorous, precisely at a time when the white elite sought to eradicate African culture from the streets of Salvador in order to 'civilise' the city. And all of this took place

8 Conde dos Arcos para o Juiz de Fora de Cachoeira (22 May 1813). APEBa, *Cartas do Governo*, 168, fl. 246.

9 I have discussed Ponte's and dos Arcos's methods in the context of Bahian-slave rebellions in Reis (1993, 1989: 24). Ponte's role in the repression of a runaway slave community in the south of Bahia is discussed in detail in Reis (1996: 332–362).

10 See several examples in *Repertório* (1988) and *Legislação* (1996: 125 ff.).

in an era shaken by slave revolts, of which the most serious was probably the 1835 uprising of predominantly Muslim and Nagô peoples (Reis, 1993: 15–20, *passim*).¹¹

The Muslim uprising occurred on a festive weekend in January, when Bahia celebrated Our Lord of the Good End (Nosso Senhor do Bonfim), the most popular Catholic devotion in town. In 1835, the date coincided with the Lailat al Qadr, the Muslim celebration that closes Ramadan. Revelry and revolt then joined forces. The rebellion was eventually defeated, but there followed a period of great tension in the province, in which every public festival facilitating a concentration of blacks became a reason for alarm. Collective fear contributed to the circulation of usually unfounded rumours. At the beginning of February, news spread that slaves from several engenhos in Itaparica Island and Cachoeira were planning a revolt for Carnival; Salvador's fishermen's festival, on 2 February, was cancelled by the chief of police as a result (Reis, 1993: 189–190).

In 1835, any batuque was largely interpreted as an attempt against slavery. A Cachoeira justice of the peace was warned of slave unrest in Iguape, the heart of sugar agriculture. A police investigation, however, revealed that all that happened was 'the divertissement of black drumming, a divertissement which is said to take place every Saturday' in one of the plantations.¹² This plantation owner simply followed the same principle as the Santo Amaro masters accused of leniency by Captain Gomes in 1808. Just as he allowed his slaves to beat the drum and dance according to local custom, many whites and mestizos hoped that life would return to normality, seeing the January Nagô uprising as just one more rebellion like many before it. But other Bahians gave in to their fears.

A segment of Bahia's press reflected and strengthened those fears by promoting the idea that all black celebration meant revolutionary revelry. The newspaper *Correio Mercantil* played this role perfectly. In 1838, for instance, it published a long article about a 'noisy batuque' on the outskirts of Salvador that had brought 'fright and terror to numerous families in the neighbourhood'. The newspaper had certainly received complaints from residents whose sleep had been disrupted by the sound of drums and who pictured images of Africans warming up for war. The *Correio* proceeded to say that it had already exposed similar happenings in the same district and added that numerous runaway slaves could also be found there. Batuque and revolt were associated in the reporter's mind.¹³ This batuque, however, drew not only Africans. The newspaper reported the presence of 'people of diverse qualities'. This social mixture, though not as threatening as an African rebellion, frightened those who preached the

11 Elsewhere, I have estimated that 77 per cent of the slaves-for-hire in Salvador in the mid-1850s were Yoruba or Nagô (Reis, 1997b: 391). Using different sources, Oliveira (1992: 107, 109) estimates a figure of 79 per cent of the slaves in and around Salvador during the second half of the nineteenth century.

12 Juiz de Paz do 1º Distrito de Cachoeira to the Presidente da Província, 9 February 1835, APEBa, *Juízes. Cachoeira, 1834–1837*, maço 2272. The fear that Muslim rebels could be emulated outside of Bahia led to a severe slave control in other parts of Brazil, above all in Rio de Janeiro. See Reis (1993: 29–30), Gomes (1995: 259) and Soares (1998: 89 ff., 92, 102, 277, 295 ff., etc.). The fear of popular rebellions has already been studied in other historical contexts: see Delumeau (1989, chapters 4 and 5). For convergence between revelry and revolt in France, see Bercé (1976) and Le Roy Ladurie (1979).

13 *Correio Mercantil* (4 July 1838).

elimination of the batuque as part of the plan to civilise the province the European way. The newspaper gives the impression that Africans had the upper hand, civilising Bahia their way.

The following month, the *Correio* again denounced lavish 'African revelry' in the same district as well as other suburbs of the city; moreover, 'smaller batuques' occurred in celebration of the departure from Salvador of a military battalion brought in to fight the liberal rebellion that had engulfed the city from early November 1837 to early March 1838. The liberal movement had gained the support of several sectors of the black population, and its defeat was followed by a bloodbath promoted by the legal forces, including the departing battalion.¹⁴ According to the newspaper, 'to show how relieved the Muslims were, they all sang, or rather howled in groups'.¹⁵ By assimilating Africans to Muslims and the latter to beasts, the reporter increased his readers' fear. A week later, the *Correio* returned to batuques and Muslims.¹⁶ The subject, however, would come to a head during the celebrations for the young Emperor D. Pedro II's coronation in 1841. Once again, a relatively prosaic incident brought 'fright to the peaceful inhabitants of this city'. It seems that the arrest of an African slave carrying papers written in Arabic provoked rumours that the Muslims were attempting a reprise of the 1835 rebellion. The newsmen guided the eyes, ears and minds of their readers to their interpretation of batuques:

Horrifying scenes are witnessed in this city on Sundays and Holy Days, and especially during the eight days of coronation celebrations. Let us speak clearly: in view of the tumultuous and numerous African batuques to be seen all around everyday by the peaceful resident, making him hurry in terror to reach his house, who would not justify, to a certain degree, the sudden terror that takes over a whole population . . . when it bears in mind the audacity with which the barracks were taken by surprise in 1835, etc, etc, etc?¹⁷

The 'etc, etc, etc' invited readers to fill their minds with memories of 1835. Of course, their minds were already crowded, the newspaper maintained, with thoughts of the more recent terrifying batuques.

The *Correio* took advantage of this episode for a vehement defence of the elimination of batuques in Bahia. Claiming to be the voice of public opinion, particularly of those who attended the coronation celebrations, the reporter swore that blacks had stolen the scene: 'multiple batuques . . . in every plaza and public places, all day and sometimes until late in the evening, struck the poor eyes and ears of those who tried to enjoy the beautiful celebrations'. And he imagined what a foreign tourist, a European

14 For the Sabinada movement, see Souza (1987) and Kraay (1992). The English traveller Gardner (1846: 78) wrote that the Sabinada began just after he left Salvador and that it was led by some whites but 'supported by the majority of the black population'.

15 *Correio Mercantil* (2 August 1838).

16 *Correio Mercantil* (7 August 1838).

17 *Correio Mercantil* (30 September 1841). In previous issues, the *Correio* enthusiastically described and commented on the official ceremonies surrounding the Emperor's coronation.

of course, would think in the face of such music and dance: 'a foreigner arriving in the city would believe he had before him an African village, so numerous and noisy were those batuques!' Had the author of these words been reading contemporary European travellers' accounts, he would have known that, with or without batuques, they already considered Salvador a kind of African village due to the overwhelming presence of blacks in the streets (Augel, 1980: 201–207). To change this impression, the *Correio's* publisher should know, Salvador would have had to hide, expel or exterminate the vast majority of its inhabitants, and in so doing cease to function. With 34 per cent of its population born in Africa and another 40 per cent entirely or partially descendants of Africans, the city was predominantly African. But the newspaper's battle was not demographic or economic; it was cultural.

It was a fact – a journalistic fact at least – that the Africans had gained cultural hegemony of the 1841 celebrations, and that constituted a problem. Bahian whites who converged on a particular neighbourhood to watch the fireworks were 'taken by terror' with the noise made by almost 500 blacks occupying that part of town. There was the terror produced by the threat of a new slave revolt, and there was fear of the cultural Africanisation of the province. The African appropriation of the festive space meant they had won a battle in a symbolic war. But the politics of symbols would not distract the *Correio* from a possibly more serious political outcome, and it concluded its coverage of the episode warning against 'the unfortunate results that emerge from these noisy and turbulent meetings, where the brutal fanaticism of this sect [Islam], exalted by rum, conceives ideas of extermination and cannibalism'.¹⁸ Fanatics, exterminators, cannibals, as well as dancers and drunkards – *voilà* the profile of Muslims as depicted by the *Correio*. We see an echo of descriptions of the Santo Amaro slaves in now distant 1808. But the 1835 Muslims, according to numerous contemporary witnesses, had been tuned to a more austere Islam, even though they did not seem to have reached the perfection recommended by Shaikh dan Fodio. There were reports that they promoted banquets but not batuques. There were reports that they had beaten the drums in 1835, but to make war not to revel in peace.¹⁹

Reports such as those printed in the *Correio* helped to create a plausible, if mostly fanciful, image of the batuque. Nevertheless, this journalistic discourse dealt in symbolic and ideological materials and was produced in a context that facilitated its reception. Africans had indeed proved, in 1835 and other occasions, that they could turn feast into revolt. The collective energy of their batuques, often enveloped in mystery, seemed to many people a warning that they were preparing to attack again.

But on the whole, the drums announced another kind of movement. Rather than a frontal attack on slave society, they communicated that the Africans and their descendants had not accepted being mentally enslaved. To achieve this goal, blacks did not have to continuously occupy their minds with the image of whites ready to conquer their souls, having already enslaved their bodies. Getting together to celebrate African values and to think about themselves was a form of liberation. Such an Africa collectively reinvented in Bahia, which

18 *Correio Mercantil* (30 September 1841).

19 See Reis (1993, especially part II). All religions have a centre and a periphery. I am talking about the centre or the most orthodox Muslims in 1835.

did not surrender culturally, was just as threatening as the Africa that rebelled socially. For those who thought the way the *Correio's* editors did, African revelry represented a threat to an imagined European civilisation in the tropics as well as to the slave system.

However, not everyone in power and among the common white and mestizo folks agreed with the newspaper. We have already seen that people with different social backgrounds joined or watched the batuques reported by the *Correio*. Besides, the lavish black celebrations for the Emperor did not bother the police or political authorities of Bahia, who allowed them to happen and may have even encouraged them. They believed it was safe to see the members of society's lowest echelon celebrate so enthusiastically in honour of its highest political figure and chief symbol of stability.

In the 1850s, self-appointed, civilised Bahians would once more vigorously fight what they considered to be barbarous African customs such as the beating of drums in the streets of Salvador. With the end of the Atlantic slave trade in 1850, their hopes increased that an end to the batuques was also near, now that African culture in Bahia could no longer be renewed with the help of imported slaves.

Although batuques took place under many different circumstances and disguises, it was during Catholic religious festivals that they occurred most insistently. The festival of Our Lord of Bonfim, the same celebration that had served as cover for the Muslim conspiracy in 1835, was one of the most popular in town. For this reason, local authorities paid close attention to it. In 1855, for instance, twenty drums were confiscated in batuques near the Bonfim church.²⁰ A year later, the Englishman James Wetherell wrote in his diary:

The 'festas' at this church were formerly scenes of the wildest debauchery. Upwards of 20,000 blacks would be assembled and scattered over the hill, upon which the church is situated: hundreds would be dancing their national dances whilst thousands looked on, and these orgies would be incessantly continued. The dancers in public have been prohibited for some years, but immense crowds, dressed in the height of negro fashion, go there during the three Sundays in January when the feast takes place. Dances are held in the houses, and even out doors, spite of the prohibition, and all kinds of amusement in booths, which are erected round and near the church (Wetherell, 1960: 122).

In mid-century, the siege of African revelry seemed to intensify, and so did black resistance. Although it is difficult to measure, the batuques may have been expanding, dispersed here to reappear there, often under different forms such as indoor dance and drumming. This apparent paradox is in part explained by the attitudes of those with power to repress the batuques. The whites continued to be divided between permission and prohibition. A debate on the theme reached Bahia's Provincial Assembly in 1855.

The debate is surprising because it was about the right to beat and dance to the drum, something that seemed to have long been already prohibited, at least on the legal level. The opportunity for the debate was a Municipal Ordinance from the town of Maragogipe,

20 *Jornal da Bahia* (17 March 1855: 2 and 19 March 1855: 1).

which needed to receive the approval of the Assembly in order to be enforced. The ordinance prohibited 'bataques and shouts' in 'public houses'. This is rather different to street drumming, which was generally forbidden even if it may have been sometimes tolerated, depending on the mood or the character of the local police authority. The law, after all, often represented an instrument of negotiation more than one of punishment.²¹

The 1855 debate included a discussion on the meaning of batuque. A member of the Conservative Party and a district police officer (delegado), Antonio Luiz Affonso de Carvalho, favoured the ordinance. He defined bataques as people coming together to dance 'the most barbarian and immoral dances, with non-rhythmic and loud voices...the most complete orgy'; it was also a stage for drunkenness, fights and crimes. Bataques were no 'innocent amusement', he argued. He praised the Bonfim *delegado* for having recently dispersed and arrested 'a great number of black Africans...who were giving themselves up to immoral dances in the middle of the most disturbing clamour'. Note his emphasis on the sensual aspect of the bataques, a typical white man's fear of supposedly exaggerated African sexuality.

Another Conservative representative, José Pires de Carvalho e Albuquerque – from the same family as the Santo Amaro Captain-Major of 1808 – added an important economic angle: 'Those who gather in bataques are on the whole slaves who run away from their masters' houses leaving them without workers'. This perspective is absent from the *Correio* campaign against bataques and is only hinted at in the reports regarding the 1808 episode in Santo Amaro. The newspaper, remember, fought the 'barbarism' of bataques – just as these politicians did – and warned about their role in bolstering slave resistance – a theme the assemblymen would not touch now. It makes sense: the *Correio* published its theses between the late 1830s and the early 1840s, when Muslim ghosts still haunted the province. By the time that the Assembly discussed *bataques* in 1855, twenty years had passed without any serious slave uprisings. The problem now was how to subdue African customs, considered barbarous and immoral, and to prevent them from disturbing the business of slavery. The concern here lay in the homeopathic resistance represented by slave flights, roving and lack of decorum, not in the surgical resistance represented by violent insurrection.

Assemblymen opposing the anti-batuque ordinance chose a strategy of defending the freedom to party indoors. The most articulate in the debate was the medical doctor, journalist and liberal politician João José Barbosa de Oliveira. He did not defend the disorderly bataques or the runaway slaves identified by his conservative colleagues. He simply played by the liberal book, maintaining that it was an intolerable despotism to legislate over what took place in private and behind closed doors. He chose to ignore the argument made by his opponents that the ordinance dealt with bataques in 'public houses'. 'The municipal government', he argued, 'cannot enter other people's houses'. As for the batuque, he equated it to any other kind of music and dance, the latter consisting in 'the cadence of more or less harmonious steps', and the former in 'the sound of instruments and voices which can be loud or not'. 'It's a noisy singing', intervened José Pires in astonishment. João Barbosa calmly proposed the surprising thesis that batuque singing could always be 'in a submissive voice' and its drums 'softly

21 The debate is published in the *Jornal da Bahia* (17 March 1855 and 19 March 1855).

played' to result in a 'batuque without shouting'. In sum, batuque was one thing and noise the other.

He went on to define dance. Who, he asked, could forbid someone to dance 'behind closed doors', the way he or she wished? There was no way of repressing that kind of dance because there was no way to enter the human heart and say: 'I hereby extinguish this source of passion'. Yes, the consequences of passion should be controlled, should they offend a third party, but not the passion itself. Barbosa explained that the law should reconcile 'civil liberty with social right'. He refused to accept that the state be allowed to control so completely the actions of individuals. He even accused the conservatives of being Communists, for their drive 'to reduce all individuals to the level of pupils . . . to eliminate natural rights . . . to establish Communism and deliver to the State the tutelage of all individual actions'. To be sure, Barbosa did not call for any absolute freedom to drum and dance the African way, but he was not against the batuque itself. He believed that the police edicts and the criminal code were enough to control the excesses that the municipal ordinance sought to punish. And in the end, despite even the opposition of Bahia's Archbishop (and assemblyman) Don Romualdo Seixas, he won the day.

Politicians such as João Barbosa belonged to an ideological lineage with a long history in Bahia, although it flexibly took on different strategies and arguments according to circumstance. In the period of the slave revolts, those who followed this line maintained that batuques appeased potential rebels; when the slave quarters quieted down, they went so far as to defend batuques as a civil right. In the meantime, those who followed a harder line mixed concern with social order with moral and religious repugnance, though their rigidity was belied by their changing emphasis. Around the 1835 rebellion, the repression of African drumming and dance was depicted as a fight between the peaceful civilisation of the white man and the warlike barbarism of the Muslims. In the 1850s, the attack on moral barbarism still figured in the discourse of intolerance, but the concern with black rebelliousness was replaced by a focus on the day-to-day resistance, temporary flights and vagrancy encouraged by African revelry.

In the shadow of the rulers' doubts, black revelry continued to evolve. In the second half of the century, it would expand to include the participation of non-African people and symbols. But for many – whites, blacks and mulattos – the batuque and later the samba would not lose the marks of their African moulds. And the batuque's Africanity was certainly not represented by a 'submissive voice' or instruments 'softly played' as suggested by liberal politician João Barbosa. The Africans civilised Bahia in their own way, with their soulful sound. Usually quiet, cultural slave resistance in this case was not so silent.

References

- Abreu, M. (1999) *O império do divino: festas religiosas e cultura popular no Rio de Janeiro 1830–1900*. Nova Fronteira: Rio de Janeiro.
- Antonil, A. J. (1982) *Cultura e opulência do Brasil*. Itatiaia: Belo Horizonte.

- Augel, M. P. (1980) *Visitantes estrangeiros na Bahia oitocentista*. Cultrix: São Paulo.
- Barrickman, B. J. (1991) *The slave economy of nineteenth-century Bahia: export agriculture and local markets in the Recôncavo*. PhD dissertation, University of Illinois, Champaign-Urbana, IL.
- Bercé, Y.-M. (1976) *Fête et révolte: des mentalités populaires du XVe Au XVIIIe siècles*. Hachette: Paris.
- Delumeau, J. (1989) *História do medo no Ocidente*. Companhia das Letras: São Paulo.
- Eltis, D. (1987) The nineteenth-century transatlantic slave trade: an annual time series of imports into the Americas broken down by region. *Hispanic American Historical Review* 67(1): 109–138.
- Fúdi 'Uthmán Ibn (Usuman dan Fodio) (1978) *Bayán Al-Hijra 'Ala 'L-'Ibad (The Exposition of the Obligation of Emigration upon the Servants of God)* (ed. and trans. F. H. El Masri). Khartoum University Press: Khartoum; Oxford University Press: New York.
- Gardner, G. (1846) *Travels in the interior of Brazil... 1836–1841*. Reeve Brothers: London.
- Gomes, F. dos Santos (1995) *Histórias de quilombolas: mocambos e comunidades de senzalas no Rio de Janeiro – século XIX*. Arquivo Nacional: Rio de Janeiro.
- Kraay, H. (1992) 'As terrifying as unexpected': The Bahian Sabinada, 1837–1838. *Hispanic American Historical Review* 72: 501–527.
- Legislação da Bahia sobre o negro: 1835–1888* (1996) Fundação Cultural do Estado da Bahia/Diretoria de Bibliotecas Públicas: Salvador.
- Le Roy Ladurie, E. (1979) *Le carnaval de romans: de la chandeleur au mercredi des cendres, 1579–1580*. Gallimard: Paris.
- Oliveira, M. I. C. de (1992) *Retrouver une identité: jeux sociaux des Africains de Bahia (vers 1750–1890)*. PhD dissertation, Université de Paris-Sorbonne, Paris.
- Reis, J. J. (1989) Quilombos e revoltas escravas no Brasil. *Revista USP* 28: 14–39.
- Reis, J. J. (1993) *Slave rebellion in Brazil: The Muslim uprising of 1835 in Bahia*. Johns Hopkins University Press: Baltimore.
- Reis, J. J. (1996) Escravos e coiteiros no quilombo do Oitizeiro: Bahia, 1806. In J. J. Reis and F. Gomes (eds), *Liberdade por um fio: história dos quilombos No Brasil*, pp. 332–362. Companhia das Letras: São Paulo.
- Reis, J. J. (1997a) Identidade e diversidade étnicas nas irmandades negras no tempo da escravidão. *Tempo* 2(3): 7–10.
- Reis, J. J. (1997b) 'The revolution of the Ganhadores': urban labour, ethnicity and the African strike of 1857 in Bahia, Brazil. *Journal of Latin American Studies* 29: 355–393.
- Repertório de fontes sobre a escravidão existentes no Arquivo Municipal de Salvador: as posturas (1631–1889)* (1988) Fundação Gregório de Mattos: Salvador.
- Soares, C. E. L. (1998) *A capoeira escrava no Rio de Janeiro, 1808–1850*. PhD dissertation, UNICAMP, Campinas.
- Souza, P. C. (1987) *A Sabinada: a revolta separatista da Bahia, 1837*. Brasiliense: São Paulo.
- Tinhorão, J. R. (1988) *História social da música popular brasileira*. Editora 34: São Paulo.
- Tinhorão, J. R. (1998) *Os sons dos negros no Brasil. Cantos, danças, folguedos: origens*. Art Editora: São Paulo.
- Vilhena, L. dos Santos (1969) *A Bahia no século XVIII* (two volumes). Itapuã: Salvador.
- Wetherell, J. (1960) *Stray notes from Bahia*. Webb and Hunt: Liverpool.