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Rafael de Bivar Marquese. *Feitores do corpo, missionários da mente: Senhores, letrados e o controle dos escravos nas Américas, 1660-1860*. São Paulo: Companhia das Letras, 2004. 479 pp. No Price Listed (paper), ISBN 978-85-359-0561-8.

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Slavery, Labor Management, and the History of Ideas in the Atlantic World

Our understanding of the historical experience of slavery in Brazil by now rests on a massive, and rapidly growing, body of scholarship, based on innovative uses of archival sources, manuscripts, and published texts, that encompasses detailed accounts of the transatlantic, regional, and local economies of slavery there, as well as vivid social and cultural histories of what the experiences of enslavement meant for Africans, born in Africa and Brazil, and for Brazilian society as a whole. As Brazilian historian Rafael de Bivar Marquese notes in introducing his incisive *Administração e escravidão*, however, less studied is the history of ideas within Brazilian slavery, regarded by some scholars, as Antonio Penalves Rocha suggests in his preface, as merely epiphenomenal. Marquese's aim, then, in both *Administração* and *Feitores do corpo, missionários da mente* is to integrate a history of ideas into the history of slavery in Brazil and, more specifically, to examine "the intellectual conventions utilized between the sixteenth and the nineteenth centuries to comprehend the management of Brazilian slavocratic rural properties" (*Administração*, p. 27). While *Administração* provides a survey of these conventions in Brazil, *Feitores* places Brazilian writings on slavery within a broader Atlantic context, illuminating not only comparative and contrasting experiences in the Caribbean and North America, but also the historical trans-imperial and

transnational transmissions of ideas about the problem of slave labor.

Although the use of enslaved Africans in plantation agriculture in Brazil began in the sixteenth century, as Marquese notes in *Administração*, before the nineteenth century those who profited from this enterprise—owners of rural properties and slaves, merchants, royal officials, and many missionaries—did not generate a corpus of writing about slave labor. Setting aside the few who wrote with lament about the merciless traffic in human beings across the Atlantic to work cultivating commodities that Europeans were discovering they did not want to live without, for the first two centuries of the slave trade and slavery in Brazil, there was no "systematic reflection" on slavery as a social and economic institution and no consideration of slaves as laborers who needed to be governed or administered as such (*Administração*, p. 49). Why not? It is, of course, difficult, if not impossible, to attribute motives for something that does not exist. According to Marquese, however, the absence of writing on slavery and slave labor can be understood with reference to the largely illiterate or semiliterate population of slave owners who neither could nor saw the need to create or consume writing about knowledge (how to run a plantation and deal with slaves) that they regarded as

being grounded in practice rather than theology or philosophy.

As Marquese also explains in the first chapter of *Administração*, when systematic writings on slave labor did appear they were concurrent with a period of intense slave rebellion and evinced a reformist concern with restoring and affirming social order. If the earlier absence of writing on slave labor then was symptomatic of an unchallenged status quo and if it was crisis that led to discursive intervention, it was still not slave owners who took up the pen. Rather, those who began to examine the implications of using African slaves as laborers on plantations were Jesuits, members of the most influential missionary order in Brazil (which also owned African slaves), not directly involved in the supervision of plantation labor themselves. In *Cultura e Opulência no Brasil* (1711), for example, André João Antonil (1649-1716) drew on classical authorities including Xenophon and the Roman agronomist Columela to argue that slaves should be regarded as members of the owner's household (*oikos*). The result, Marquese argues, was a conception of agricultural slave labor in Brazil that synthesized a "Biblical discourse" on morality and reciprocal obligations with visions of social order grounded in the authority of the owner as the head of the household. The plantation thus became the site of the patriarchal Christian family. Slaves were to obey; and owners were to provide slaves with adequate food and shelter, attend to spiritual needs, and, importantly, provide punishments, measured and justly defined, that forged submission and discipline. Thus, the relationship between masters and slaves could be reformed in a way that would mitigate the motivation for, and the practical possibility of, rebellion.

Recognition of the need to carefully define an economy of violence was also a feature of Antonil's Aristotelian vision of the plantation as an organism in which the owner was the head; the slaves were the feet and hands; and the *feitores* (foremen), often reviled for their cruelty and volatility, were the arms. Giving too much power to the feitor, allowing him to punish severely minor instances of insubordination, or, conversely, ignoring his failure to adequately discipline idleness or defiance all compromised the viability of the plantation as a living body. Challenging previous readings of Antonil, Marquese argues that throughout the eighteenth century this understanding of the "administration" of enslaved labor as preserving social order was not related to, or accompanied by, concerns with profits or the profitability of slave labor per se. In the case of sugar plantations, owners regarded their profit margins to be more directly

linked to the quality of the cane and to the skill of the technicians employed in the refinement process.

At the turn of the nineteenth century, such an understanding of slaves as laborers within the regime of the owner's household (*governo da casa*) was displaced by a new wave of writings on the Portuguese imperial economy, studies of regional economies, and theoretical engagement with political economy by members of the *Academia Real das Ciências* in Lisbon. In chapter 2 of *Administração*, Marquese examines how Portuguese and Brazilian-born *letrados* (educated elites), including members of the clergy, dedicated both to scientific analysis of the empire's predicaments and service in imperial bureaucracy, moved beyond reliance on authors of antiquity to read, critically assess, and translate works written in and about other contemporary slave-based colonies, especially those in the French Caribbean. Frei Mariano Veloso's (1741-1811) monumental *Fazendeiro do Brasil*, eleven volumes published between 1798 and 1806, included translations of the *Art de Raffiner le Sucre* (1764) by Henri-Louis Duhamel de Monceau and *The Coffee Planter of Saint-Domingo* by P. J. Labourie, published first in English in 1798. Of paramount interest to Luso-Brazilian writers were the technical aspects of cultivation and refinement (in the case of sugar) that they believed could yield more productivity and profitability if implemented with respect for local circumstances. The administration of slave labor, in turn, taken up systematically in writings on Saint Domingue was of less interest, at least to Veloso, who expurgated from translations discussions of the nature of the slave labor force. Yet, according to Marquese, turn-of-the-century writing did begin to identify the administration of slave labor as an integral part of the administration of rural estates, potentially subject to scientific analysis outside exclusively moral and religious frameworks. The *letrados* openly admired Jesuit prescriptions for discipline but also shed a certain Christian idealism about mutual obligation in favor of pragmatic understandings of the demands of an economy based on slave labor. Political economists remained more concerned with the plantation owner as an economic agent within the marketplace than with how he treated his slaves, and royal government was not interested in any concerted intervention in the relationship between owners and slaves. Yet the Haitian Revolution, as a crisis and an opportunity for Brazilian planters, dramatically underscored the importance of social control as labor management and as a basis of profitability (i.e., more clearly defined tasks and incentives); a lack of control meant the end of slave labor altogether.

In the middle of the nineteenth century, Marquese shows in the third and final chapter of *Administração*, turn-of-the-century political economic discourse provided a foundation for thinking about the administration of slave labor that came into its own in Brazil with the publication of manuals for agricultural enterprises, some of which were written by owners of land and of slaves and enjoyed a much larger circulation than the writings of the Jesuits a century earlier. (Indeed, Antonil's text had been suppressed because the Crown feared it disclosed too much about the Brazilian economy to Portugal's imperial rivals.) Once again, Marquese calls attention to the relationship between these texts and their context. Rebellions in Brazil in the 1830s revealed the need for more effective social control even as plantation and mill owners faced competition from other places (Cuban sugar and European beet sugar) and what appeared to be the coming end of the transatlantic slave trade. Consequently, although an illegal trade continued, owners began to consider technical innovations that would save labor as well as strategies for labor management including task systems and quotas that would maximize production. As Marquese observes, Brazilian reform-minded owners and writers had been attentive to the need for variations in discipline within Brazil's multifaceted export economy. Before 1830, coffee planters had not embraced the use of incentives that seemed to encourage enslaved laborers to harvest beans too early. By the middle of the century, however, writings on the administration of agricultural properties offered a range of labor saving strategies especially in post-harvest technologies. The army was embraced as a model for labor force discipline. The relationship between owners and slaves, which had preoccupied the Jesuits, remained a matter of concern but was now regarded as part of a larger strategy for maintaining a labor force, no longer guaranteed by the slave trade, that included attempts to decrease mortality (diet and hygiene) and increase its potential for reproduction (health and recognition of slave families). Religion, which once defined the moral burdens of the relationship between owners and slaves, was now conceived as a tool that, together with concessions for the social and cultural lives of slaves, would "break" the momentum of resistance by teaching "resignation" (*Administração*, p. 232). Thus, while from the sixteenth to the nineteenth centuries, writing on slave labor in Brazil became more detailed and systematic, and the relationship between ideas and practices more manifest, with the administration of labor identified as the basis for profit, there was also, Marquese concludes, significant continuity: "the question of the administration of labor was al-

ways linked to the problem of slave resistance" (*Administração*, p. 248).

In *Feitores*, Marquese's second book, the trajectory of thinking and writing about Brazilian slave labor analyzed in *Administração* is integrated into a broader Atlantic history of ideas. Demonstrating an enviable erudition, Marquese compares North American, Caribbean, and Brazilian experiences and identifies and traces common intellectual ground among elites concerned with coming to terms with changing contexts for slave labor. Elites with different political allegiances and varying theoretical and cultural dispositions shared pragmatic concerns: how to ensure that plantations were lucrative; and, more specifically, how to administer enslaved labor (use it efficiently and avoid its depletion) and, as noted above in the case of Brazil, to ensure that as a force it remained compliant.

In the first part of *Feitores*, Marquese examines the "Christian Theory of the Governance of Slaves" in Brazil, North America, and the Caribbean. He identifies in North America and the Caribbean intellectual efforts, similar to those in Brazil, to make seigniorial practice consistent with ideals of charity and brotherhood articulated by, among others, the Dominican Jean-Baptiste Du Tertre in his *Histoire générale des Antilles* (1654). Christian theory also encompassed significant differences, however, including conflicting claims about the possibility and consequences of conversion. Du Tertre himself noted divergent understandings of how owners should assume responsibility for their slaves' well being, rejecting the "Brazilian way" of leaving slaves to provide for their own nutrition by cultivating gardens. Yet, with its confidence in religion's disciplinary potential and its respect for an exclusive authority of owners over their slaves, what Marquese refers to as the principal of "domestic sovereignty," Christian theory defined understandings of slave labor in societies throughout the New World. The one exception to the wholly religious discourse on slave labor, the French *Code Noir* (1685), may have sought to extend royal authority to the social control of slaves outside the plantation, Marquese notes, but it also affirmed Catholic prescriptions for social control and left intact the slave owners' prerogative to define the nature of slave labor and discipline within the plantation. Indeed, in all the contexts Marquese considers, there was both a considerable offering of advice about the relationship between masters and slaves and a general reluctance to breach "domestic sovereignty."

For the French, Spanish, and Anglo Atlantics, as for the Luso-Brazilians, the eighteenth century, examined in

the second part of *Feitores*, was then a turning point when “An Enlightened Theory of the Administration of Slaves” displaced a Christian one. Here, Marquese examines, among others, the work of the clergyman Jean-Baptiste Labat, who administered a Dominican plantation in Martinique. In *Nouveau voyage aux isles de l’Amerique* (1722), Labat linked Christian principles to a defense of the material interests of slave owners, a defense that would be developed by other writers in terms of what Marquese describes as the “binomial” of “humanity and interest” in which the defense of better treatment for slaves was absorbed by a defense of slavery as a defense of owners’ material interests that was not dependent on an interpretation of Christian morality (*Feitores*, p. 92).

The end of the eighteenth century and the emergence of the “national state” produced both convergent and divergent ways of thinking about slavery and slave labor across the Americas. The French, earlier regarded by the British as more successful administrators of slave labor, were faced with a revolution in Haiti that appeared to expose both the limits of social control on plantations and the need for more of it. Those now articulating a theory of the administration of enslaved labor on plantations also had to acknowledge the ramifications of abolitionism in politics and culture. In the final section of *Feitores*, Marquese examines the ways in which understandings of the relationship between owners and slaves and of the administration of plantation slave labor responded to these changing international political-cultural contexts. According to Marquese, in Cuba, a relatively large white population meant that owners were less fearful of an uprising of slaves than of intervention from Great Britain against the trade. Cuban owners also benefited from the fact that the cost of slaves remained relatively low in the first half of the nineteenth century. Nevertheless, faced with an increasingly competitive sugar market, owners invested in refinement technologies that would maximize their yields. Having rebuffed Spanish royal government’s reformist efforts to mitigate deprivations and abuses on plantations in the eighteenth century, in the 1820s owners turned to new forms of housing—the *barracón de patio*—that, as a number of scholars have contended, allowed for the incarceration of slaves when they were not working. According to Marquese, this development was symptomatic of owners’ view of their enslaved laborers as simply “a work force, and not as a group dependent” on their social and cultural guidance (*Feitores*, p. 329).

In contrast to their Cuban counterparts, plantation owners in both Brazil and the United States embraced

disciplinary regimes as expressions of their own paternalistic duties. Faced with the end of the transatlantic slave trade and still fearful of rebellion, Brazilian owners sought to encourage the formation and maintenance of slave families as a way to ensure the reproduction of a labor force that could no longer be imported and as a way to forge social order. Prescribing religious instruction, allowances for housing, clothing, and food production, Marquese argues, elites imagined that owners could cultivate a “peasant ethic” that would mitigate motives for rebellion (*Feitores*, p. 92). Indeed, Marquese argues, as in the southern United States, “civilizing” enslaved Africans came to be regarded by many as one of the foundations for forging and preserving postcolonial national order. According to Marquese, this paternalism also defined the encounters of slavery, liberalism, and modernity. As paternalism both responded to and reinforced perceptions of African difference that implied a permanent dependence, slaves could be kept on the margins of new regimes defined by autonomy and citizenship without jeopardizing liberal projects for national sovereignty and representative government, even as the institution of slavery provided the foundation for national or regional prosperity.

In the discussion of Brazil and North America in the concluding chapters of *Feitores*, Marquese also provides the most developed discussions of the relationship between the texts he has undertaken to study and the contexts in which they were written and read. In nineteenth-century Brazil, he explains, in contrast to the eighteenth century, agricultural manuals were part of debates about slavery and the institutions’ features in the future as slave owning elites constructed a consensus on the end of the slave trade. In the United States, in turn, a periodical press dedicated to covering the rural economy was also part of a broader political culture in which understandings of national identity took shape. Commenting on the work of James Oakes, among others, Marquese argues that as the slave labor economy expanded and the “class of slave owners” became potentially less cohesive, newspapers provided “specific means of expression to standardize their behavior” (*Feitores*, p. 373). Examining letters written by slave owners in response to articles on the administration of slave labor, and weighing in on the relationship between “ideals and administrative practice,” Marquese concludes that there was a “dialectic interaction between prescriptive administrative ideals and concrete practices on plantations” (*Feitores*, pp. 373-374).

This conclusion is consistent with the broader conceptual framework for *Feitores* and Marquese’s under-

standing of the term “theory” as “a set of ideas meant to explain and guide practice.” “There is no dichotomy between theory and practice,” he writes, “theories about the administration of slaves are forms of knowledge concerned with action; they are born out of past management practices, re-elaborated in agreement with assembled mental tools and seek to inform future administrative practices” (*Feitores*, p. 15). That it is neither possible nor illuminating to insist on rigid distinctions between ideas and practices is a point taken. Yet, using the term “theory” to describe writings on slave labor may also imply a coherence that is not always in evidence or that collapses under the weight of two of the most pervasive experiences of the enslaved and their owners: violence and fear. Paternalism may be capacious and subjective enough to encompass a range of potentially contradictory ideas and practices, but as expressed in discourse historically it also tended to obscure rather than recognize the foundations and consequences of violence and fear, often yielding utopian claims about causes and effects. Labat, for example, claimed that owners who refrained from putting to work recently acquired slaves would be rewarded with slaves’ affection. When fear and violence were embraced as the foundation of ensuring order and profit, as was the case with the Brazilian agricultural manual by Carlos Augusto Taunay, a recent edition of which has been edited by Marquese, the results were abject. “Slavery,” Taunay observed, was “a contract between violence and submission (*não-resistência*) ... [that] attacks equally the laws of humanity and religion and peoples who have admitted it into their [social]

organization have paid dearly for this violation of natural law.”[1] And yet, he convinced himself, the perceived inferiority of Africans and the belief that the present cannot be held culpable for the errors of the past made the institution tolerable; and so he proceeded to offer a guide to managing enslaved laborers.

Administração e escravidão and *Feitores do corpo* are substantial, often dense, yet always engaging books that provide innovative inquiries into our understandings of slavery in the Atlantic World. For scholars of Brazilian slavery, they clarify the complexities of an intellectual culture defined by slavery and its interactions with social and economic forces, while *Feitores* also situates Brazil within an Atlantic experience with the slave trade and slave labor in agricultural enterprise. Scholars of North America and the Caribbean can assess Marquese’s reading of primary sources and his engagement with the last thirty years of scholarship on slavery in these places. Together, these books also illuminate an Atlantic world of owners, educated elites, clergy, and government officials looking to each other across regions and hemispheres, and across time, both competing with each other and sharing knowledge about how to turn the misery and deprivation of Africans and their descendants in the New World into fortunes for themselves, their rulers, their nations.

Note

[1]. C. A. [Carlos Augusto] Taunay, *Manual do Agricultor Brasileiro*, ed. Rafael de Bivar Marquese (São Paulo: Companhia das Letras, 2001), 50.

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