Styles of Afro-Brazilian political activism during the campaign for the abolition of slavery in Brazil: Rebouças, Patrocínio, Gama[1]

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I will tell three stories. André was an urban aristocrat; Luiz, a freeborn who became a slave; and José, a plantation boy. Their dissimilar fates had in common a shared skin color and, later, gave them a common cause: the abolitionist movement.

Their differing but convergent trajectories allow us to discuss an assumption of the bibliography on the Brazilian abolitionist movement, that blacks and mulattos who were engaged in the abolitionist movement formed a homogeneous social group. The stories of André, Luiz and José contradict that thesis, pointing to the complex nature of the social stratification of the Empire's aristocratic society that produced differences in lifestyle as well as different styles of activism among black abolitionists.

1. Origins

1.1 The engineer of multiple dikes

André was the son of a statesman, deputy and advisor of the Empire as well as the owner of a well-regarded law practice. The family's advantageous social position, with easy access to both political parties and to the Imperial family, was complemented, as was the style of the period, by the ownership and full use of an allotment of domestic slaves.

Offspring of the social elite, André Pinto Rebouças received a degree in engineering from the Escola Central and augmented his studies following graduation with the traditional Grand Tour of Europe. He lived in Paris, without missing, however, the legendary parties of the Brazilian Chancellor, Baron of Penedo, in London.

He returned an entrepreneur. He arranged employment and opportunities, managing his address book like an expert lobbyist. In this way, he arrived at the position of fortification inspector, travelling from one end of Brazil to the other, drawing, building projects. Dom Pedro II decorated him for his experience with "multiple dikes." He offered his services to General Osório in the War with Paraguay. Later, as a gas company inspector

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and supervisor of Customs building projects, with a high salary, he rose to a position from which he doled out favors. He would soon rise to the position of Professor at the prestigious Polytechnic School. In the late 1860s, Rebouças had full pockets and easy access to political parties and social prestige, confirmed by his frequent invitations to the salon of Count D'Eu.

It was 1867. One of his subordinates asked him for the freedom of a slave working on projects under his supervision: "a letter from Engineer C. Neate, requests that I undertake the emancipation of the worker Chico, the senior employee of the hydraulic projects" (Rebouças Diaries, 10 February 1867). The episode led Rebouças to attack the subject by becoming involved in politics. Imbued with civic spirit, he not only liberated the plumber Chico but also included freeing the slaves in the progressive rhetoric with which he padded his projects as a modernizing businessman, considering a "Tax law on slavery," whose collection should be employed in the emancipation of slaves (Rebouças' Diaries, 28 July 1867).

He saw himself accused, however, of moving in the opposite direction. In 1868, during a lecture he was giving at the Central School, in the presence of the Emperor, he was tagged with the "the label of slaveholder." The Rebouças family did indeed have slaves at home.

André then freed "our slave (*cria*) Guilhermina" (although it was only on June 24, 1870 that he would free his three remaining slaves), as a way of honoring the answer he gave to his accuser:

"I am an abolitionist at heart (…) and I hope to God not to die without giving to my Country the most enthusiastic proof of my dedication to the Sainted Cause of Emancipation." (Rebouças' Diary, 15 June 1868) Over the next two decades Rebouças did provide ample proof.

1.2 Luiza's son

The boy was named Luiz because he was the son of Luiza, a free African, a fruit and vegetable vender and a rebel from the Malê revolt, who left her son behind with his father, a *fidalgo*, who raised him until gaming debts proved stronger than his paternal instincts (Menucci, 1938:20). At the age of 10, Luiz departed Salvador free and landed in Rio de Janeiro a slave.

From there he was taken to Campinas, then on to São Paulo, where he learned several domestic tasks and trades until he developed a friendship with a law student who taught him to read and write and instructed him in politics and the law. He brandished the law when at the age of 18 he confronted his owner: he had been born free and declared himself to be so (Luiz Gama Letter to Lúcio de Mendonça, 7/25/1880). He then enlisted in the army where he rose to the rank of corporal, became a copy editor and then clerk to the secretary of the police. He was regularly fired for political agitation (Menucci, 1938:48ss).

He held a string of jobs obtained through favors and protection, principally from the Conselheiro Francisco Furtado de Mendonça, leader of the Liberal Party in São Paulo

(Menucci, 1938:55). These positions led him to journalism where he wrote satirical verse attacking customs and institutions.

With his inclination for partying, Luiz would never belong to salons, like Rebouças. Despite his rise into São Paulo political circles he never acquired courtly manners. The *parvenus*, how Bourdieu call them, depend on a full assimilation of style of life from the upper social strata to complete their social ascension. Gama failed in this test. He rained "a hailstorm of an old sergeant's crass jokes," "no-holds barred jokes" (Pompéia, 1882: 207-8; 210); he was ironic to the point of rudeness. Hence the politeness did not cover his skin color, as happened to Rebouças.

Neither the educational socialization canceled it. His education by the law student sparked his interest in the world of the law and the courts. And because his social ascension promised to be apparently limitless, Luiz Gama harbored the dream of sitting under the legal arches. He was, however, never able to enter the Law School. This incompleteness of his social ascension path frustrated his possibility of being "one of them". That's when he became a *rábula*, a self-taught attorney, more knowledgeable than those with degrees, but without their social seal of approval. Unable to ascend within the Empire's structure, Gama set about to challenge it.

His anticlericalism and antimonarchism found a home in the *Diabo Coxo* (1864-5), then in *Cabrião* (1866-7), newspapers instigated by the Liberal Radicals devoted to spreading Republican ideals. He was later a typesetting apprentice at *O Ipiranga*, owned by the avowed Republicans Ferreira de Menezes and Salvador de Mendonça. Thus he joined the circle of those wishing to reform the Empire from top to bottom. By the late 1870s, he had adopted the slogan "neither kings nor slaves". (Ferreira, 2001: 351-2).

1.3 José Who?

José do Patrocínio was born of the relationship between a free black fruit vender and the church vicar in the parish of Campos (Rio de Janeiro) who denied him a surname, but raised him within the parsonage. Thus José was sort of a plantation boy on the Lagoa de Cima Ranch. Everything was normal until he became an adolescent when he reacted to his illegitimacy by slapping one of his father's lovers (Senna, 1909:300). After this, Patrocínio was sent to the Imperial capital of Rio de Janeiro in 1868. At first, he had an allowance and the protection of the vicar's friends. The money soon disappeared, but a series of favors allowed him to live rent-free, to arrange an apprenticeship at a pharmacy and to enter Medical School (Patrocínio, GT, 5/29/1884).

Surviving lean times through the cultivation of friendship with good families, José Carlos do Patrocínio wove an elaborate social support system. On the one hand, he set himself up as a well-known bohemian, pontificating among musicians, theater owners, impoverished versifiers and actresses of no consequence. On the other, he allied himself with the liberal political circle, finding employment as a copyeditor for the party newspaper, *A Reforma*.

Everything was going well again when a friar-professor in the medical school failed him for non-academic reasons. Without mentioning the student's background—or lack

thereof—he stated only that he "did not like him" (Alencar, 1906). In 1873, in *O Lábaro*, the college newspaper, Patrocínio raised his voice to complain, aligning himself with the victims of the Empire injustices:

"Quebremos essas algemas	Let us break these bonds
Que oprimem nossos irmãos,	That oppress our kin
(…)	(…)
Brademos aos quatro ventos:	Let us shout to the four winds:
'Escravos, sois cidadãos!'"	'Slaves, you are citizens!'"

(*Uma Esmola* apud Magalhães, Jr., 1969:27)

Barred by the friar, he left the college in 1874, with only a diploma in Pharmacy, but with a wide-open career in republicanism and abolitionism. In *Os Ferrões* [The Stingers] he faulted the ineffectiveness of the Free Womb Law and the barbarity of slave owners. He sang this tune in several small newspapers until he joined a larger one, *Gazeta de Notícias*, owned by another mulatto, José Ferreira de Souza Araújo. Under his patronage, Patrocínio moved from copyeditor to political reporter. In the mid1870s, Patrocínio started to sign his articles with the name "Proudhomme," adapting Proudhon's maxim to the local scene: "slavery is robbery."

2. *A question of skin color*

What do these such diverse trajectories have in common?

Two things. First, the same phenotype--skin color. Second, a kind of political activism--abolitionism.

Does one have anything to do with the other?

To answer this it is necessary to understand how each man became involved in the abolitionist movement. Each one experienced a decisive episode precipitating a sense of injustice. Injustice understood as a social situation—not the result of nature or the work of superhuman forces—the product of political decisions. The individual motivation for the conversion of Rebouças, Gama and Patrocínio to abolitionist political activism arose from the realization that the situation had been socially produced and that only *collective* action could change it (Gamson and Meyer, 1996). The three men suffered the stigma of bias related to their skin color which motivated their conversion to abolitionist activism.

For Gama and Patrocínio the experience was a career obstacle.

Luiz Gama, barred from Law School, turned prejudice into a ricochet, employing his situation as an object of discrimination into an oratorical weapon against accepted social norms, visible in his famous poem "Bodarrada" ['Herd of goats.]. Called a 'goat' because he was black (Menucci, 1938: 93), Gama struck back:

"Se negro sou, ou sou bode	If I be black, or a goat be
Pouco importa. O que isto pode?	Who cares. What's it to me?
Bodes há de toda casta	There are goats of every caste
Pois que a espécie é muito vasta…	As the species is so vast…
(…),	(…),
Bodes negros, bodes brancos,	Black goats, goats of white,

E, sejamos todos francos,
(…),
Gentes pobres, nobres gentes
Em todos há meus parentes."

And, let it see the light,
(…),
Be they humble or be they noble
I have kin amidst all these people.

The closing line of the poem homogenizes the imperial elite: "they're all goats." The adjective "goat," flung by his adversaries, ricochets and strikes squarely at the core tenets of hierarchy, inequality and prejudice, at the same time that it highlights the difficulty in discerning social position by color in Imperial Brazil.

Gama identified himself as black, married to a black woman and proud of his color. This puts him on equal footing with a fourth abolitionist, Vicente de Souza, also a black man married to a black woman.

But not everyone experienced color in the same way.

Patrocínio embodied his color ambiguously. He described himself as being the color of "burnt brick," but used the classic strategy of whitening in his marriage, preferring, as in fact did Frederick Douglass, the great black American abolitionist, as also did Machado de Assis, to achieve social legitimacy by marrying a white woman. Marriage also gave Patrocínio access to a comfortable material life. But his wife's dowry was not used for his personal life. Patrocínio spent every last cent organizing the largest and best of all the abolitionist newspapers, *A Gazeta da Tarde*. The victim of a series of stigmas, beginning with the veiled one by the friar at the medical school up to the explicit one in an 1889 political rally—"Patrocínio was the last black man who sold out in Brazil"—he threw himself body and soul into the abolitionist campaign. Skin color reappeared innumerable times. Around 1887, in the midst of a turbulent rally, the spectators screamed: "Shut up, blackie!" Patrocínio rose up on his heels: "When God gave me Othello's color it was so that I would be jealous of my Race!" (Mariano, 1927).

For Gama as well as for Patrocínio, the stratifying experience of color is added to the experience of a barrier to upward social mobility, with one being inseparable from the other. Access to positions of social recognition and political power, for which a university diploma was the passe-partout, remained closed for mulattos of low birth as they both were, even when they had sponsors. This explains why Machado de Assis protected himself well by never attempting to obtain a university or parliamentary position.

This experience of forced social subjugation helps to explain Patrocínio's and Gama's initial connection to the Radical wing of the Liberal Party which at this period was out of power and used public space—with newspapers and conferences (Carvalho, 2007)—to defend a program of reforms, including the gradual end of slavery, as well as the subsequent shift, along with most of the Liberal Radicals, to Republicanism: Patrocínio and Gama were both early militants of the Republican Party, in the Court and in São Paulo, respectively.

For both men, however, the limited access to channels of social ascension for blacks and mulattos explains the political mobilization against the three-pronged system of Imperial power: monarchy, Catholicism and slavery. Limited access because the public

sphere was porous, which Machado de Assis exploited to the maximum, and which gave both Patrocínio and Gama access to newspapers, clubs and networks of political sociability. But this access was not consummated in diplomas, positions and sinecures that would socially and politically ratify the upward climb. Patrocínio and Gama found work, refuge and space for political dialogue in the press, not in Parliament.

Barriers to political ascension as a motivation for abolitionism, however, only partially explain the mobilization of mulattos. They do not, however, explain everyone's mobilization.

Let's look at Rebouças. Throughout his successful career, he was not hindered more than usual in the society of a small court, with few positions and sinecures available. Obviously he did not win all of the battles, because no man won them all (Graham, 1990), but he won many important ones, was awarded sumptuous contracts, directed important works of engineering and enjoyed intimacy with cabinet heads, even the most chief leaders, such as Itaboraí and Rio Branco, and the Imperial family. He was a closest friend of the Count D'Eu, after the Emperor himself. Thus, his mobilization could not have been born of social obstacles to his personal career.

His texts from the 1870s vehemently express a rhetoric of progress, aiming to influence his equals in the social and political elite of the business world. What motivates him to enlist in abolitionism is the impetus of a modernizing aristocrat.

Because that was who Rebouças fundamentally was: a member of the social aristocracy. As such, and as an engineer whose accomplishments were readily acknowledged, he had long ignored his skin color. Between the apparent indifference to it in the circles he frequented and his own self-camouflage, he was able to live into maturity without reference to his skin color in even the most intimate of confessionals: his personal diary.

He did not, however, escape social subjugation due to skin color. It happened in June of 1873 in New York. Rebouças considered the Yankee power to be a model for Brazil, but it was there that he felt the limiting effect of his skin color. In Europe and in Brazil, in the highest circles, he turned a deaf ear to jokes, obstacles, antipathies, even to an anonymous letter from September 20, 1871, exposing "my situation as a mulatto" (Rebouças' Diaries, 20 September 1871). He was an aristocrat who happened to be a mulatto. But in the North American metropolis, averse to labels of nobility, his skin color outweighed the titles: he was refused by a series of hotels in New York: "After several attempts, I understood that the reason for my refusal of accommodations was due to my skin color." In the end, the Brazilian consulate "arranged lodgings for me in the Washington Hotel with the condition that I would eat in my room and never in the restaurant." "The first lodging I was given was a dirty little room on the third floor (…)." "In the morning I was forced to bathe in a barber shop." (Rebouças' Diaries, 29/05; 10 June 1873). He could not attend the opera. On June 16 he went to bed hungry, due to the rejection by several restaurants. He fled to Pennsylvania. He found Philadelphia dirty, Philadelphia found Rebouças black: "Still the prejudice of color forced me to eat meals in my room." (Rebouças' Diaries, 18 June 1873)

When the interventions of friends finally arranged accommodations for him in a French hotel in New York, the French's Hotel, Rebouças resumed the persona of an aristocrat: "the hotel staff is much inferior to that of European hotels." (Rebouças' Diaries, 21 June 1873).

Rebouças lived the intense experience of a democratic society in which in the absence of aristocratic hierarchies, skin color had become the distinction that distinguished, differentiated and ranked, in Bourdieu's sense, but was also the stigmatizing distinction in Goffman's usage. The engineer, an appreciator of symmetries, realized exactly two years after freeing the last slaves in his own home that he was also the African offspring of the slave trade. The condition endured indelibly in his skin. Rebouças learned this, literally, in the flesh.

The humiliation, rather than subjugate him, led Rebouças to aim high, identifying an equivalent for himself in American society: "the mulatto Douglass, old friend of President Grant, very influential in his reelection, had been recently refused at Washington hotels (…)." (Rebouças' Diaries, 21 June 1873). Like Rebouças, Douglas was a captivating personality, striding through the antechambers of power, well educated, traveling frequently to Europe. And the victim of prejudice. They were almost as alike as twins. It was only a matter of Rebouças becoming for Brazil what Douglass had been to the United States: the greatest black abolitionist.

Rebouças, Patrocínio, and Gama arrived at activism by different subjective motivations. Each man, however, at some point felt stigmatized because of his African roots. Each man could have adopted an individual strategy to navigate the rules governing the subjugation of blacks and mulattos under the Empire, as Machado de Assis had. The rule consisted in denying or camouflaging one's color, supplanting skin color with talent. Machado was a genius also in this area: he successfully made his skin color socially invisible, a process that another abolitionist, Joaquim Nabuco, would later ratify and legitimize, by attributing to him a more exalted status: "I would not have called him a mulatto (…). Machado was white to me, and I believe he considered himself thus: (…). At least I only saw the Greek in him. Our friend, so sensitive, would prefer to forget about his origins." (Letter from Joaquim Nabuco to José Veríssimo, 25 November 1908, archives Brazilian Academy of Letters).

In the heat of the moment, Rebouças, Patrocínio and Gama understood that the process of subjugation by skin color was a system rooted in the slave-owning social order. This fact was responsible for each of the three men burning his *individual* ship, permanently losing the chance for upward mobility in Imperial society. Abolitionist activism was responsible for the collapse of sponsorship politics, in the cases of Gama and Patrocínio, and of business opportunities, in the case of Rebouças. *Collective* strategy against the *status quo* was a choice leading to a complete break. Gama, Patrocínio and Rebouças put their talents in the street and created a social movement.

3. Styles of activism

Although they were alike in skin color, the different points of entry into aristocratic society of Rebouças, Patrocínio and Gama resulted in the three men developing different individual styles of abolitionist activism.

3.1 The Rebouças method – between abolitionism at Court and abolitionism in the streets

When he became interested in abolition in 1868, as part of his project for Brazil's modernization, Rebouças was already a successful lobbyist in the business world. His network of relationships in the political parties and to the social milieu of the court led him to try to attack slavery from within the main decision-making system, which was not the arena of parliament, but the antechamber of the cabinet chief.

In political institutions the debate which would lead to the Free Womb Law in 1871 was moving slowly. The American Civil War, aroused by the same question, had placed it squarely on the Brazilian agenda. In both the Council of State and behind the scenes, the application of the Spanish solution was being discussed: freeing the unborn and elderly slaves, the Moret Law, put in place in Cuba and Puerto Rico in 1870 and the model for several Brazilian projects for gradual emancipation beginning in 1869 (Conrad, 1972: 86ss). By this time another war was ending, Brazil's war with Paraguay, which also raised the slave question: during that conflict the government had promised emancipation in the future in exchange for soldiers in the present and, in the epilogue, Count D'Eu, the husband of the heir to the throne, abolished slavery in Paraguay.

When the discussion intensified within the political system, Rebouças began to use his system of noble influence, successful on his own behalf, in favor of the abolition of slavery. Extremely well versed in the pathways of imperial institutions when he decided to become an abolitionist, he approached the project in his traditional manner, from the perimeters of the political system. Abolitionism, Rebouças observed, could advance by means of the ins and outs of court society, whispered in the ear of the authorities by means of lobbying.

Since the political parties were more opposed than favorable to the advancement of the abolition question, perhaps the best thing, Rebouças ruminated, would be to invest in cooperation with the authorities by means of the network of interpersonal relationships so central to court society. And so he proceeded to pressure politicians, wielding his web of contacts with the imperial elite.

By 1869, Brazil already had at least twelve abolitionist associations (Alonso, 2012), and Rebouças considered forming his own as well. But even with this plan, he determined that the most important thing would be to act at the intersection between civil society, the political system, and court society. Thus, in 1870 he attempted to create the "Central Protecting Association for the Emancipated" (Rebouças' Diaries, 15; 19 April 1870), comprising members of these three spheres. And he began by going directly to the cabinet head, Viscount of Itaboraí, and to the husband of the heir to the throne.

A political operator many tentacles, Rebouças tried to erode resistance the same way he arranged jobs, by making the rounds. He spoke to deputies and circulated behind

the scenes of Parliament, distributing bills he had written (Rebouças' Diaries, 9 May 1870). But everyone answered him hesitantly. Between access and influence there was a huge gap that Rebouças was unable to bridge.

He persevered. He continued to lobby the next two leaders of the government, the Viscount of São Vicente, who promised passage of the Free Womb Law and the other Viscount, Viscount of Rio Branco, who undertook the task of passing it. In May of 1871, Rebouças delivered to Rio Branco "the three diagrams of Emancipation Projects" that gave 1890 as the deadline for abolition. "We talked about free womb." (Rebouças' Diaries, 20 June 1871).

While the bill was being discussed in Parliament, Rebouças seesawed between influencing the political institutions and founding an association advocating for abolition to the general public. Other abolitionists began to appear at crusading conferences. Rebouças attended one of them, on July 2, in the Teatro São Pedro (Conrad, 1971: 325), as he had earlier gone to a performance at the Teatro Lírico do Rio de Janeiro, at the end of which a little slave girl had been freed on the stage by the actor Ernesto Rossi, who shouted to the audience: "God had not yet said what color his angels are, that all men were equal: black, white or any color." (apud Rebouças' Diary, 27 June 1871)

Rebouças, who loved the opera, set himself up as the communication link between the backstages of politics and the theater. When on September 27, 1871 the Senate passed the Free Womb Law, Rebouças was there. He kept one eye on the political system, but the other was already mobilizing in theatrical society. He would soon find a colleague of his stature in each sphere. In political institutions, Rebouças allied himself with an aristocrat like himself, Joaquim Nabuco. In the public sphere, he found another mulatto of his reach: José do Patrocínio, to whom he would become not just a partner but also the godfather of his child.

3.2 The Gama method or juridical abolitionism

While Rebouças encircled the political institutions, Gama attacked through the courts. Adopting the rhetoric of the right to freedom, he dedicated himself to the "processes in support of free people criminally enslaved; and to aid lawfully, to the extent of his abilities, the manumission of slaves (…)" (Letter from Luiz Gama to Lúcio de Mendonça, 25 July 1880). Lawful meant using Articles 19 and 179 of the Constitution of 1824, affirming, respectively, the abolition of whippings, hot irons and torture; the inviolability of civil and political rights; and, above all, the evaded accord between Brazil and the English forbidding the entrance of slaves since 1831, and whose application would mean freeing innumerable "free Africans" who had entered between 1831 and 1850, as well as their descendants.

"It is a fact that most of the African slaves in Brazil *were imported* after the law forbidding slave trade (…). Should friends of humanity, defenders of morality sit idle when faced with such abhorrent crimes?" (Luiz Gama, *Radical Paulistano*, 30 September 1869 apud Ferreira, 2009)

The answer was contained in the question. Gama tried to abolish slavery by proving its illegality on a case-by-case basis. The method was simple: by establishing the date of entry into the country, it was possible to establish the illegality of the title of ownership of the slave. All at no charge: "I practice law at no charge, out of sincere dedication to the cause of the wretched; I do not desire profit, nor do I fear violence." (Luiz Gama, *Correio Paulistano*, 20 November 1869 apud Azevedo, 1999:119). And with advocacy: "The below signed hereby agrees to present at no charge to the courts, all of the causes of freedom that interested parties wish to entrust to him. Luiz Gonzaga Pinto da Gama." (*Radical Paulistano*, 31 May 1869 apud Azevedo, 1999:193).

He defended accused slaves, defying the heart of the imperial order, by designating as legitimate the ignominious act *par excellence*, the most feared of the feared by owners: "Under the law, the crime of homicide perpetrated by the slave on his master is justifiable." (Luiz Gama apud Menucci, 1938:154). By interpreting legislation indiscriminately, upending rules of evidence and sometimes having accused slaves stay at his home before trial, Gama walked a fine line between legal activism in the courts and the crime of harboring criminals.

He defended "liberty trials" throughout the region and attracted emulators, like his Republican Party colleagues, the fashionable Campos brothers, Américo and Bernardino. His impassioned fire in trials and in the press attracted a retinue among the youth at the Law school who would hang around him, founding a newspaper in 1882 (*Ça-Irá*) and the Luiz Gama Freedom Fund to collect monies for manumission. His method became popular throughout the country, becoming henceforth one of the chief strategies of the abolitionist movement. These "liberty acts" freed some 500 slaves between 1868 and 1880 (Sud Menucci, 1938). He went from *goat* to leader.

Gama, as opposed to the much-traveled Rebouças, never saw a foreign sky, but chose as his role models three icons of global abolitionism: his revolutionary compatriot in the American Civil War; the Roman leader of a slave rebellion; and the American President, assassinated after abolishing slavery: "I want to be crazy like John Brown, like Spartacus, like Lincoln" (*Gazeta do povo*, 28 December 1880 apud Azevedo, 1999: 186).

In 1880, Rebouças invited Gama to write for the newspaper he had founded with Joaquim Nabuco, *O Abolicionista*. He and Patrocínio seriously considered the idea of founding a federation of anti-slavery associations. Then, in 1882, Gama created the Centro Abolicionista [Abolitionist Center] of São Paulo, that would join the Confederação Abolicionista [Abolitionist Confederation] the following year. The Confederation, nevertheless, did not get off the ground until 1883. In the interim, Gama died. They were no longer a trio. Patrocínio, however, who made the long trip to São Paulo for his funeral, found a new position for him: Luiz Gama became a symbol.

3.3 The Patrocínio method: theaters and streets

When he married Bibi, one of the daughters of Captain Emiliano Sena, a Republican as well as a quite wealthy military officer, Patrocínio used the dowry to purchase the

Gazeta da Tarde. He brought former classmates from Medical School and writers from his bohemian circle to work for him in the service of the cause he had embraced at the *Gazeta de Notícias*: abolition.

In addition to the newspaper, Patrocínio joined Vicente de Souza and André Rebouças to organize public proselytizing conferences in theaters. From opera to vaudeville, from chamber music to full orchestras, the stages provided popular entertainment without failing to attract the refinement and taste of members of the aristocracy. The trio conceived of the theater as a democratic space, suitable for both aristocrats and commoners, more attractive for proselytizing than universities or association offices. In this space they created conference-concerts, which became public rituals for the granting of freedom in truly theatrical events, with ample use of the arts.

Souza gave the initial kick-off in 1879. Rebouças' familiarity with opera and Patrocínio's with the theatrical world supplied the spark. Rebouças was a friend of Carlos Gomes, and besides his organizational expertise he enjoyed galas. Patrocínio, on the other end, lived in the world of the operetta, was friends with theater owners and people like the popular musician Chiquinha Gonzaga. He was skilled at café-concerts, at impromptu toasts, and had a network of relationships with artists of no consequence or employment that he hired to work for the paper. Writers, poets and even actors, like Vasquez, went to write for the *Gazeta da Tarde*. People of questionable refinement and who didn't mince words, gushing with worldly enthusiasm as a counterpoint to the pomp of Rebouças—and they must have, sometimes, scandalized him.

The erudite Rebouças, the circumspect Vicente de Souza and the popular Patrocínio made up a trio. They saw the theater as a possible organizational structure and public space for their advocacy, as a substitute for the role of the church in Anglo-American abolitionism. It gave style to the protest (Alonso, 2009).

Depressed due to business losses and personal problems, Rebouças took responsibility for backstage, his natural environment: he specialized in logistics, practical arrangements, budgeting. The first person to give a public face to the cause was Vicente de Souza, speaking about *O Império e a Escravidão: o parlamento e a pena de morte* [The Empire and Slavery: parliament and the death penalty], on March 23, 1879 in the Teatro São Luiz (Moraes, 1924: 350). On Sunday, July 25, 1880, in the hall of the Normal School, a slave was freed with the funds raised (Conrad, 1972: 169). From that point on the conferences became a regular series. Rebouças organized the second one in August, bringing Carlos Gomes to free one of his female slaves. In the same month they held the third one in the Teatro São Luiz, with a musical program and almost 700 in attendance (Conrad, 1972: 169).

There was sufficient volume for Rebouças, Souza and Patrocínio to seek an alliance with the senior politician of lesser importance, Nicolau Joaquim Moreira. The four men created, still in 1880 in Rio de Janeiro, the Associação Central Emancipadora [Central Emancipating Association] (ACE) that continued the conference series in theaters: Recreio Dramático, Polytheama, São Luis, basically any location that Patrocínio could arrange at no charge. Between July 1880 and July 1881, the ACE sponsored 43 events at Court (*O*

Abolicionista, 1880), around three per month. In seventeen of them Vicente de Souza spoke; in eighteen it was Patrocínio (Silva, 2006: 6). Rebouças preferred the wings.

The presence of Nicolau Moreira had to do with Rebouças' tactic of one foot in each boat, inside the political system and outside of it, but it was also because of Patrocínio's prudence. Afraid that the police might break up the events, he insisted on the presence of an authority figure:

"Since the beginning the conferences were always presided over by men of great merit and prestige, and so as not to list the names at length, I will mention that the events were almost always graced by the presence of Nicolau Moreira, the blind Muniz Barreto, and Senator Silveira da Mota (…)." (Patrocínio, *Cidade do Rio*, 5 May 1889)

The conferences were also concerts, including "a musical and concert portion" (ACE, boletim n. 8, 20 March 1881: 10), that came before or after the political speeches. This created a mixture of theatrical performance and political activism (Alonso, 2010).

Patrocínio was the soul of these events. Passionate, "he was born with oratory in his blood. He had lapses in form, philosophical slips, immoderation in his images, but once he was on the dais (…), he was a storm personified." (Araripe Junior apud Mariano, 1927). The audience reciprocated: "The applause continued, taking on the proportions of a true ovation, when the popular orator José do Patrocínio took the dais (…)." (ACE, boletim n. 8, 20 March 1881 17)

After the series in the Teatro São Luiz, Patrocínio, by coordinating his bohemian friends, on the basis of friendship or for a modest fee, arranged other theaters, such as Recreio Dramático and Polytheama. From 1880 to 1885, under half a dozen names—conference; conference-concert; festival; soirée; matinee; artistic benefit-- at least 147 events of this type were held in the Court and environs, more than one per month.[2]

When the conferences had brought in a growing captive audience of ladies as well as gentlemen, of freed as well as free, of slaves and even children, the phenomenon spread individual initiatives by new abolitionist societies throughout the city. Patrocínio and Rebouças, now united by the latter's baptism of Patrocínio's son, established a collective agenda, establishing beforehand which association would be in charge of Sunday's event to avoid duplication and splintering of the audience. The meticulous Rebouças took great care with the logistics and the management of expenses and donations collected. The sociable Patrocínio took charge of attracting artists and maintaining relationships with theater owners.

The process continued to grow and extrapolate beyond its original dimensions. The abolitionist conference-concerts spread throughout the country in the mid 1880s. And the mobilization moved beyond theater: open-air meetings, protest marches, and boat demonstrations sprang up. Luiz Gama was no longer around to see it, but the abolitionism of

[2] I collected information about these events from the main abolitionist newspapers: *O Abolicionista*, 1880-1; *Gazeta da Tarde*, 1883-6; *A Redempção*, 1887-8, *Cidade do Rio*, 1887-8. For an analysis of them see Alonso, 2009

Rebouças and Patrocínio had acquired the status of a social movement. It took over the streets.

3. The triangle

Rebouças' lobbying, Gama's judicial activism and Patrocínio's popular mobilization: three abolitionist strategies that highlight different levels of rupture with Imperial order. Rebouças began from within political institutions; Gama used the counterpoint of legal institutions; and Patrocínio turned to the press and the public sphere of theaters. These were interdependent actions, varying more according to the political situation than as matters of principle.

The three men became allied in the early 1880s. Rebouças' privileged social situation made him the broker, the principal apex of the triangle, connecting the differing arenas, the streets of Patrocínio, with whom he founded the Abolitionist Confederation, and the courtrooms of Luiz Gama, whom he invited to write for *O Abolicionista*.

Rebouças was a transitional figure between the honor principle of the estamental system of an aristocratic society, as a member of the court society, and the principle of competition of a market economy, as an entrepreneur. This situation—which caused him personal torments—established him as the link between the imperial institutions in ruins and the ascending mobilization of the socially subordinate blacks and mulattos. By his participation in court society circles and in the spheres of the political system, Rebouças could have restricted himself to the intra-elite social debates, allying himself only with Nabuco. But his skin color determined his solidarity with the societal mobilization that was socially beneath him, creating an alliance with Patrocínio and Gama.

This dual identity of aristocrat and mulatto made the engineer of multiple dikes the spokesman between the abolitionist arenas, the one within the social and political aristocratic hierarchies and the one in the public sphere, of the theaters and the streets:

"Rebouças embodies, as none of the rest of us did, the antislavery spirit (…). (…) he had (…) the primary role, however hidden, of the motor, the inspiration that he shared with everyone…, we almost didn't see it, from the outside, but each one of us who was seen was looking to him, felt him with us, in us, was guided by his invisible gesture to the multitude…, knew that he alone had the conscience that was capable of solving all of the cause's problems (…)." (Nabuco, 1900: chapter XXI).

Rebouças, Patrocínio and Gama acted in concert and consonance. The methods of activism on which they embarked, the lobby of political institutions, the judiciary and popular mobilization expanded and combined, attacking slavery from different flanks. The Abolitionist Confederation in which the three men were involved put into practice all these forms of activism. This combination of tactics permitted the abolitionist mobilization to grow throughout the 1880s to the extent that it gained the status of a national anti-slavery movement.

In solidarity and alliance with other black abolitionists like themselves and with white abolitionists, such as Nabuco and João Clapp, they simultaneously promoted popular

mobilization and pressure on the political institutions, until slavery had no support structure.

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In early 1888, the dismantling of slavery was a foregone conclusion. But the abolitionists were combating no less than the Baron of Cotegipe, a cabinet head from 1885 until 1888, when he led the repression of the abolitionist movement. And, yes, he also had African roots.

So skin color does not explain abolitionism? Only in part. While it may be true that many abolitionists were mulattos—because the list here could expand to include Teodoro Sampaio, Miguel Dias and Cruz e Souza, for example—it's true that there were also slaveholding mulattos.

The abolitionist campaign did not divide the country between whites and blacks. On both sides there were people of both colors. But the end of the campaign did indeed mark a turning point in Brazil's history. Up until then, skin color had been one of several criteria of social stratification, differentiation, and subordination within aristocratic society that relied on multiple and sophisticated social hierarchies. It was, however, a system of prestige based entirely—directly or indirectly—on slave ownership. When this basis of the Empire´s hierarchical organization collapsed, skin color loomed as a potentially new distinguishing criterion, a candidate for the nucleus of a new system of social stratification that would define those who would remain on top and those condemned to stay below— in terms of prestige and power. It was not that the Republic had invented races, but rather that the entire social hierarchy during the Empire was founded on slavery. One could not live without the other. If the Empire had not collapsed as a political system, it would have to find another basis for its system of prestige to substitute for slave ownership. What the nineteen months that separate Abolition from the founding of the Republic lead us to suspect is that such a basis could very well have been skin color.

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