

Caetano Mauricio Machado, a slave trader from eighteenth century Bahia and the Memory of Slavery

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Anybody who walks through the traditional downtown in Salvador da Bahia and, by chance, crosses the Praça da Piedade, a site's name that can be translated to English as "Piety's Place" or "Piety's Square," will find there a roundabout organizing a busy car traffic in many directions. That urban spot is highlighted by a neo-classic style fountain and surrounded by flowerbeds and benches where retired elders use to play table games. However, if you look closely, you will find among the bushes four black men's bust-statues. These monuments were placed there in 2004 as a result of a civil-campaign to honour the memory of these individuals who paid with their lives for being involved in the so-called Tailors' Revolt or Cowries' Upheaval,² event established by historiography as Bahian Conspiracy of 1798.

That was one of the events which placed Brazil into the Age of Revolutions. It was an attempt to separate Bahia from the Portuguese empire. Nevertheless, such a plot failed due to the sequence of miscalculated actions, during August, 1798. Investigations pointed as the heads of the sedition plots the soldiers Luiz Gonzaga das Virgens e Veiga and Manoel Faustino dos Santos Lira, and the tailors João de Deus do Nascimento and Lucas Dantas do Amorim. On November 9, 1799, these free coloured men from the local working class were executed on the gallows at Piety's Place, few yards from where their statues are set today. They were hung, their bodies were

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² Translation mine to *Revolta dos Alfaiates* and *Revolta dos Búzios*.

quartered, their heads were kept exposed publicly for some weeks across the town, and their family names were cursed to the third generation. The Portuguese crown required punishment to set an example to others, not only to their bodies but to their memory.

Later, in the early twentieth century, after Brazil became a republic, local historians found in the Bahian Conspiracy of 1798 earlier aspirations for democracy and abolitionism. Also, recent researches have found clues regarding the place of those individuals in this event, never denying their activism, but analysing the discourse into the documents produced by the conspirators. The papers announcing the people of Bahia dissatisfaction with Portugal had a vocabulary related to the French Revolution. Such information has been leading researchers to inquire the presence of terms like “revolution” and “republic” in those barely literate coloured men oral repertoire.

Meanwhile, in his correspondence with the Lisbon court, the teacher of “royal classes” (Translation mine to *Aulas Régias*) Luiz dos Santos Vilhena noted names of local elite members who voluntarily delivered their captives to the authorities as suspects for involvement in that sedition’s plot. The letters of Vilhena mentions such wealthy individuals as participants of the Stepchildren Corporation (Translation mine to *Corporação dos Enteados*), a group that worked using their political influence and social standing to have economic advantages through privileged information.³ The seven men and a woman who composed the Stepchildren Corporation could be behind the Enlightenment discourse present in the Bahian Conspiracy papers.

The military-officer Caetano Mauricio Machado⁴ was among them. Born in Lisbon, *circa* 1750, Machado built an outstanding pathway, starting in Portugal countryside as a fresh-officer

³ See Patricia Valim, *Corporação dos Enteados: tensão, contestação e negociação política na Conjuração Baiana de 1798* (Salvador: EDUFBA, 2018).

⁴ This paper presents a very brief summary regarding Caetano Mauricio Machado, his family and legacy, his military career and his involvement in the Atlantic slave trade. The longer biographical study will be presented soon as a Major Research Paper for completing my Master’s degree at York University. This paper will be titled “Caetano Mauricio Machado, a merchant-officer in eighteenth-century Bahia.”

and being transferred, in 1771, to Pernambuco, Northeastern Brazil. There, he was the lieutenant commanding the Auxiliary Cavalry in the city of *Parahyba*. Soon, he was assigned for a temporary term as a right-hand man in Pernambuco's government office. When the governor Manuel da Cunha e Menezes was moved to Bahia, he decided to take Machado as his permanent right-hand. In 1774, Caetano Mauricio Machado landed in Salvador, one of the busiest centres of Portuguese America.

For the following 33 years, Caetano Mauricio Machado consolidated his position in the local society. Besides his strategic position in the government structure, he was also the head-officer of the prestigious Regiment of Chosen and Useful People to the State (Translation mine to *Regimento da Gente Escolhida e Útil ao Estado*). In 1778, he joined the *Misericórdia* brotherhood as a major-brother. Then, his political and social influence started to go up. He earned the Order of Christ's robe, being yet elected twice to the local senate house. Hence, Machado became a wealthy man. From 1779 to his death, in 1807, his vessels traded with Bight of Benin ports importing hundreds of enslaved Africans to Bahia. During this period, he owned lands across Salvador living with his wife, his eight children, and slaves in a two story-house located right in the centre of local power, the Palace Square (Translation mine to *Praça do Palácio*).

As a slave-trader, Machado possessed at least two slave-ships: a corvette invoked as *NS da Conceição S José e Almas*, acquired before 1783, and the galley *Estrella* from which the construction he ordered to the Bahian naval-builder José da Costa de Carvalho, in the early 1800s. However, he also invested in other slave-voyages assembled by partners and creditors. Sometimes, he hired crew and captain to represent him in African slave ports. One of his creditors claimed that he had taken "29 slaves" from one of Machado's ships as a payment for his debts.⁵

⁵ APEB. Judiciário_Capital_Inventário. Doc. 3/1145/1614/06. fl. 11 and 12.

The @ Slave Voyages Database presents 324 enslaved Africans disembarked on Salvador by only one of Machado's vessels, in 1783. Machado was a big enslaved humans' trafficker.

Still, in the march of the Bahian Conspiracy's investigation, he joined his Stepchildren Corporation peers delivering one of his slaves to the authorities for being inquired about sedition ideas. Unfortunately, nobody knows what this man could add to the investigations: Antonio José, the enslaved coachman who served Caetano Mauricio Machado was found dead by poisoning in its cell, twenty-four hours after arriving in the prison.

Later, after his death, Caetano Mauricio Machado's sons run his political legacy ahead. Involved in the events related to the War for Brazilian Independence, they had an active role in the siege of Salvador (1822-1823) and the expulsion of Portuguese troops confirming the liberation of Bahia. However, Machado's family name is not seen on Bahian streets. Neither schools' names, statues, nor any trace of their existence can be found if not in the archives. But, it is unquestionable that slave traders' memorials are exposed across the streets of Brazilian cities. It happens mainly on those ancient ports that received almost 90% of all enslaved Africans disembarked in Brazil – Salvador da Bahia, Pernambuco, and Rio de Janeiro - representing about 38% of all captives brought from Africa.⁶

Recently, a digital humanities initiative for public history has been created by scholars from Bahia. Determined to identify monuments, street names, and other urban landmarks associated to the slave trade power across the city of Salvador, the website @ *Salvador Escravista*, that could be translated as *Salvador as a Slaver*, is a pioneer action aiming to introduce widely the debate regarding the memory of slave trade and slavery in the capital of Bahia. This digital initiative

⁶ “Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade - Estimates,” Slave Voyages, accessed March 12, 2021. Doi: <https://slavevoyages.org/estimates/f4MPKjrw>

invites the Bahian and Brazilian societies to discussing the validation of monuments honoring slavers as well as flags the unidentified sites related to slave resistance and abolitionism.

Motivated by Black Lives Matter movement, www.salvadorescravista.com⁷ tracks monuments and landmarks which celebrates the memory of individuals who lived in Salvador da Bahia and made their wealth trading enslaved Africans. Through that website, scholars have been contributing with material that clarifies slavery personalities' lifepath and legacy using accurate research outcomes. For instance, the Portuguese slave trader and slave-captain (*capitão negreiro*) Teodósio Rodrigues de Farias⁸ who expressively contributed to the rising of Senhor do Bonfim's devotion in Bahia at mid-eighteenth century. Since his endeavours as the main patron of Senhor do Bonfim veneration, this is the most important Catholic expression to Bahian society.

Through his research, Dr. Candido Domingues de Sousa has been providing substantial information linking Farias to Atlantic slave trade. The said slave-captain is frequently celebrated as the main patron of the religious festivities of Senhor do Bonfim da Bahia. Yet, many other relevant personalities' memorials are questioned by this website: the influential Jesuit Antonio Viera, who names a big Catholic college responsible to form the local elites' children; the famous *Elevador Lacerda*, a sightseeing and an transportation engine that links the lower and higher parts of the city, associated to the local proud, was built through a wealth rooted in the slave trade; and the merchant Conde Pereira Marinho⁹ who still has his statue placed at a referential hospital's garden.

⁷ <https://www.salvadorescravista.com/>

⁸ Candido Domingues de Sousa, "Teodósio Rodrigues de Faria," *Salvador Escravista*, accessed December 26, 2020. Doi: <https://www.salvadorescravista.com/homenagens-controversas/teod%C3%B3sio-rodrigues-de-farias>.

⁹ Cristiana Lyrio Ximenes, "Conde Pereira Marinho," *Salvador Escravista*, accessed in January 04, 2021. Doi: <https://www.salvadorescravista.com/homenagens-controversas/conde-pereira-marinho>.

The unfolded implications from this mapping will be complex touching the memory and heritage of a big community. Perhaps, it is not only the case of simple removal of these memorial urban elements. But, it can be helpful to the local society on the next generations' education regarding Salvador da Bahia's place in the Atlantic Slave Trade, also contributing to enhance a new local conscience about the impact of business run by men like Caetano Mauricio Machado nowadays.