

SPECIAL ISSUE: SLAVERY, EVERYDAY LIFE,
AND DYNAMICS OF MISCEGENATION
IN THE IBERIAN WORLD (16TH-18TH CENTURIES):
SPACES, MOBILITY, AGREEMENTS AND CONFLICTS

Slavery, dynamics of miscegenation, and mobility in a society in formation

Vila Rica de Ouro Preto at the dawn
of its foundation (ca. 1710-1730)

Esclavitud, dinámicas de mestizajes y movilidad en una sociedad en formación

Vila Rica de Ouro Preto en los albores de la fundación (ca. 1710-1730)

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ABSTRACT This study explores how the formation and characteristics of the sociodemographic structure of Vila Rica during the first third of the 18th century, marked by profound imbalances and the zenith of gold mining, fostered a sufficiently flexible relational universe sufficiently flexible to allow a minority yet significant portion of the enslaved population, especially women and their children, to transition from slavery to freedom, rise socially and economically, and even become slave

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owners enslavers while still remaining enslavedslaves. To achieve this, we worked with an extensive and varied documentary corpus, analyzing baptisms, marriages, and burials from the two parishes, post-mortem inventories from the Casa do Pilar, land tenure registers, or “*termos de aforamentos*,” and payment lists of the Real Donativo from the Public Archive of Minas GeraisArquivo Público Mineiro. The systematic cross-referencing of these various sources has enabled the reconstruction of multiple individual and family trajectories, integrating them into the framework of a social reality characterized by the development of urban slavery, the scarce presence of women of Portuguese origin, the prevalence of non-sacramentalized families typologies, the dynamics of miscegenation, and socioeconomic mobility.

KEYWORDS slavery, socioeconomic mobility, Minas Gerais

RESUMEN Este artículo trata de explorar cómo la formación y las características de la estructura sociodemográfica de Vila Rica durante el primer tercio del siglo XVIII, una etapa marcada por los profundos desequilibrios generados por la afluencia masiva de migrantes y esclavos al calor de la fiebre del oro, propició un universo relacional lo suficientemente flexible para que una porción minoritaria pero significativa de la población esclava, especialmente de mujeres y sus hijos, pudieran transitar desde la sujeción de la esclavitud a la libertad, ascender social y económicamente y llegar a convertirse en señoras de esclavos incluso cuando todavía eran esclavas. Para ello, se han empleado de forma sistemática los registros de bautismos, matrimonios y óbitos de sus dos matrices, inventarios *post-mortem* de la Casa do Pilar, y las series de “*termos de aforamentos*” y de las listas de pago del Real Donativo del Arquivo Público Mineiro. El cruzado sistemático de los diversos tipos documentales ha posibilitado reconstruir múltiples trayectorias individuales y familiares e insertarlas en el marco de una realidad social caracterizada por el desarrollo de una esclavitud urbana, la escasa presencia de mujeres de origen portugués, la extensión de tipologías de familias no sacramentalizadas, las dinámicas de mestizajes y la movilidad socioeconómica.

PALABRAS CLAVE esclavitud, movilidad socioeconómica, Minas Gerais

THE FORMATION OF MINAS GERAIS: AN INTRODUCTION¹

The Portuguese monarchy and the inhabitants of the captaincies of Brazil longed for the discovery of precious metals in the interior regions long before their eventual unearthing. However, this discovery did not occur until late in the 17th century, unleashing a fever with consequences that proved challenging to predict. The news of gold's discovery in the Serra do Espinhaço unleashed a massive influx of immigrants into the backlands of Minas Gerais. This occurrence has few parallels in human history (Zemella, 1990, p. 45). This vast interior space, situated between the captaincies of Bahia, Rio de Janeiro, and São Paulo, had previously been occupied by Tapuian tribes and subjected to raids led by “bandeirantes” settlers from São Paulo. In just a few decades, it transformed into the most populous and economically dynamic region of 18th-century Brazil (Paiva, 2022, p. 70–84). The erosive action of the orography caused the burgeoning gold mining activity to concentrate primarily on riverbeds and streambeds. The gold rush, which drew free settlers migrants and enslaved peoples alike from Europe, Africa, and the Brazilian coast, alongside the monarchy's institutional weakness and the territory's very geography, influenced the subsequent occupation patterns. The initial settlements of Minas Gerais were established in the river valleys, with dwellings constructed from adobe bricks or wood walls and thatched roofs, reflecting an urbanism marked by improvisation and impermanence. These settlements, or “arraiais,” could be rapidly abandoned in response to rumors of richer gold deposits, famines, and food shortages. These settlements paved the way for establishing villages in Minas Gerais, including the one examined in this study: Vila Rica de Ouro Preto (Veloso, 2018, p. 40–72).

1 Abbreviations used: Paróquia de Nossa Senhora da Conceição de Ouro Preto database (AEPNSC), Historical archive of the Museu da Inconfidência de Ouro Preto – Casa do Pilar (AHMIOP-CP), Paróquia de Nossa Senhora do Pilar de Ouro Preto database (BD-AEPNSP), Baptism Book (LB), Marriage Book (LM), Burial Book (LO), Codex of Records (C.), Proceeding (A.), official document (of.), box (cx.), folio (f.), recto (r.), verso (v.).

The establishment of “arraiais” that would later serve as the political headquarters of the captaincy of Minas Gerais from 1720 onward stemmed from expeditions of “settlers bandeirantes” from São Paulo in the Carmo River valley and its tributaries during the late 17th century, led by Manuel Garcia, Antônio Dias de Oliveira, and Father João Faria de Fialho. Limited information exists about the sociodemographic life within these settlements. A memorial commissioned by the provincial magistrate Caetano Costa Matoso around 1750 portrays sparsely populated settlements and buildings made from perishable materials (Borrego, 2004, p. 44). However, the massive influx of migrants, driven by the gold rush and enslaved individuals/slaves, eventually multiplied the number of settlements near mining operations. This expansion led to the formation of the toponyms that shaped the urban geography of the future Vila Rica, listed from west to east as Passa-Dez, Caquende, Ouro Preto, dos Paulistas, Antônio Dias, Barra, Alto da Cruz das Almas, and Padre Faria (Veloso, 2018, p. 52–53).

The disputes between settlers from São Paulo and “outsiders,” which culminated in the War of the Emboabas (1708–1709), and the Portuguese crown’s growing interest in asserting greater control over the region, resulted in the establishment of the first villages (Veloso, 2018, p. 44–46). For Vila Rica, the previous “arraiais” were consolidated into a single village by the Auto de Ereção, comprising two parish churches: Nossa Senhora do Pilar in Ouro Preto and Nossa Senhora da Conceição in Antônio Dias.²

This study explores how the formation and characteristics of the sociodemographic structure of Vila Rica during the first third of the 18th century, marked by profound imbalances and the zenith of gold mining, fostered a sufficiently flexible relational universe. This flexibility enabled a minority yet significant portion of the enslaved population, especially women and their children, to transition from slavery to freedom, rise socially and economically, and even become enslavers/slave owners while still remaining enslaved/slaves.

2 AUTO de ereção de Vila Rica, *Revista Arquivo Público Mineiro*, ano II, v. 1, p. 84–86, 1897.

To achieve this, we worked with an extensive and varied documentary corpus, analyzing baptisms, marriages, and burials from the two parishes. This corpus comprised more than 2,300 records. We utilized the database for the parish of Pilar³; for Antônio Dias, we transcribed all entries. The latter's records are microfilmed and accessible on the Family Search website. However, baptismal book number two, which covers 1727-1740, is absent from this platform. This book was microfilmed in the museum Casa dos Contos in Ouro Preto, where it was transcribed.⁴

Additionally, we analyzed a sample of eleven post-mortem inventories from the historical archive of the Museu da Inconfidência – Casa do Pilar in Ouro Preto, accounting for 122 enslaved slaves/individuals. Despite the reduced sample size, the findings align with those of a more extensive study in quantity and chronology (Corona Perez, 2023b), providing a representative illustration of the distribution of individuals based on quality, nation, and gender.

The land tenure registers, or “termos de aforamento,” from 1712-1722 and five payment lists of the Real Donativo (compulsory royal tax) from 1730, encompassing the Vila Rica population, were meticulously transcribed, with each entry examined individually. The “termos de aforamento” were records through which the municipal chamber allocated unoccupied land plots to individuals to construct houses, ranches,

3 The database corresponds to a project coordinated by Professor Adalgisa Arantes Campos, to whom we express our gratitude for her contribution. It represents an absolutely monumental effort and has enabled the publication of numerous studies, such as the dossier published in the journal *Varia Historia* titled “*Vila Rica do Pilar: Reflections on Minas Gerais in the Early Modern Period*”, organized by Campos, Libby, and Franco (2004). This dossier includes more than a dozen works focusing on the religiosity and demography of this parish, while also highlighting the database's limitations and challenges, such as the repetition of some records. More recently, an article on the abandonment of newborns has been published, comparing the case of Vila Rica with those of the neighboring Mariana and Recife in Pernambuco (Franco, 2016). Additionally, a book examining the baptism of adult enslaved individuals/slaves during the first half of the 18th century has also been published (Oliveira, 2022).

4 The documentary records of this parish have been the subject of numerous studies, see Costa (1981), Vidal Luna & Costa (1981), Motta & Costa (1992), and more recently, Campos (2011) or Corona Pérez (2023e).

and gardens in exchange for a fee proportional to the land's size. These documents are invaluable for analyzing property access according to buyers' socioeconomic status and tracking urban growth (Borrego, 2004; Veloso, 2018). Similarly, the Real Donativo lists from 1730 provide complementary chronological data to the "termos de aforamento," offering a detailed nominal record of economically active residents, their neighborhoods, and their commercial and slaveholding properties enslaved property holdings (Gaspar, 2021).

We processed and cross-referenced this extensive documentation in a database, resulting in the qualitative reconstruction of individual and family trajectories alongside quantification. The fundamental epistemological principle of Social History is that it concerns itself with people and their intricate relationships "and that a close examination through the magnifying glass reveals reality more clearly." Consequently, quantification is systematically employed to integrate these trajectories and case studies into their broader historical context (Fernández Chaves; Pérez García, 2009, p. 28).

STRUCTURE OF A SOCIETY IN FORMATION

The occupation of Minas Gerais was predominantly influenced by two distinct exogenous population flows of: migrants and enslaved peopleslaves, since t. The increasing demand for labor, triggered by the influx of migrants, directly resultedof the former fueled in the forced displacement of enslaved peoplearrival of the latter. HoweverEven so, the extent to which these groups can be quantified to ascertain their total numbers and origins remains uncertain. The demographic study of Vila Rica during the first third of the 18th century must account for the absence of censuses that recorded the total population and the various groups that composed it. However, in the case of migrants, cross-matching marriage and burial records from two distinct sources have offered insights into the origins of 223 free individuals and freedpersons. Notably, not all individuals who relocated to Vila Rica married or died during the studied period; thus, the sample cannot represent the entirety

of these groups. Nevertheless, the results presented in Table 1 offer insights into the geographic profile of these settlers during the first two decades of the village's existence.

Table 1. Origin of migrants in Vila Rica (1707-1730), n = 223.

Region	Captaincy	Men	Women	Total	%
Portugal, Azores, and Madeira 163 (73.1%)	Braga	50	3	53	32,5
	Porto	20	0	20	12,3
	Lamego	3	0	3	1,8
	Viseu	2	0	2	1,2
	Coimbra	4	1	5	3,1
	Lisbon	22	4	26	16,0
	Évora	1	1	2	1,2
	Azores	8	1	9	5,5
	Madeira	2	1	3	1,8
	Unknown	33	7	40	24,5
	Total	145	18	163	100,0
	% Sex	89,0	11,0	100	
Brazil 60 (26.9%)	Pernambuco	5	5	10	16,7
	Bahia	6	7	13	21,7
	Rio de Janeiro	6	9	15	25,0
	São Paulo	2	0	2	3,3
	Minas Gerais	1	4	5	8,3
	Unknown	8	7	15	25,0
	Total	28	32	60	100,0
	% Sex	46,7	53,3	100	
Total for migrants		173	50	223	
% Sex of migrants		77,6	22,4	100,0	

Source: AEPNSC: LM 1; LO 1, 2. BD-AENSP.

The Portuguese constituted the demographic majority within the immigrant population, accounting for more than two-thirds of its total. A substantial proportion of these individuals were born in parishes within bishoprics in the northern half of the kingdom. The dioceses of Braga, Lisbon, and Porto particularly stand out due to their significant representation. While Although the records do not specify the place of origin for a quarter of the Portuguese individuals listed, it is notable noteworthy that no documentation individuals exists for people originating from the Algarve or Alentejo are found in the documentation. In contrast, individuals from the Azores and Madeira archipelagos are documented. The other major group forming the migrant population of Vila Rica consisted of Brazilian individuals. Among them were individuals born in the captaincies of Rio de Janeiro, Bahia, and Pernambuco, particularly in Rio, Salvador, and Recife. To a lesser extent, the group also included individuals from Minas Gerais, with fewer migrants hailing from São Paulo.

Beyond the quantitative and geographic divergence, migrants from Portugal and the Macaronesian islands displayed notable differences from their Brazilian counterparts. One key distinction lies in the distribution of sexes. In contrast to the Brazilian population, which exhibited a balanced ratio of men to women, reflecting natural reproductive patterns, the Portuguese population displayed a pronounced imbalance, with a ratio of nine men for every woman displayed a slight predominance of men. In contrast, the Portuguese population revealed a pronounced imbalance, with a ratio of nine men for every woman. Consequently, given the demographic weight of this group, the migrant population demonstrated a pronounced male predominance. A further divergence between the two populations pertains to the profiles of individuals, which included unique descriptors among the Brazilians. For instance, individuals such as Domingos da Costa, born in Rio de Janeiro and described as a single miscegenated “pardo” man⁵; Maria, “carijó”⁶(indigenous-descended woman); or an anonymous person buried and described as “mestiça da

5 BD-AEPNSP: 29-X-1714.

6 AEPNSC: LO 2, sf., 10-I-1730, Fig. 7.

terra”⁷ illustrate these distinctions. In addition, individuals born in Brazil included freed persons, such as Lourenço, a “pardo” miscegenated man born in Rio de Janeiro;⁸ Narciza de Almeida, a “parda” miscegenated woman born in Olinda;⁹ and Inácia de Souza, a “preta crioula” black crioula born in Bahia.¹⁰ However, most freed persons documented during this period were born in Africa and arrived in Brazil enslaved as slaves, subsequently gaining their freedom there.

Table 2. Origin of the enslaved people inventoried slaves in Vila Rica (1720-1730), n = 122.

Geographic zone	Descriptive group and region		Men	Women	Unknown	Total	%
Africa 87 (71.3%)	Cabo Verde		0	1	0	1	1,1
	Cobú		4	0	0	4	4,6
	Courano		3	0	0	3	3,4
	Fuam		1	0	0	1	1,1
	Mina		26	7	0	33	37,9
	Nagô		1	0	0	1	1,1
	Total for West Central Africa		35	8	0	43	49,4
	Angola		8	2	0	10	11,5
	Benguela		17	1	0	18	20,7
	Congo		3	4	0	7	8,0
	Massangano		1	0	0	1	1,1
	Total East Central Africa		29	7	0	36	41,4
	Western Africa	Mozambique	2	0	0	2	2,3
	Negro		5	1	0	6	6,9
	Total for Africa		71	16	0	87	100,0
	% Sex of Africa		81,6	18,4	0,0	100,0	

7 AEPNSC: LO 2, sf., 22-II-1730, Fig. 7.

8 BD-AEPNSP: 16-VI-1718.

9 AEPNSC: LO 1, sf., 12-XII-1721, Fig. 6.

10 AEPNSC: LO 2, sf., 11-IX-1727, Fig. 4.

Geographic zone	Descriptive group and region		Men	Women	Unknown	Total	%
Brazil 28 (23%)	Crioulo		4	7	0	11	39,3
	Carijó		5	6	0	11	39,3
	Miscegenated	Mulato	2	0	0	2	7,1
		Cabra	0	2	0	2	7,1
		Unknown	1	1	0	2	7,1
		Total	3	3	0	6	21,4
	Total for Brazil		12	16	0	28	100,0
	% Sex of Brazil		42,9	57,1	0,0	100,0	
Unknown origin		1	2	4	7	5,7	
Total slaves		84	34	4	122		
% Sex of slaves		68,9	27,9	3,3	100,0		

Source: AHMIOP-CP: Of. 1, C. 19, A. 180; C. 43, A. 505; C. 57, A. 680; C. 98, A. 1198; C. 77, A. 915; C. 104, A. 1308; C. 134, A. 1687; Of. 2, C. 11, A. 114; C. 21, A. 228; C. 46, A. 506; C. 66, A. 737.

As observed in the mining districts of the Mortes and Velhas rivers during the 18th century (Paiva, 2022, p. 126) and in Vila Rica itself in the first half of the century (Corona Pérez, 2023b), the analysis of post-mortem inventories from the district during the 1720s reveals a predominantly African enslavedpopulationslave population (Table 2). These findings are consistent with the historical record, indicating that three out of every four enslaved peopleslaves originated primarily from the Gulf of Guinea region, notably the “mina”enslaved people, and from the central-western area of the African continent, which included “congo,” “angola,” and “benguela” groups. These contingents arrived in Minas Gerais mainly via the Caminho dos Currais do Sertão, Caminho da Bahia, and Caminho Novo, which connected the region to Salvador and Rio de Janeiro ports. By contrast, enslaved peopleslaves born in Brazil, including “crioulos,” “carijós,” and miscegenated groups such as “mulatos” and “cabras,” constituted a less substantial demographic. However, in contrast to their African counterparts, who exhibited a sex ratio of eight men for every two women, Brazilian-born individuals enslaved people demonstrated a proportion closer to a balanced sex balanceratio. While the registry sample exhibits a higher representation

of women, this inclination towards balance indicates natural reproductive patterns. This phenomenon contrasts with the sociodemographic profile of enslaved Africans, whose distribution was shaped by mercantile logic and political contexts conjunctures tied to the transatlantic slave trade. Nevertheless, the overall demographic balance exhibited a substantial male preeminence, with an approximate sex ratio of three men for every woman. How was the society of Vila Rica distributed according to legal status?

Table 3. Legal status of newborns in Vila Rica (1707-1730).

Newborns	No.	%
Slave	587	66,9
Freed	128	14,6
Free	157	17,9
Unknown	6	0,7
Total	878	100,0

Source: AEPNSC: LB 1, 2; BD-AENSP.

Given the absence of registers that collect the legal profiles of the inhabitants of Vila Rica, baptism records offer a means to measure the volume reached by social groups according to the legal status of the newborns(Cortés Cortés, 1987, p. 94). To avoid distorting the birth rate, we excluded those sacramentalized in adulthood (Cortés Cortés, 1987, p. 94). As illustrated in Table 3, the results demonstrate the social composition of the political headquarters of Minas Gerais. A significant proportion of the newborns, approximately two-thirds, were recorded as enslavedslaves, following the legal principle of *partus sequitur ventrem*. That is to say, the children of slave women inherited their mothers’ legal status. The slaveholding nature of that society is further reinforced when considering that the mothers of the newly freed infants were slaves, meaning that these women were responsible for over 80% of the birth rateThis phenomenon suggests an inheritance of their mothers’ legal status, which is further compounded when acknowledging the enslaved nature

of their mothers, constituting over 80% of the birth rate. These newborns, freed at the baptismal font upon receiving the sacrament, constituted a significant proportion of the children of enslaved slave women, offering insights into the complexity of that society (Corona Pérez, 2023b).

Accordingly, the sociodemographic structure of Vila Rica in the first third of the 18th century was shaped by the continuous arrival of a tremendously diverse exogenous population in terms of origins, legal conditions, and social statuses. The influence of mercantile logics on the profiles of enslaved individuals brought through the supply by African transatlantic traffic trade and the socioeconomic mobility among migrants resulted in a notable scarcity of women, especially those of European origin (Figueiredo, 1997, p. 28). This demographic scenario, marked by profound imbalances generated by the continuous arrival of external contingents, fostered a relational framework flexible enough caused by the ongoing influx of foreign contingents, fostered a relational framework sufficiently adaptable to support the dynamics of miscegenation and social mobility (Ibid., p. 86). The society of Minas Gerais represented a cultural universe defined by its diversity and fluidity, characterized by continuous movement and interactions that were sometimes harmonious and sometimes conflicting (Paiva, 2022, p. 86). Slavery was fundamentally rooted in urban environments and characterized by the decentralization of slaveholding enslaved populations' properties with many small-scale owners (Paiva, 2022, p. 86). Although Vila Rica was home to prominent individuals who owned over 50 enslaved people/slaves, such as Captains Henrique Lopes Araújo and Antônio Ramos dos Reis, most slaveholders fell within the range of owning one to five enslaved individuals/slaves, as revealed by the fiscal documentation from the lists of the taxes and the Real Donativo (Gaspar, 2021, p. 801–817). This distribution suggests a state of proximity, indicating that enslaved populations did not form isolated communities but rather coexisted within the broader sociability shared by the entire society (Paiva, 2022, p. 206–207). Domestic and public spaces, such as homes, senzalas, streets, fountains, squares, workshops, mines, stores, inns, brothels, prisons, churches, and chapels, became sites of interaction among individuals

with different statuses and legal conditions, encompassing a vast array of circumstances and possibilities. Notably, the multiple economic uses of enslaved peopleslaves, such as their leasing to third parties or their work as “*escravos de ganho*,” expanded the avenues for forming new human relationships (Pérez García, 2018, p. 252). How were these relationships shaped and defined within family and labor contexts?

THE FAMILY ORGANIZATION

Historiography had not extensively examined family organization outside the Tridentine model of a father and mother united in legitimate marriage with their offspring until a few decades ago. This narrow view of the family, rooted in the authority of a patriarchal head who managed a household and established consanguineous and dependency ties over a group of free and enslaved peopleslave (Silva, 2016, p. 123-137), limited the study of family structures, consequently obscuring other forms of family organization practiced in past societies¹¹. In Vila Rica, cross-matching the records of baptisms, marriages, and burials from its two matrices has revealed that most “primary organization”—whether consanguineous or matrimonial (Florentino; Góes, 1997, p. 73)—did not involve formalized union through the altar.

Table 4. Family organizations in Vila Rica (1707-1730).

Family organizations	No.	%
Sacramentalized nuclear	183	21,7
Non-sacramental nuclear	103	12,2
Single parent	535	63,5
Reconstituted	21	2,5
Total	842	100,0

Source: AEPNSC: LB 1, 2, LM 1; LO 1, 2. BD-AENSP.

11 A historiographical review of the history of the family in slaveholding Brazil, in Paiva, 2020, p. 301-417.

Only 22% of the documented families were sacramentalized (Table 4). The remaining family organization corresponded to various typologies that deviated from the Tridentine model. Non-sacramentalized couples with children represented 12%. However, the single-parent family was the most widespread model in Vila Rica during the first third of the 18th century. Nearly two-thirds of the recorded families consisted of single mothers. In the baptismal records of these women's children, the father's identity was typically omitted or recorded using phrases such as "sem nomear pai," "e não se nomeou pay," "não se deu pay," "pay incerto" or "pay incógnito." Nonetheless, some of these single mothers were likely involved in non-sacramentalized relationships, which remain obscured due to the sacramental focus of these records.

Additionally, there is evidence of a minority model involving reconstituted or composite families. These were formed by individuals who had offspring with different partners. Examples include Jerônimo de Araújo Tinoco, who fathered natural children with his enslaved slave woman Catalina¹² and with the freedwoman "crioula" Cristina Enes;¹³ Joana de Jesus de Brito, who married Inácio [Side] da Rosa, both miscegenated "pardos" and free,¹⁴ after already becoming the mother of Luiz, whose father was unknown;¹⁵ and Luisa Ferreira de Mello, who had a daughter with José Ferreira Passos while enslaved¹⁶ and, later, as a freedwoman, had another son whose father was not identified.¹⁷ The prevalence of the different family organizations documented varied according to the legal status of their members.

12 AEPNSCAD: LB 1, sf., 18-VII-1712, Fig. 10.

13 BD-NSP: B, 4-IV-1715.

14 AEPNSCAD: LM 1, f. 1v, 24-VIII-1727, Fig. 5.

15 AEPNSCAD: LB 1, f. 60v, 11-I-1725, Fig. 69.

16 AEPNSCAD: LB 1, f. 42r, 6-IX-1722, Fig. 49.

17 AEPNSCAD: LB 2, sf., 9-IX-1726.

Table 5. Family organizations according to the legal status of women in Vila Rica (1707–1730).

Women	Sacramentalized		Non-sacramentalized		Single mothers		Reconstituted		Total
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	
Slave	46	7,3	71	11,3	498	79,6	11	1,8	626
Freed	24	32,0	19	25,3	26	34,7	6	8,0	75
Free	113	80,1	13	9,2	11	7,8	4	2,8	141
Total	183	21,7	103	12,2	535	63,5	21	2,5	842

Source: AEPNSC: LB 1, 2, LM 1; LO 1, 2. BD-AENSP.

Legal status was a determining factor in family formation. Among freeborn women primarily associated with migrants, the most prevalent model was the Tridentine (Table 5). Women of this status likely encountered fewer obstacles in establishing sacramental relationships. However, freedwomen exhibited more significant variability, with the single mother and sacramentalized partner models nearly tied, followed closely by non-sacramentalized relationships. Conversely, among enslaved slaves women, predominantly African during this period, the most widespread family typology was that of the single mother, as observed in Minas Gerais, Rio das Velhas, Rio das Mortes (Paiva, 2022, p. 150) and other Iberian territories, such as the Neo-Granadian town of San Gil (Salazar Carreño, 2017, p. 216) and Seville (Corona Pérez, 2023a, p. 7). While legitimacy among freeborn individuals accounted for 60% of the total number of children in this category, it did not exceed 5% among freedwomen and enslaved individuals/slaves. Thus, most of the children of enslaved slave women and freedwomen were born outside of marriage, as was common in other towns and cities of the Iberian worlds during the 16th–18th centuries (Table 6).¹⁸ Why?

¹⁸ A comparative perspective on this phenomenon across different Iberian spaces during the 16th–18th centuries, in Corona Pérez, 2023a.

Table 6. Illegitimacy of newborns according to legal status in Vila Rica (1707-1730).

Legal status	Legitimate	Illegitimate	Unknown	Total	%
Slave	26	559	1	586	95,4
Freed	5	122	0	127	96,1
Free	92	67	0	159	42,1
Unknown	0	0	6	6	0,0
Total	123	748	7	878	85,2

Source: AEPNSC: LB 1, 2. BD-AENSP.

According to Figueiredo (1997, p. 28), the prevalence of illegitimacy in Minas Gerais during the 18th century revolved around three key factors. The first was related to the sociodemographic structure. The predominantly male nature of Portuguese migration, combined with the scarcity of European women, led Portuguese men to enter into non-sacramental relationships with black or miscegenated women. The second factor was ecclesiastical bureaucracy. The Church sought to combat concubinage and informal unions through pastoral visits. Not surprisingly, the Tridentine family was seen as a mechanism for establishing social order (1997, p. 26–27). However, the formalities required for marriage hindered the widespread adoption of this model. On the one hand, the fees charged by the Church were often prohibitive for a significant portion of the population of Minas Gerais. Moreover, the extensive certifications required by canon law to prevent bigamy further complicated the process (1997, p. 36). Consequently, while the Church attempted to address the problem, it failed to create adequate mechanisms for its resolution. As a result, institutional barriers multiplied free and consensual relationships outside the Tridentine model (1997, p. 38–39). The third factor related to the challenges enslaved peoplepopulation faced in accessing marriage, as marital life implied a degree of autonomy that directly conflicted with enslaverowner control (1997, p. 36).

Historiographical explanations for these relationships have focused on the spaces of agency that women, mainly enslavedslaves, could navigate to form stable family ties in a context marked by violence and sexual exploitation. While the extant sources do not offer direct evidence

regarding the aforementioned abuses, it is reasonable to hypothesize that sexual violence against these single mothers was a prevalent aspect of society, as evidenced by judicial documentation from Vila Rica in the latter half of the 18th century (Aguiar, 1999, p. 161–234). Marital life also served as a site of conflict, with many women suffering mistreatment at the hands of their husbands. A contributing factor was the transgression of the principle of monogamy and the reversal of traditional expectations toward wives. For instance, free married men often treated their mistresses—frequently their own enslaved slave women—with kindness while mistreating their wives. The misogynistic structure of the Tridentine family relegated wives to a position of inferiority, leaving them vulnerable to violence (Figueiredo, 1997, p. 88–89).

However, limiting the framework of social relations exclusively to the dichotomy of men-women/slave owners-slaves and portraying women solely as passive victims of oppressive structures would be a mistake (Salazar Carreño, 2017, p. 34). While the relational universe of the society of Minas Gerais in the first third of the 18th century was undoubtedly fraught with tensions, it was also shaped by affections and mutual interests. Establishing family life among enslaved slave and free populations, which did not require formal marriage, is crucial (Libby, 2007, p. 418). In the context of a predominantly African enslaved peoples slaveholding scenario, the retention of affective and relational customs and practices must also be considered. In many Bantu groups in Central Africa, polygamy and premarital sexual relations among the young were socially accepted without devaluing women (Velázquez Rodríguez, 2006, p. 80–81). Consequently, it is plausible that in Vila Rica, where numerous enslaved Africans were directly transported from coastal ports to Minas Gerais,¹⁹ in which they underwent catechism and sacramentalization, African social patterns persisted. Marriage was not regarded as necessary for the establishment of romantic affective relationships.

19 As could be the case of Maria, a slave of Manuel Esteves, described as “adulta instruída na nossa sancta fê,” as indicated in her baptismal record (AEPNSC: LB 1, ff. 70r-70v, 13-IX-1718, Fig. 79).

Table 7. Couples by legal status and sex in Vila Rica (1707-1730).

Couples	Sacramentalized		Non-sacramentalized		Total
	N.º	%	N.º	%	
Male and female slaves (same slave owner)	33	80,5	8	19,5	41
Male and female slaves (different slave owner)	8	50,0	8	50,0	16
Slave man and slave woman	2	28,6	5	71,4	7
Slave man and free woman	0	0,0	0	0,0	0
Freedman and slave woman	0	0,0	1	100,0	1
Freedman and freedwoman	1	50,0	1	50,0	2
Freedman and free woman	3	100,0	0	0,0	3
Free man and slave woman	4	6,7	56	93,3	60
Free man and freedwoman	1	7,1	13	92,9	14
Free men and free women	124	90,5	13	9,5	137
Total	176	62,6	105	37,4	281

Source: AEPNSC: LB 1, 2, LM 1; LO 1, 2. BD-AENSP.

Cross-matching baptism, marriage, and death records have enabled the reconstruction of 281 couples (Table 7). The results are compelling, as they reveal relational patterns influenced by the legal status and gender of the documented couples' members. When both individuals were enslaved slaves and shared the same enslavement owner, these pairings were more likely to result in marriage. It seems, therefore, that they may have found it easier to marry than slaves who did not share an owner. This suggests that enslaved individuals who shared an owner may have had an easier time marrying compared to those who did not, with an equitable distribution between sacramental and illegitimate relationships. For enslavement owners, the act of enslaved individuals marrying facilitated greater control, while.

In contrast, for these enslaved people, marriage represented the formation of bonds of solidarity, mutual assistance, and material and spiritual support within the enslavement manorial domain (Paiva, 2009,

p. 130). The data in the table underscore that relationships between enslaved slave men and freedmen or freedwomen and free women were minimal and consistently outside the bounds of marriage. Freedwomen more frequently formed relationships with free men, mainly Portuguese, as such unions offered better prospects for themselves and their children. A similar pattern can be observed among free women, although their demographic representation in Vila Rica's society was smaller than that of enslaved slave women. Conversely, relationships between free women and enslaved slave men were virtually nonexistent, as free women primarily established relationships with men of similar origins and legal status.

Beyond the information required for administering sacraments or formalizing burials, parish registers provide scant detail regarding physical attributes, skin color, and origins. Nine out of ten documented individuals lack such descriptions. However, numerous cases reveal mothers who did not share the same qualities as their children, illustrating the intensity of miscegenation in the political center of Minas Gerais. One such example is Isabel, an enslaved slave woman by Alexandre Ferreira dos Santos, described as “do gentio de Guiné,” who had a daughter, Maria, identified as “miscegenatedparda,” later freed at the baptismal font.²⁰ Maria also shared the same fate, in this case a “mulata,” who, being the daughter of Anna, “de nação mina” and slave, would eventually be freed by her owner. Similarly, another Maria, this time described as mulata, was the daughter of Anna, a mina slave, and was also freed by her enslaver, Manuel Antunes Ferreira, who declared her “forra e livre de todo o captiueiro.”²¹ Although qualities are not always specified in baptism records, the relationships between (seemingly) white free men and enslaved slave or freedwomen indirectly testify to these dynamics. For instance, in May 1712, records indicate the baptism of Raphael,

20 “Maria, parda filha de Izabel, do gentio de Guiné, escraua de Alexandre Ferreira dos Santos, cuja creatura disse o dito senhor a daua por forra pelhos bons seruísios que tem recebido da dita sua may, e o mesmo dicerão os padrinhos” (AEPNSC: LB 1, f. 33v, 2-V-1717, Fig. 41).

21 AEPNSC: LB 1, sf. 43r, 1-VIII-1720, Fig. 50.

the son of Antônio Luis Chaves and his enslaved slave woman Inácia;²² Caterina, the daughter of Simão de Meireles and his “mulata” mulata, Ângela de Campos;²³ and Francisco, the son of Francisco de Lucena and Marcela, “mulata sua escrava.”²⁴

It seems no coincidence that Simão and Francisco recognized the paternity of these children with their enslaved slave women. These cases were not isolated incidents. Of the 715 children of enslaved slave women documented in the two parishes during the study period, approximately 8% (56 children) were recognized as offspring by their enslavers/owners. While this figure may appear modest, it is undoubtedly significant because it was not a common practice in early modern Iberian societies. In fact, it is more than likely that the figure is an underestimate due to the widespread absence of fathers in the baptism records of newborn slaves, especially given the likely underreporting caused by the frequent absence of fathers' names in baptismal records. The documentation fails to elucidate how these illegitimate relationships came to fruition. Nonetheless, these unions may also have been stable, potentially resulting in the formation of non-sacramentalized families that persisted over time. Such could be the case with the relationship between Captain Manuel Martins Carneiro and his enslaved slave woman, Isabel.

The initial reference to this couple precedes the town's establishment, dating back to April 1710. It documents the baptism of their son, Antônio, whom Manuel granted freedom at the baptismal font, acknowledging him as his son: “por forro como seo filho que reconhecia ser.”²⁵ Antônio would not be their only child. In March 1713, they baptized João, whom Manuel also freed during the baptism.²⁶ This child is believed to have passed away, as two years later, in June 1715, another

22 “o qual confessou ser a dita criança seu filho” AEPNSC: LB 1, sf., 20-V-1712, Fig. 10.

23 AEPNSC: LB 1, sf., 21-V-1712, Fig. 10.

24 AEPNSC: LB 1, sf., 21-V-1712, Fig. 10.

25 AEPNSC: LB 1, sf., 12-IV-1710, Fig. 7.

26 AEPNSC: LB 1, f. 14v, 10-III-1713, Fig. 21.

newborn with the same name was baptized and likewise freed.²⁷ This trajectory is remarkable. Its stability over time and the social mobility achieved by their children through freedom granted at baptism suggest that this relationship, formed within the enslaver domain, was forged and sustained by affection. This conclusion is reinforced when considering that Manuel did not extend similar actions to all the people he enslaved with all his slaves, not even those born under his domain. During the study period, the captain baptized at least eight enslaved peopleslaves—including the adults Miguel,²⁸ Pedro,²⁹ Antônio, and Manuel,³⁰ and newborns João (mother unknown)³¹ and Domingas, daughters of the enslaved slave women Teresa³² and Paula,³³ respectively. However, only his children with Isabel were granted freedom at the baptismal font.

The relationship between Manuel Martins Carneiro and Isabel was not the only non-sacramentalized union between enslavers slave owners and slaveenslaved women that remained stable over time. Captain Francisco da Costa Oliveira, who owned between 18 and 24 enslaved peopleslaves from 1718 to 1730,³⁴ had a first child with his “miscegenated enslavedparda” slave woman, Florencia, named Antônio. According to the baptismal record by the parish priest of Nossa Senhora da Conceição, Francisco de Queirós Monteiro, “diçeme o dito capitam Francisco da Costa hera seu filho, que assim era da dita sua escraua Florençia, e que pelhos bons seruissos que tinha da dita escraua, avia por forra e liure de

27 AEPNSC: LB 1, f. 28v, 6-VI-1715, Fig. 36.

28 AEPNSC: LB 1, sf., 5-X-1712, Fig. 13.

29 AEPNSC: LB 1, f. 17v, 15-V-1713, Fig. 24.

30 Baptized on the same day but recorded in different entries, AEPNSC: LB 1, f. 21v, 2-IX-1713, Fig. 29.

31 AEPNSC: LB 1, sf., 26-VIII-1712, Fig. 12.

32 AEPNSC: LB 1, f. 11r, 12-I-1713, Fig. 17.

33 AEPNSC: LB 1, f. 23v, 31-XII-1713, Fig. 31.

34 As inferred from the fiscal documentation of the Quintos lists for the years 1718 and 1719 (Gaspar, 2021, p. 803 and p. 806) and the Real Donativo for the year 1730 (APM: CMOP, Cx. 02, doc. 34, f. 7v; CMOP, Cx. 02, doc. 54, f. 7r).

toda a seruidão”.³⁵ Three years later, Francisco and Florencia, described as “miscegenated and enslaved *parda e escrava*”, baptized José, although no record of freedom was granted at his baptism.³⁶ The final documented child, however, exhibits substantial discrepancies from earlier records. Named Francisco, this child was listed simply as “*filho natural*,” with no reference to legal status or quality. Florencia, now referred to as “*Florencia da Costa*,” was no longer described with her former enslaved slave status or the designation “*miscegenated parda*” noted in earlier records. Florencia had been emancipated over the six years between these records, although the precise timeframe remains uncertain due to the absence of extant archival notarial records. Her liberation, coupled with her relationship with the captain—effectively her partner despite the absence of marriage—allowed her to redefine her social status and present herself as a free woman.³⁷ These examples reflect a slaveholding society with fluid hierarchies (Guedes, 2008, p. 101–102).

Another similar case involves Félix de Souza Porto and Páscoa, who were listed as enslaved slave in the baptism of their daughter Maria, though her enslaver owner or mistress was not identified.³⁸ In the baptism of their second child, Josefa, Páscoa Maria, as she was then called, appeared without a legal status. This suggests that she was enslaved slave, as her daughter was registered as freed in the sacramental book.³⁹ By the time of the baptism of their third child, Alexandre, Páscoa Maria was described as miscegenated and freed,⁴⁰ indicating that she had been freed sometime between the births of her second and third children.

These changes in legal status and social designation were not solely the result of affective relationships between enslavers slave owners and enslaved slave women. In December 1718, the enslaved slave

35 AEPNSC: LB 1, f. 34r, 29-III-1717, Fig. 41.

36 AEPNSC: LB 1, f. 42r, 29-I-1720, Fig. 49.

37 AEPNSC: LB 1, f. 85r, 7-IV-1726, Fig. 90.

38 AEPNSC: LB 1, f. 49v, 6-I-1722, Fig. 57.

39 AEPNSC: LB 1, f. 53v, 2-IV-1723, Fig. 62.

40 AEPNSC: LB 1, f. 63v, 15-IV-1725, Fig. 72.

Mariana and Caetano became parents to Agostinho. Their owner, Vicente de Souza, granted freedom to the child at the baptismal font, citing “pelos bons servisos que tem recebido de seus pais.”⁴¹ Approximately five years later, in June 1723, Mariana and Caetano baptized their second child, Antônia. While Caetano remained enslaved, Mariana was registered as “freedforra.”⁴² In other cases, the absence of surviving notarial records from this period hinders our ability to ascertain the precise circumstances surrounding her liberation. The granting of freedom to the first child as a reward for faithful service and diligent labor suggests a “favorable” treatment of these enslaved individuals. However, such treatment was not free of cost. These dynamics were rooted in the daily negotiations between enslaver owners and enslaved slaves, influenced by reciprocal interests, religious motivations, and economic considerations (Soares, 2022, p. 108). This interplay was also evident in these women’s roles in the labor sphere.

THE WORK ORGANIZATION

In the “termos de aforamento” of the municipal chamber of Vila Rica, João Veloso de Carvalho is recorded registering several lots of unoccupied land in the “arraial” of Pilar. In April 1713, he paid for three *braças* of a plot in the “caminho nouo que vai deste Ouro Preto para o Pilorinho desta Villa, da parte do morro”⁴³. A few months later, in November, he paid again for a plot in the “caminho nouo”, this time with only one “*braça*” and described as “da parte direita, fazendo frente ao morro, e parte com cazas de Manoel Ribeiro”.⁴⁴ In January 1720, he registered four more *braças* in Rua Nova, near the houses “da câmara.”⁴⁵ These transactions portray João Veloso de Carvalho as an individual

41 AEPNSC: LB 1, f. 37v, 9-XII-1718, Fig. 45.

42 AEPNSC: LB 1, ff. 54v-55r, 27-VI-1723, Fig. 63.

43 APM: CMOP, Códice 1, 24-IV-1713.

44 APM: CMOP, Códice 1, 24-IV-1713.

45 APM: CMOP, Códice 1, 24-IV-1720.

with considerable economic means. In taxes from 1715, João Veloso de Carvalho is listed as one of the most significant contributors, paying 100 octaves of gold (Gaspar, 2021, p. 789). Francisco Rodrigues Godim is also documented as purchasing a plot on Rua Nova, next to a “rancho.” These ranchos, made of mud and covered with straw, were used as shelters for miners and enslaved workers/slaves and storing tools. Reflecting the provisional nature of the early 18th century, these modest constructions were fundamental to stabilizing the population of Minas Gerais (Veloso, 2018, p. 190–191). One rancho was registered as “de huma Negra de João Vellozo, por nome Joana.”⁴⁶

Joana, married to Antônio—both enslaved slave by João Veloso—had a son⁴⁷ and managed to negotiate with her enslaver/owner for permission to manage the rancho. It is plausible that the adjacent plot allowed her to cultivate horticultural crops for subsistence and small-scale trade. Such activities probably facilitated her accumulation of personal savings. This case was not unique. Nazario Carvalho applied to the chamber for a plot of land measuring three braças on Rua Nova da Praça. This plot was bordered on one side by the rancho of a “black preta” woman called Susana and on the other by the rancho of Bento Cabral, where “tem uma negra com uma venda”⁴⁸ or “ranxhino”, as noted in Joana’s land register, was described as a “preta” black freedwoman.⁴⁹ The ownership of land plots by these women was exceptional. Of the more than 270 registrations—excluding repeated and incomplete ones—only seven were made by women, three of whom were classified as “preta” black freedwomen.⁵⁰ This fact is particularly significant considering that men were the

46 APM: CMOP, Códice 1, 16-V-1714.

47 Antônio (BD-AEPNSP: 11-VIII-1715).

48 APM: CMOP, Códice 1, 18-IX-1714.

49 APM: CMOP, Códice 1, 9-XII-1714.

50 In addition to Joana, already mentioned, Maria de Bairros (16-I-1713) and Maria da Cruz (9-IV-1718). APM: CMOP, Codex 1.

majority among enslaved individualspopulation; only one “preto” black freedman, Manuel da Graça Tomé, is documented as acquiring land.⁵¹

The involvement of enslaved slaves and freedwomen in food production and sales was a critical factor in their ability to accumulate personal savings and, consequently, achieve social mobility in 18th-century Minas Gerais (Dantas, 2016; Lima, 2023; Paiva & Lima, 2023; Barros, 2023). The significance of these activities becomes even more apparent when examining another set of documents, this time fiscal in nature: the payment lists of the Real Donativo.

Table 8. Declarants in the lists of the Real Donativo of Vila Rica (1730).

Sex	Free		Freed		Slave		Unknown	Total
	N.º	%	N.º	%	N.º	%	N.º	
Men	1.288	91,5	22	14,9	11	9,1	0	1.321
Women	4	0,3	126	85,1	110	90,9	5	245
Unknown	0	0,0	0	0,0	0	0,0	8	8
Total	1.292	91,8	148	100,0	121	100,0	13	1.574
%	82,1	9,4	7,7	0,8	100,0			

Source: APM: CMOP, Cx. 02, docs. 05, 38, 34, 54, 50.

Most declarants of the Real Donativo were male and primarily free, except for the category of freedwomen, which accounted for more than 15% of the sample (Table 8). The distribution of the enslaved population, which was 70% male (Table 2), contrasts with that of the women, who exhibited a remarkable ability to move from the subjection of slavery to freedom. These women demonstrated autonomy and capacity for insertion into the labor market to obtain income and contribute to the processes of manumission, both for themselves and their children.

While not all freedwomen declared themselves, the “vendas,” itinerant stalls for the sale of food and other daily objects, appear to be the most widespread economic activity (Dantas, 2016, p. 89–90; Lima,

51 APM: CMOP, Códice 1, 17-IV-1718.

2023, p. 299). This is evidenced by the cases of the black “pretas” freed-womean Maria da Silva Liria,⁵² Anna de Jesus⁵³, and Leonor Gonçalves.⁵⁴ This does not imply that the freedmen were not employed. For instance, the lists include individuals such as Antônio da Silva, a “preto” black man;⁵⁵ Frutuoso Pereira, a “pardo” miscegenated barber;⁵⁶ Luiz dos Santos, “pardo” miscegenated⁵⁷, and Tomé Rodrigues, “preto” black;⁵⁸ João Lopes⁵⁹ and Manuel [Brito], tailors;⁶⁰ hunters, such as Domingos Velho⁶¹ and Domingos da Rocha;⁶² and Antônio do Vale, a “pardo” miscegenated holder of a “venda.”⁶³ However, women demonstrated a greater capacity for socioeconomic mobility, and access to the slave market was one of these facets. The freedwomen in the sample reported owning 194 enslaved peopleslaves, compared to only 31 owned by men of the same status. Paiva and Lima (2023, p. 108) recently observed that the transition from enslaved slave person to enslaver slave owner was frequent in Minas Gerais. These agents merely replicated the very logic that had initially subjected them to slavery. Subsequently, they enabled their transition to achieve freedom and socioeconomic mobility and become enslaversslave owners. There was no inherent contradiction within this social context, including for the enslavedslaves.

People reduced to slavery also appear as declarers of taxable goods for the payment of the Real Donativo. Among them, women

52 APM: CMOP, Cx. 02, doc. 34, f. 2v.

53 APM: CMOP, Cx. 02, doc. 54, f. 1r.

54 APM: CMOP, Cx. 02, doc. 55, f. 1v.

55 APM: CMOP, Cx. 02, doc. 38, f. 4r.

56 APM: CMOP, Cx. 02, doc. 05, f. 1v.

57 APM: CMOP, Cx. 02, doc. 38, f. 5r.

58 APM: CMOP, Cx. 02, doc. 38, f. 5r.

59 APM: CMOP, Cx. 02, doc. 38, f. 7r.

60 APM: CMOP, Cx. 02, doc. 38, f. 7v.

61 APM: CMOP, Cx. 02, doc. 05, f. 1v.

62 APM: CMOP, Cx. 02, doc. 05, f. 2r.

63 APM: CMOP, Cx. 02, doc. 38, f. 3v.

were particularly prominent among these individuals. Furthermore, the quantitative disparity between freed and enslaved slave women, despite the legal subjugation of the latter, is striking. However, enslaved slave women could obtain or manage goods through negotiation and/or affective relationships with their enslavers/owners, whether temporarily ceded, donated, or acquired by themselves. The lack of notarial records prevents us from cross-matching the documentation with this source, but possibly, many of these enslaved peopleslaves were “alibiedcoartadas”. This would have granted them autonomy in their labor and the opportunity to accumulate personal wealth/savings. Among the goods declared by the enslaved slave people of Vila Rica, the “vendas” stand out, although they are generally cataloged as “poor” or “very poor,” as in the cases of Vitória, enslaved slave by Francisco Ribeiro;⁶⁴ Joana, enslaved slave by Simão Ribeiro;⁶⁵ or Rosa, enslaved slave by Manuel Teixeira da Cunha.⁶⁶

Slavery and its socioeconomic limitations explain why most of the enslaved peopleslave women did not declare others slaves. For instance, Antônia, an enslaved personslave belonging to belonging to Antônio Teixeira, declared not only a “venda pobre sortida,” but also two additional enslaved slaves/people.⁶⁷ Similarly, Josefa, an enslaved personslave belonging to José Pacheco, declared three enslaved peopleslaves.⁶⁸ The possession of enslaved peopleslaves by individuals of similar social standing serves to illustrate/illustrates the extensive deep integration of slavery into the very fabric of that society’s structure.

64 APM: CMOP, Cx. 2, doc. 38, f. 3r.

65 APM: CMOP, Cx. 2, doc. 38, f. 4r.

66 APM: CMOP, Cx. 2, doc. 38, f. 9r.

67 APM: CMOP, Cx. 2, doc. 38, f. 7r.

68 APM: CMOP, Cx. 2, doc. 54, f. 6v.

CONCLUSION

The discovery of gold in the late 17th century led to a significant migratory influx to Minas Gerais. This “new” society was structured around the institution of slavery. It comprised diverse individuals, primarily Africans from a broad geographic range extending from the Cape Verde Islands to Mozambique. This highlighted the heterogeneity of the contingent. Notably, women constituted a segment of this population that played a prominent role, and the limited presence of Portuguese women only reinforced this dynamic. However, the profound social and demographic imbalances of that society favored flexible forms of sociability that enabled the socioeconomic mobility and advancement of a significant minority of enslaved slave women. This phenomenon was further facilitated by the urban environment in which slavery in Minas Gerais developed, which promoted interactions between diverse human groups and fostered crossbreeding dynamics.

The study revealed that most family organizations were established and cultivated outside the confines of marriage, yet this did not impede their resilience over time. The findings indicate that the emotional and familial bonds cultivated within the enslavers slave domain, particularly between enslavers slave-owners and enslaved slavespeople, provided a favorable environment for the social mobility of these women and their children. A striking aspect of this phenomenon is that 15% of all newborn enslaved peopleslaves, most recognized as the children of their enslaversowners, were freed at the baptismal font. Concurrently, these mothers were also granted the opportunity to secure their freedom. This framework further facilitated these women’s access to and more agile participation in the world of work, as demonstrated by the analysis of the “*termos de aforamento*” and the Real Donativo of Vila Rica lists. These sources demonstrate that, despite their continued captivity, these women were managing ranchos or vendas and even holding enslaved peopleslaves in their names. Social mobility was, paradoxically from the perspective of the present, a mechanism for maintaining social differentiation.

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