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**The limits of liberty after the creation of international courts in the Atlantic world: demography and the work of liberated Africans in plantations and public road construction (1831-1864)**

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## **Abstract**

This article analyses the distribution system of liberated Africans in the Atlantic world in order to explore identity and freedom in the nineteenth century. Thus far the literature has paid scant attention to the relationship between Brazilian political institutions and the distribution system of liberated Africans. This study aims to analyse this system to explore issues of labour, gender, and freedom. The article argues that the authorities created the illegal scheme for the redistribution of the liberated Africans. The system favoured the agro-export merchant elite associated with the transatlantic slave trade (the 1810s-1830s), coffee plantations, and the purchase of road works. The article uses little-explored sources: the processes of the making of bridges and roads encoded in a database that reaches a volume of 23,000 documents for the period 1840-1889 and the list of names of liberated Africans (1853).

## **Keywords**

Transatlantic slave trade; liberated Africans; coercion; labour; demography

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## 1. Introduction

In 1807, England and the United States suppressed the transatlantic slave trade.<sup>1</sup> From then on, there was an expansion of the legal apparatus against the slave trade. British diplomatic pressure resulted in bilateral agreements signed by five countries in order to curb the international slave trade of Africans, as well as inventing a new legal category: “liberated Africans” or “emancipated”, referring to captives of confiscated slave ships.<sup>2</sup> Thus, between the 1810s and 1840s, mixed commissions were installed in different areas of the Atlantic world: Freetown, Havana, Rio de Janeiro, Paramaribo, Cape of Good Hope, Boa Vista, Luanda, Jamestown, Port Louis, Nassau, Kingston and New York.<sup>3</sup> These mixed international courts had the legal prerogative to seize the shipments of slave ships and to emancipate the captives. Despite these efforts, the impact of this policy was limited in terms of ending the traffic; of the 2.8 million enslaved people who disembarked in the Americas between 1808 and 1867, the movement to suppress the transatlantic trade captured 1,994 ships and “emancipated” 180,969 enslaved people.<sup>4</sup> Of this total, Cuba received 26,000, Brazil 11,000, and the United States 7,000.<sup>5</sup> As the literature indicates, Brazil and Cuba were the main destinations for those Africans in the 19th century, with the importation, respectively, of more than 1.7 million and 685,000 enslaved people.<sup>6</sup>

The historiography of liberated Africans has underlined the role of international diplomacy in the configuration of mixed commissions and their significance in suppressing the transatlantic slave trade.<sup>7</sup> Recent research has explored issues of identity and freedom in the Atlantic world, with liberated Africans as the central figures.<sup>8</sup> These studies have shown that the manuscripts about liberated Africans enlighten us on the enslavement process in Africa,

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<sup>1</sup> David Eltis, *Economic Growth and the Ending of the Transatlantic Slave Trade* (Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press, 1987); Seymour Drescher, *Capitalism and Antislavery: British Mobilization in Comparative Perspective* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987); Stanley Engerman, ‘Comparative Approaches to the Ending of Slavery’, *Slavery & Abolition* 21, no. 2 (1 August 2000): 281–300, <https://doi.org/10.1080/01440390008575316>.

<sup>2</sup> England had established a bilateral agreement with Spain, Portugal, Brazil, the United States, and the Netherlands, see Daniel Domingues da Silva et al., ‘The Diaspora of Africans Liberated from Slave Ships in the Nineteenth Century’, *The Journal of African History* 55, no. 3 (November 2014): 347–69, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0021853714000371>.

<sup>3</sup> Henry B. Lovejoy, ‘The Registers of Liberated Africans of the Havana Slave Trade Commission: Implementation and Policy, 1824–1841’, *Slavery & Abolition* 37, no. 1 (2 January 2016): 23–44, <https://doi.org/10.1080/0144039X.2015.1117253>; Samuël Coghe, ‘The Problem of Freedom in a Mid Nineteenth-Century Atlantic Slave Society: The Liberated Africans of the Anglo-Portuguese Mixed Commission in Luanda (1844–1870)’, *Slavery & Abolition* 33, no. 3 (1 September 2012): 479–500, <https://doi.org/10.1080/0144039X.2012.668301>.

<sup>4</sup> Silva et al., ‘The Diaspora of Africans Liberated from Slave Ships in the Nineteenth Century’, 367.

<sup>5</sup> Beatriz Gallotti Mamigonian, *Africanos livres: A abolição do tráfico de escravos no Brasil*, 1ª edição (Companhia das Letras, 2017), 30–57.

<sup>6</sup> Silva et al., ‘The Diaspora of Africans Liberated from Slave Ships in the Nineteenth Century’, 368–69.

<sup>7</sup> Leslie Bethell, ‘The Mixed Commissions for the Suppression of the Transatlantic Slave Trade in the Nineteenth Century’, *The Journal of African History* 7, no. 1 (1966): 79–93; Robert Conrad, ‘Neither Slave nor Free: The Emancipados of Brazil, 1818–1868’, *Hispanic American Historical Review* 53, no. 1 (1 February 1973): 50–70, <https://doi.org/10.1215/00182168-53.1.50>; Rosanne Adderley, ‘“A Most Useful and Valuable People?” Cultural, Moral and Practical Dilemmas in the Use of Liberated African Labour in the Nineteenth-century Caribbean’, *Slavery & Abolition* 20, no. 1 (April 1999): 59–80, <https://doi.org/10.1080/01440399908575269>.

<sup>8</sup> Lovejoy, ‘The Registers of Liberated Africans of the Havana Slave Trade Commission’; Richard Anderson et al., ‘Using African Names to Identify the Origins of Captives in the Transatlantic Slave Trade: Crowd-Sourcing and the Registers of Liberated Africans, 1808–1862’, *History in Africa* 40 (2013): 4–9.

the structure of transport to the Americas and the process of formation of African communities.<sup>9</sup> A converging point in these studies is the perception that the specificity of historical records on liberated Africans allows us to reconstitute aspects of the limits of freedom in the Atlantic world and individual trajectories and the impact of the abolition of the Atlantic slave trade.<sup>10</sup>

This article explores the distribution of liberated Africans to the heart of Brazil. The study gives special attention to Africans assigned to work in the province of Minas Gerais. Based on the list of names of liberated Africans (1853) and manuscripts written by engineers and the provincial authorities, the article analyses the displacement of liberated Africans and the limits of freedom in Minas Gerais. Using these manuscripts, this study examines the origin, age, sex and movement of liberated Africans in the interior of Brazil after their arrival in the Americas. We argue that the Presidency of the Province of Minas Gerais set up an illegal system of redistribution of liberated Africans to benefit members of the agro-export mercantile elite linked to coffee farming, the slave trade (1809-1830) and the construction of road works. The slave system in Minas Gerais in the 19th century was the largest that had existed in the entire history of the institution of slavery in Brazil.<sup>11</sup> Over the century, the slave population of this province surpassed all the other Brazilian provinces and demonstrated demographic growth; from 276,098 individuals in 1832, it rose to 378,126 by 1873.<sup>12</sup> This was greater than the slave population of any other slave society in America, except for Cuba and the United States. Furthermore, except for Rio de Janeiro, Minas Gerais received the largest number of liberated Africans of all the Brazilian provinces. Despite this evidence of the region's importance in the history of slavery, there is no systematic study of liberated Africans in Minas Gerais. Most studies of liberated Africans focus on the Court of Rio de Janeiro and consequently present few references to Minas Gerais.<sup>13</sup> This perspective has come from the perception that Africans held under direct government control were used in urban squatter settlements, and little attention was given to geographic mobility.<sup>14</sup>

An analysis of two sets of records relating to Brazil (the Anglo-Brazilian Joint Commission and the national authorities) between 1831 and the 1850s, shows that only 9,133 slaves were rescued from smuggling out of a total of 504,000, representing 1,82% (Table 1).<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Daniel B. Domingues da Silva, 'The Kimbundu Diaspora to Brazil: Records from the Slave Ship *Brilhante*, 1838', *African Diaspora* 8, no. 2 (1 January 2015): 200–219, <https://doi.org/10.1163/18725465-00802003>; Marcos Abreu Leitão de Almeida, 'Ladinos e boçais: o regime de línguas do contrabando de africanos, (1831-c.1850)' (Master's thesis, Campinas, Universidade Estadual de Campinas, 2012), <https://doi.org/10.47749/T/UNICAMP.2012.850403>.

<sup>10</sup> Lovejoy, 'The Registers of Liberated Africans of the Havana Slave Trade Commission', 25.

<sup>11</sup> Roberto Borges Martins, 'Growing in Silence: The Slave Economy of Nineteenth-Century Minas Gerais, Brazil' (PhD diss, Vanderbilt University, 1980); Amílcar Martins Filho and Roberto B. Martins, 'Slavery in a Nonexport Economy: Nineteenth-Century Minas Gerais Revisited', *The Hispanic American Historical Review* 63, no. 3 (1983): 537–68, <https://doi.org/10.2307/2514786>; Clotilde Andrade Paiva, 'População e economia nas Minas Gerais do século XIX' (PhD diss, Universidade de São Paulo, 1996), <https://repositorio.usp.br/item/000718605>; Roberto Borges Martins, 'Minas e o tráfico de escravos no século XIX, outra vez', in *História econômica da independência e do império: coletânea de textos apresentados no I Congresso Brasileiro de História Econômica (Campus da USP, setembro de 1993)*, ed. Tamás Szmrecsányi and José Roberto Do Amaral Lapa (EdUSP, 1996), 99–130; Laird W. Bergad, *Escravidão e história econômica: demografia de Minas Gerais, 1720-1888* (Bauru: EDUSC, 2004).

<sup>12</sup> Mario Marcos Sampaio Rodarte, *O Trabalho do Fogo: Domicílios ou Famílias do Passado - Minas Gerais, 1830* (Belo Horizonte: Editora UFMG, 2012), 84–104.

<sup>13</sup> Mamigonian, *Africanos livres*, 94–111; 301–4; Conrad, 'Neither Slave nor Free', 54.

<sup>14</sup> Conrad, 'Neither Slave nor Free', 55.

<sup>15</sup> Beatriz Gallotti Mamigonian, 'To Be a Liberated African in Brazil: Labour and Citizenship in the Nineteenth Century' (PhD diss, University of Waterloo, 2002), 280; "Slave Voyages," Emory University, accessed on April 10, 2019, <https://www.slavevoyages.org/voyage/database>.



**Table 1 - Slaves disembarked in Brazil and emancipated liberated Africans, 1821-1860**

Decades	Enslaved disembarked		Emancipated Africans			
	N	%	N	%		
1821-1830	500,627	49.80	634	6.49		
1831-1840	226,027	22.48	4,775	48.89		
1841-1850	270,772	26.93	1,717	17.58		
1851-1860	7,900	0.79	2,641	27.04		
	1,005,326	100.0	9,767	100.0		

Notes and sources: N: Number. Beatriz Mamigonian, *Africanos livres: a abolição do tráfico no Brasil*, (São Paulo: Companhia das Letras, 2017), 566-589; Beatriz Mamigonian, "To Be Liberated African in Brazil: Labour and Citizenship in the Nineteenth Century" (PhD diss., University of Waterloo, 2002), 280. "Slave Voyages," Emory University, accessed on April 10, 2022, <https://www.slavevoyages.org/voyage/database>.

**Table 2 - Places and distribution of liberated Africans, 1851-1852 and 1865**

Places and institutions	1851-1852 (*)		1865 (**)	
	N	%	N	%
Province of Rio de Janeiro	300	40.9	61	8.5
Province of Minas Gerais	120	16.4	117	16.3
Mato Grosso Mining Company	100	13.6		
Province of São Paulo	93	12.7		
Penitentiary	40	5.5		
Public Lighting (Court)	32	4.4	18	2.5
União & Indústria Road			48	6.7
Navy Arsenal			43	6.0
D. Pedro II Hospice			42	5.8
Public Works (Court)			39	5.4
Magé – Sapucaia Road			27	3.8
Petrópolis – Estrela Road			27	3.8
Mangaratiba Road			20	2.8
D. Pedro II School			18	2.5
Ipanema Factory (São Paulo)			18	2.5
Province of Bahia			18	2.5
Polytechnic Laboratory			14	1.9
Other Institutions	48	6.5	210	29.2
Total	733	100.0	720	100.0

Notes and sources: N: Number. (\*) May 1851 to April 1853. Total number of liberated Africans distributed.

(\*\*) March 1865. Places of Employment of liberated Africans. Roberto Conrad, "Neither Slave nor Free: the Emancipados of Brazil," *The Hispanic American Historical Review* 53, no. 1 (1973), 57. Beatriz Mamigonian, *Africanos livres: a abolição do tráfico de escravos no Brasil*, (São Paulo: Companhia das Letras, 2017), 302-304.

The repression of the traffic produced a new problem in the Atlantic world: what were they to do with the Africans found on the ships?<sup>16</sup> In Brazil, figures indicate that the national authorities redistributed liberated Africans to Minas Gerais, São Paulo, Mato Grosso, Bahia and the

<sup>16</sup> Adderley, "A Most Useful and Valuable People?", 59-60.

interior of Rio de Janeiro, either by sea or land.<sup>17</sup> Between 1851 and 1852, the volume of liberated Africans redistributed to the interior reached 42.7%. In 1865, liberated Africans transferred out of the Court amounted to 38.4% (Table 2). The records indicate that Minas Gerais was second only to Rio de Janeiro as a destination for liberated Africans.

Scholars have emphasized the diversity and complexity of experiences of emancipation, notably pointing out the differences between liberated Africans in British colonies (Sierra Leone, Gambia and Cape Colony) and in other plantation economies (Brazil and Cuba).<sup>18</sup> Indeed, liberated Africans forged strategies that have encouraged historians to ask questions about abolition in the Age of Emancipation. Their actions undeniably offered new perspectives for understanding the complex abolitionist movement as well as the micro-stories of enslaved Africans.<sup>19</sup> The debate about the histories of liberated Africans in the Atlantic world and the origins of international human rights focused mainly on the individual trajectories of slaves.<sup>20</sup> This article contributes to the debate in a different way. It explores a unique set of demographic data, including new archival sources in Minas Gerais that have never been explored in the literature on liberated Africans. Institutional aspects of the geographic mobility of liberated Africans are better understood through these records. Furthermore, they shed new light on the demographic characteristics of a group of women and men who experienced work as a structural dimension of their lives, moving between coffee plantations, tea cultivation and heavy manual labour in the construction of public roads. The article is divided into six parts. In the second section we explain the distribution policy of emancipated Africans in the interior of Brazil, as well as the main sources used here. The third part shows the work of the liberated Africans in road construction and coffee plantations in Minas Gerais. The fourth section explores the emancipated men and women in tea cultivation and the fifth part briefly comments on aspects of control and working time. The sixth section concludes.

## 2. Distribution policy, list of names of liberated Africans and limits of freedom in Minas Gerais (1839-1860)

In 1839, deputy Francisco de Paula Santos,<sup>21</sup> in the tribune of the Provincial Assembly of Minas Gerais, praised the decision of the Minister of Justice, Bernardo Pereira de Vasconcelos, to send several liberated Africans to work for Paraibuna road for a modest sum.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Agostinho Marques Perdigão Malheiros, *A Escravidão No Brasil: Ensaio Histórico-Jurídico-Social, Parte 2 - Índios* (Rio de Janeiro: Typ. Nacional, 1867), 64–69.

<sup>18</sup> Henry B. Lovejoy and Richard Anderson, 'Introduction: "Liberated Africans" and Early International Courts of Humanitarian Effort', in *Liberated Africans and the Abolition of the Slave Trade, 1807-1896*, ed. Richard Anderson and Henry B. Lovejoy, NED-New edition (Boydell & Brewer, 2020), 1–22, <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctvktz0v>.

<sup>19</sup> Suzanne Schwarz, 'Reconstructing the Life Histories of Liberated Africans: Sierra Leone in the Early Nineteenth Century', *History in Africa* 39 (ed 2012): 175–207, <https://doi.org/10.1353/hia.2012.0011>.

<sup>20</sup> Jenny S. Martinez, *The Slave Trade and the Origins of International Human Rights Law* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 12–15; 34–37; 164–68, <https://doi.org/10.1093/acprof:osobl/9780195391626.001.0001>; Mamigonian, *Africanos livres*, 21–25; Andréa Lisly Gonçalves and Marileide Lázara Cassoli Meyer, 'Nas fimbrias da liberdade: agregados, índios, africanos livres e forros na Província de Minas Gerais (século XIX)', *Varia História* 27, no. 46 (2011): 645–63, <https://doi.org/10.1590/S0104-87752011000200013>.

<sup>21</sup> Francisco de Paula Santos distributed enslaved Africans, who had disembarked in Rio de Janeiro, to the interior of Brazil. Between 1809 and 1830 he sent 80 slaves to Minas Gerais. He was elected provincial deputy twice in the 1840s and was a deputy in the General Assembly on six occasions in the 1850s and 1860s. Douglas Libby pointed out that Francisco de Paula Santos joined in the slave rental system for the English mining company Saint John d'El Rey Mining Company. In 1867, Francisco de Paula Santos and his son-in-law, engineer Henrique Dumont, rented a total of 414 slaves, see Douglas Cole Libby, *Trabalho escravo e capital estrangeiro no Brasil: o caso de Morro Velho* (Belo Horizonte: Editora Itatiaia, 1984).

<sup>22</sup> Bernardo Pereira de Vasconcelos was an important moderate politician during the First Reign (1822-1831) and in the Regency period (1831-1840). He began his political career when he was elected deputy general for Minas Gerais in 1824, actively participating in the country's first legislature (1826). Because of his parliamentary experience in the sessions of 1826 and

For deputy Francisco de Paula Santos, a similar action would never have been practised by past administrations, arguing that the act of “[...] performing this service to the province of Minas was reserved for Vasconcelos. Justice, therefore, is done to the Minister of Justice, who gave this testimony of his zeal for his province”.<sup>23</sup>

Because of Vasconcelos’ political activities, the opposition protested about the Minister of Justice. Deputy Teófilo Ottoni mentioned that past administrations sent liberated Africans to the Casa de Correção and the judges in order to distribute them to residents of Rio de Janeiro, with the obligation to report with them each month to the General Curator.<sup>24</sup> Certainly, Ottoni was referring to the fulfilment of the instructions of November 19, 1835,<sup>25</sup> which stated that concessionaires could not receive more than eight liberated Africans each and that applicants for the services of liberated Africans must declare status, residence, employment or the occupation they lived on and pay an annual price for each African.<sup>26</sup>

However, Ottoni denounced the Minister of Justice, accusing him of using the distribution system of liberated Africans for clientelistic political interests. From 1837 onwards, the distribution among “[...] relatives, friends and clientele [...] Vasconcelos went down to these small details in order to please his people.”<sup>27</sup>

Twenty-seven liberated Africans made up the “portion” sent by the Minister of Justice to construct the Paraibuna road, which was under the administration of the provincial engineer Halfeld.<sup>28</sup> By May 1840, seven had been declared dead. Another twelve were judged incapable

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1827, he wrote the book “Letters to the voters of the Province of Minas Geraes”. He was a senator from 1838 until 1850, when he died. He also held the position of Minister of Finance (1831-1832) and Minister of Justice (1837-1839). On the participation of Bernardo Pereira de Vasconcelos in Brazilian politics during the illegal era of the slave trade, see Tâmis Peixoto Parron, ‘A política da escravidão no Império do Brasil, 1826-1865’ (Master’s thesis, Universidade de São Paulo, 2009).

<sup>23</sup> “Sessão parlamentar de 16 de fevereiro”, Fundação Biblioteca Nacional - BNDIGITAL (BN) *Jornal O Universal*, March 15, 1839, 1-2. Roberto Borges Martins, ‘A Transferência Da Corte Portuguesa Para o Brasil: Impactos Sobre Minas Gerais’, *Anais do XIII Seminário sobre a Economia Mineira [Proceedings of the 13th Seminar on the Economy of Minas Gerais]* (Cedeplar, Universidade Federal de Minas Gerais, 2008), 16; Fábio Wilson Amaral Pinheiro, ‘O Tráfico Atlântico de Escravos Na Formação Dos Plantéis Mineiros (1809-1830)’ (Master’s thesis, Universidade Federal do Rio de Janeiro, 2007), 163; Between 1999 and 2001, the Court’s police records (Intendência de Polícia da Corte) referring to “slave dispatches to various locations, 1809-1833” in the National Archives of Rio de Janeiro were transcribed and digitized. The distribution of slaves from Rio de Janeiro to different regions of Brazil indicates that few slave traders who controlled the transport of enslaved people from Africa redistributed the captives to the Brazilian hinterland, see Manolo Garcia Florentino, *Em costas negras: uma história do tráfico atlântico de escravos entre a África e o Rio de Janeiro: séculos XVIII e XIX* (São Paulo: Companhia das Letras, 1997), 107–39; João Luís Fragoso and Roberto Guedes, ‘Tráfico de Escravos, Mercadores e Fianças. Dois Bancos de Dados (Despachos de Escravos, Passaportes e Licenças)’. Rio de Janeiro: Laboratório Interdisciplinar de Pesquisa Em História Social – Liphis/UFRJ/Instituto de Pesquisa Econômica Aplicada – IPEA: 2001.

<sup>24</sup> Teófilo Benedito Ottoni was born in Serro on November 27, 1807 and died in Rio de Janeiro on October 17, 1869. He studied at the Academia de Marinha, but in 1829 he left the navy and returned to his hometown. A liberal activist, he was a provincial and general deputy. On his performance in parliament in Minas Gerais, see Claus Rodarte, ‘Os Liberais de Minas e o “Regresso”’, *Revista Do Arquivo Público Mineiro* 50, no. 2 (2014): 68–85.

<sup>25</sup> Decree of 19 November 1835, see *Collecção de Leis Do Império Do Brasil de 1835, Parte II* (Rio de Janeiro: Typ. Nacional, 1864), 125–26.

<sup>26</sup> BN, “Edital,” *Jornal do Commercio*, Rio de Janeiro, March 7, 1836, 2-3. BN, “Relação das pessoas contempladas na distribuição dos africanos livres pertencentes aos carregamentos do Brigue Amizade Feliz e Escuna Angélica”, *Jornal do Commercio*, Rio de Janeiro, January 8, 1836, 2.

<sup>27</sup> BN, “Sessão parlamentar de 16 de fevereiro,” *Jornal O Universal*, March 14, 1839, 1-2.

<sup>28</sup> Arquivo Público Mineiro (APM), Public Work (OP), 3/4, Box 3, doc. 04/07.

of working on the roads,<sup>29</sup> and were sent to the Ouro Preto Botanical Garden,<sup>30</sup> whose director was Fernando Antônio Pereira de Vasconcelos, brother of the Minister of Justice.<sup>31</sup>

In 1849, the newspaper “O Philantropo”, in an article titled “The answer to our questions”, indicated how the change in the distribution of liberated Africans by the Minister of Justice, Bernardo Pereira de Vasconcelos, in the 1830s still reverberated in the State’s practices: “Is there not a law to protect liberated Africans? The answer is simple. There is a protection law for liberated Africans, but this law has been converted into a patronage law for the godsons of the executioners. Liberated African means cheap enslaved person.”<sup>32</sup> In other words, Bernardo Pereira de Vasconcelos, as Minister of Justice, by subverting the distribution process of liberated Africans, helped conceal the persistence of practices of slavery under the legal formula of the category of liberated Africans.

In April 1853, a Circular issued by the Ministry of Justice reached the Presidency of the Province of Minas Gerais.<sup>33</sup> The ministerial document asked for the number of liberated Africans existing in the province distributed to individuals, public establishments, charities, religious orders, and societies, identifying names, sex, and presumed age. That said, the Minas Gerais State Secretariat provided a list of Africans who were assigned to public and private institutions.

According to this list of 1853, in Minas Gerais there were 139 liberated Africans, 119 men and 20 women. Of this total, 42 liberated Africans were located in the Jardim Botânico de Ouro Preto, 20 women and 22 men. Another 35 men were in the services of Paraibuna road in Serra da Mantiqueira under the direction of the provincial engineer João José da Silva Teodoro and 62 were with Commander Custódio Ferreira Leite (Table 3).

**Table 3 - Liberated Africans in the Province of Minas Gerais, 1853**

					<i>Total</i>
	<i>Men</i>		<i>Women</i>		
	N	%	N	%	
<i>Botanical Garden</i>	22	18.49	20	100.0	42
<i>Paraibuna road in Serra da Mantiqueira</i>	35	29.41			35
<i>Under the tutelage of Custódio Ferreira Leite</i>	62	52.10			62
<i>Total</i>	119	100.0	20	100.0	139

Notes and sources: N: Number. Arquivo Público Mineiro, Arquivo Público Mineiro, APM, PP, 1-12, Box 1, doc. 37.

It is noteworthy that 52.0% of liberated Africans were in the hands of a private individual. According to the director of the Botanical Garden, the concession was only made locally by the 5th Section of the Minas Gerais State Secretariat.<sup>34</sup> Therefore, there was an illegal practice of distributing liberated Africans, which came under the power of the province of Minas Gerais. It illicitly redistributed liberated Africans to individuals, ignoring norms established by the

<sup>29</sup> APM, Presidência da Província (PP), 1-27, Box 4, doc. 08.

<sup>30</sup> Fernando Antônio Pereira de Vasconcelos, ‘O Jardim Botânico de Ouro Preto Em 1835’, *Revista Do Arquivo Público Mineiro* 3 (1898): 774–77; Fernando Antônio Pereira de Vasconcelos, ‘Informações Sobre o Jardim Botânico Em 1836’, *Revista Do Arquivo Público Mineiro* 17 (1912): 436–38.

<sup>31</sup> APM, PP, 1-27, Box 2, doc. 42.

<sup>32</sup> BN, “A resposta às nossas perguntas,” *Jornal O Philantropo*, July 20, 1849, 1.

<sup>33</sup> BN, “Circular Ministério dos Negócios da Justiça,” *Jornal O Bom Senso*, June 16, 1853, 3.

<sup>34</sup> APM, Seção Provincial (SP), 834, doc. 334.

Central Government on how Africans were to be divided up. Such extralegal conduct directly impacted the freedom of liberated Africans when, in the 1850s, they demanded emancipation. In April 1858, several liberated Africans, who had provided services in the province of Minas Gerais since 1839, expressed their intention to obtain a letter of emancipation under the National State Decree nº 1,303 of 1853.<sup>35</sup> Nine months later, in January 1859, the provincial president issued an arrest warrant for the 38-year-old liberated African, Satiro, who had disappeared from the services in which he was employed and was wandering the streets of Ouro Preto, declaring that he had obtained emancipation.<sup>36</sup> This was the result of doubts held by the Provincial Government about implementing the Decree of 1853:<sup>37</sup> did it deal only with liberated Africans granted to individuals? Who should issue the emancipation letter: Judges of Orphans or Central Government?<sup>38</sup>

Faced with these questions, José Thomaz Nabuco, Minister of Business and Justice, resolved the confused situation. In a letter addressed to the provincial president, he explained that the decree was only applicable to liberated Africans from the service of private individuals and could not be extended to employees in offices and public establishments.<sup>39</sup> This episode has its connections to international law, in the context of the Atlantic world, for the suppression of the slave trade in the 19th century. It illuminates the conditions that defined the parameters of the possible struggle of liberated Africans for freedom within Brazilian slave society.

### **3. Slave trader, liberated Africans and bidding for road works**

During the first three decades of the 19th century, the Ferreira Leite family, especially Custódio Ferreira Leite and his brother Francisco Leite Ribeiro, were active in the internal traffic of new Africans.<sup>40</sup> Between 1809 and 1832, the records of the Court Police indicate that the Leite brothers sent 1,337 new Blacks in 72 shipments. These men were destined for the new coffee plantations of the Paraíba do Sul valley, in Rio de Janeiro and for Minas Gerais.<sup>41</sup>

Originally from São João Del Rey, Custódio Ferreira Leite also participated in the construction of the Polícia road (1816-1820) and employed slaves to build it.<sup>42</sup> In the 1840s and 1850s, he became one of the main coffee growers in Mar de Espanha, in Mata Minas Gerais. His activities as a bidder for road works continued and developed into new fields in the 1850s.

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<sup>35</sup> BN, "Africanos livres ao serviço da província," *Jornal Correio Oficial de Minas*, April 14, 1858, 6.

<sup>36</sup> BN, "Ao substituto do juiz municipal," *Jornal Correio Oficial de Minas*, January 20, 1859, 1.

<sup>37</sup> *Collecção Das Leis Do Império de 1853*, , Parte II (Rio de Janeiro: Typ. Nacional, 1853), 420–21.

<sup>38</sup> BN, "Ao substituto do juiz municipal," *Jornal Correio Oficial de Minas*, January 20, 1859, 1.

<sup>39</sup> BN, "Ministério da Justiça," *Jornal Correio Oficial de Minas*, January 31, 1859, 1.

<sup>40</sup> The list of names from 1831 indicates that Francisco Leite Ribeiro had 205 slaves, 153 of whom were male and only 52 female. Of the total, 149 were Africans and 56 were crioulos, with 106 Africans aged between 10 and 20 years. In 1840, when the slave trade was already banned by the law of November 7, 1831, Francisco Leite Ribeiro appears on another list of names with traces of enrichment: he had 267 enslaved people, of whom 167 were Africans. See Roberto Borges Martins, 'Tesouro Revelado', *Revista Do Arquivo Público Mineiro* 51, no. 1 (2015): 80–105.

<sup>41</sup> The British traveller George Gardner, with a background in natural history from the University of Glasgow, travelled through the countryside of Minas Gerais in 1840 and visited the farms of the Leite brothers. Gardner estimated the coffee production of the farm of Custódio Ferreira Leite at 10,000 arrobas per year and that of Francisco Leite Ribeiro at 11,000, in addition to the production of cheese, brandy, and sugar that were sent to the market in Rio de Janeiro, see George Gardner, *Viagens No Brasil: Principalmente Nas Províncias Do Norte e Nos Distritos Do Ouro e Do Diamante Durante Os Anos de 1836-1841* (São Paulo: Companhia Editora Nacional, 1942)447-48.

<sup>42</sup> Alcir Lenharo, *As Tropas Da Moderação: O Abastecimento Da Corte Na Formação Política Do Brasil, 1808-1842* (São Paulo: Editora Símbolo, 1979), 68.

Among the 62 liberated Africans under the guardianship of Custódio Ferreira Leite, all were male and aged between 10 and 24 years.<sup>43</sup> More than 60% were between 10 and 14 years old, another 30.6% were between 20 and 24 years old, and 8.0% were between 15 and 19 years old. Africans from the Benguela and Mozambique nations predominated in the first age group, and Africans from the Congo, Cabinda and Monjolo nations appeared less frequently.<sup>44</sup> These data indicate that Custódio Ferreira Leite, in addition to circumventing the 1835 instructions, had more than 8 Africans under his tutelage, and favoured liberated Africans aged 10 to 24 and from Mozambique (Table 4).

**Table 4 - Estimated age group and ethnicity of liberated Africans under the tutelage of Custódio Ferreira Leite, 1853**

<i>Ethnicity</i>	<i>Estimated age range (years)</i>			<i>Total</i>	
	10 - 14	15 - 19	20 - 24	N	%
<i>Rebolo</i>	1	-	-	1	1.61
<i>Monjolo</i>	1	-	-	1	1.61
<i>Cabinda</i>	2	1	-	3	4.84
<i>Congo</i>	6	-	-	6	9.68
<i>Benguela</i>	16	-	-	16	25.8
<i>Moçambique</i>	12	4	19	35	56.5
<i>Total</i>	38	5	19	62	100.0

Notes and sources: N: Number. Arquivo Público Mineiro, APM, PP, 1-12, Box 1, doc. 37.

Since 1854, the Presidency of the Province had noted that liberated Africans under the Commander's responsibility were employed in various repairs and the opening up of roads.<sup>45</sup> In 1857, Custódio Ferreira Leite completed the construction of the Mar de Espanha road to *Meia Pataca*, an important route for coffee exports from Mata Mineira: "[...] coffee, which [...] already exceeds one hundred thousand arrobas per year, have it proceed as it seems most convenient to the interests of the province."<sup>46</sup>

Before starting the work, Custódio pressured the Leopoldina City Council to submit a request to the Provincial Government for the use of liberated Africans under his tutelage in the construction of the road. He claimed lack of manpower. The justification was accepted by the Presidency of the Province, which authorized the beginning of the works with the use of liberated Africans. In October of the same year, the daily report of liberated Africans in the charge of Custódio Ferreira Leite indicated that 35 liberated Africans were working on constructing the Leopoldina road.<sup>47</sup>

<sup>43</sup> APM, PP, 1-12, Box 1, doc. 37.

<sup>44</sup> APM, PP, 1-12, Box 1, doc. 37.

<sup>45</sup> Database of Process of Construction of Bridges and Roads in the Province of Minas Gerais, APM, Provincial Section, Public Works, 3/6, Boxes 2-28; 32-57, cited in the database developed by the Núcleo de Pesquisa em História Econômica e Demográfica do Centro de Desenvolvimento Econômico e Planejamento Regional/UFGM.

<sup>46</sup> Database of Process of Construction of Bridges and Roads in the Province of Minas Gerais, APM, Provincial Section, Public Works, 3/6, Boxes 2-28; 32-57, cited in the database developed by the Núcleo de Pesquisa em História Econômica e Demográfica do Centro de Desenvolvimento Econômico e Planejamento Regional/UFGM.

<sup>47</sup> APM, OP, 3/5, Box 6, doc. 40.

Over his lifetime, Custódio Ferreira Leite<sup>48</sup> was involved in mercantile credit;<sup>49</sup> his activities included the internal slave trade, road construction, the policy of distributing liberated Africans by the State and the mercantile activities of coffee growing. With his death in 1859, the provincial engineer Heirinch Gerber requested that the liberated Africans be moved to another area to work on roads. In 1860, they were busy building a trail towards the road from Mar de Espanha to Três Barras, also in the Mata of Minas Gerais.<sup>50</sup>

In 1858, the engineer Gerber requested the sending of two liberated Africans to work on constructing the Mar de Espanha road. The engineer claimed that the scientific instruments (a sextant and a repeating-theodolite) needed for the work could not be transported continuously by animals without major damage.<sup>51</sup> In order to fulfil this task, the engineer asked the Presidency of the Province to supply two liberated Africans. José Congo, estimated to be 30 years old, and Basílio Moçambique, 25 years old, were sent,<sup>52</sup> both had worked in the construction of Passa Vinte road as servants of the provincial engineer Henrique Dumont, who had also made a request for them to the Provincial Government of Minas Gerais.<sup>53</sup>

The provincial decision-making bodies, by authorizing the movement of liberated Africans through the interior of the territory, responded to the request of provincial engineers, who were busy building roads and bridges, employed liberated Africans in manual activities, at times to clean and maintain regular routes, and even disassemble and carry scientific instruments.

#### **4. African origins, sex and estimated age (1830-1850): labour in the Botanical Garden, on the roads and the role of engineers**

In April 1853, the Botanical Garden received 20 liberated African women. It was planned that they would be used in the harvesting of tea leaves, grown in the same institution, and in the activities of “spinning, baking and weaving” during the off-season.<sup>54</sup> All were estimated to be between 10 and 20 years old and were identified as being from the Benguela or Angolan nation. Two types of clothing were provided, one for ordinary services and the other for masses on holy days. In January 1854, Jardim Botânico informed the president of the province of the

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<sup>48</sup> On the occupation of the Vale do Paraíba in Rio de Janeiro, especially in the municipality of Vassouras, by members of the Leite Ribeiro family, see Affonso de E. Taunay, ‘Fundação de Vassouras – o Barão de Ayuruoca, Extraordinário Propulsionador Da Lavoura Cafeeira’, in *História Do Café No Brasil*, v. 2, T. II (Rio de Janeiro: Departamento Nacional do Café, 1939), 245–58.

<sup>49</sup> In 1836, Francisco Leite Ribeiro signed a contract with the province of Rio de Janeiro for the construction of an interprovincial road between the village of Magé and the Paraíba River. The contract involved a series of obligations: paving the Serra do Couto; completing the work within eight years; the establishment of two tolls; the right – for a period of one hundred years – to charge for the passage. Leite Ribeiro, shortly after signing the contract, sent a request to the provincial president to form a company. Its capital would comprise one hundred *contos de réis*, divided into one thousand shares of one hundred thousand *réis* each. Subscription could be done in cash or in slaves. Soon after the completion of the road, the company’s administration would decide on the number of slaves that should be kept for its repair, selling the remaining slaves for the benefit of the partners at public auction, as well as the animals, cars and utensils. See, AMP, PP, 1/46, Box 3, doc. 44.

<sup>50</sup> Database of Process of Construction of Bridges and Roads in the Province of Minas Gerais, APM, Provincial Section, Public Works, 3/6, Boxes 2-28; 32-57, cited in the database developed by the Núcleo de Pesquisa em História Econômica e Demográfica do Centro de Desenvolvimento Econômico e Planejamento Regional/UFMG.

<sup>51</sup> On the commerce of scientific instruments in the Empire of Brazil and the purchase by engineers from the province of Minas Gerais, see: Têlio Cravo, ‘Scientific Instruments, Booksellers and Engineers in Imperial Brazil: Building Bridges and Roads in Minas Gerais, 1835-1889’, in *Scientific Instruments in the History of Science: Studies in Transfer, Use and Preservation*, ed. Marcus Granato and Marta C. Lourenço (Rio de Janeiro: MAST, 2014), 319–43.

<sup>52</sup> APM, Secretária de Governo, 149.

<sup>53</sup> Database of Process of Construction of Bridges and Roads in the Province of Minas Gerais, APM, Provincial Section, Public Works, 3/6, Boxes 2-28; 32-57, cited in the database developed by the Núcleo de Pesquisa em História Econômica e Demográfica do Centro de Desenvolvimento Econômico e Planejamento Regional/UFMG.

<sup>54</sup> APM, PP, 1-27, Box 8, doc. 01-01.

baptism of the African women and the consequent change in names: “Jacinta changed to Ana. Josepha to Joana. Higina moved to Pordentian. Cafana changed to Ana. Helena changed to Maria. Godencia switched to Antonia. Eugenia changed to Maria.”<sup>55</sup>

Without distinction of sex, the data on the assumed age reveals that 40.29% of liberated Africans were between 20 and 24 years old, and another 35.25% were between 10 and 14 years old. Regarding men, the records of estimated age indicate a concentration of Africans between 20 and 24 years old, and 10 and 14 years old, making a total of 94 males. Among women, 19 were distributed between 10 to 14 years old and 15 to 19 years old (Table 5).

In absolute terms, 120 liberated Africans were between 10 and 24 years old, corresponding to 86.3%. Among individuals aged between 20 and 24, 44 of them were represented as Africans from the Mozambican nation; another 12 Africans were subdivided into the following nations: Congo (5 individuals), Benguela (5), Cabinda (1) and Monjolo (1). Between the estimated age of 10 to 14 years, Africans from the Benguela nation (25 individuals) prevailed, followed by those from the Mozambican nation (12), Congo (6), Angola (2), Cabinda (2), Rebolo (1) and Monjolo (1).<sup>56</sup>

**Table 5 - Estimated age and sex of liberated Africans, 1853**

<i>Estimated age</i>	<i>Liberated Africans (N)</i>			<i>Liberated Africans (%)</i>		
	<i>Men</i>	<i>Women</i>	<i>Total</i>	<i>Men</i>	<i>Women</i>	<i>Total</i>
10 – 14	39	10	49	28.06	7.2	35.25
15 – 19	6	9	15	4.32	6.5	10.79
20 – 24	55	1	56	39.57	0.72	40.29
25 – 29	6	-	6	4.32	-	4.32
30 – 34	4	-	4	2.88	-	2.88
35 – 39	2	-	2	1.44	-	1.44
40 – 44	4	-	4	2.88	-	2.88
45 – 49	3	-	3	2.16	-	2.16
<i>Total</i>	119	20	139	85.6	14.4	100,0

Notes and sources: N: Number. Arquivo Público Mineiro, APM, PP, 1-12, Box 1, doc. 37.

It is essential to underline that these designations generally indicate the ports of shipment or vast African geographic regions. The following table identifies the ethnic identity of each of the liberated Africans in Minas Gerais. This ethnic detailing makes it possible not only to indicate the general region of the slave trade but also the relative proportions between the different nations. The first conclusion is that 97.12% of liberated Africans in Minas Gerais were originally from Central West Africa and East Africa. Only 2.16% were from Western Africa (Table 6).

Considering only the liberated Africans employed in the works on the Paraibuna road in Serra da Mantiqueira, all of them were estimated to be between 20 and 24 years old. Of the total of 35 Africans, 10 were from Central West Africa and 25 from East Africa.

Engineer João José da Silva Teodoro, responsible for managing the aforementioned work, indicated that, alongside liberated Africans, rented slaves worked, some of whom were rogues: “[...] indispensável [...] in working with liberated Africans, to teach them there [...] to

<sup>55</sup> APM, PP, 1-27, Box 8, doc. 06-02.

<sup>56</sup> Mary Karasch, *A Vida Dos Escravos No Rio de Janeiro* (São Paulo: Companhia das Letras, 2000), 41–66; Douglas Libby, ‘A Culture of Colors: Representational Identities and Afro-Brazilians in Minas Gerais in the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries’, *Luso-Brazilian Review* 50, no. 1 (2013): 31–38.



farm oxen [...] and also to look for the necessary food and to cook, which, hitherto, the Africans are not good at.”<sup>57</sup>

These data demonstrate that there was coordinated political action to select liberated Africans aged between 20 and 24 years for road construction work.

Of the total of 55 men aged between 20 and 24 years, 35 were assigned to build roads. In this range, among the 55 individuals, 44 were from Mozambique, which is reflected in their predominance in the works on the Paraibuna road in Serra da Mantiqueira. With this, it is possible to affirm that the presumed age directly conditioned the choice of liberated Africans to be employed in road works (Table 7).

**Table 6 - Origins of liberated Africans in Minas Gerais, 1853**

<i>Africa regions</i>	<i>Liberated Africans</i>	
	N	%
<i>Without identification</i>	1	0.72
<i>Western Africa</i>	3	2.16
<i>Nagô</i>	1	0.72
<i>Mina</i>	2	1.44
<i>East Africa</i>	62	44.6
<i>Moçambique</i>	62	44.6
<i>West-Central Africa</i>	73	52.52
<i>Rebolo</i>	1	0.72
<i>Ambaca</i>	1	0.72
<i>Cabundá</i>	1	0.72
<i>Angola</i>	2	1.44
<i>Cabinda</i>	4	2.88
<i>Monjolo</i>	4	2.88
<i>Congo</i>	20	14.39
<i>Benguela</i>	40	28.78
<i>Total</i>	139	100.0

<sup>57</sup> Database of Process of Construction of Bridges and Roads in the Province of Minas Gerais, APM, Provincial Section, Public Works, 3/6, Boxes 2-28; 32-57, cited in the database developed by the Núcleo de Pesquisa em História Econômica e Demográfica do Centro de Desenvolvimento Econômico e Planejamento Regional/UFMG.

Notes and sources: N: Number. Arquivo Público Mineiro, APM, PP, 1-12, Box 1, doc. 37.

**Table 7 - Liberated Africans employed in the construction of the Paraibuna road in Serra da Mantiqueira, 1853**

<i>Origins</i>	<i>Africa regions</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>%</i>
<i>Monjolo</i>	West-Central Africa	1	2.9
<i>Benguela</i>	West-Central Africa	4	11.4
<i>Congo</i>	West-Central Africa	5	14.3
<i>Moçambique</i>	East Africa	25	71.4
<i>Total</i>		35	100

Notes and sources: N: Number. Arquivo Público Mineiro, APM, PP, 1-12, Box 1, doc. 37.

Based on cross-referencing the Enrollment of Liberated Africans of 1853 and the manuscripts on the construction of bridges and roads, this research reconstructs a part of the trajectory of the 35 liberated Africans employed on the Paraibuna road in Serra da Mantiqueira.

By order of the Presidency of the Province, in 1854, these men were transferred to the construction of Falcão road. Of the 35 liberated Africans, 32 went to Falcão road, another three were declared dead.

With the arrival of these liberated Africans, the overseers were tasked with preventing escapes, correcting those who missed services and indoctrinating them as Christians: “the same Africans every day at night will be given [...] a lesson in Christian doctrine by the respective overseer, as well as on Sundays and morning holy days [...]”<sup>58</sup>

The province of Minas Gerais granted the liberated Africans payment for the day's work: 0\$200 réis per day for each of them, and on Saturdays, a quarter of tobacco and 0\$80 réis in cash (Table 8).

**Table 8 - Daily rate paid to the workers of Falcão road, according to the 1854 Ordinance**

<i>Occupation</i>	<i>Daily rate (Réis)</i>	
<i>Driver, ox and cart rental</i>	4\$000	
<i>Senior bricklayer</i>	2\$500	
<i>Bricklayer</i>	1\$500	
<i>Carpenter</i>	1\$500	
<i>Blacksmith</i>	1\$500	
<i>Driller</i>	1\$500	
<i>Liberated African</i>	0\$200	0\$80 (*)

Notes and sources: (\*) Daily rate on Saturdays that included tobacco. Arquivo Público Mineiro, APM, OP, 3/6, Box 9, doc. 02-04.

In comparison with other freedmen or slave craftsmen, liberated Africans received the lowest remuneration, which explains why male Africans were assigned to work under the supervision of national and foreign provincial engineers on different road works in the 1830s and 1860s (Table 9).

The records of the construction processes of bridges and roads and highlighting the diversity of jobs and the worker's social conditions reveal the overlap of freemen, hired slaves,

<sup>58</sup> Database of Process of Construction of Bridges and Roads in the Province of Minas Gerais, APM, Provincial Section, Public Works, 3/6, Boxes 2-28; 32-57, cited in the database developed by the Núcleo de Pesquisa em História Econômica e Demográfica do Centro de Desenvolvimento Econômico e Planejamento Regional/UFMG.

and liberated Africans in road works. The next section will analyse how the State organized road works, given the legal conditions of workers.

## 5. Control and work time

In June 1854, the provincial president published an Ordinance with guidelines for the routine of work on provincial roads. Containing twelve articles, the Ordinance sought to control from admission to the punishment of workers.

According to the presidential document, only men between the ages of 18 and 50 would be employed in the services. If he was enslaved, only the “healthy and powerful” would be admitted and those who had had the payments (hired system) adjusted to their respective masters. The engineer was responsible for negotiating with the slave owners. A “necessary sturdiness” was also required for free workers.<sup>59</sup>

**Table 9 - Liberated Africans, engineers and road works, 1839-1858**

Years	Road work	Number of liberated Africans	Person in charge	Execution mode
1839-1840	Paraibuna road	27	Heinrich Halfeld (*), provincial engineer	Administration
1852-1853	Paraibuna road in Serra da Mantiqueira	35	João José da Silva Teodoro, provincial engineer	Administration
1854-1856	Falcão road	32	Bruno Von Sperling, provincial engineer	Administration
1857	Mar de Espanha road	35	Comendador Custódio Ferreira Leite	Auction
1858	Mar de Espanha road	2	Heirinch Gerber (**), provincial engineer	Administration

Notes and sources: (\*) Graduated from Bergakademie Clausthal. (\*\*) Graduated from the Polytechnic School of Hannover (1847-1852). Database of Process of Construction of Bridges and Roads in the Province of Minas Gerais, Arquivo Público Mineiro, APM, Provincial Section, Public Works, 3/6, Boxes 2-28; 32-57, cited in the database of Núcleo de Pesquisa em História Econômica e Demográfica do Centro de Desenvolvimento Econômico e Planejamento Regional/UFGM; Friedrich E. Renger, “Henrique Gerber, um engenheiro alemão a serviço da província de Minas Gerais,” in *Noções geográficas e administrativas da província de Minas Gerais*, ed. Heirinch Gerber (Belo Horizonte: Fundação João Pinheiro, 2013), 21.

An overseer was required for each group of 40 workers. As for working time, men should start in the early hours of the day. There was to be obedience during working time for freemen, enslaved and liberated Africans, with the same period of rest, food, and work for all workers: half an hour for lunch and one hour for dinner.<sup>60</sup>

In addition, workers were to be isolated and grouped according to their legal status. The State established the segregation of workers according to their social condition, as well as distinguishing the surveillance of liberated Africans: “Free day labourers worked separately

<sup>59</sup> Database of Process of Construction of Bridges and Roads in the Province of Minas Gerais, APM, Provincial Section, Public Works, 3/6, Boxes 2-28; 32-57, cited in the database developed by the Núcleo de Pesquisa em História Econômica e Demográfica do Centro de Desenvolvimento Econômico e Planejamento Regional/UFGM.

<sup>60</sup> Database of Process of Construction of Bridges and Roads in the Province of Minas Gerais, APM, Provincial Section, Public Works, 3/6, Boxes 2-28; 32-57, cited in the database developed by the Núcleo de Pesquisa em História Econômica e Demográfica do Centro de Desenvolvimento Econômico e Planejamento Regional/UFGM.

from the slaves, and the latter from the Africans in the service of the province. Surveillance over Africans is the responsibility of the person in charge of inspection and direction of the road, who is not only responsible for the loss of any of them but is also authorized to apprehend those who by chance flee, or correct those who fail to fulfil their obligations.”<sup>61</sup>

These politically-oriented regulations reveal not only that engineers had to comply with these guidelines and were subordinated to them, but also that the State authorized the coercive work of liberated Africans and the practice of renting captives in road works.

In July 1854, the engineer notified the president of the province of the uprising of liberated Africans against the foreman in work on the Falcão road. The episode, which took place at night, was resolved, and two of the “worst of them” were sent to the city of Ouro Preto under the care of the aforementioned overseer: “respectfully asking Your Excellency to have them punished severely.”<sup>62</sup> On September 4, 1854, the same group of liberated Africans tried to run away.<sup>63</sup> However, the following day, they were captured by the provincial police force and taken to Ouro Preto jail.<sup>64</sup>

The provincial political bodies clearly created mechanisms that encouraged arbitrariness, and precarious living and working conditions for liberated Africans.

## **6. Conclusion**

The evidence from the list of names of liberated Africans and from the manuscripts of engineers and government authorities demonstrates that, between the 1830s and 1860s, in Minas Gerais, there existed an illegal system of supply of liberated Africans for work. Members of the agrarian mercantile elite linked to the slave trade, coffee farming and the purchase of road works, used male Africans aged between 20 and 24 years old in the construction of roads. The State power directly forged the illegal transfer of liberated Africans to the private sphere. In addition, in comparison with the free craftsmen or enslaved employed in the construction of roads, the liberated Africans, who were overseen by the Provincial Government, received the lowest daily salary, making it possible to carry out road works more cheaply and with a greater regularity in the number of workers. Such aspects explain the presence of liberated Africans in the assembly of road infrastructure, which led the political power to create ways of controlling working time. The records also revealed the interference of provincial engineers in the destination and occupation of Africans.

As for women, the Ouro Preto Botanical Garden was the destination for African women. The provincial authorities indicated that coming from Rio de Janeiro, many of them changed their names and were between 10 and 20 years old. The age profile of these African women is striking, which leads us to the question: would they have had children? Formed families? These questions set the path of a future research agenda.

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<sup>61</sup> Database of Process of Construction of Bridges and Roads in the Province of Minas Gerais, APM, Provincial Section, Public Works, 3/6, Boxes 2-28; 32-57, cited in the database developed by the Núcleo de Pesquisa em História Econômica e Demográfica do Centro de Desenvolvimento Econômico e Planejamento Regional/UFMG.

<sup>62</sup> Database of Process of Construction of Bridges and Roads in the Province of Minas Gerais, APM, Provincial Section, Public Works, 3/6, Boxes 2-28; 32-57, cited in the database developed by the Núcleo de Pesquisa em História Econômica e Demográfica do Centro de Desenvolvimento Econômico e Planejamento Regional/UFMG.

<sup>63</sup> APM, PP, 1/27, Box 8, doc. 16-01.

<sup>64</sup> Database of Process of Construction of Bridges and Roads in the Province of Minas Gerais, APM, Provincial Section, Public Works, 3/6, Boxes 2-28; 32-57, cited in the database developed by the Núcleo de Pesquisa em História Econômica e Demográfica do Centro de Desenvolvimento Econômico e Planejamento Regional/UFMG.

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