

Slave Rebellion in Brazil: The Muslim Uprising of 1835 in Bahia. By João José Reis. Trans. Arthur Brakel. Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993. xv, 281 pp.

João José Reis's invigorating *Slave Rebellion in Brazil: The Muslim Uprising of 1835 in Bahia* provides a complex picture of the interplay between Islam and ethnicity in the 1835 African Muslim uprising in Bahia. He examines the quills of police and court scribes obtained from the prosecution records of the arrested African rebels (xiii), revealing a well-planned urban slave rebellion that evolved from unstable sociopolitical and economic conditions in Bahia. Reis argues that this context of instability contributed to the development of the uprising and demonstrates that religion and ethnicity played crucial roles.

Reis begins his analysis by contextualizing the social, political, and economic conditions of Bahia at the time of the uprising. The author describes Bahia as a slave society, comprised of a majority Black population that included both Black slaves and freedmen, characterized by stark economic disparities, which were amplified after Brazil obtained its independence from Portugal in 1822. After independence, Bahia experienced economic decline, periods of drought, unemployment, and price inflation on basic goods. The economic and political instability in Bahia ignited a series of military revolts, anti-Portuguese disturbances, street riots, liberal and federalist revolts, and slave uprisings. The 1835 African Muslim rebellion evolved from this long trajectory of revolts and uprisings.

Reis illustrates the important role Islam and ethnicity played in the success of the 1835 uprising. For instance, the rebellion was planned around an important Muslim holiday, and the rebel participants dressed in Muslim clothing and wore amulets (120). Despite its religious overtones, the rebellion, Reis asserts, was not *jihad* or a classic holy war, as other contemporary scholars have suggested, since the African Muslims knew that they needed non-Muslim participants in order to succeed. Because organizers sought to create a unified, ethnic, pan-African rebellion, they encouraged the participation of non-Muslim Africans by propagating the notion that the rebellion was an uprising for "Africans" (120-23).

Unfortunately, this attempt at ethnic solidarity never truly materialized in Bahia. The majority of the rebellion participants were comprised of two ethnic groups: the Nagô and the Hausa. Although the Jeje and Congo ethnic groups did participate, their numerical significance in the uprising was minor. In fact, the Nagô presence was so predominant that the uprising was often conceptualized as a Nagô revolt (140-48).

Reis opposes the notion that the rebellion was solely shaped around Nagô ethnicity, asserting that Islam and ethnicity were both interdependent factors. For example, the majority of the Nagô and Hausa rebel participants were Muslim, and this religious communality helped two culturally divergent ethnic groups collaborate on the uprising (148). Consequently, the event was a complex interplay between religion and ethnicity, where religion helped unite diverse African ethnic groups, and shared ethnicity helped unite Africans of diverse religious backgrounds.

In sum, Reis's provocative book demonstrates the ways in which African slaves and freedmen chose to maintain certain aspects of their identities in hopes of finding effective strategies to challenge or cope with oppressive conditions. Furthermore, his book illustrates how a unique history of rebellion, religion, and ethnicity all contributed to the formation of one of the most effective slave rebellions in the Americas.

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